Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs) in England: surviving or thriving?

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Abstract

The recruitment of Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs) to England has seemingly gone off the policy radar despite their large numbers, continuing impact on primary and secondary education, and the ongoing *Second Wave* of teacher migration that started in 2014. OTTs continue to contribute to stability and continuity of provision in primary and secondary schools. From a qualitative study on "A day in the life of an Overseas Trained Teacher", this paper examines (a) strategies used by OTTs to cope in their daily working lives and (b) teaching experience of OTTs in England compared with their teaching experiences in their countries of origin. The findings suggest that whereas all OTTs are "surviving and coping" with the demands of their jobs, they do not appear to be "thriving and flourishing". This, against the background of a racialised education and migration policy context that grants exclusions from undertaking UK Qualified Teacher Status to teachers from White, industrialised countries, although not for OTTs from non-White, non-industrailsed countries. Through personal agency and a strong sense of self (or their "situated identity"), OTTs navigate complex institutional and regulatory hurdles in order to survive and cope. The paper concludes that the education system, school governors and school leaders can do more to ensure all teachers, thrive and flourish, and not just some.

Keywords: Race, discrimination, England, Overseas Trained Teachers

Introduction

Within the last decade, very little has been written about overseas trained teachers (OTTs) in England who arrived during the *first wave* of teacher migration. This is due mostly to the fact the pattern of teacher migration to England slowed in response to an expanded European Union, and also due to the fact the treatment of OTTs improved in the wake of several reports and research publications (Ochs, 2003; Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004; Miller, 2008) highlighting their mistreatment. Although the pattern of non-European Union teacher migration to England slowed considerably between 2008- 2014, there is evidence that due to ongoing problems in teacher supply, teacher migration and recruitment has once again picked up.

Similar to the early 1990s, the current decline in influence of local authorities in England, coincides with a period of rising pupil numbers and a decline in local teacher numbers, where : salary levels, work intensification, burn-out from government initiatives, performance accountability measures, pupil indiscipline, and poor leadership and management are believed to be fuelling the loss of local teachers. A number of these factors were previously identified in the 1990s and early 2000s as catalysts for the shortfall in local teachers, when the numbers of teachers leaving the teaching profession rose to unprecedented levels (Audit Commission, 2002; Smithers & Robinson, 2005). Furthermore, these factors, and combinations thereof have once again resurfaced as reasons for teachers leaving the profession, and for the low numbers of persons entering the teaching profession in England. As the local shortage of teachers continue, it is expected that the *second wave* of teacher migration and recruitment to England which started in 2014 will intensify as England once more struggles to staff classrooms and to maintain its position in key international education league tables. This paper, from broader research on "A day in the life of an OTT" examines (a) how OTTs spends a typical work day in England compared to a work day back 'home', and (b) whether OTTs feel they are surviving (coping; getting by) and/or thriving (progressing; flourishing) in England.

The Context for teacher migration and recruitment to England

International migration has always played an important role in England's nation building, and economic and demographic interests are both push and pull factors behind voluntary migration, skilled or otherwise. Furthermore, migration has served as a means of social, cultural,

ideological, racial and symbolic control, underlining the right of a nation state's decide who to allow in, and under what conditions (Miller, 2008). During the 1950s, migrant selection to England was racially motivated, with certain groups deemed more desirable than others (Grannum 2002). In the 1950s, migrants from the Caribbean, India and Africa were welcomed with open arms, as they were highly valued for their manual and domestic skills (Bradford & Kent 1993) and were needed in post-world war two rebuilding efforts. Although the 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act attempted to restrict their numbers, however, the turn of the twentieth century and the industrial revolution meant Britain had to depend on migrants from all over the world to provide both manual and technical skills, and individuals from former colonies including the Indian subcontinent and the Caribbean were encouraged to take up such positions - which either could not be filled by locals and/ or which had been vacated by locals.

In the early 1970s, for the first time, the selection and admission of migrants to England was based primarily on 'educational skills and resources' and less on racial backgrounds (Whitaker 1991, p.19). On the surface, this new system appeared to suggest that England's policy towards migrants was both 'colour and religion blind' in that this new thrust of migration from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia represented a balancing of patterns of migration to England from America, Canada, Australia and Europe. By the mid-1970s, fewer migrants were arriving in England from developed countries and more from developing countries, in particular from Asia, the Caribbean and Africa (Dustmann et al, 2003), a period of migration based on skills over race described by Whitaker (1991) as a "historic watershed" (p.19). Since the mid-1990s, the selection of migrants based on their education and skills, favouring the highly skilled over family-class immigrants and refugees has significantly intensified- although events in England's political arena from the mid-2000s to date have exposed OTTs to regulatory and school-based maltreatment.

Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs) in England

An Overseas Trained Teacher (OTT) is any teacher who has undertaken teacher training outside of the European Economic Area and Switzerland and has been recognised by the competent Millerity in their home country. OTTs in England originate from all over the world, but primarily from United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Jamaica (Boffey, 2015). Although not considered OTTs, it is worth noting that teachers trained in a European Union member country are exempt from UK QTS due to the mutual recognition of qualification clause under the Bologna Convention. Additionally, as at 01 April 2012, the Department for Education (DfE) removed the requirement for teachers trained in Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand to do undergo any additional training and/ or assessment for UK QTS (DfE, 2014, p.2). Furthermore, OTTs without UK QTS, not including those exempt from further training and assessment such as those from United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, are considered "Unqualified teachers" until they have satisfactorily completed UK based qualifying training and assessment. It is also worth noting that, of the top six countries from where OTTs originate, only the teachers from the two non-White, non-industrialised did not get an exemption for UK QTS based on prior training.

The cultural backgrounds of OTTs differ considerably, and data on OTTs is very patchy (Miller, 2006; 2015). Using Home Office and data from Work Permits UK, Miller (2006) estimated circa 43,000 OTTs were in the UK. In 2006, this was approximately 10% of the total teaching force. Top supplying countries during the period 2001-2005 were: South Africa, Australia, United States, New Zealand, Canada and Jamaica. Currently, the issue of patchy data as well as the top sending countries have not changed, with the Home Office and the Department for Education confirming they no longer collect nationality data on OTTs and that work permit data is no longer broken down into categories (e.g.: teachers and instructors). The precise numbers of OTTs in the UK in 2018 is therefore known, although one can assume the numbers are not below the level in the early 2000s due to increased migration and recruitment associated with the *second wave* of teacher migration.

Theoretical framework

This paper draws on agency and teacher identity theories as its main theoretical underpinning. Together these allow us to understand and evaluate the 'actions' and 'stance' of overseas trained teachers in the study. These are discussed in turn below.

Personal agency/ efficacy

Personal agency has been conceptualised in different ways. It has been used to describe an individual's capacity to act independently (Barker, 2005), as well as an individual's ability to intentionally influence their life as well as that of others around them (Bandura, 2001). In the case of OTTs, this would be associated with them being able to engage and lead their students to success, and to work successfully with others in their school settings, despite challenges within their professional lives and school settings. Thus, agency is an essential tool for navigating the "… the political, economic, cultural and other systemic forces that shape society, and the associated process of growth in relevant knowledge, analytical skills, and emotional faculties" (Watts & Guessous, 2006, p. 3). Watts & Guessous also suggest that agency helps to mediate the tensions between social beliefs (i.e.: beliefs one holds about how society works and their place in it) and socio-political behaviour or action (i.e.: accepting or challenging the status quo).

Personal agency has sometimes been used interchangeably with self-efficacy (Bandura & Adams, 1977), at both individual and group levels, and is suggested to play a central role in the exercise of self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001). The proposed links aside, an individual's ability, in this case OTTs, to be agentic is in many ways related to the environment in which they exist. As Barker (2005) notes, for example, one's agency is constrained by their beliefs and experiences, as well as by the structures and circumstances of their environment or by a society, factors which will be accounted for in examining whether OTTs in this study are merely surviving or thriving.

Teacher [professional] identity

The fluidity of the concept of identity makes it hard to define. Whereas, Josselson (1987) characterised identity as "the relatively permanent traits shown in given situations such as in roles", (p. 5), Nietzsche (1961), proposed that a person's identity comprises two parts: the "plastic self' and the 'expressive self" (p. 56), where the "plastic self", makes identity flexible and adaptive and the "expressive self" is concerned with authenticity (from external forces). Additionally, Marcia (1966) suggested, "coming to identity" represents a process of creating the self through making choices and decisions; a simultaneous negotiation of deciding who one is and who one is not (p.280). According to Josselson (1996), this process occurs gradually and is unique to each individual. Furthermore, personality structure, past conflicts, cultural norms, religion, gender, migratory experiences and family are among the factors that can influence identity development. In her seminal work on teacher identity, Nias (1989) characterised the process of coming to identity as one defined by shifts away from rigidity and conformity to "increased internalization, increased ability to stand alone, individual goal setting and to greater awareness of self" (p. 23). This process of growth and revision expands identity without altering it completely (Nietzsche, 1961). In his work on Caribbean trained teachers in England, Miller (2011) described identity as being in a continued state of transition. Miller (2011) also reported that Caribbean trained teachers in England experienced epistemic shifts in their professional identity, resulting from living and working in England, leading to them adopting a "new" professional identity which combines original (situated) knowledge from their country of origin, with localised knowledge acquired in England (p.81).

