

# Migration from developing countries: The case of South African teachers to the United Kingdom

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## Abstract

*The United Kingdom (particularly England) is the main developed country that recruits teachers from South Africa. This article provides an overview of teacher migration from South Africa to the United Kingdom over the past decade. The research focuses on the following aspects of migration: the recruitment of South African teachers; motivation for migration; the impact of teacher shortages in both the recruiting and the source country, and experiences of South African teachers in the United Kingdom. A number of recommendations are made for future practice.*

**Keywords:** South African teachers, migration, recruitment, experiences, teacher shortages

## Introduction

The cross-national migration of humans, from the quest for career advancement by skilled professionals to the seeking of asylum by refugees, is not a recent phenomenon. Teacher loss is a global phenomenon that is impacting both developed and developing nations the world over, but has been reported on primarily amongst members of the Commonwealth. The most important reasons include disaffection with the teaching environment leading to a career change, death due to the HIV&AIDS epidemic or teacher mobility and recruitment by other countries. A particular concern has been the recruitment of teachers from developing Commonwealth countries and small states. The loss of teachers through recruitment and migration impacts most on education systems in small countries where the stock of human capital is limited, and in poor countries where the cost of teacher training is funded mainly by the national budget. In industrialised countries the demographic trends of ageing populations coincide with the limited supply of young teachers.

Teacher recruitment on a south to north basis has been a relatively recent phenomenon. Organised teacher recruitment dates from the late 1990s, reaching a peak during 2000-2002 (Morgan, Sives & Appleton, 2005). The teacher recruitment agencies' main focus of the new

market has been on South Africa. Many South African teachers are forced to seek opportunities abroad. At present South Africa faces the problem of intercontinental migration in the education workforce, the effect of which has placed pressure on the governments of South Africa and other Commonwealth countries. Morgan *et al.* (2006) are of the opinion that the need to improve education services for their own development, as well as to meet internationally agreed goals, combined with the impact of increased migration, have led to a dilemma.

The problem of teachers migrating from South Africa leads to several key questions such as: What problems do South African teachers experience working in schools in the United Kingdom (UK)? How can these problems be solved? What are their induction and orientation needs? How can governments of both source and recruiting countries help them? How can the teacher recruitment agencies and schools in the UK help them? What are the consequences of aggressive recruitment of teachers for the educational system in the source country? How will South Africa ultimately benefit from this 'brain circulation'?

## Teacher shortages in the United Kingdom

In 2000-2001 teacher shortages were at their highest level for a decade. One common strategy employed by this wealthy industrial country for dealing with the problem was to recruit teachers from abroad. The shortage of teachers in the UK is confined to specific subjects, secondary phase and specific regions. According to Morgan *et al.* (2006) there has been a decrease in the number of migrant teachers working on the primary level since 2000. Smithers and Robinson (2000) emphasised that posts were difficult to fill in of Mathematics, Sciences, Design and Technology, Physical Sciences, Home Economics and Religious Education. Coulthard and Kyriacou (2002) confirmed that the problem is particularly acute in secondary schools in the subject fields of Mathematics, Chemistry, Physics, Modern Languages and Technology. It is being speculated by the Department for Education and Skills that teacher shortage will not be a problem in the near future because of falling learner (pupil) numbers, an increase in the number of aspirant teachers and the introduction of the Higher Level Teaching Assistants.

The peaks and troughs of teacher supply have opened up the market for the global migration of teachers. Barlin and Hallgarten (2002) argue that supply teaching occupies a much more central role in filling vacancies and offers a more flexible choice for both teachers and schools. Many overseas teachers are employed in this capacity, particularly in London.

The industrialised countries have the means, but have planned poorly and are now buying human resources from abroad. The decline in the influence of local education authorities, however, particularly after the transfer of funding to schools in the early 1990s, coincided with a period of rising school enrolment and falling teacher numbers. These factors together created a shortfall in teacher numbers that was especially significant in the period between 1995 and 1997, when numbers leaving the teaching profession rose to unprecedented levels (McNamara, Lewis & Howson, 2005). Studies undertaken by Smithers and Robinson (2001) examined the reasons that lay behind teacher shortages during the late 1990s. The main conclusion they drew from their research was that difficulties in teacher supply arose firstly because the salaries and working conditions of teachers had never been fully adjusted and secondly, due to the retention of teachers in the profession. Smithers and Robinson (2005) found that teacher turnover has remained at the same level over the previous three years: 14.7% in primary schools and 12.5% in secondary schools.

