

Do They Receive the Same Treatment? Employment Terms and Conditions for Elderly Teachers in Sri Lanka

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Abstract : *This paper is to examine the prevailing employment terms and condition on elderly teachers in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The scope of the private sector schools covers in the study is unaided private schools and international schools in Sri Lanka. This is a qualitative study, where data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 interviewees representing employers in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The findings revealed that the common basis for recruiting ETs in the private sector is on annual renewable contract basis. Also, when deciding the condition of full-time versus part-time employment, the private sector schools in Sri Lanka take into consideration both the school requirement (employer) and ET's concerns as well. However, the remuneration and other benefits given by the private sector schools implied age discriminatory conditions by offering lower remuneration and curtailing other benefits offered to ETs in comparison with younger teachers. These research findings about employment terms and conditions in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka provide indications to be concerned when creating age-friendly working environment amidst of a dearth of teachers in the school education sector.*

Keywords: *Employment Terms and Conditions, Elderly Teachers, Private Sector Schools.*

I. Introduction

A recent notable feature of demographic composition in Sri Lanka is constant and steady increase in ageing population (population over age of 65), which is projected as 9.4% in 2015 and 21% in 2045 and to be further increased to 35.6% by 2100 [1]. The seriousness of this issue is reflected through the fast pace in rising ageing population like developed countries, yet Sri Lanka holds comparatively lower per capital income level (ibid). Population of Sri Lanka is one of the fastest ageing countries in the world [2]. The demographic drivers explaining population ageing in Sri Lanka are sharp decline in fertility and mortality rates along with rising longevity at the older ages [3], [4], [5]. Population projections made by researchers confirmed that, Sri Lanka is on the brink of labour shortage in another decade or so [4], [6]. Thus, the government of SL has taken several initiatives after taking the elderly issue into consideration. Earlier the retirement in the public sector was set at the age of 55 and later it extended to 57, further allowing annual service extension upon request up to the age of 60. The latest amendment allowed the public servants and employees in public enterprises can work until the compulsory retirement age of 60, if they are capable and willing to do so without applying for a service extension [7], [8]. Another effort taken by the Sri Lankan government is launching a scheme of re-employing retired nursing officers on contract basis as to address the shortage of qualified nurses in the government hospitals [9]. The latest compulsory retirement age extension is for specialist medical officers up to the age of 63 years [10]. Not only the government, today even the private sector employers are considering and implementing the strategy of re-employment of retired employees in order to face the challenges in their industries.

Besides that, there are other several imperatives which trigger the importance of employing Elderly Employees (EEs) in Sri Lankan context: poverty among the elderly, inadequate social security coverage [5], [11], [12], [13], structural changes in the family system [14], [15], [16], younger retirement age and the accelerating ageing dependency ratio [14]. In the light of all those challenges, it is of paramount importance to explore pertaining labour market structures, employment policies and practices, different perceptions about the elderly employees in Sri Lanka. The ageing arena intertwined with the labour shortage call the attention for novel strategies to determine the size, structure, regulations and norms of labour market as well as the future economic growth of Sri Lanka.

One of the prominent areas which currently is suffering from qualified labour force in Sri Lanka is that school education sector. At present both the public and private sector schools in Sri Lanka are critically affected by a dearth of qualified teachers. As an alternative solution, the schools tend to re-employ government retired teachers, especially among the private sector schools. From Sri Lankan labour market perspective, it would be a novel trend of attracting EEs or retirees to the formal sector, which may escort certain considerations in terms of employment policies and practices and also attitudes towards EEs.

Nonetheless, EEs are gradually stepping into the labour market, the empirical studies on elderly employment often emphasize on the stereotypical attitudes and age discriminatory employment practices among the employers as the major deterrent for employment of elderly or retired employees [17], [18], [19], [20], [21], [22]. Attitudes of the employers towards EEs are one of the highly influential criteria for recruitment decision of elderly workers in an organization [23], [24]. Albeit, the economies deeply concern about the population ageing and labour shortage, apparently the attitudes of the employers do not reflect such a welcome towards EEs [27], [25], [26], [27], [28]. In the study of Bittman et al [29], stated that, studies from different countries have shown that, employer attitudes constitute as the major barrier to the employment of older workers. According to the authors, it is often claimed that the negative attitudes of employers towards older workers are very powerful and can hold even though their personal experiences with older workers may suggest otherwise. Therefore, the likelihood that employers will utilize the older labour force is directly related to their perceptions of the limitations of employing an older worker [30].