Methods

This paper draws on a combined descriptive and phenomenology research methodology. Descriptive research aims to provide a detailed and accurate picture of a particular situation (Neuman, 2006) – in this case, "A day in the life of an OTT". A phenomenological approach was also used with the aim of providing detailed accounts of events and experiences from the viewpoint of participants, since phenomenology studies structures of consciousness from an individual's point of view. Together, these approaches allowed participants to speak with an uninterrupted voice (Etherington, 2009). The aims of the study were to show (a) how OTTs spend a typical work day in England compared to a work day back 'home', and (b) whether OTTs feel they are surviving (coping; getting by) and/or thriving (progressing; flourishing) in England. Each participant responded to the same 12 questions. Each question was treated as a separate unit of analysis, and responses were therefore analysed separately, after which these were aggregated to identity common or discordant themes across the entire data-set, used to guide the reporting of evidence.

Sample

Six OTTs participated in the study. All six are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, and rather coincidentally, they are all from Jamaica. There was one Head of Year (a middle leader) and five classroom teachers. Teachers arrived in the UK between 2001 and 2016, thus in both the first and second waves of teacher migration/ recruitment to England. They each work in six different London boroughs: five in secondary schools and one in a primary school, and have spent between one and 14 years in those schools. There were four females and two males. Their main subject taught are: Mathematics (2); Design & technology (2); Social Studies (1) and Tourism/ Home Economics (1). Snowballing technique was used to recruit participants for the study.

Findings

The findings reported in this paper are from a larger study on, "A day in the life of an OTT". Responses to 7 of 12 questions are summarised and presented below.

Typical work day in a school in England

These OTTs used words such as hectic, fast paced, tiring, challenging and overwhelming to describe their typical work day in England. Despite the period of time they'd been working in England, OTTs experiences appeared quite similar. Two suggested:

> A typical work day in England can be hectic at times. Planning in advance is helpful because once you get into the classroom in the mornings there is no letting up. (R2)

> Very rigorous especially spring and summer term. Trying to get course work from students, to mark give them feedback and let them resubmit. Having staff meetings, ensuring deadlines are met and Course work marked and moderated to be sent off. Preparing students to sit different examinations. (R4)

Acknowledging that no two days are alike, another OTT, a middle leader, also described her job as challenging, but rewarding.

> No two days are the same. There are many unforeseen eventualities that have to be factored in. As a Head of Year, there is pressure to monitor and support teachers, control behaviour and deliver outstanding lessons all in a day. This can also be compounded by safeguarding issues, planning for an extended curriculum or dealing with parents/carers. I find it challenging but extremely rewarding. (R6)

Typical work day in England compared to a typical work day back "home"

There were positives and negatives associated with a typical work day in England, compared with a teaching day back home. Whereas the teaching day “back home” appeared to allow for some “down time”, the teaching day in England tended to be fairly “intense” and presented several routines (such as morning briefings, etc) and tasks (break duty, lunch duty, etc), which sometimes made it harder for them to cope and achieve a healthy work-life balance. In their own words:

> I am more accountable for my work here England than back home. However, my work life balance is better at home than in England. (R1)

> Very little time for a breather, always working. (R3)
> In Jamaica life was much easier and the children wanted to learn and pupil behaviour was not an issue. The Jamaican students do not have the resources as the children in England have, so in Jamaica the work much harder. (R4)

> The days here are usually filled with unnecessary paperwork. The days are also much longer. (R5)

In addition to the demands, the complexity and range of tasks were identified:

> The difference for me is the higher tempo at which schools operate in England. The admin work here is relentless although there are admin assistants to help with the work load. A typical school day may be off timetable to accommodate scholastic achievement alongside the curriculum to enrich the learning and life chances of students. There are numerous tasks like bus stop, lunch and break duties as well as learning walks to promote behaviour for learning. I can't remember doing those in Jamaica. (R6)

Most common activities during a typical school day

These OTTs, as with any other teacher, were involved in four main areas of teaching and leadership activities: teaching and assessment, pastoral care, behaviour management and administration & collegiality. I summarise the key activities in Figure 1:

Figure 1: HERE

Teaching in England - challenging professional practice

These OTTs shared both positive and negative impacts and experiences associated with teaching in England. A number of positive impacts were highlighted by some:

> Teaching in England has left me no choice but to be very prepared for my lessons and to make greater preparation for differentiation. (R3)

> Teaching students with learning disorders of all kind. (R5)

> I have grown into a more confident leader and made exceptional professional gains I think I wouldn't have had if I practiced in Jamaica. My leadership on whole school issues and working beyond the walls of the school has enabled me to challenge my practice continually in order to make me a better practitioner. I thrive on the challenge. (R6)

Additionally, some negative impacts and experiences were also noted:

> You always have to be on top of your game as you are challenged daily by your peers as well as students. The teachers who are trained here have the perceptions that they know

more than us and always wants to correct us or steal our ideas and make it theirs. This has happened to me on numerous occasions. (R4)

The behavior management across some schools can be limited at times, support from the SLT is mediocre at times. Being an overseas trained teacher, at times, can be a contributing factor to being looked over for leadership roles as well other opportunities. Also being racially aggravated and threatened with capability procedures. (R2)

Teaching in England- enhancing professional practice

These OTTs described significant positive benefits which have accrued to them as a direct result of teaching in England. OTTs cited "Acquiring further qualifications", "undertaking educational action research to inform my practice", "access to professional development activities" and being "able to teach in a different sector and subject area" as direct enhancements to them, resulting from teaching in England. Furthermore:
Teaching in the UK has made me a better professional in terms of accountability and class preparedness. (R3)

I have gained extensive knowledge in teaching students of different cultural background. (R5)

Additionally:

I have had to learn about the British system. How to deal with students who have behavioural issues, Gifted and Talented and stretching the more able. Teaching here has broadened my horizon and given me opportunities to engage in activities to enhance my ability. (R4)

Teaching in England - challenging professional values

All OTTs in the study highlighted some degree of challenge to their professional values associated with their experience of teaching in England. The two quotations below provide insights into the range and types of challenges:

There are some practices I am not allowed to carry out in school in England as it is not allowed. For example, praying at the beginning of the day. This is something I do before I get into the classroom. I now understand that I am in a different country where rules and laws are different. Also, the idea of watching your back and tread on eggshells in schools is something I have never had to deal with whilst teaching in Jamaica. Respect was given to each and every one. (R2)

I have remained true to myself and have branded myself self, using the strong moral compass that schooling in Jamaica gave me. I sometimes take issues with things but have learnt not to take them personally in the land which is multicultural and filled with values which do not necessarily align with my own. (R6)

Teaching in England- enhancing professional values

This question elicited mixed responses from OTTs, and some suggested some positive impacts:

Completing my Bachelors and my masters degrees have given me great exposure to widen my professional values. (R1)

There is an unrelenting drive to get students to achieve. I hope to be in a Headship position one day to drive this forward. Although this is so, it shouldn't be 'at any cost'. . Children should be also held accountable for their failures and understand there are consequences for decisions they make. (R6)

> My professional values have been honed and I feel even more passionate about education now than I did when I started teaching. Working with inner-city students in a high deprivation area has kept me focused on educating the next generation out of poverty. (R6)

However, others suggested that not much or no change had occurred to their professional values:

> Not to a great deal; my professional values are intrinsic. (R3)

> It has not enhanced my professional values as most of the teachers do not care about being a professional as far as I can see. (R4)

Discussion

From the data collected, there is no doubt these OTTs are challenged by their teaching experiences in England. Similarly, there is also evidence that, as a result of teaching in England, the professional vales and practice of these OTTs have been enhanced. I discuss these issues below, by examining whether these OTTs are simply surviving or whether they are also thriving.

OTTs surviving and coping

That OTTs appear to be surviving and coping with the demands of their jobs in England is important for three main reasons. First, their surviving and coping justifies the decision to recruit them. Second, in line with the definition of surviving, they are getting the job done. As professionals, nothing else is to be expected. And as have been set out by OTTs, gaining access to bespoke Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and to other training and latest research thinking has enabled them to perform much more confidently (and competently). Third, their ability to get the job done is linked to their personal agency to navigate, social, cultural and political spaces that are new to them, and to succeed in doing so. This profound sense of self, shown by these OTTs, emanates from their "situated identity" (Miller, 2011, p.81) or their professional identify developed before migrating to England.

