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## **Experiences of overseas trained teachers seeking public school positions in Western Australia and South Australia**

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Many overseas trained teachers migrate to Australia in search of different lifestyles. In their endeavour to find suitable teaching positions in public secondary schools, overseas trained teachers often confront multiple challenges. This study explored the different issues that 12 overseas trained teachers experienced before obtaining a teaching position in a public secondary school in either Western Australia or South Australia. Data were collected through using twelve in-depth semi-structured interviews and researcher-generated field notes. The results indicate that participants experienced the following challenges: apparent lack of information on post immigration life in Australia; danger of misinformation; registration delays; inconsistency in English language requirements; fixed term offers for teaching positions; difficult living conditions in the country areas; and a perceived lack of consistency in the teacher orientation programs provided by the Education Departments of Western Australia and South Australia.

### **Introduction**

Due to teacher shortages, an increased number of overseas trained teachers started migrating to Australia at the onset of the 21st century from culturally and linguistically diverse and non-English speaking backgrounds, along with the usual immigrant teachers from the United Kingdom and North America (Reid & Collins, 2012). According to the National Teaching Workforce Dataset (2014), teachers in Australia are born in 193 different countries round the world. The international migration of secondary teachers in Australia has increased in recent years from 4.8% in the years 1953-1957 to 10.3% between 2008-2013 (National Teaching Workforce Dataset, 2014). Hawthorne (2016) observed that unlike Canada, in Australia, "employability" of overseas trained teachers is determined on the basis of credential assessment and pre-migration screening by the relevant national or territorial licensing body.

The focus of this study was to explore the experiences of overseas trained teachers prior to obtaining a teaching position at a public school in Western Australia or South Australia. An overseas trained teacher in the Australian context is a person who has been educated and professionally trained in any country other than Australia. There are two categories of overseas trained teachers who come to Australia: teachers from the native English speaking background ('NEST'); and teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse and non-English speaking backgrounds ('CALD/NESB'). This study included overseas trained teachers who had worked in public secondary schools in Western Australia or South Australia. The study focused on participants in these two states because of practical constraints. Firstly the authors work in Western Australia and were readily able to access a diverse range of participants. Secondly, participants were drawn from South Australia as it

is a neighbouring state. Combining participants' experiences from two states enhanced the sample representation.

The epistemological approach of this research is constructivist in nature. This constructivist research used interpretivism, with a filter of symbolic interactionism as its theoretical perspective. An instrumental case study is the chosen methodology, as it provides a general understanding of a phenomenon using a particular case (Harling, 2012). Accordingly, this study explored the different issues that 12 overseas trained teachers experienced before obtaining a teaching position in a public secondary school in WA or SA. It presents the main findings resulting from Datta Roy (2016).

## **Conceptual framework**

The literature presented on contextual experiences of overseas trained teachers prior to obtaining a teaching position in a public school highlights four common challenges that teachers might face before obtaining a teaching position at a public school. These challenges are a general lack of background information on post immigration life in a foreign country (Manik, 2007; Collins & Reid, 2012); varying teacher registration processes in Australian states which can cause delay in employment (Bella, 1999; Reid & Collins, 2007; Collins & Reid, 2012); loneliness, stress and isolation of overseas trained teachers in country postings (Reid, Collins & Singh, 2010) and; a lack of consistency in the orientation programs for overseas trained teachers in Australia (Hudson, Beutel & Hudson, 2009; Reid, Collins & Singh, 2010).

### **The availability of background information prior to arrival**

Collins and Reid (2012) observed that not much information was readily available to aspiring overseas trained teachers before migrating to Australia. Misinformation was also a significant problem. These researchers noted that many overseas trained teachers claimed they did not have access to all the facts, processes, procedures and institutional hurdles that lay before them prior to their arrival in Australia. The overseas trained teachers also observed that recruitment websites did not contain clear information. Collins and Reid (2012) noticed that while their research was in progress, all Australian states adjusted their websites to include information on experiences of overseas teachers including narratives and video clips of immigrant teachers.