In an attempt to help alleviate schools' staffing needs, teacher supply agencies 'moved' into the market to 'provide' teachers. Some even recruited on behalf of local authorities. By 2000 it was evident that in some parts of England, schools were already relying on the recruitment of overseas teachers to fill the gaps. The market in teacher supply has led to abuse of the system with overseas teachers arriving in the UK to find no job available: "Teachers, mainly from African countries such as South Africa and Zimbabwe are facing deportation because they can no longer find jobs in the classroom." (Garner, 2003, 15)

## Teacher shortages in South Africa

Currently there is great concern about teacher shortages in South Africa. Unfortunately, the South African government does not keep a record of the numbers of its teachers recruited internationally. There have been estimates of the number of unemployed teachers in South Africa. Opinions also differ on the extent to which there is a shortage of teachers in South Africa. According to Rademeyer (2005), the South African Director-General in the Department of Education has argued that there is no general shortage of teachers in South Africa. He believed that there were about 11 000 teachers without posts on the Department of Education's database. He also said the Department of Education did not have a formal policy on teacher migration and that a year of community service for teachers may be in the offing. Although the South African government was originally in favour of 'brain circulation,' it has become necessary to 'regulate' outward migration. Appleton *et al.* (2006) makes the important point that international recruitment does not lead to harmful shortages of teachers in South Africa, but may 'cream off' the more effective teachers. Bertram *et al.* (2006) argued that teacher shortages in South Africa are not translating into available jobs for newly qualified teachers. For Morgen *et al.* (2006) it seems hard to argue that the consequences of international recruitment for the education system in South Africa would be severe because of an apparent oversupply of teachers locally.

Teaching is the largest single occupational group and profession in South Africa, numbering close to 390 000 in public and private schools (Department of Education, 2006). The supply of newly qualified teachers is substantially less than the number of teaching posts that become vacant each year. Fourie (2006) contends that there are estimated to be around 39 000 students studying for BEd and PGCE courses. Only around 6 000 newly qualified teachers graduate each year. With a teacher attrition of around 4-5% per annum, Morgan *et al.* (2006) has calculated that there is a need to recruit 17-20 000 teachers per year. According to Bernstein (2007) the Human Science Research Council estimated that by 2008 South Africa will need 15 090 teachers if the current learner-to-educator ratios of 40:1 for primary schools and 35:1 for secondary schools are maintained. Rademeyer (2005) points out that research showed that South Africa needs about 22 000 new teachers annually. In 2004 the Education Minister concluded that each year in South Africa 17 000 teachers were leaving the teaching profession in South Africa (Mkhize, 2004). Others have argued that unemployed teachers are not trained in shortage subjects such as Mathematics and Science (Morgan *et al.* 2006). Key findings from the study of Bertram *et al.* (2006) showed that 27.4% of the samples of final year student teachers in 2005 were planning to teach abroad.

The South African Council of Educators has considered discontinuing registration of unqualified or under-qualified teachers from 2006 onwards. This will greatly reduce the flexibility of South Africa's education system in response to teacher shortages. South Africa has a shortage of Mathematics and Science teachers in both urban and rural public schools. Mangxamba (2007) reports that at least 6 000 schools do not have qualified teachers in these subjects. The Council of Education Ministers has also explored the recruitment of foreign Mathematics and Science teachers earlier this year. India was one of the countries from which South Africa had agreed to recruit the most teachers. However, the Department of Education also intends to recruit teachers from Zimbabwe, Singapore, Malaysia and Uganda. Forde (2007) stated that according to government estimates, there are also about 10 000 Zimbabwean fully trained teachers living in this country. Among them are about 4 000 qualified Mathematics and Science teachers. Already the current Education Minister has signalled her eagerness to recruit trained teachers from Zimbabwe to fill some vacant posts in these scarce skills subjects. Bringing in the Indian and Zimbabwean teachers will be a short-term solution. The questions arise: What is the future blue print from the Department of Education with regard to teacher shortages in scarce skills subjects? How thoroughly are these foreign teachers trained in our outcomes-based education?

According to Bernstein (2007) the South African Democratic Teachers' Union claims that South Africa has 50 000 unemployed teachers who need to be employed before foreign recruitment can be considered.