Though there have been a very few researches carried out on ageing employment in Sri Lankan context, the study of Vodapivec & Arunatilake [2] clearly pointed out that, wage discrimination against elderly workers in Sri Lanka is as one of the common practices. After analyzing data from various labour force surveys in Sri Lanka they have concluded that, in comparison to younger workers, older workers are paid less in both the public and private sector organizations. Such age-wage discriminatory practices adopted by employers is a reflection of negative attitudes towards elderly workers. Therefore, those researchers have called for further researches to explore perceptions of employers towards the elderly employees, which would be another obstacle to elderly employment in Sri Lanka. Further, age discriminatory practice in Sri Lanka is clearly visible in most of the vacancy advertisements in the newspapers and employment websites, placing an upper age bar to discourage applications from non-preferred age categories. The data on newspaper vacancy advertisements from the Labour Market Information Bulletin of Sri Lanka pointed out that, a large number of vacancies advertised for the job seekers in the 18-30 age group [31]. It is an indication that, employers set rules of the games which are favourable for young generation and restricting opportunities for EEs. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine the prevailing employment terms and condition on Elderly Teachers (ETs) in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The scope of the private sector schools covers in the study is Unaided Private schools (UPSs) and International Schools (ISs) in Sri Lanka.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Another major area where age discriminatory employment practices can often be seen is terms and conditions applied to EEs, for instance, the basis of employment (e.g. casual, contract, permanent), the remuneration package, other benefits, and part-time work options.

Loretto, Duncan & White [32] illustrated from their focus group discussion with Scottish employers the types of attitudes expressed by an employer regarding the re-employment of retired employees: “they are cheap” and “no maternity leave, no pension costs, (prepared to work) unsociable hours.” That attitude itself is a reflection of underestimating the value of elderly workers and is a direct demonstration of age discrimination when negotiating employment terms with EEs. It is noteworthy that the employment of EEs is not supposed to be treated as “benevolent assistance” for older people due to the imposition of the Equal Employment Act or any social pressure. Rather, it should be implemented on a “win-win” basis alike for younger employees so as to overcome the scarcity of labour.

In an analysis of the UK. labour force in a survey in 2004, Loretto et al. [33] pointed out several employment options adopted towards EEs. The majority of them worked on a part-time basis and the revealed reasons were that it was the choice of some EEs and for others the inability to find a full-time job. Also, the working patterns of some EEs were contractual, and the employment was casual and temporary.

Offering part-time employment for EEs rather than full-time may be sometimes favourable for older workers. However, researchers have criticized some of the employment conditions attached to it on the basis of the EEs feeling marginalized, employing them in non-central roles in the organization, lowering their status, under-utilization of their skills and risk of erosion of skills, restricting career opportunities, lower levels of earning, limited prospects of training or promotion, limited access to fringe benefits, and lower pensions later in life [34], [35].

Additionally, a study of Arrowsmith, Gilman, Edwards, and Ram [36] found that EEs were paid around the national minimum wage. Sometimes employers offer work flexibility to EEs under the wage-work trade-off option, adjusting their working hours according to the domestic circumstances. Authors described it as a “captured workforce,” i.e. EEs are unable to move elsewhere for better-paid jobs and therefore employers are able to exploit their situation. That finding draws attention to the possibility of manipulative practices in employment practices in the labour market. Though scholars and policy advocates promote flexibility of work for EEs, in practice it can be misused by the employers and become a backlash to EEs.

