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# Navigating Borders and Classrooms: A Phenomenological Exploration of Teachers' International Professional Experiences

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## Abstract

There has been an increase in teacher migration from the effect of globalization and internationalization. Teacher migration affects the education policies of both home and host countries. This phenomenological study aims to analyze the experiences of migrant teachers at the international level. This study examines 12 migrant teachers from different countries and with different backgrounds. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with these migrant teachers selected using purposeful sampling. Content analysis was used to analyze the interview data. As a result of the content analysis, two themes were obtained: 'Pre-migration process' and 'post-migration professional life'. Cultural differences between home and host countries were observed as effective on professional adaptation of the participants. The findings indicate that the participants complained about the challenges they had to deal with in adaptation process such as the pressure of grading and negative attitudes of their colleagues while they stated teaching abroad was positive for their professional development. In this regard, some formal arrangement could be designed by policymakers to make migrant teachers' adaptation process easier.

## Keywords

Teacher Migration,  
Internationalism,  
Globalization, Teacher  
Professional Develop-  
ment

## Introduction

Migration movements and patterns result in social and economic changes in home and host countries, as well as influencing the policies of states. According to a report from the International Organization for Migration (2020), the rate of international migration is on the rise, and it is estimated that around two-thirds of international migrants can be categorized as labor migration, meaning immigrating to other countries for better

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working and economic conditions. International migration has economic, geographical and demographic effects on both home and host countries and shapes their policies in these areas. International migration represents a complex process with longitudinal effects in many dimensions (International Organization for Migration [IOC], 2020). Therefore, there is a field to examine a specific group of professionals' migration experiences and the reasons for and results of their migration.

A report by the Europe Commission (2011) indicated that teachers have the highest rate of international mobility, after the health care workforce. Although there are few studies on international teacher mobility (Collins & Reid, 2012), how teacher migration affects the national education systems in some countries (Appleton et al., 2006) is a common issue among policymakers because teacher migration has a drastic effect on the educational systems of home and host countries (Caravatti et al., 2014; Guo & Singh, 2009).

Teacher migration is often discussed in the context of brain drain; that is, migration movements from third world countries to developed countries. This teacher migration means economical and academic losses for the third world home countries (Hatakenaka, 2004). However, developed countries benefit from this type of migration pattern by attracting brilliant individuals to their countries or by turning them into human capital as Bakioğlu and Keser (2019) stated. Thus, teacher loss has become a serious concern for sending countries due to increasing international migration (Keevy & Jansen, 2010, p. 11).

Teacher migration could be used interchangeably with teacher mobility, which refers to teachers that move to other countries for a brief time and teach abroad to develop themselves professionally. The current research adopts a holistic approach to explore the migration experiences of teachers in an international sense. Teacher migration is an important topic to be researched and analyzed, when its effects on the educational systems of countries are considered. However, the studies examining education and migration together generally focus on the educational and cultural experiences of refugees (i. e. Damaschke-Deitrick & Wiseman, 2021; Sangalang et al., 2019; Spaaij et al., 2019, Welker, 2022) and educational policies for refugees (i. e. Alpaydin, 2017; Buckner et al., 2018; Magos & Margaroni, 2018). There are few studies that examine experiences of migrant teachers from an international perspective in the literature (i. e. Caravatti et al., 2014; Yonemura, 2012). The current study aims to examine the experiences of migrant teachers with different backgrounds by exploring the reasons for migration, as well as the results of migration holistically to fill a research gap in the literature.