## Number of South African teachers in the United Kingdom

There are no comprehensive figures on the numbers of migrant teachers working in UK schools. According to Morgan *et al.* (2006), 3 665 migrant teachers had either completed or were undertaking the overseas-trained teacher programme. Of those 721 (19.6%) were South Africans. Morgan *et al.* also found that most schools in the UK tend to employ South African teachers when compared with teachers from nationalities. The drastic migration of South African teachers was demonstrated by the statistics of the British Department of Home Affairs: in 1997-1998 only 20 work permits were allowed for South African teachers to teach in the UK. By 2001-2002 this had risen to 2 297 (Jansen, 2002). Commonwealth research at the end of 2003 showed that more than 5 000 South African teachers left the country to work in the UK between 2001 and the end of 2003 (SABC Special Assignment, 3 March 2004). South African teachers often find themselves taking up the challenge in extremely tough inner-city London schools and the South East of England. According to a broadcast (South Africa's brain drain dilemma, BBC News, 19 April 2004) up to 5 000 South Africans are teaching in London alone. The number of work permits issued in the UK to those where the jobs included teaching from 2001-2003 indicated that South Africa has the highest number with 6 090 teachers (McNamara *et al.*, 2005).

## Motivation for migration

International teacher mobility is driven primarily by the prospect of profitable income. So far, the Commonwealth Secretariat has conducted the most relevant systematic studies concerning the recruitment of teachers. Ochs (2003) and Morgan *et al.* (2006) have conducted studies on the migrating of teachers, attributable to financial status, travel, for increased studying. De Villiers (2004) noted that it was mostly on account of financial reasons and the opportunity to travel that South African teachers left their country of birth to teach in the UK. A staff reporter of the *Cape Argus* (a newspaper), 26 November 2003, also confirmed it: "Lure of the pound draws professionals". According to Grace (2003), Africans can earn up to four times as much in the UK as at home. Rossouw (2006) contended that South African teachers are promised salaries of up to R5 000 per week.

## Recruitment of South African teachers

The international recruitment of teachers by countries of the developed world from developing countries has become a controversial aspect of the problem of teacher migration. The recruitment of South African teachers by the UK arose during a period of shortage of local teachers in 2000-2001, and England is the main developed country that recruits teachers from South Africa.

The Office for Standards in Education in the UK (Ofsted) (2002) contends that most of the overseas-trained agency teachers are 'very good'. South Africa's teaching corps is particularly favoured for their loyalty, hard work and their sheer dedication (Garrun, 2007). The demand for them in the UK is great and for this reason South Africa loses hundreds of teachers annually.

The recruitment of overseas-trained teachers from Commonwealth countries to work in England has been at the heart of the debates on the migration of trained teachers amongst Commonwealth Education Ministers who have argued that governments invest substantial amounts of money in training teachers only for them to be recruited to work abroad, usually to a developed country where they can earn a much higher salary (Morgan *et al.*, 2006). A former South African Education Minister accused British recruitment agencies of "poaching" teachers:

There was an agreement that the British government would not poach our teachers. If the recruitment companies are looking to fill posts for local authorities in Britain, then the British government is involved (Naidu, 2001, 9).

In 1997 a moratorium on the employment of new teachers in South Africa was introduced and several experienced teachers took early retirement. Recruitment agencies are key players in the migration of teachers. South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Canada are the main countries where agencies have set up offices. According to Ochs (2003) the more qualified and more experienced teachers are targeted by recruitment efforts in developed nations to serve in their schools. In the context of small states in particular, such recruitment causes great challenges in replacing these individuals, whose skills and knowledge are vital to the education system. According to Mulvaney (2005) direct marketing campaigns on university campuses in South Africa were the most effective (40%) marketing strategy. Surprisingly, in the study of Reid (2006) more than 90% of the South African teachers had 'recruited' themselves. South Africa was an attractive location for agencies to find teachers willing to teach in the UK.

In South Africa there have been concerns that overrecruitment of teachers for schools in the UK could cause local shortages of teachers (UK behind SA brain drain, BBC News, 16 February 2001). In 2001 the former Education Minister, also voiced concern about international recruitment of teachers, accusing British recruiters of 'raiding' the country's resources (McGreal & Smithers, 2001). Although South Africa has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world (Kingdon & Knight, 2001), this does not necessarily imply a surplus of teachers. The current Education Minister is of the opinion that overseas recruitment is not the bugbear it is made out to be:

We accept that teachers are part of a highly mobile international workforce, and that there is significant migration of teachers around the world. This phenomenon is a positive one, provided it is managed, and does not involve large scale systematic poaching efforts (Pandor, 2005).