Surprisingly, regarding the fastest ageing economy in Asia, Japan’s re-employment practices are also embedded with drastic age discriminatory employment terms and conditions for EEs. A study of Japan revealed that re-employment practice comes at the cost of lower wages and a decline in job status. Selected EEs for re-employment are relegated to lower job status, have less responsibility, and are paid substantially lower wages, and illustrated cases report that wages are reduced to the range of 10-40 percent upon re-employment [37].

By and large, similar practices can be observed among re-employed retired/elderly teachers. In Gambia and Malawi, retired qualified teachers were allowed to remain employed on temporary contracts in the public schools, as “month-to-month” employees, in order to address the teacher shortage. Further, in Gambia “unqualified” teachers were employed in the public schools on 11-month temporary contracts and were entitled for re-employment on an annual basis [38]. This exemplifies the irrational age discriminatory practices in the education system, obstructing opportunities for qualified teachers, and compromising the quality of education, merely because of chronological age.

The ministry of education in Singapore extensively detailed the re-employment terms and conditions for trained retired teachers on the ministry official website under the Adjunct Teacher Programme (AJTP) . Some of the retired teachers are offered employment on an annual renewable contract basis, the entitlement of the monthly salary pro-rated according to workload, eligibility for leaves, medical and dental benefits, and annual salary increment is not based on performance but on a standard amount. There is additionally no performance bonus but re-engagement bonuses, and no eligibility for dedicated teacher recognition programmes (it is called the Connect Plan). Though Singapore widely promotes re-employment opportunities for EEs, yet the age factor apparently creates discriminatory practices, especially in the area of performance evaluation. This is due to the effect of age stereotypes against EEs.

III. METHODOLOGY

Examining prevailing employment terms and conditions applied to ETs in the private schools in Sri Lanka is not quite direct due to the social desirability, cultural values and norms in the society and in turn their impact on the image of the school. Hence, it needs a research strategy which can overcome those issues while conducting inquiry to reach the research objectives. The study used qualitative method, where data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 interviewees representing employers in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka (Table 1- Summary of the Schools and the Interviewees). Data were analyzed on the themes and relationships through inductive logic and finally bringing the interviewees’ voices in a holistic manner [39].

As cited in Teddlie & Tashakkori [40], “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry” because the size depends on a number of factors. Thus, among the total study population of 103 private sector schools, I selected 10 schools (almost 10 percent of the study population) from the Western province, which records the highest number of private sector schools in SL, for the interviews. When selecting schools, I have taken into the consideration that, sufficient representation of both categories of schools, whether the school employed retired/elderly teachers or not, and the size of the school, in terms of student population. Therefore, I used “purposive sampling” technique, which is selecting of units based on specific purposes associated with answering the questions of research study [40]. The 10 schools comprised of 4 UPSs (including Catholic Management Board) and 6 ISs. All the selected UPSs are single gender schools, whereas ISs are co-educational. Those schools conduct classes from primary level to advance level. Nonetheless, the scale of the school in the sample vastly varied from small to large in terms of the number of students, teachers, physical area, and facilities provided. 8 out of 10 schools located in the metropolitan areas whereas 2 are in suburban. 3 of UPSs are offering national curriculum in both vernacular and English media. The other UPS teaches the national curriculum in vernacular and English media and British curriculum too. Among the ISs, 2 schools teach the national curriculum in English medium, another one offers only British curriculum, and all other 3 schools are offering both the national and British curricular.

Table 1: Summary of the Schools and the Interviewees

School	Information about the School					Information about the Interviewees					
	Type	Size*	Location	No. of Students	No. of Teachers	Position	Age	Gender	Education	Working Experience	Serving in the school (years)
1	Int.	S	City	250	30	Chairman/Principal	45	Male	Post graduate Advance	Educationist	9
2	Int.	S	Suburban	350	40	Principal	63	Female	Level	Educationist Business	6
3	Int.	S	City	390	50	Principal	69	Male	Post graduate	Mgt.	5
4	Pvt.	M	City	1650	76	Principal	72	Female	Post graduate	Educationist	28
5	Pvt.	M	City	2500	130	Principal	63	Female	Post graduate	Educationist	1
6	Int.	M	Suburban	2500	255	Managing Director/Principal	76	Male	Post graduate	Educationist	15
7	Pvt.	L	City	6700	330	Principal	67	Female	Post graduate	Educationist	6
8**	Int.	L	City	5000	600	Coordinating Principal Director/Coordinating	41	Female	Post graduate	Educationist	9
9**	Int.	L	City	15500	1700	Principal	52	Female	Post graduate	Educationist	22
10***	Pvt.	L	City	42500	2100	General Manager	51	Male	Post graduate	Educationist	9

* SIZE OF SCHOOL: S- SMALL SCHOOL M- MEDIUM SCHOOL L- LARGE SCHOOL

**Schools with branches

*** Collection of Catholic schools

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Age discrimination can often be intertwined with the employment terms and conditions offered. As the literature stated, the stereotypical perceptions of EEs tend to treat them disadvantageously in the labour market. Further, an imposed official retirement age generally sets a demarcation for the retirees/elderly group that is supposed to be out of the labour market and that perception itself forces the differentiation of conditions for younger and elderly employees. Thus, this study explored the terms and conditions applied in the private sector schools under several themes: annual renewable contract basis, full-time versus part-time employment, remuneration and other benefits offered to employees.

4.1 Annual Renewable Contract Basis

It was revealed by the interviewees that the “annual renewable contract” was mostly used by the private sector schools in Sri Lanka when recruiting ETs. Among the 9 interviewees that employed ETs in the schools, 8 stated that ETs are hired on contract basis while only 1 interviewee from an IS employed ETs on permanent basis. All 4 UPSs out of 8 interviewees offered employment for ETs on contract basis. However, 2 interviewees from ISs said that, irrespective of age, all teachers are recruited on the annual contract basis. The other 2 ISs recruit younger teachers on a permanent basis but ETs on a contract basis.

The data from the interviews concluded that the common basis for recruiting ETs in the private sector was an on annual renewable contract basis. Even if few ISs recruited ETs on a permanent basis, no UPSs employed them on a permanent basis.

The interviewees argued the rationale for offering contract employment for ETs. Specifying the official retirement age in an organization stipulates that it is the agreed age boundary for employment. Employing retired employees means that the organization has crossed that boundary and obtained the service of retired employee or provided extended opportunity for the retired employee. From the school’s standpoint, it is not practical to provide a life-long employment for a profession like teaching. Hence, one interviewee stated that it is not an age discriminatory practice; rather, contract employment is a specific arrangement to convey the boundary/limit of employment when employing retired teachers. According to the Interviewee 1, “Likewise, retirement age, contract basis employment is a method of conveying the limit of employment with the organization when employing retired teachers.”

Further, one interviewee used the perspective of the “re-employment” of the elderly rather than employment. Based on the retirement age, he distinguished the concepts of employment from re-employment. According to him, any employee recruited beyond the retirement age can be generally considered as re-employment and the alternative strategy for such recruitment is the contract agreement, which is extensively practiced in the labour market when employing retired employees.

Also, some interviewees considered contract employment as the “best option” for employing ETs because ETs too are aware of the labour market preferences for younger individuals and of the administrative constraints involved in recruiting ETs in schools after retirement. Interviewee 7 stated that “it is the best and widely used practice in offering employment for retired employees. Elderly employees also understand it well.”

Some of the interviewees viewed the annual renewable contract as a method of motivating employees to up keep their performance. The contract is renewed based on the performance of the employee. According to the terms in the contract, if the performance is not at a satisfactory level, then the school has the discretion to terminate the employment. As a result, employees are compelled to perform in a better manner. The opinion of interviewee 3 was that “recruiting on a renewable contract basis is automatically pushing employees to better performance to get renewed their contract for the next year.”

Some interviewees from ISs said that all their employees are under contract employment irrespective of the age. Thus, no age preference was considered. The decision of continuing their employment was based only on the performance of the teacher. Interviewee 2 described their policy as follows: “our school recruits all the employees on contract basis irrespective of the age. Only performance matters.”

