



Review

International teacher mobility and migration: A review and synthesis of the current empirical research and literature



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ABSTRACT

This article reviews the international literature and cross-disciplinary empirical work on the issue of international teacher mobility and migration. The aim of the article is to offer a comprehensive and up-to-date synthesis of the research on internationally mobile educational professionals. The study reviewed over 120 documents published on the issue within the last fifteen years in English and German. The review focuses on three broad aspects: The first section reviews documents concerning the recent increase in international mobility and migration of educational professionals. The second part synthesises research addressing the lived experiences of migrant teachers during their transition into a new context. The final section of the article provides insights into current debates about the impact of migrant teachers on education systems in receiving countries. The review closes by identifying gaps in the current research base and by suggesting areas for inquiry that have not been addressed and warrant further research.

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been a tremendous increase in teacher mobility and migration, and the topic is now a growing field of research with numerous empirical studies and special editions emerging. These teacher movements are a reflection of the increased international mobility of highly-qualified workers in a growing global labour market. Alongside nurses, doctors, and engineers, teachers represent one of the “most mobile professions” (European Commission, n.d.) and play an important part in the global employment market these days (Reid & Collins, 2013). However, despite a heightened research interest in issues related to international teacher mobility and migration, reviews of the existing literature are scarce. Yet, reliable information is essential in order to develop evidence-based policies and practices for the management of teacher recruitment, mobility, and migration.

The present paper reviews the international literature and cross-disciplinary empirical work on the issue of internationally mobile educational professionals. The objective is to provide researchers and policymakers with a reliable and current assessment of what is known and not known about the issue of international teacher mobility and migration. What are the main trends and flows in international teacher migration? What are the main characteristics of migrant teachers? How do they contribute to the education system of their host countries, and what impact does teacher migration have on sending countries? What are the main challenges for migrant teachers during their professional transition, and what are the personal and professional benefits of international migration for teachers? Plus, are the existing support practices successful in helping migrant teachers during their professional acculturation? These and other basic questions must be answered in order to plan future policies for the management of international teacher migration. Ultimately, the aim of this review is to identify gaps and questions in the research base that have not been addressed so far, and which require further engagement.

1.1. Review method

The research started with searching online databases such as ERIC, SAGE's online database, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The following key terms were used in these searches: Immigrant teacher(s), Lehrer mit Migrationshintergrund, Migrant teacher(s), Teacher migration, Internationally trained/educated teacher(s), Overseas trained teacher(s), Foreign trained teacher(s), Minority immigrant teacher(s), Overseas teacher(s), Non-native teacher(s), Imported teacher(s), Global teacher(s), Teacher mobility, Lehrer mit Zuwanderungsgeschichte, and Overseas born teacher(s), plus combinations of these terms with alternative expressions, such as Educators and Professionals. This initial key word search located around 240 documents, including articles, monographs, reports, dissertations, and conference presentations.

This review exclusively searched documents published in English and German. As a result it may not exhaust the existing evidence base on teacher mobility and migration. Studies addressing local issues related to teacher migration are likely to be published in a country's national language. For instance, the search located 22 documents on issues related to teacher migration in Germany that were published in German, yet no documents published in English. However, a search on the online database *SCImago* (2007) also showed that the countries with the most publications in the subject category of Education over the period from 1996 to 2013 comprised of the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, China, and Germany. It is therefore hoped that the over 240 documents published in English and German, which were located in the initial key search for this review, represent a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge base.

Of the initially found 240 documents 45 could not be retrieved, trimming the list to about 195 documents. Following a closer look at the documents, any studies not addressing issues related to international teacher mobility and migration were excluded. This step proved rather difficult due to varying definitions between countries of what constitutes an Immigrant teacher/Migrant teacher. For example, Lehrer mit Migrationshintergrund (Teachers with a migration background) is a broad term generally used in German publications to describe teachers with a personal and/or family history of immigration. At the end, the review excluded any documents that were not focusing on issues related to internationally mobile teachers, which resulted in a further reduction to about 165 studies. Further, it is the goal of this review to provide an up-to-date synopsis of the current knowledge base on the issue. For that reason, documents published before the year 2000 (24 documents) were not included in this review. Finally, doctoral dissertations were excluded from the review (21 documents), but the results of five theses were included in the form of published papers. This initial elimination process resulted in a list of over 120 documents.

Given this large sample size, priority was given to documents published in high-quality journals (41%) and articles in peer-reviewed and internationally recognised journals (24%). Compared to other topics, the evidence base for this review is relatively broad and from a variety of disciplines and fields of knowledge. Even though a categorisation is difficult since many studies are conducted and published interdisciplinary, an analysis showed that within the cited documents a large majority of articles appeared in the subject category of Education and Educational Research, including Teaching and Teacher Education, Education Policy & Politics, Sociology of Education, and International and Comparative Education. This is followed by studies that can only be categorised very generally into the broad area of Social Sciences, while fewer articles addressed topics that fall into the subject categories of Demography, Cultural Studies, Language and Linguistics, Planning and Development, Sociology and Political Science, Anthropology, Urban Studies, and Social Work. As a consequence of this broad range of knowledge domains, there is a plethora of national and international journals. However, the major outlets for this literature (with three or more publications on the issue) are: Teaching and Teacher Education, the Australian Journal of Education, Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, the International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, Teaching Education,

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