Overseas trained teachers had similar experiences in other countries. For example, Manik (2007) recorded the initial experiences of South African teachers who migrated to the United Kingdom. These overseas trained teachers complained that important information on everyday life was missing from the recruiting websites. Those overseas trained teachers indicated that there was little or no information on accommodation, healthcare, transportation, food costs, phone services and many other general factors that affected their everyday lives. Manik (2007) reported that all these factors caused significant confusion and stress to overseas trained teachers as they moved to a foreign country. In addition, in the United States of America, there were reports of unscrupulous recruitment agencies.

Researchers have provided recommendations to counter the issue of insufficient background information received by migrant teachers. Jhagroo (2004) as quoted in Biggs (2010), recommended that overseas trained teachers should visit the proposed country of immigration at least once beforehand. This exercise might assist the migrating overseas trained teachers to get a feel for the people and the country in general. In the process, aspiring overseas trained teachers might also be able to evaluate the education system of their proposed country of immigration and make an informed decision about immigrating. Specific recommendations were given explicitly for Australian schools in the final 'Globalisation and Teacher Movements' research report (Reid, Collins & Singh, 2010). The first recommendation of the report focused on creating increasing transparencies in the migration policies and encouraging overseas teacher migrants to understand the realities of working in Australia. The report also suggested provisions for extending personalised connections and support to address any problem that migrant teachers might encounter across all areas of their personal and professional lives, particularly during their first six months in Australia.

### **Registration process and English language testing**

Registration experiences of immigrant teachers varied throughout Australia, as each state had its own recruitment policy (Reid, Collins & Singh, 2010). Reid, Collins and Singh (2010) observed that as a result of this situation, there was an emergence of a form of labour market failure that impeded the ease by which immigrant teachers entered and taught in Australian schools. These authors noted that teachers who were registered in any one of the Australian states did not get an automatic recognition or acceptance in other states. If teachers wanted to work interstate, they had to apply through the registration board of the concerned state to obtain permission to teach. While this situation was applicable to all teachers, both local and overseas trained, it had the potential to be more stressful for overseas trained teachers trying to commence their professional careers in Australia.

As far back as 1999, Bella observed that overseas trained teachers in Queensland schools considered obtaining registration and initial employment as their biggest hurdle. The teachers were unhappy about the 'wait' time to obtain their teacher registration. Bella (1999) also observed that many teachers felt that there was discrimination shown against teachers from overseas, particularly for teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds and this perception was evident from the delay in the registration process. These teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse and non-English speaking backgrounds observed that there was an inbuilt lack of acceptance of overseas trained teachers in the education community of Queensland (Bella, 1999).

Achieving the required standards of English language proficiency for teacher registration could prove to be an immense challenge to some overseas trained teachers as quite often the registration board might ask for native-like proficiency in English (Murray & Cross, 2009). Many overseas trained teachers found it hard to meet that requirement, mainly due to their varying accents. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership defined English language proficiency as "achievement of a level of professional

proficiency in spoken and written English” (AITSL, 2014). According to AITSL (2014), the English language proficiency of overseas teachers in Australia could be assessed through the International English Language System (IELTS), International Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ISLPR) or Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT). South Australia offered overseas trained teachers full registration after a successful completion of one of the above mentioned tests (TRBSA, 2016). Western Australia accepted desirable bands of 7.5 and 8 in International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT) (TRBWA, 2016).