On the other hand, an interviewee from an IS that recruits ETs on permanent basis explained that the “sense of job security” of teachers that are on permanent basis is higher than contract teachers. It is one of the main considerations and motivations, especially for elderly-age employment and leads to stability in their employment, which in turn increases their contribution and loyalty towards the school. If the job is permanent, efforts for shifting the job are also very unlikely. Further, the school particularly welcomes ETs and is not hesitant to offer them permanent employment, as seen in the following passage.

I think sense of job security is one main motivation for work hard at the later age. I believe that, offering a permanent job would pave the way to obtain higher contribution, job retention and loyalty towards the school. (Interviewee 5)

As found, generally the recruitment of ETs is on contract basis and the interviewees reasoned out the merits and demerits of their decision in contrast with being hired on a permanent basis. Despite those facts, as long as employees are under a contract, employers can offer a different employment agreement from the normal

terms and conditions tenured under the stipulated period, which directly affects the job security of the employee. A contract agreement can curtail the benefits that are offered to the permanent employees, such as health and welfare benefits, reducing the cost of employees as well. That may be the reason for some schools recruiting both younger and elderly teachers on a contract basis. However, from the ET's standpoint, it would still be a positive trend to have some opportunities to continue their career on a contract basis in the competitive labour environment.

4.2 Full-time versus Part-time Employment

The general tendency in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka, as explained by the interviewees, is employing ETs on a full-time basis. Only two interviewees mentioned the part-time employment of ETs while one stated that they used both methods.

The interviewees elaborated their concerns about the practice of full-time versus part-time for ETs. Those that are employing ETs on a full-time basis explained that the teachers are supposed to work during the school hours during the daytime in the school. Unlike the usual office employee, working hours do not last from morning to evening. The employment of ETs in the private sector schools is due to a variety of reasons. One is the inadequacy of the number of teachers, which means sharing teaching responsibilities. Except for teaching, the schools are expected to share other duties and responsibilities of the school by all the teachers, for examples, administrative, mentoring, and student counseling services from the ETs. The schools are only able to obtain those services by utilizing them on a full-time basis because part-time involvement means only teaching the subjects and no additional responsibilities can be expected. Therefore, it is not useful to offer part-time employment for the teaching profession unless there is a specific reason for doing so. Interviewee 6 explained that "both the young and elderly teachers are supposed to work on full-time basis. Since the school hours are not that long and no point of utilizing them on part-time basis if not for any valid reason."

On the other hand, some interviewees reasoned out employing ETs on part-time basis from the perspectives of the employee and employer. One interviewee stated that some ETs would not like to engage in full-time employment because of the higher responsibilities, such as extra-curricular activity involvement, event organizing, and after school activities. They prefer only engaging in teaching, and flexibility in their employment is expected. Since they are qualified and produce good results, their service is vital for the school. Considering all those matters, the school is compelled to offer them part-time employment.

Interviewee 7 shared the idea that, "some qualified ETs like only engaging in teaching. They do not want to bear additional responsibilities. Therefore, we recruit them on part-time basis."

Another interviewee representing a small IS shared his concern when deciding to obtain part-time ETs. Since the number of students in the school was comparatively low (fewer than 500 students were in a small school) and some of the subjects were selected by few students, the school requires fewer teaching hours per week for that subject. In such a circumstance, it is always beneficial for the school to recruit ETs on part time basis. That arrangement is cost effective for the school and convenient for the teacher as well. Interviewee 10 gave an example that "in our school the subject of Malay is taken by few students. So, we hired an elderly teacher on part-time basis, which is cost effective and teacher also prefers that arrangement."

It was interesting to note that when designing the full-time versus part-time employment practices among the private sector schools in Sri Lanka, both the employer and employee perspectives were taken into consideration. This indicates that ETs are in a good position to negotiate their requirements and the schools are ready to accommodate them in a convenient manner, which facilitates an age-friendly work environment.