### Internationalization in Education: The Migration Trends of Teachers

The role of teachers for national development is critical, especially for developing countries. Teachers' social agency and commitment are addressed to achieve the national goals of the host countries on the educational level as teachers are expected to contribute to

social development of the society (Keevy & Jansen, 2010: 3; Sives, et al., 2005). However, teachers migrate from developing countries to developed countries for different reasons (Bense, 2016). The factors affecting this phenomenon of migration are usually classified into pull and push factors. While pull factors are positive factors that attract migrants to move to another region or country; push factors are explained as negative factors pushing people from their home countries for various reasons (Zanabazar et al., 2021). The pull and push factors affecting migration are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Push and pull factors for migration

	<b>Push factors</b>	<b>Pull factors</b>
<b>Economic factors</b>	High unemployment rates Lack of promotions Risk of losing jobs Low salaries	Low unemployment rates Labor recruitment Reasonable remuneration
<b>Non-Economic factors</b>	Political, racial, ethnic upheaval Fleeing war and/or civil unrest	Wealthy, stable and democratic practices Safe country
<b>Other factors</b>	Inability to live a decent life Deteriorating work environment Significant stress and burnout	Better life Satisfaction of practicing the profession Satisfactory work conditions

*Note:* Adapted and compiled from: Aguiar et al. 2007; Martin & Zurcher, 2008; Packer, et al. 2014.

In Table 1, push and pull factors include economic factors such as high / low unemployment rates, low salaries / reasonable remuneration, risk of losing jobs and labor recruitment. There are also other push and pull factors such as political considerations, physical security and quality of life. Parkins (2010) stated that the rise in global migration has been estimated at 35% overall in the last two decades, which implies an increase in push and pull migration factors (Urbanski et al., 2022).

### Studies on Teacher Migration

Bartlett (2014, p. 104) pointed out that migration trends alter traditional local boundaries of teacher labor markets by creating a brand new international migrant teacher labor market. Accordingly, most of the studies on teacher migration examine migration trends from developing countries to developed countries, while there are few studies in the literature examining the migration trends from developed countries to other developed countries. For example, the research conducted by Reid and Collins (2013, as cited in Bense, 2016) indicated that teachers' motivation for migration is to have an experience living abroad, while a few participants stated that they have career related reasons. Another study examining the experiences of teachers who immigrated to Australia (Collins & Reid, 2012) indicated that the reason for migrant teachers to teach in Australia are career

related reasons, such as professional development and acquiring modern teaching skills.

An international study examining migrant teachers' motivations to migrate by Caravatti et al. (2014) revealed valuable information about teacher migration. According to the findings in the research, teachers preferred to migrate because they wanted to live a better life, to provide better opportunities for their children, to improve their language skills or to have the opportunity to get further education. It seems migrant teachers have different sources of motivation based on the results of the limited number of studies examining teacher migration.

### Professional Experiences of Migrant Teachers

People within the same culture have a similar mental schema of what teaching is like, for the act of teaching is affected by one's mental conception (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018; Stigler & Hiebert, 1998). Thus, migrant teachers are exposed to different career processes due to the cultural differences of the countries to which they migrate (Peeler & Jane, 2005). It is possible to evaluate this situation as a natural result of the migration process; however, the increase in the number of migrants in developed countries aggravates the migration process, even for qualified migrants (Benson & O'reilly, 2009). The significant challenges they face can be summarized as employment problems and diploma equivalency, professional socialization, cultural conflict and classroom management problems derived from dominant pedagogical approaches in the host country that are different from the home country.

First, migrant teachers have some serious problems in the employment process. Accreditation issues are the main factor responsible for employment problems; some developed countries make migrant teachers take extra classes in order to have the title of teacher (Fee, 2011; Oloo, 2012; Schmidt, 2010), since some developed countries may not recognize migrant teachers' qualifications (Gravelle, 2011).

Second, migrant teachers may have problems communicating with students, teachers and parents in the host country; however, these problems may not be limited to linguistic problems. According to studies conducted in Australia, Canada and the USA, prejudice and discrimination toward migrant teachers are frequently observed because of their accents (Collins & Reid, 2012; Fee, 2010; Oloo, 2012). Linguistic problems also affect their communication and interaction with the school community; they fail to form professional socialization because they cannot feel themselves as legitimate member of a professional society (Niyubahwe, et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2010). Thus, migrant teachers need to make extra efforts to gain the trust and respect of school stakeholders (Janusch, 2015; Remennick, 2002).

Third, migrant teachers' professional experience and teaching philosophies may not work equally as well in the host country (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2004) because of culturally

different pedagogical approaches. