
BUT WHO WILL TEACH THE CHILDREN? GLOBAL TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION

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The second of the Millennium Goals set by the United Nations General Assembly in 2000 was universal primary education for all children. The inclusion of universal primary education is a recognition that education plays a crucial role in the alleviation of poverty and the promotion of peace and security, however the UN Millennium Project team estimates that there are more than 100 million primary age children not attending school for a variety of reasons (UN Millennium Project, 2005). In most cases their families are too poor to afford the costs involved, in many cases their labour or their income is needed at home, in others there is no school available, but increasingly children are prevented from attaining full primary education because there are insufficient teachers to staff schools adequately. .

TEACHER SHORTAGE

Concerns about the supply of teachers and warnings about a shortage of teachers have surfaced periodically since the early 1990s and have resulted in some vicious arguments between commentators who regard the projected teacher shortage as a serious problem and those who regard it as a myth. The true situation lies somewhere between these two extremes, and will require complex and innovative solutions.

UNESCO estimates that as many as an additional 30 million teachers will need to be employed to achieve the goal of UPE, but as UNESCO's own report monitoring global the supply and demand of teachers towards 2015 admits, this figure alone does not explain the complexity of regional and local differences (UNESCO, 2006). In fact, the global population of primary school aged children is expected to remain relatively stable, which implies that the teacher population could also remain stable or even decline, but an analysis of the situation, region by region suggests that the situation is vastly different.

China, Brazil and India will not need to increase their stock of teachers to meet the goal of UPE in 2015, nor will Europe or North America In contrast, the Arab states need to increase the number of teachers by 26%, South and West Asia need an increase of 7% and Sub-Saharan Africa requires an increase of 68%.

There are also huge variations within regions - Europe as a whole will have sufficient teachers, but Spain, Ireland and Luxembourg will not; the North American region will have enough, but the USA will not.

Moreover, these figures do not adequately reflect the shortage of teachers in specific subject areas or disciplines. In the last few years we have gone from a shortage of ITC teachers to an oversupply of ITC teachers in certain areas and then back again as local conditions have changed.

TEACHER MIGRATION

The issue of teacher supply and demand leads us to the issues of global recruitment and teacher migration. Once again, there is a shortage of really reliable information that makes it difficult to determine just what is happening. One of the most pressing difficulties is that governments are either reluctant to report the number of teachers arriving from overseas or do not record the information in a meaningful manner. Recruitment is also decentralised – there are more than 100 private teacher recruitment agencies in the UK and around 70 in the USA. There is no national co-ordination and the immigration indicator systems are not designed to record their activities.

However, we do know that a substantial number of teachers are on the move and it is clear that national governments attempting to cope with a shortfall in the supply of teachers in their own country are relying on recruitment outside their national boundaries more and more heavily. From their point of view this solution makes perfect sense in the short term – they can hire skilled teachers who are immediately available and who have exactly the right qualifications to fill existing places. Gene Budig (2006) estimates that the United States will need to employ an additional 2 million teachers in the coming decade to maintain its current educational standards and closer to 3 million if it wished to improve them in order to remain competitive with the newly emerging superstates India and China. Budig does not advocate large-scale recruitment from overseas, but there are others who do. Writing in *USA Today Magazine*, Kirk Johnson from the Heritage Foundation in Washington suggested loosening the visa requirements for teachers – whom he described as a very low security risk because their daily actions were highly scrutinised – in order to recruit several thousand English-speaking technical, maths and science teachers to work in secondary schools and technical colleges.

Recruiting teachers on short-term contracts is not a bad solution to a temporary problem. In 1979, Cambodia recruited contract teachers as an emergency measure to replace teachers who had not survived the Khmer Rouge regime and again in the late 1990s when the tightening of entry requirements to teacher training courses led to a temporary shortage and contract teachers were employed to fill the gaps (Duthilleul, 2004). Many younger teachers from developed nations also enjoy the prospect of an extended working holiday overseas before returning home to settle down. But this approach is inappropriate as a long-term solution and is a symptom of poor social and economic planning.

Recruitment of teachers through private or government-sponsored agencies is only part of the story; more insidious is the use of skilled migration programs to recruit teachers and other professionals. Figures released by the International Labor Office show that university graduates are six times more likely to emigrate than those with secondary education – primarily because not many countries want to accept unskilled migrants. Around the world, thirty countries have immigration policies or programs that promote the selection of skilled migrants – 17 of those are developed nations. Such programs are likely to attract individual teachers making it hard to accurately gauge the number of teachers on the move or their reasons for relocating.

Many teachers also arrive as graduate students who then opt to remain for personal reasons. The ILO reports that the number of persons studying abroad had doubled since the late 1980s

and notes a strong connection between studying abroad and permanent migration. Some of these graduate students are already experienced teachers intending to upgrade their qualifications, but others change to education or add a degree in education to their existing qualifications after their arrival in order to qualify for residency under the skilled migration program.