### **Country postings**

The literature suggests that many overseas trained teachers found it necessary to take up their initial country postings in country, as these positions were more readily available compared to ones in metropolitan schools (Lonsdale & Ingvarson, 2003; Collins & Reid, 2012). The reasons for ongoing country vacancies were multiple. The most prominent reason was that the regional lifestyle in Australia appears to be a less desirable option for many local teachers. For example, Lonsdale and Ingvarson (2003) observed that "some schools in remote and rural areas find it hard to attract teachers"(p. 12). Collins and Reid (2012) noted that many local teachers became reluctant to take up teaching positions in remote areas of Australia. Due to the practical difficulties of sending staff to remote locations, even the universities found it hard to place student teachers in country schools (Lonsdale & Ingvarson, 2003). As a result of these situations, there were ongoing staff shortages in many rural and remote areas of Australia (Lonsdale & Ingvarson, 2003). In particular, Reid, Collins and Singh (2010) indicated that in Western Australia, it had become increasingly difficult to place and retain a steady education workforce in rural and remote locations. Country postings frequently caused loneliness, stress and isolation in overseas trained teachers. Overseas trained teachers were often required to fill in these readily available gaps between demand and supply of teaching staff in the rural and remote regions of Australia to commence their teaching careers (Reid, Collins & Singh, 2010).

Collins and Reid (2012) observed that many overseas trained teachers were forced to take up country postings to begin their new teaching careers in Australia. This situation could lead these teachers to endure a secluded and isolated life, away from the mainstream community. Furthermore, this situation added extra stress on the teachers' adaptation process to Australian public schools. Working in regional Australia could increase culture shock in overseas trained teachers, due to differences in culture, communication and the necessity to deal with extreme climates (Collins & Reid, 2012). In Australia, even though overseas trained teachers took up country positions for a variety of reasons, their services were not always valued in the country regions of the nation. The *Globalisation and Teacher Movements* research report (Reid, Collins & Singh, 2010) indicated that there was a perception amongst some immigrant teachers that overseas trained teachers were discriminated against, especially in terms of promotional opportunities, access to professional development and many other aspects of school life. Overseas trained teachers were often looked at as transient staff in the context of hard-to-staff schools,

both in country and metropolitan areas. The report advised the school community against such practices (Reid, Collins & Singh, 2010).

### **Teacher orientation programs**

The literature also highlighted a lack of consistency in orientation programs for overseas trained teachers in Australia. Collins and Reid (2012) observed that teacher orientation programs differed between the various Australian states. Some Australian states had specific teacher orientation programs for overseas trained teachers, for example Queensland, while others like New South Wales had a general orientation for all new teachers. In this regard, Hudson, et al. (2009) recommended that new professionals, both overseas trained and beginner teachers in Australian schools did not have the expertise, practice skills or knowledge like that of other experienced members of staff in the education system. An organised, consistent and ongoing support might be desirable in order to assist new professionals to commence and successfully retain their teaching careers in Australia.

Researchers have argued for better and more consistent teacher orientation programs for overseas trained teachers. Specifically, the difference between overseas trained teachers and Australian beginner teachers must be taken into consideration while building a program of initial support and integration for immigrant teachers during their first few years of work (Michael, 2006; Biggs, 2010). Teacher orientation must include substantial information on community and extend a provision for assistance in banking, licensing, accommodation and transport should it be required (Hutchison, 2005). A teacher orientation tour of the school showing the classrooms, technology and videos on best practices of experienced teachers (who might also act as mentors), might have the potential to provide the required guidance for overseas trained teachers. Furthermore, the role of a mentor should be that of a friend in order to assist overseas trained teachers through their transitional phase (Hutchison, 2005). Finally, the orientation process should introduce the new teachers to school staff and other networking agencies (Hutchison, 2005). These recommendations, if successfully implemented, would provide much improved support for overseas trained teachers in the initial years of settlement.

### **Purpose and research questions**

The purpose of this research was to explore the first hand experiences of overseas trained teachers prior to obtaining a teaching position in an Australian public secondary school. The intention was to acquire an understanding of different barriers and challenges that overseas trained teachers need to negotiate before obtaining a teaching placement. In the light of the purpose and the review of literature, there was one primary research question:

What are the contextual experiences faced by overseas trained teachers prior to obtaining a teaching position in public secondary schools of either Western Australia or South Australia?