Each of these points are as important as the other, and together highlights that the survival of OTTs in English schools is multifaceted. Thus, identity and agency play key roles in the ability of OTTs to successfully navigate and manage competing demands and expectations. As Bandura & Adams (1997) note, personal agency underpins self-efficacy. And, as Watts & Guessous (2006) note, personal agency is the belief that one can make an impact. These OTTs were motivated to make an impact in the lives of students, pushing back against events and individuals in their places of work, to chart their path and define their practice. This intentional stance by these OTTs to not cower in the face of adversity and/or challenges belie Bandura's (2001) view of agency as an individual's ability to intentionally influence their life as well as that of others around them.

The professional values and practices of these OTTs are being overhauled as a direct result of being in England. This confirms earlier research on OTTs by Miller (2006; 2007; 2011) who describes OTTs as developing a new professionalism and new ways of being, as a result of living and working in England. Such a position underlines Nietzsche's (1961) construction of a person's identity in which the "plastic self" is flexible and adaptive to change. Accounting for all the negative experiences faced by these OTTs in their interactions with staff, students and England's education system, it is to be noted their willingness to show flexibility and to learn is indicative of their professionalism and their desire to succeed in England.

OTTs thriving and flourishing?

Despite clear evidence that these OTTs surviving and coping, the evidence was not as clear as to the extent that these OTTs feel they are thriving. Of the six participants in the study, only one had been promoted, and promotion was to a Head of Year role. This is consistent with research by Miller (2015) which found that the career progression of OTTs was flatlined and where progression had indeed occurred, this was not usually above the level of a Head of Department or Head of Year for BAME OTTs in particular. Furthermore, within this study, the sole OTT in a promoted post was a female, which also confirmed Miller's (2015) research that BAME females appear more likely to be promoted over males.

As noted by these OTTs, they experience racial discrimination and threats of capability proceedings being started against them by school leaders. Furthermore, OTTs not trained in the European Union, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States and Switzerland have to undergo a period of compulsory re-training for UK QTS. This problematic and racially discriminatory government policy, coupled with their school-based experiences highlights what Barker (2005) describes as one's agency being constrained by the structures and circumstances of their environment or by a society. Put differently, the agency of OTTs is no match for a political and migration system designed to keep them in their place, thus defying Watts & Guessous's (2006) argument that agency is an essential tool for navigating the "… the political, economic, cultural and other systemic forces that shape society…." (p. 3). For, although OTTs grounded themselves in a strong sense of self (or "situated identity"), this is not enough for their thriving, and the requirement of UK QTS has been used by the government as a barometer and lever for their career progression, and a public signalling that their "expressive self" (Nietzsche,1961) or "situated identity" (Miller, 2011) have been altered and they are now thus 'fit for purpose'.

Whither leadership?

The position of OTTs from non-White, non-industrialised countries or OTTs from BAME backgrounds in England's education system underlines a struggle for mutual recognition, and where this recognition is not forthcoming, this can result in impairment to their professional identity (Miller, 2008). School leaders are not powerless in the face of an increasingly racialised migration and educational policy context in England. They can use their status and the power associated with that status to challenge the British government to create a more equal and welcoming climate for OTTs not trained in the EU and in White - industrialised societies, since without OTTs from all over the world in English schools, many schools could simply not function. Speaking out for all OTTs to be afforded the same privileges accorded by government policies is speaking out for racial equality and inclusion.

Furthermore, school leaders need to ensure equal opportunities are provided to all staff for their professional development and promotion/ progression. Whereas the OTTs in the study confirm they are provided with opportunities to widen and deepen their practice through different professional development activities, there was only very limited evidence that OTTs were being promoted or progressing in their careers. These are school-based issues that can only be resolved through changes to school cultures and current practices, led by school leaders and governors.

Conclusions

Overseas Trained Teachers (OTTs) are an important part of the teacher workforce in England, and government policies and school level practices should reflect this. They contribute to workforce stability, the continuity of teaching and learning due to falling numbers of locally trained teachers, behaviour management and all aspects of school. Despite these contributions, and clear evidence they are surviving and coping with the demands of their jobs, there is little evidence they are thriving or flourishing in the education system in England. This, against a racialised migration and educational policy context that grants exclusions from the requirements of UK Qualified Teacher Status to teachers from primarily White, industrialised countries and not

the same for OTTs from non-White, non-industrialised countries. That OTTs are surviving is a good thing for the education system, the schools in which they work and for OTTs themselves, since this justifies the decision to recruit and employ them. However, that OTTs from BAME backgrounds appear not be to thriving and flourishing as well as locally trained teachers and non-BAME OTTs in England is an urgent public policy issue and needs attention from government, school governors and school leaders.

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