4.3 Remuneration and Other Benefits

According to Duthilleul [41] some of the objectives of using contract teachers are: a) to expand the enrollment in the school; b) to improve the pupil-teacher ratio; c) to provide assistance to regular teachers; and d) most importantly as a cost-saving means. The report he compiled for International Labour Organization after studying Asian and African countries revealed that, everywhere, the salaries and conditions of contract teachers are far inferior to those of regular civil service teachers. Contract teachers are typically hired for one year at a salary of one-half to one-quarter of that of a regular teacher. To ascertain those facts, it is worth considering the remuneration practice of the private sector schools in Sri Lanka, where recruitments are carried out mainly on a contract basis.

Some of the interviewees mentioned that they offer a "competitive salary" for ETs considering their experience and prevailing salary scales in the private sector schools. According to them, they do not under pay ETs when obtaining their service. That was basically emphasized by the interviewees from ISs. For some interviewees, it was better than government remuneration.

The opinion of interviewee 9 was the following:

"I think some retired teachers draw a salary more than what they got during the government teaching. Since I was a government principal, I know the salary scale."

They further elaborated that, when deciding the remuneration of ETs, whether the teacher receives a pension, or any other income is not taken into consideration. Not only that, in addition to the salary, some schools provide an annual bonus for the ETs just as with younger teachers. Further, ETs are given statutory allowances like an employee provident fund and employee trust fund. Interviewee 5 stated that “though elderly teachers are on contract basis, we give them annual bonus and other statutory entitlements such as employees’ provident fund and employees’ trust fund.”

Another interviewee representing a small IS however did not directly answer that question; instead, he explained the way he negotiated the benefit packages with ETs, facilitating the requirements of the ETs. Referring the benefit package negotiation point with the previous comment he made as one of the reasons for employing ETs in that particular small ISs was that his inability to pay higher expectations of young qualified teachers, yet he was able to meet the negotiable expectations of ETs. Arguably those negotiations are strong indications of offering lower salaries to ETs when employing them, as suggested in the following:

Retired teachers do not much concern about the salary. But they highly expect flexibility, less work stress and less additional responsibilities. We have to understand their needs and on that basis we can negotiate the package. (Interviewee 10)

Nevertheless, interviewee 7 representing a UPS, straightaway claimed that full-time contract-employed ETs were paid lower salaries than permanent teachers, which was further evidence that demonstrated the lower salaries of ETs.

In responding to the follow-up question, “Why do UPSs pay lower salaries to the ETs?,” the interviewee elaborated with reference to the salary of government teachers. Usually qualified senior government teachers earn a higher remuneration during a longer tenure with their career advancements. However, after the retirement age, though they are still qualified and experienced, having fewer opportunities and because there is less demand for ETs tend to keep their remuneration at a lower scale-employers are not ready to offer higher remuneration for ETs. Also, knowing the limited opportunities in the labour market, sometimes ETs are compelled to accept offers without further negotiation. Additionally, the monthly pension of retired government teachers is a considerable factor when determining the remuneration package for ETs in the private sector schools. By and large, all these factors affect the decisions regarding the remuneration package of an ET.

This point can be further validated through the comment made by interviewee 8 from an IS that did not like to employ ETs, who directly stated that “private schools know that the service of government retired teachers can be obtained under lower salaries.” This may be a manifestation of the “general perception of the remuneration practice” among the private sector schools in Sri Lanka when employing ETs. In articulating that statement, the interviewee further justified his rationale for not employing ETs in that particular school as follows:

By giving a lower salary to retired teachers, the school cannot expect much contribution from them. Offering a lower salary is an indication for the retired teachers, that school would expect lower contribution from them compared to younger teacher. (Interviewee 8)

According to the interviewees’ perceptions, negotiations and practices like ETs being employed with lower salaries are clear evidence for age discrimination in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. ETs are conceivably not only mistreated in terms of salary but also other benefits.

In responding to the idea of pension schemes for ETs, the interviewees from the UPSs explained that many of them are registered under the School Teachers Pension scheme, which is managed by the ministry of education in Sri Lanka. This scheme is only open to regular permanent teachers on a contributory basis. However, the interviewees from the ISs stated that they did not have such a pension scheme for teachers. However, both types of schools adhere to contributing to the statutory funds of the Employees’ Provident Fund and the Employees’ Trust Fund.