## Significance

The significance of the study lies in the fact that many overseas trained teachers experience challenges when initially trying to find a teaching position in Australia (Collins & Reid, 2012). This research provides an insight into the experiences of 12 overseas trained teachers prior to obtaining a teaching position in public secondary schools in Western Australia or South Australia. Lessons learnt from this study might help prepare future aspirant overseas trained teachers, both physically and psychologically, to teach in the public schools of WA or SA.

## Methodology

Methodology defines why a certain method was chosen against all other available methods for a particular study (Kothari, 2004). An instrumental case study was the chosen methodological approach for this research. Grandy (2010) defined instrumental case study as the study of a case (e.g., person, specific group, occupation, department, organisation) to provide insight into a particular issue, redraw generalisations, or build a theory. In an instrumental case study, the case facilitates understanding of something else. Tellis (1997) noted that an instrumental case study can be used when the researcher wants to understand more than what is obvious to the observer. Through the analysis of contextual experiences of 12 overseas trained teachers from varied nationalities, this instrumental case study investigated a bigger and more intricate picture of multiple, subjective experiences of overseas trained teachers before obtaining a teaching position at a public secondary school in Western Australia or South Australia.

## Participants

This study sought to explore experiences of overseas trained teachers from both NEST and CALD/NESB backgrounds. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) was used while choosing the participants. In this process, each participant was chosen from a different country and background to provide a wide variation in the sample. In Western Australia, the participants were personally approached by one of the authors. The author limited recruitment to one participant per country. In South Australia, three willing participants were recruited (each representative of a different country) from the first ever conference of overseas trained teachers in Adelaide (October, 2012). Overall, nine participants were from Western Australia and three were from South Australia. Out of the 12 participants, eight belonged to the CALD/NESB group and four others were from NEST group. The participants consisted of seven females and five males from different age groups. Three participants worked in remote public secondary schools of either Western Australia or South Australia, five in rural schools and four in metropolitan schools. All the interviews were conducted between October 2012 and April 2013. Table 1 provides an overview of the 12 participants.



Table 1: Overview of overseas trained participants

Participant pseudonym	Group	Country of origin	Gender	State	Age group
Ali	NESB/CALD	Iraq	Male	WA	30-40 years
Leyla	NESB/CALD	Iran	Female	WA	50+ years
Steve	NESB/CALD	Zimbabwe	Male	SA	30-40 years
Monaco	NESB/CALD	Japan	Female	SA	30-40 years
Nadine	NESB/CALD	Ukraine	Female	WA	30-40 years
Rumi	NESB/CALD	India	Female	WA	30-40 years
Hayat	NESB/CALD	Eritrea	Male	WA	30-40 years
Lawson	NESB/CALD	Seychelles	Male	WA	30-40 years
Alice	Native speaker	Canada	Female	WA	20-30 years
Barbara	Native speaker	Ireland	Female	SA	50+ years
Bob	Native speaker	South Africa	Male	WA	30-40 years
Anne	Native speaker	United Kingdom	Female	WA	50+ years

NEST: native English speaking background; CALD/NESB: teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse and non-English speaking backgrounds.

## Context

All states and territories of Australia have their own responsibility for the delivery of school education within their education sectors (Australian Government, 2017). This study concentrated on the experiences of overseas trained teachers in the public secondary schools of the two states of Western Australia and South Australia. Hence the educational context of these two states will be briefly discussed. The Department of Education in Western Australia is the largest public sector employer in the state with more than 800 schools in communities across the state, both in bustling cities and regional centres. A number of these schools are located in some of the most remote regions of the world (Australia's Guide, 1997-2015). South Australia is the southern central state of mainland Australia. As of the latest updated published list in March 2015, there were 523 South Australian Government schools (Australian Education Union, South Australia, personal correspondence, 1 March 2016).