Some teacher recruitment agencies in the UK have been criticised by recruited teachers, schools as well the UK government and governments of source countries (Curtis, 2003). The vast majority of British recruitment agencies recruiting teachers in South Africa are guilty of gross unethical conduct. Teachers were not informed about the challenges waiting for them at typical inner-city London schools (Teaching overseas 'precarious', News 24, 1 July 2005). The main criticisms concerned inadequate information on the cost of living, taxation, Qualified Teacher Status and differences between information received before and after arrival (Ochs, 2003). Some migrant teachers reported feeling pressured by their recruitment agency to change to a different contract and even location once they arrived in the UK (Crace, 2003). In the study of Mulvaney (2005) over half (54%) the teachers indicated that they were misled or not told the whole truth about conditions in the UK schools.

In 2004 Commonwealth Education Ministers signed the Commonwealth Teacher Recruitment Protocol, designed to stem the damaging flow of teachers from poorer to richer nations. The Protocol has no legal standing, but has moral authority over the signatory governments, which are urged to develop their own regulations and legislation in order to meet its commitments. This Protocol seeks amongst others to safeguard the rights of recruited teachers, and the conditions relating to their service in the recruiting country (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004). However, how many head teachers (school principals) and migrant teachers are aware of this Protocol? How effective is this Protocol?

## Experiences of South African teachers in the United Kingdom

Although more than 70% (of 22) South African teachers surveyed in the UK recommend teaching abroad (De Villiers, 2004), a number of research studies have reported that some migrant teachers

find their experience demanding, lonely and difficult (Sutherland & Rees, 1995; Mowbray, 2001; Ochs, 2003). Asmal (2004) said that many teachers choose to return to South Africa after a year or two in the UK, and most return as better teachers. Research by De Villiers (United Kingdom discourages South African teachers, News 24, 15 July 2005) showed that the negative experiences of South African teachers who had taught in England caused them to lose all interest in teaching. It was interesting to note that because of the poor salaries in South Africa, six of the eight South African teachers interviewed, planned on leaving the teaching profession on their return. Many South African teachers in the UK had never taught before (De Villiers, 2004; Mulvaney, 2005).

## Negative experiences

### *Classroom management*

In a study by Hutchings *et al.* (2002), learners' behaviour was repeatedly cited as the main reason why a third of the UK teachers had left their posts. Migrant teachers experience the same discipline problems in the classroom (Ochs, 2003; De Villiers, 2004; Mulvaney, 2005). A Special Assignment Programme 'Lessons Abroad', shown on South African television (SABC 3, 23 March 2004), revealed how many hard-working South African teachers reach the end of their tether in London's inner-city schools. Many of them soon find their enthusiasm dissipating as they realise what a tough place the UK can be. They are not empowered to deal with lack of discipline. They are also unable to form meaningful relationships with learners from deprived backgrounds who are aggressive and unmotivated.

### *Finances*

Some teachers acknowledged receiving information on finances including tax, national insurance and council tax, but others have suggested that the information they received was inadequate. One teacher from South Africa, for example, arrived with £100:

No-one told me how far the money would stretch (Ochs, 2003, 31).

Sutherland and Rees (1995) also identified the financial difficulties faced by teachers. Living in London and the South East is especially challenging for teachers who are paid as unqualified teachers, since they receive lower wages. They are not remunerated during school and public holidays. De Villiers (2004) found that almost 34% of the South African teachers in the UK earned a second income at night, over weekends or during school holidays. Although the cost of living is markedly higher in the UK, most teachers are able to take home significant sums from their stay in the UK.

### *Induction programmes*

The study by Mulvaney (2005) showed that 50% (of 100) teachers indicated their schools offered no induction programmes when they arrived for the first time. Furthermore, they claimed that the induction programmes offered by the teacher recruitment agencies were inadequate (De Villiers, 2004).

