

Barriers to the Employment and Promotion of Teachers: The Case of International Teachers at Secondary Schools in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa

Mohammed. I.

Facukty of Education

University for Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana

ssh.mohammed@yahoo.com

and

Molepo, J.M.

Faculty of Education

Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the barriers to the employment and promotion of international teachers at secondary schools in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa. A sample of five principals, five Deputy Principals, five Heads of Departments and five international teachers from five different public secondary schools was used in the study. Face-to-face in-depth individual interviews were used to collect data from participants. Data obtained were analysed thematically. The following common barriers to the employment and promotion of international teachers at secondary schools in the district were revealed in the study: resistance from the local teachers to recognise the cultural similarities and differences that existed between themselves and the international teachers, the element of insecurity in the local teachers concerning the employment or promotion of international teachers, the school governing body's influence which favours the local teachers in any employment situation, the limited promotional posts in the senior secondary schools and the lack of work permits and South African resident permits by the international teachers. Recommendations concerning these barriers were made to ensure equal employments and promotional opportunities for all teachers irrespective of their nationalities.

Keywords: International, Teachers, Barriers, Employment, Promotion, Resistance

Introduction

The management of a diverse teacher workforce in modern schools is seen as a challenge to most schools. In some countries, managing workforce diversity is partly enforced by the Employment Equity Act; where the stated intention of the Act is to eliminate unfair discrimination, ensuring employment equity, and achieving a diverse teacher workforce that is broadly representative of the country's demographic realities (Bean, Human, Llewellyn, Kley, Tshabalala, & Eksteen, 2006).

International teachers in foreign countries have been a major and very necessary source of labour supply (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2009). It is surprising schools in most countries still experience employment and promotional barriers after a number of actions in the forms of legislations to rectify the injustices in employment and promotions have been initiated (Grobler, Surette, et. al., 2006). For example in South Africa, legislations which include: the Labour Relation Act, No. 66 of 1995 (as amended); the constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, No 108 of 1996; the Basic Condition of Employment Act, No. 75 of 1997 (BCEA) (as amended); the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998 (EEA); the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, No 4 of 2000 and the Code of Good Practice (Grobler, Surette, et. al., 2006).

As regards the challenges faced by international teachers in foreign countries, Mauricio (1994) states that the specific mechanisms and barriers that affect the advancement of international teachers in the workplace can be grouped under the general heading of discrimination in the workplace. Workplace barriers can be categorized into the following three major headings: organizational hierarchy or career ladders, stereotypes and workplace culture.

The WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2009) highlight that the issue of prejudice is seen as a barrier to the employment of international teachers. Immigrant teachers' status loomed large within the recruitment process; immigrant teachers are seen not just as potential employees but as foreign employees who looked less favourably in the employment process. The question that needed to be answered was: *What are the barriers to the employment and promotion of international teachers at secondary schools in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa?*

This paper examines the barriers to the employment and promotion of international teachers at secondary schools in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa. Despite the important role play both local and international teachers in South African schools, international teachers in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa faced employment and promotion barriers and look less favorably in the employment process as a result of perceived cultural differences and the existence of discriminatory practices

in the schools as some school governing bodies and local teachers resist the employment and promotion of teachers from other countries.

It is important to highlight here that very little research has been done in the area of barriers to the employment of international teachers in schools. Given the importance of teachers in national development, it was important to conduct a study that intended to find out the key employment and promotional barriers faced by international teachers in the secondary schools of the Mthatha Education District in South Africa.

The rest of the paper is organised as follows: section one deals with the barriers to employment and promotion of international teachers in schools. The research method and design employed in the study are presented in section two while the results of the study and the discussion of the research findings are presented in section three. The last section comprises recommendations, conclusions and suggestions for further studies.

Barriers to International Teachers' Employment and Promotion in Schools

It is important to bring to light that cultural differences in communication are seen to present significant difficulties in employing international teachers (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2009). Stephen (2009) claims the uniqueness of teachers' social groups; gender, religion, and culture have a significant bearing on their employment and experiences in schools. Mauricio (1994) confirms this by stating that minority teachers are adversely affected by the assumption that advancement within schools requires assimilation and acculturation to the dominant perceptions.

According to Mauricio (1994), the most damaging discriminatory workplace practices experienced by minority teachers in America is the lack of culturally-sensitive mentors who can build upon minority culture and values and overcome language and acculturation issues.

Discrimination and Stereotype in Schools

Deborah (1994) explains how immigrant workers, who upon furthering their studies and acquiring higher qualifications in foreign lands still find it difficult to secure themselves decent jobs by stating that, despite dramatic inroads made by minority teachers into institutions of education, there has been converging evidence that education for Asian Pacific American teachers often brings lower returns than it has for other groups. This explanation has been confirmed by Mauricio (1994), who claims that discriminatory practices in the recruitment and hiring of minority teachers result in under representation of minorities in entry-level jobs and at all levels of hierarchies in organization.

From the South African schools perspective, Grobler, Surette, Michael, Norbert and Robert (2006) lamented that while the South African workforce in schools is becoming increasingly diversified, discrimination is still a problem. They explain that discrimination still exists in schools making many South African teachers to experience employment discrimination. According to Mauricio (1994), the most damaging discriminatory workplace practices experienced in America is the stereotyping of minority teachers by tracking them to certain kinds of jobs only, and the labelling of minority teachers as poor persons who lack potential as good leaders and managers.

Lack of Qualifications and Inadequate Language Proficiency

With reference to employment difficulties Somali teachers faced in the United Kingdom, Sidiq (2003) states that, there are many barriers to Somalians teachers entering the teacher profession in the United Kingdom, which impact on each other to become even more impenetrable, these barriers include: the lack of recognition of prior qualifications in order to achieve employment, the lack of support Somali teachers receive in terms of information, advice and guidance, English language as a significant barrier, the absence of English courses for professionals compounded the problem and the lack of UK teaching experience hindered the Somalis efforts to secure teaching jobs in the UK.

The findings presented by Sidiq (2003) above are corroborated by McCormick (2008) and WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2009), who claim that the following attributes of international teachers or immigrants themselves can act as barriers in their employment. These are: when immigrants lack local knowledge or networks, when they lack proficiency in the local language and are unfamiliar with local ways of work then their entry point into the labour market is likely to be at a low level.

Furthermore, the type of inter-personal communication required in schools makes it very difficult for some international teachers to find work in foreign lands. In addition, issues around verbal and non-verbal communication cause problems at interview stage in most recruitment centres (WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2009).

Raghava (2013) and WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2009) also support these opinions by stating that languages spoken in international countries are different and therefore act as barriers to the employment of foreign teachers. The lack of proficiency in English on the part of immigrants is a major barrier to their employment in both the private and the public sector. This includes a general lack of proficiency as well as limited technical or business vocabulary (Raghava, 2013; WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2009).

Lack of Legal Documents for Employment

The WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2009) point out that legal issues and legal documents to work are barriers to the employment of international teachers. Various entitlements to work associated with different legal status, are poorly understood by employers. This can mean that employers are unsure of which job applicants require permits or other formal procedures. This is confirmed by Raghava (2013) who claims that dealing with immigration laws and regulations, getting sufficient work permits for immigrant teachers for a longer period of time is always a challenge and most often a tiresome process to go through. In Germany, Constant (2013) claims that the reluctance of intensifying the employment of international teachers appears to be related to the fact that the legal framework guiding immigration to Germany is perceived as difficult and cumbersome and so acts as an important barrier to international recruitment by many organisations.

Methodology

A qualitative case study design was used in this study in order to identify participants' views and perceptions about the barriers to the employment and promotion of international teachers at secondary schools in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa. The district was used as a case because it has a large number of public schools where international teachers live and seek employment opportunities all the time. The time frame for the study was September 2008 to May 2011. The case study design was chosen as it aided in the presentation and interpretation of detailed information about the phenomenon. The greatest advantage of case study is that it endeavours to understand the problem under investigation (Gajendra & Mallick, 1990).

The researcher purposefully selected five principals, five deputy principals, five heads of departments and five international teachers from five different public secondary schools of the Mthatha Education District with the belief that they were the managers and teachers that contained the most characteristics representative of the population. On the basis of the researcher's knowledge of the population, a judgment was made about which members of the school management team including the international teachers should be selected to provide the best information on the barriers to the employment and promotion of international teachers at secondary schools in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa (White, 2005).

Furthermore, the reasons for the researcher sampling the Principals, Deputy Principals and Heads of Departments as participants of the study were that they are the official managers of the schools who are actively involved in the teaching and learning process

in the schools and are also responsible for the implementation of equal employment opportunities for all teachers in schools.

Local teachers who were not in managerial positions were not selected to be part of the study as they lack experience and knowledge on equal employment opportunities and promotional policies in the schools. International teachers were sampled since they were the minorities who were perceived to be barred from employment and promotional opportunities in the schools. As a result a limited number of them were used as participants in the study.

The limitation of the study was the use of only a selected secondary school management team and international teachers in the Mthatha Education District of South Africa as participants. There is the need for a large scale research which involves all senior secondary school teachers of the Mthatha Education District to help establish the predominant barriers.

The interview schedule comprised semi-structured questions which were used during the data collection stage to conduct face-to-face, in-depth individual interviews. Participants' responses were audiotaped during the interview proceedings. Clair, Min and Judith (2006) claim an in-depth interview is one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armoury, and has been the major research method used by researchers to encourage and enable participants to tell their own life stories, and to disclose rich and detailed information about previously hidden truth (Claire, Min, et. al., 2006).

In general, asking questions that were understandable to participants was an important part of the researcher used to establish rapport in the study (White, 2005). Permission to carry out the study was sought from the principals of the secondary schools, teachers and from the Department of Education. Participants were assured of confidentiality and the use of their responses only for the purpose of the study.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher considered the issue of bias when data was been collected, sufficient time was allocated to participants to answer the research questions and the use of member checks where respondents were asked to corroborate the findings of the study. Data analysis was done manually using thematic analysis. This process was carried out after the data from the interview recordings were been transcribed. The researcher read through the data and became familiar with it and then identified the main themes (Marie, 1997).

The Result of the Study

The results of the study based on the research question that needed to be answered were: a phenomenon of resistance to the employment and promotion international teachers

in the schools and there were resistance to the integration and management of cultural similarities and differences in schools. Other results were that the governing body in the various schools had influenced on the employment and promotional processes in the schools, there were limited employment and promotional opportunities, international teachers' lack work permits and South African resident permits as well as international teachers lack higher qualifications in education and despondency among international teachers in the employment and promotional processes in the schools.

Discussion

Resistance to the Employment and Promotion of International Teachers

It was revealed in the study that local teachers resisted the employment and promotion of international teachers and also had some elements of insecurity when a decision to employ or promote an international teacher was to be made. It was also found that most local teachers found it difficult to accept the fact that they were been led by an international teacher in a school whose salary was said to be higher than the local South African teachers A head of department said: *The issue is about money, if a teacher from outside is leading you and is paid better than you who is a South African, this creates conflicts and one will end up thinking of not allowing them to be employed and promoted again.* These findings have been corroborated by Stephen (2009) who claims that issues concerning the employment and promotion of teachers from different cultural background and nationalities in South African schools usually generate highly-charged emotions. For example, as the pressure for workforce diversity increases in schools, the concern is that international teachers might displace the local teachers and as such becomes an important reason why school governing bodies and their local teachers resist the employment and promotion of teachers from other countries (Stephen, 2009).

Resistance to Integrate and Manage the Cultural Similarities and Differences in Schools

It was also found that there was an element of resistance to integrate and manage the cultural similarities and differences on the schools and there was a tendency of the local teachers to resist the inclusion of the international teachers in the Affirmative Action Acts deliberately. An opinion from a principal was: *I believe it is because of Affirmative Action, which gives more opportunities to the local teachers over the international teachers. Another reason could be the attitude of this is not their country so they should not lead us.* Stephen (2009) and Mauricio (1994) both supported the above findings when they assert that the uniqueness of teachers' social groups, gender, religion, and culture have a

significant bearing on their employment and experiences in schools. Minority teachers are adversely affected by the assumption that advancement and promotion to higher position within schools requires international teachers to assimilate and acculturate into the dominant culture (Stephen, 2009; Mauricio, 1994).

Cultural and Language Differences

The study revealed that cultural and language difference was found to be a barrier to the employment and promotion of the international teachers in most schools. It was found that senior secondary schools were owned and governed by the school management team and the governing body who are sometimes illiterates and who thought when international teachers are employed or promoted to management positions would not be able to communicate fluently with the local people using the local language. A comment from a principal was: *There is no reason why they should not be promoted in the Senior Secondary Schools, the problem they do encounter sometimes is the culture of South African Schools and the community in which these schools are situated. Another barrier will be that the local teachers have favours over the international teachers.* Raghava (2013) and WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2009) support the above findings by stating that languages spoken in international countries are different and therefore act as barriers to the employment of foreign teachers (Raghava, 2013; WRC Social and Economic Consultants, 2009).

An international teacher also lamented that: *When it comes to promotion, an international teacher cannot stand a chance as good as the local candidates. This culture is all over the country; these Acts put emphasis on the empowerment of the local teachers over the international teachers.* Findings such as these have prompted Mauricio (1994) who laments that, among the most damaging discriminatory workplace practices experienced by minorities teachers in America are: the stereotyping of minority teachers by tracking them to certain kinds of jobs only and the labelling of minority teachers as poor persons who lack potential as good leaders and managers.

Governing Body's Influences on the Employment and Promotional Processes

It was also found in the study that school governing body had a strong influence on the employment and promotional processes of teachers in the schools. This influence was regarded as a form of discrimination which was a barrier to the international teachers' employment and promotion in the various senior secondary schools in the district. An opinion from an international teacher was: *I will again mention the role of the School Governing Body; they are part and parcel of the recruitment and promotion of teachers which is an obstacle to the international teachers' employment.* From the South African schools

perspective, Grobler, Surette, et. al. (2006) report that while the South African workforce in schools is becoming increasingly diversified, discrimination is still a problem. They explain that discrimination still exists in schools making many South African teachers to experience employment discrimination.

A deputy principal expressed the following opinion: *I think I have said this earlier on, the preferential treatment and the government policy of promoting the local teachers first before the international teachers are some barriers to the international teachers' employment and promotion in our schools. The School Governing Body is also a barrier because their presence as discrimination in a different way.* Grobler, Surette, et. al. (2006) confirmed this finding by highlighting how surprising it is to see teachers in South African schools experiencing employment and promotional barriers after the Government of South Africa has initiated a number of actions in the forms of legislations to rectify the injustices in employment and promotions (Grobler, Surette, et. al., 2006).

Limited Employment and Promotional Opportunities in Schools

It was found that there were limited promotional opportunities in the senior secondary schools for all teachers and as a result limited the international teachers' prospects of being employed and promoted in the schools. The study found that, though there were limited employment opportunities, the available and created employment and promotional opportunities by the Department of Education were first filled in by the local teachers before any considerations could be given to the international teachers. A principal said: *It is not easy because the number of senior posts in each senior secondary school is limited and there are lots of local teachers who also being teaching for over twenty years now who have the interest of being employed into senior positions.* Reasons such as limited employment and promotional positions in schools prompted Stephen (2009) to claim that issues concerning the employment and promotion of teachers from different cultural background and nationalities in schools usually generate highly-charged emotions in South African schools. The same present could be reasons why Deborah (1994) categorically explains how immigrant workers, who upon furthering their studies and acquiring higher qualifications in foreign lands still find it difficult to secure themselves decent jobs.