## Limitations

There were two limitations to this study. First, there were only twelve overseas trained teacher participants in this study. Purposeful maximum variation sampling (Patton, 1990) was used when recruiting the participants. One of the authors is an overseas trained public secondary school teacher from a NESB and CALD background and she used her personal contacts, as well as her opportunity to visit the first ever conference of overseas trained teachers in Adelaide (2012) to recruit willing participants from different countries and ethnic backgrounds. Secondly, due to time and practical constraints, overseas trained teachers from only two states of Australia were included in this study. However, this study could be used as a basis for a more comprehensive review of the experiences of overseas trained teachers involving participants from all states and territories of Australia. The findings from such a study would have greater generalisability and could be used to

identify best practices from the different contexts. There is also the opportunity to explore the experiences of overseas trained teachers working in Australian primary school settings.

### **Data collection**

This study concentrated on exploring the perception of overseas trained teachers in their natural settings by using semi-structured, in-depth interviews as a method of data collection. Patton (1990) observed that a "fundamental principle of qualitative interviewing is to provide a framework within which respondents can express their own understanding in their own terms" (p. 205). The data were collected from the personal experiences of 12 overseas trained teacher participants. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews suited this objective of the study as this process allowed the participants to express freely their points of view. The interview guide consisted of four types of questioning, as suggested by Patton (1990). These types of questioning are: background/demographic; experience and behaviour; knowledge; and feeling and sensory questions (Appendix A). The interviews were 45 to 60 minutes in length and at least on five occasions, the interviews continued over an hour. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis. In addition, field notes were compiled on the observation of participants' experiences. As Tessier (2012) observed "field notes are also important because ideas and memories from the interviews will most likely be lost further down in the research process" (p. 448). In order to remember important observations during the process of interviews, relevant notes were taken on the participants' reactions to the interview questions, their body language, tone, language, emotions and gestures. The intention behind recording such observations, was to obtain an indication of the effects of contextual experiences on the participants.

### **Data analysis**

An interpretive analysis of results was used to explore the contextual experiences of overseas trained teachers in the public secondary schools of Australia in relation to their cultural perspectives. The intention behind the use of interpretive analysis of data was to illustrate a real life picture of varied experiences faced by overseas trained teachers before obtaining a teaching position at a public school in Western Australia or South Australia. As Willis (2010) observed, the "task of qualitative data analysis is meaning-making" (p. 409). For the analysis of the qualitative data, this study utilised the analytical approach proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994). This approach incorporates "three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data flow and conclusion drawing/verification" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Miles and Huberman (1994) described the process of data reduction as "focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the data" (p. 10) that originally appears in a researcher's field notes and transcriptions. This process is followed by data flow, a process that Miles and Huberman (1994) defined as "an organised, compressed assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action" (p. 11). The final section of data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is drawing conclusions/verification, where the researcher is able to draw conclusions by monitoring the recurring patterns of themes. These three interlinked processes were consistently used throughout the research process.

## Results

The results of this study are presented in four sections: lack of in-depth information on post immigration life in Australia; teacher registration and English language requirements in the states of Western Australia and South Australia; lifestyle changes and relocation for obtaining permanency with the Education Department; and the teacher orientation process.

### **Lack of in-depth information on post immigration life in Australia**

The data detailed in this section highlight three concerns identified by the participants in this study. These were perceived lack of information on everyday life in Australia; apparent inadequacy of online information on registration and resources; and danger of misinformation on teaching locations.

Barbara from Ireland raised concerns over what she saw as a lack of prior information on everyday life in Australia. Barbara reflected that she was immensely surprised when another colleague enquired if she had completed her annual tax return. Barbara was amazed as she had not received this basic information beforehand. According to Barbara,

They need big changes - they need clarification. There has to be a physical pack for teachers when they set foot in the country and what they are entitled to. In my country, as a teacher, you can never apply for your tax back.

Two participants were unhappy about the clarity of information that was provided by the Education Department websites, both in Western Australia and South Australia. Anne from the United Kingdom said that she had wanted to view the Western Australian curriculum framework and gain a feel of the pedagogical requirement before migrating to Western Australia. Anne recalled,

I wanted to have a look at the framework and how it looked like, but I wasn't able to get to the website, because it didn't have an 'E' number. The basic structure of the system was very hard to find out. It should be easier.