When discussing the other benefits to the teachers, another interviewee from an IS commented that the school offers medical allowance for teachers, “but it is only for the permanent teachers” (Interviewee 9). Yet, that school employs ETs only on a contract basis and that means that a medical allowance is not given to the ETs. Thus, it can be argued that sometimes employers use a contract service agreement as a tool to discriminate against ETs when determining the entitlement of benefits.

However, the mixed responses given by the interviewees indicated that though some of the schools provide better benefit packages to ETs, making them satisfied, some still maintain age discrimination in deciding remuneration and other benefits. Those employers that offer lower salaries, however, would help ETs in other ways, such as through employment flexibility, refraining from calling that practice “age discrimination.”

V. DISCUSSION

The terms and conditions applied for ETs employed in the private sector schools are discussed in this section on the basis of employment, full-time versus part-time, remuneration, and other benefits offered by the private sector schools to their ETs.

The study found that the common basis for employing the ETs in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka was on a contract basis, except for a very few schools. In the UPSs, it was strictly on a contract basis. There was very few ISs that employed all the teachers on a contract basis, irrespective of age. Since UPSs are registered under the Ministry of Education, there is an approved permanent teaching cadre for each UPS under certain conditions. Beyond that number, still the school management can recruit teachers according to the requirements, which is called an “excess cadre.” With this administrative restriction, inevitably ETs are under the excess cadre and hence the only alternative to recruiting them in the UPS is on a contract basis. However, ISs are free from such restrictions and they can recruit ETs according to the discretion of the school management. That may help some ISs recruit all the teachers on a contract basis irrespective of their age.

In the context of ageing employment, contract employment has been a widely popular method of hiring retired workers for the labour market. Empirical studies have confirmed that many countries follow this practice in employing retired teachers. When a country is suffering from a teacher shortage, as an alternative strategy they recruit retired teachers on a contract basis even if it has inherent pros and cons [42], [43]. The ministry of education in Singapore has also launched a scheme for re-employing retired teachers in the public schools only on an annual, renewable contract basis. Not only that, many countries in Asia and Africa that are suffering from teacher shortage recruit retired teachers under a contract agreement [41].

Duthilleul [41] further argued that there is a contradiction involved in job stability and performance of contract teachers. The job stability of teaching is one essential element to ensure the provision of quality education. If the teacher is not stable in a particular school setting, it causes frequent job attrition and commitment issues in performance. Conversely, job instability associated with contract employment serves as an incentive for those teachers to perform at the best level in order to get extended their contract further or to secure a permanent position. However, when employing retired teachers on a contract basis in Sri Lanka it would not question about their qualification and experience and they are unlikely to have job attrition because of competition from the young teachers.

The next concern is the employment of ETs on full-time versus part-time basis. The study observed that most of the private schools in Sri Lanka prefer to adopt full-time employment practices for ETs. Comparatively UPSs employed a higher number of ETs on a part-time basis. This implies that ISs are suffering from a teacher shortage compared with UPSs. On the other hand, even after retirement, ETs are still in a position to secure full-time employment in the same profession in the private sector schools, indicating a growing tendency in the education labour market for retired teachers and the readiness of ETs to take up full-time opportunities. The employers in the present study revealed that they preferred full-time employment since the school hours were not too long and also lack of teachers in the schools required all the teachers to share academic and extra-curricular activities equally.

The literature on the working patterns of EEs indicated that EEs would either like to continue working in some form after retirement or stay with the existing employer by downscaling their commitments in terms of hours and working patterns, mostly targeting flexible working opportunities [36]. In contrast to that, generally ETs in Sri Lanka are looking forward to continuing their career on a full-time basis and employers are also willing to employ them accordingly.