IMPLICATIONS

National or regional shortages of teachers or teachers in particular disciplines will not necessarily have a serious impact on the overall well-being of the education sector in developed nations that have the ability to recruit and/or retrain personnel locally, but the impact for less-developed nations may be very serious. Where teachers have been trained at public expense and where their skills and expertise cannot easily be replaced their loss may represent a major impediment to the achievement of the Millennium goal of universal primary education, let alone the provision of secondary education. The consequences of these shortages are far reaching as lower levels of education are inextricably linked to poverty, but it can be argued that less-developed nations actually get less return for their education-dollars than developed nations (O'Neill, 1995). Thoughtless and unregulated recruitment of teachers from less-developed by developed nations may represent a form of exploitation that is unsustainable in the long term.

However, the situation has a number of positive aspects as well. The International Labour Organisation (Rattree, 2006) suggests that migration from large developing nations may in fact be beneficial as it can stimulate growth and provide opportunities in the local labour market. This is what economists call the 'virtuous circle'; for example recruitment of information technology and communications (ITC) specialists from India stimulated growth in the field as exiting personnel were replaced and there was a flow-on effect in the training and education sectors. Many of the Indian ITC specialists residing in other countries maintained strong links with their families and communities. They often continued to contribute financially through remittances, but also invested in property, holidays at home and through purchasing local products unavailable in their country of residence.

The same is not true in small developing nations and the least developed nations such as many of the African and Caribbean nations. A higher proportion of their skilled workforce leaves and does not return. Not only are their knowledge and experience lost to their country of origin, but they are less likely to invest either in property or visits home. The impact of this situation cannot be underestimated – the ILO estimates that 50-80% of tertiary educated citizens from some of the smaller African and Caribbean nations now live abroad (Rattree, 2006). This represents an enormous loss of investment of both economic and social capital. In particular, teachers are often highly-valued members of the community who occupy a wide range of roles in the rural or regional areas.

RESPONSES

Responses to this issue need to be tailored to the specific circumstances of each country, but a global approach is necessary to avoid serious hardships in particular areas. To begin with, the adoption of a protocol on teacher recruitment by Commonwealth nations is a very welcome step. The protocol, adopted by all Commonwealth Ministers of Education in September 2004, sets out the rights and responsibilities of both recruiting and source nations. Significantly, it also

stipulates the rights and responsibilities of the recruited teacher in an effort to balance the rights of teachers to migrate either permanently or on a temporary basis with the need to protect national education services; for example, it discourages recruiting nations from arranging departure dates that occur within the school terms as these disrupt classes and encourages them to oversee the activities of private recruiting agencies. Source countries are encouraged to examine teachers' working conditions to determine if systemic problems are contributing to the exodus of trained personnel and to put in place policies that will assist in the reintegration of teachers wishing to return after a limited period. The protocol offers an excellent model of the type of multilateral agreement that should be extended to nations outside the Commonwealth, in particular the USA.

At the national level, developed nations such as Australia need to develop national codes of conduct for the ethical recruitment of teachers (and other professionals). These might include preferential recruitment from large developing nations where the effects may be positive or at least less-harmful, restrictions on recruitment of teachers from smaller developing nations where the loss of teachers has serious implications, for example teachers from certain countries might be offered limited visas that enable them to work for two years but require them to return home before applying for an extension. The development of innovative schemes to off-set possible losses might be even more effective, for example wealthy nations might provide targeted funding for a certain portion of a teacher training place for every qualified teacher they recruit from a less-developed nation or lend key personnel to establish or improve teacher training courses and facilities.

At the same time, the less-developed nations need to make education a priority in their budgets. They need to cultivate teachers by improving salaries and conditions: no matter how dedicated they are it is difficult to expect teachers to work in a rural school with no toilets when they know they can get a well-paid job in the USA, UK or Australia. Development of flexible systems of leave that allow teachers to work in another nation for 6 months to 2 years, include a guaranteed position on return and recognise foreign service/experience towards promotion would help to ease the problem by encouraging temporary rather than permanent migration.

One possible solution to the teacher shortage in both developed and less-developed nations might be to reintroduce tied grants or bonds for teaching qualifications. These would recoup at least some of the expenditure involved and would ensure a guaranteed supply of teachers for a certain period of time, however schemes of this type have obvious drawbacks as well.

In reality, both developed and developing nations need to develop a more sustainable approach to recruitment and retention of teachers. Nations like Australia and America need to consider the causes of the teacher shortage and to work towards local solutions. One key factor appears to be the relatively low salaries paid to teachers in comparison with other professions; figures vary but some estimates suggest that in Australia teachers' salaries have experienced a decline in real terms of around 30% since the 1970s while the nature of teachers' work has become more complex and demanding over the same period.

In developed nations such as Australia, problems of recruitment centre on the type and quality of recruits. These countries need to explore ways of encouraging more highly-able young people to consider a career in teaching; these might include scholarships, reduced fees and the provision of living allowances. In addition, consideration should be given to attracting "non-traditional" applicants such as older people and ethnic minorities.

However, attrition among recently qualified teachers is a more serious problem for the developed nations. In Australia there is a very significant drop out within the first five years of

graduation and a smaller drop with the first ten. It is beyond the scope of the paper to examine the causes of attrition among recently-graduated teachers in detail, but it appears that the demanding nature of the work, relatively poor chances of promotion combined with a salary structure that plateaus after a few years and better opportunities elsewhere lead many younger teachers to reconsider their career plans, but it is also evident that if the shortage of teachers in developed nations can be addressed, many of the issues facing the less-developed nations will be reduced. It is always easier to prevent a problem, than to solve it afterwards.

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