Another participant, Manako from Japan, reflected that she had to find out by herself how to meet the prerequisites for becoming a teacher in South Australia. She could not access help or appropriate information from relevant sources. She recalled "it was difficult to find information on what to do or where I should go!"

A majority of the participants thought that the information provided on the Education Department websites may not always show the reality of job situations. Eight participants believed that a mention of some of those real life challenges and practical circumstances might have helped the Education Department websites to appear more accurate, truthful, valid and dependable. Bob from South Africa claimed that overseas trained teachers coming from abroad might be victims of misinformation in Australia. According to Bob,

some information provided by different sources, might indeed be misleading and might need to be doubly checked. He said:

A maths teacher from Ireland, a teacher I knew, was told that Tom Price - lovely town and near the coast! We had another teacher from Singapore, who informed the authorities that she had a skin problem with heat. Yet she was sent to Tom Price at 46 degrees heat. She didn't like bugs, cockroaches and stuff, but it's like that there in Tom Price. It's a desert and seriously was not the right place for her. Yeah, they take advantage.

Bob thought that that kind of incident should not happen to overseas trained teachers who are unaware of the topography of the country.

### **Teacher registration and English language requirements in WA and SA**

The participants identified two issues relating to teacher registration and English language requirements. These were anomalies in the teacher registration process in Western Australia and South Australia; and differing English language requirements for teacher registration.

Many participants found the teacher registration process time consuming. For example, in 2008, Alice from Canada claimed that she had to face registration issues in Western Australia with the then Western Australian College of Teaching (WACOT), which is currently (as of 2017) known as the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia (TRBWA, n.d.). Initially, as part of the immigration process, she was asked to replicate a Criminal Clearance Certificate from Canada (her country of origin). It did not make any sense to Alice, as she thought that Canadian police clearance must have been included in the International Criminal Check. One more participant, Rumi, from India, settled initially in New South Wales and later migrated to Western Australia along with her husband, who also was a teacher. She was surprised by the differences in the teacher registration policies of the two states. Different policies of teacher registration requirements of the states and territories of Australia, caused confusion in the minds of participants.

Another participant, Barbara from Ireland, indicated that she had to face the hurdles of registration backlog, which in turn led to the replication of her paperwork. Barbara claimed to have experienced a number of issues with the Teacher's Registration Board of South Australia. Before leaving Ireland, she had sent all the required paperwork for police and character verification details to the South Australia Teacher Registration Board. However, the South Australian teacher registration board demanded the same paperwork again. Barbara already had a job offer in South Australia before leaving Ireland, but due to registration issues she could not immediately take up her position. Furthermore, some of her certificates were not accepted by the State. For example, Barbara reported that she had a first aid certificate from the St. John's Ambulance in Ireland, but it was not accepted in South Australia. Since a first aid qualification was compulsory for teachers in South Australia, Barbara had to pay to renew her certificate.

A majority of the participants had to complete the 'International English Language Testing System' (IELTS) as part of the migration process. However, depending on the state in which the participants wished to teach, there were different English language requirements for teacher registration purposes. Participants from Western Australia did not have to appear for a separate English language exam to become registered as a teacher in the state. However, the participants from South Australia had to sit for English language testing to become registered.

### **Lifestyle changes and relocation for obtaining permanency with the Education Department**

The data from the participants revealed two dominant themes: incentives and permanency through country postings; and loneliness and separation from family.