International Teachers' Lack of Work Permits and South African Resident Permits

The study revealed that most international teachers in the country might have teaching qualifications; the issue was that they had no legal documents permitting them to work as teachers in the schools and so had a significant impact on their inability to secure employment and promotions in the schools. A principal made the following

claims: ...Another issue why some of these international teachers do not get promotion is that they do not have proper work permits or South African resident permits. Like I got one international teacher before, but I could not employ him because of lack of proper work permit. These findings have been confirmed by each of the following: the WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2009) point out that legal issues and legal documents to work are barriers to the employment of international teachers in Ireland, Raghava (2013) who claims that dealing with immigration laws and regulations, getting sufficient work permits for immigrants teachers for a longer period of time is always a challenge and most often a tiresome process to go through and Constant (2013) alludes that in Germany, the reluctance of intensifying the employment of international teachers appears to be related to the fact that the legal framework guiding immigration to Germany is perceived as difficult and cumbersome and so acts as an important barrier to international recruitment by many organisations.

International Teachers Lack of Higher Qualifications in Education

The study revealed that international teachers lack higher qualifications in the teaching profession and as such had less chances of being employment into leadership and management positions in the schools. A deputy principal asserted: *The fact is that most international teachers do not have higher qualifications in education like the higher qualifications possess by the local teachers that give them the opportunity to lead and manage schools.* This finding has been corroborated by the findings of the WRC Social and Economic Consultants (2009), when they revealed that the issue of qualifications and having foreign qualifications recognised is one of the barriers to international and immigrant teachers.

Another comment from a head of department was: *What I think could be the obstacle is that the Department of Education always evaluates their foreign qualifications to see if these qualifications can fit into the South African education system or into any senior management positions.* These findings have been confirmed by the findings of Sidiq (2003), who states that there are many barriers to Somalian teachers entering the teacher profession in the United Kingdom, one of which is the lack of recognition of their prior qualifications acquired in Somali in order to be employed in the UK.

The Despondency among International Teachers in the Employment and Promotional Processes

It was revealed that most international teachers lack the confidence and the courage to apply for promotional positions when advertisements are made to fill positions in schools. The study revealed that these international teachers had refused to apply for such positions on the assumptions that they had no chance of been considered for the

positions since local teachers were always preferred over them. A principal lamented in the following way: *There was a head of department post in this school and one of the international teachers was qualified to apply for that post. Unfortunately this teacher did not apply. On the day of the interview, this very teacher approached me that he was interested in the post. I got shocked, and asked why he did not apply in the first place. His answer was that he had no confidence in himself and had never been in management position before.* These findings can be contextualised and linked to the report of Paulsen (2009), who claims that female teachers have lower self-confidence in applying for jobs for which they are both qualified and not qualified than their male counterparts.

Conclusion

There were resistances to the employment and promotion of international teachers in the schools. Such resistances acted against efforts towards making schools more diversified and also lowered the self-confidence of qualified international teachers in applying for employment and promotional positions for which they were qualified. School management teams failed to integrate and manage the cultural similarities and differences that existed in the schools. The inability to integrate and manage these cultural similarities and differences in the schools had an effect on the international teachers' advancement and promotion to leadership and managerial positions. The influences School Governing Bodies had on the employment and promotion of teachers favoured the local teachers over the international teachers as more employment opportunities given to only the local teachers. Issues concerning limited employment and promotional opportunities in the schools greatly affect international teachers' chances of being employed. Issues concerning international teachers' lack of work permits, the lack of recognition of their prior qualifications in foreign lands and their despondency in the employment and promotional processes all acted as barriers to their employment and promotional eligibility in the schools.

Recommendations

Proper support and mentor systems should be established by the various recruitment agencies to train all international teachers on how to build on their confidence. These agencies should offer their assistance to all international teachers on interview techniques. All international teachers should be encouraged by all the recruitment agencies to upgrade their teaching qualifications to enable them stand a chance of being employed and promoted in the secondary schools. The Department of Education need to work hand in hand with the National Department of Home Affairs to secure proper work permits for all international teachers whose services are needed in all schools of the country. The Department of Education in conjunction with diversity management

experts should organise in-service training and workshops to help curb resistance to international teachers' employment and promotions in schools. Advertisement for new positions created by the Department of Education should be inclusive and should have a proper recruitment steps to follow.

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