### *Qualified Teacher Status*

Every teacher must have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) in order to teach in England. Migrant teachers however can work in England for four years without QTS. The process of gaining QTS is both complex and demanding for the teacher and the school and can leave migrant teachers feeling undervalued, offended and surprised at the commitment and tasks involved (Sutherland & Rees, 1995) despite perhaps having several years of teaching experience in their home countries. Mowbray (2001) noted that few recruits were actually expecting the process to be so

difficult or indeed necessary at all. De Villiers (2004) found that teachers without QTS feel inferior because many of their colleagues did not regard them as fully qualified. The teacher who experiences problems adapting, especially supply teachers who are transient, will find it difficult to enrol for the QTS, since most migrant teachers will access QTS via the 'Employment Based Route', which requires the support of a school. Mulvaney (2005) indicated that South African teachers are not informed in the recruiting advertisements about QTS. However, the advice from Bubb (2003) how to obtain QTS will help head teachers and migrant teachers. She proposes an 18-step plan and recommends that head teachers and teachers obtain expert advice on the application form before even starting to fill it in.

## Positive experiences

### *Discrimination*

In general, most of the South African teachers experience no discrimination in UK schools. In his study De Villiers (2004) found that only two of 22 South African teachers had encountered discrimination whilst working in the UK. Black South African teachers are not very popular in UK schools. Many head teachers send them back to the agencies because of their accent (personal communication: *HigherTeach*, 2002). Ochs (2003) reports that one black South African teacher was told by a recruitment agency that she should change her accent to make it sound more British.

### *National curriculum*

The study of Ochs (2003) noted that some migrant teachers felt that the demands of teaching in England improved their teaching, whereas others thought the restriction of conforming to the curriculum had a detrimental effect upon their standard of teaching in some respects. De Villiers (2004) reported that South African teachers in the UK found the curriculum practical, extremely specific, well set out, enjoyable, very detailed and relevant.

### *Interpersonal relationships*

In general South African teachers experienced good relationships with their colleagues. They found their colleagues very friendly, helpful and pleasant people. Those teachers who were fortunate enough to have classroom assistants coped very well with their presence. Most teachers experienced no problems in teaching multiracial classes.

## Recommendations

South African teachers are thrown into the deep end, crossing continents, cultures and curricula, and are expected to start teaching almost as soon as they arrive in the United Kingdom. Most of the teachers find it difficult to cope in these schools. Agencies, schools, and both South African and British governments should take note of the following recommendations:

### British schools

- Stop employing "teachers" as supply teachers who do not have any educational qualifications (De Villiers, 2004).
- Don't require teachers to teach age groups or subjects for which they are not trained.
- Consider appointing supply teachers for longer periods. It is impossible for supply teachers to maintain good discipline in a school when they are constantly rotated.

- Change the image of the supply teacher in the eyes of the learner. Only then will problems of discipline in schools start to decrease. The learners do not regard supply teachers as true teachers, but merely as stopgap teachers.
- Schools in the UK which appoint supply teachers should only involve agencies with the Quality Mark.
- Improved and comprehensive induction programmes which must be administered to all migrant teachers will consequently lead to greater productivity in schools.

## Teacher recruitment agencies

- Closer monitoring of teacher recruitment agencies. South African teachers are aggressively recruited under false pretences. Agencies should inform teachers about the challenges awaiting them.
- Agencies should employ the use of structured interviews when recruiting teachers in South Africa.
- Teachers newly arrived in the UK would benefit if they could attend an observation programme in different schools before they begin practising.
- Regulate teacher migration and recruitment times. South Africa operates a different school year. It is highly disruptive for South African schools when teachers leave their schools in the middle of a quarter.
- Institute a teacher-school matching selection process. Not all teachers have suitable personalities for coping in some of the more challenging schools in the UK.
- Closer co-ordination and cooperation between schools in the UK and recruitment agencies in both the UK and South Africa.

## South African Government

- The South African government should keep statistical records on the international recruitment of its teachers.
- Newly qualified teachers would have much more self-confidence if they first gained at least one year's practical teaching experience in their own country before considering teaching in the UK.
- The Department of Education should introduce international relocation grants to encourage South African teachers overseas to return home.
- The South African government should welcome South African teachers with international experience.

## British Government

- Unacceptable learner behaviour should be high on the government's priority list if its adverse affects on recruitment and retention of teachers are to be addressed.
- Distribute South African education-related lists of vacancies in the UK among those who intend to return to South Africa as teachers.
- Improved and comprehensive induction programmes of the agencies will reduce most of the teachers' problems.
- Establish a bigger awareness-raising exercise of the Teacher Recruitment Protocol and the Quality Mark for head teachers in the UK.

The migrant teachers usually bring with them a wealth of experience and inspiration when they return to teach in their country of birth. I support the migration of teachers to foreign countries if it does not lead to harmful shortages of teachers in the source country.



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