The Western Australian Education Department offered teachers (both local and overseas trained) the option of accepting country placements to achieve permanency with the Department. The reason for such offers was the fact that many rural and remote teaching positions remained vacant for a long time. Some of the participants in this study had to take up such offers to commence their teaching career in Australia. Seven of the nine participants from Western Australia (Ali, Leyla, Lawrence, Nadjuhin, Hayat, Bob and Anne) taught in rural and remote locations to begin their teaching career in WA and all of them obtained permanency with the Department of Education of Western Australia. However, even though the country positions provided the above mentioned participants permanency with the Department of Education in Western Australia, the situation also led to some issues, as discussed in the next section. On the other hand, the experiences of teachers from South Australia differed in this respect and all the three participants from South Australia were frustrated with this issue. In South Australia, there were fewer permanent jobs on offer (Overseas Trained Teachers' Conference, Adelaide, 4 October, 2012).

A majority of the participants had to accept readily available country positions to commence their teaching career in Australia. Country locations often created a sense of loneliness for the participants, as many of them had to leave their families in the cities, to take up their teaching positions in different rural and remote regions. Five participants (Ali, Leyla, Hayat, Nadjuhin, Barbara) thought that their remote work locations created personal issues for them. Ali from Iraq reported that he had to leave his family and friends to start his teaching career in a rural location of Western Australia. Hayat from Eritrea also had to leave his young family to pursue his teaching career in a rural location. In Hayat's case, after trying in vain to get a transfer back to Perth to be with his family, he resigned his position to rejoin his family. Forced separation from family made Hayat resign his teaching position and even change his profession.

Another female teacher from Ukraine had to live alone for three years in remote regions of Western Australia to achieve permanency with the Department of Education. Nadjuhin from the Ukraine came to Western Australia after her marriage and started her teaching career in a remote location of the state. She had to leave her husband for three years in Perth to pursue her Level 3 posting in remote regions of Western Australia. Nadjuhin

indicated that she had to undergo a range of challenging experiences when she started her teaching career in remote locations of Western Australia. Some of the challenges that Nadjuhin had to experience were abiding by the rules of the indigenous communities in remote regions of Western Australia; and the necessity to confront extreme behaviour of students in some schools. Another participant, Barbara, discovered only after commencing her teaching position in a remote location of South Australia that she had to "*import food and vegetables*" and drink stored rainwater. Drinking water was stored in a tank and Barbara fell sick immediately after she commenced teaching in that location.

### **The teacher orientation process**

Participants raised one particular concern over the teacher orientation process. It was the apparent lack of consistency in the teacher orientation processes of the Education Departments of Western Australia and South Australia.

Participants identified what they saw as a lack of consistency in the Departmental teacher orientation process for new overseas trained teachers, both in Western Australia and South Australia. In Western Australia, three participants reported that they had received teacher orientation, while six others commented that they did not. Ali, Leyla, Hayat, who joined the Western Australian Education Department in the early 2000s, did not receive any formal teacher orientation from the Education Department of Western Australia. In South Australia all three participants indicated that they did not receive any teacher orientation. It appeared that over the years there were some changes in policies for teacher orientation in Western Australia, but South Australia relied on individual schools for the orientation of new teachers.

One of the participants (Nadjuhin) indicated that back in 2003, Murdoch University conducted training programs for overseas trained teachers. Formal information from the Education Department of Western Australia was not provided in that regard. Nadjuhin attended the course and found it quite helpful. However, since that program was not endorsed by the Education Department of Western Australia, she had to pay for the course. In later years, some changes in the teacher orientation process were put into place by the Department of Education of Western Australia. Anne recalled that in 2007, as part of her 457 visa (employer sponsored, temporary residence), she was classified as an overseas trained teacher and had to attend a formal teacher orientation program organised by the Department of Education of Western Australia. Anne reflected that this information was both useful and relevant, as many participants did not have any contextual information on Western Australian schools. Alice from Canada also had to undertake an intensive teacher orientation program conducted by the Department of Education of Western Australia in 2008. She reported that she was given work packages designed for overseas trained teachers and was provided with copies of the curriculum, worksheets to level assessments (levelling was the prevalent mode of assessment at that time). Along with all those theoretical practices, she also had to attend practical teaching sessions at a school where she worked for 10 days (with pay). After observing her teaching and coping mechanisms over this time, the Deputy Principal of that particular school signed her off with a satisfactory report. Alice was allowed to obtain a public secondary

school placement, only after the completion of that teacher orientation process. The participants expressed concern on the Education Department's varying policies on teacher orientation.