Considering the size of the schools, it appears that large schools always offer full-time employment while part-time employment could only be observed in medium and small schools. Also, in offering teaching employment to ETs, sometimes the decision of full-time versus part-time was based on the considerations of both the employer and the employee. The reasons for a part-time arrangement by the medium and small school may be that those schools are still at the growing stage and they may face certain constraints such as financial considerations, the number of students, gaining a reputation, and they are facing competition and high job attrition. From the ETs’ standpoint, they tend to teach and engage in the profession but do not want to take up additional responsibilities. Therefore, the better way to find a compromise for those objectives is to create an age-friendly environment to attract more ETs and to offer them part-time jobs. Studies have highlighted the potential contribution of the small and medium sector organizations in providing employment opportunities and in particular, flexible working options for older workers [22], [44].

The different benefit packages offered to ETs against younger teachers are a crucial factor demonstrating age discrimination in the organization. Bal and Visser [49], mentioned that bridge employment (employment beyond retirement) is often accompanied by a lower level of working hours, consequently a lower level of remuneration, yet it is very important income to compensate pension gaps. The way in which employment practices changed in Japan with the ageing labour force was explained by Clark [45], as firms replaced lifelong employment policy with a mandatory retirement and seniority pay system changing to performance based pay, which reduced earning at an older age. In South Korea also under the seniority wage system the practice of wage reduction for EEs could be seen in the name of a “wage peak system” based on the length of time they have been employed after a certain age [28].

Nevertheless, the findings of the study provided a mixed picture regarding remuneration and other benefit practices in the private schools. In some schools, ETs were provided a competitive remuneration and other benefits irrespective of age, while other schools gave lower benefit packages compared with younger teachers. However, it was found that sometimes small and medium schools tended to offer lower remuneration and benefits compared to large schools because of the financial and other numerous challenges faced by those schools. Hence, they tried to compromise those issues by negotiating with other demands of ETs such as flexibility, lower responsibilities and reduced working hours. Since financial incentives play an important role in performance, such bargained benefit packages for ETs may have direct implications regarding the motivation of teachers and in turn the quality of the education provided in the schools when employing ETs.

As the interviewees mentioned, if the schools offer competitive salaries and other benefits such as bonuses, irrespective of age, it will motivate the teachers by maintaining an environment of equality. Teachers are the heart of quality education. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the schools to maintain a “satisfied” teaching staff. However, if the ETs are paid lower salaries than younger teachers it will obviously demotivate the ETs and the school cannot obtain higher contribution from them. This treatment for ETs is an underestimation of their knowledge and experience, solely because of “being a retiree.” It is also contradictory to the reasons given for employing ETs in the private sector schools regarding their competence, expertise, and experience. Further, creating a perception that ETs could be hired at a lower salary would tarnish the image of the ETs and the schools that employ those teachers. This will in turn diminish the demand for ETs, establishing another stereotypical attitude in the education industry. As emphasized by Duthilleul [45], the long-term sustainable answer to teacher shortages is not institutionalizing low cost, non-professional teachers, but decent working and living conditions that make teaching an attractive profession.

VI. Conclusion

The objective of this paper is to examine the prevailing employment terms and condition on Elderly Teachers in the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The study used qualitative research method with a sample of 10 interviewees representing employers of the private sector schools in Sri Lanka. The key findings of the study categorized prevailing employment terms and condition on the ETs into three, namely, annual renewable contract basis, full-time versus part-time employment, remuneration and other benefits offered to employees. The study confirmed mixed results in adopting employment terms and conditions for both the younger teachers and ETs. In other words, under all three themes identified in the study did not indicate age discriminatory employment terms and conditions for ETs in every circumstance.

However, it can be concluded that the common basis for recruiting ETs in the private sector is on annual renewable contract basis. Also, when deciding the condition of full-time versus part-time employment, the private sector schools in Sri Lanka take into consideration both the school requirement (employer) and ET’s concerns as well. That flexible approach adopted in private schools indicate the age-friendly employment terms in the labour market. Conversely, the remuneration and other benefits given by the private sector schools implied age discriminatory conditions by offering lower remuneration and curtailing other benefits offered to ETs in comparison with younger teachers. Hence, it is required to concern about the age discriminatory employment terms and conditions derived from the study as to create age-friendly working environment amidst of a dearth of teachers in the school education sector.

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