Similar issues were experienced by participants in South Australia. Barbara in South Australia, who joined her school in a remote community mid-year, reported that she did not have the opportunity to attend any teacher orientation program and simply had to assess the situation in her school herself. Moreover, as a Head of Learning Area (HOLA) she had to take charge without any assistance. Teacher orientation in South Australia was generally provided by individual schools after the appointment of teachers, through Education Department web sites (Overseas Trained Teachers' Conference, Adelaide, 4 October, 2012). Steven from Zimbabwe worked in the United Kingdom before migrating to Australia. He recalled that the teacher orientation program in the United Kingdom was "one of the best of its kind". Steven noted that he did not face much difficulty in adjusting to the public secondary schools in South Australia, due to his previous orientation and teaching experience in the United Kingdom. Steven's previous knowledge from teacher orientation in the United Kingdom helped him to deal with his new environment. The third participant from South Australia, Manako, confirmed that she did not receive any orientation before the commencement of her teaching position.

## **Conclusion and recommendations**

This study highlights that overseas trained teachers potentially face a range of challenges prior to taking up a teaching position in two Australian states. The identified challenges included lack of in-depth information on post immigration life in Australia; anomalies in the teacher registration and English language requirement in the states of Western Australia and South Australia; lifestyle changes and relocation for obtaining permanency with the Education Department; and the lack of consistencies in the teacher orientation process.

This study reconfirmed most of the observations that were highlighted by previous researchers (Reid & Collins 2007; Collins & Reid, 2012; Manik, 2007; Bella, 1999; Reid, Collins & Singh 2010; Hudson et al., 2009). Those observations included a general lack of background information on post immigration life in a foreign country; varying teacher registration processes in Australian states, which can cause delays in employment; loneliness, stress and isolation of overseas trained teachers in country postings; and a lack of consistency in the orientation programs for overseas trained teachers in Australia.

From these results and discussion, the authors offer two recommendations. First, it is imperative that the Education Department websites are consistently updated with relevant and appropriate information for the benefit of all teachers, especially those from overseas. Information might include registration requirements, the timeline for registration, post immigration life in Australia, values and pedagogical expectations in Australian schools, and realistic depictions of life in the rural and remote locations of the two states. This information will help aspiring overseas trained teachers to be mentally prepared before migrating to Australia.

The second recommendation focuses on the need for effective, ongoing teacher orientation and school-based induction for new overseas trained teachers, before they take on their classroom responsibilities. Provision for school-based inductions on a smaller scale might be considered if teachers join a public secondary school in the middle of an academic year. Effective teacher orientation and school-based induction will help in promoting confidence and preparedness in the minds of overseas trained teachers.

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## Appendix A: Questions for semi-structured interview

(adapted from Datta Roy, 2016)

- Q1. Please tell me a bit about yourself.  
 (Please include background information about the country of your origin, family, professional training, the educational system back home, values etc).
- Q2. When did you come to WA/SA? Did you teach anywhere else in Australia before coming to WA/SA? Please explain your initial experiences of the first public school that you taught in WA/SA.
- Q3. How did that experience differ from your initial expectation? Why did you have that kind of expectation? How did you react?

- Q4. Did you need to make any lifestyle change or adjustments in order to adapt to your teaching profession in WA/SA? What were those?
- Q5. How effective do you think the induction process was? What are your suggestions for improvement?
- Q6. Is there any additional information on teaching in WA/SA you would have liked to receive before coming here?
- Q7. From your own point of view, what do you think of the contribution of overseas trained teachers towards the education system of WA/SA? What are the impacts?
- Q8. What advice would you give to overseas trained teachers moving from an overseas school to teach in a secondary school in WA/SA?
- Q9. Are there other matters of interest that you would like to discuss?

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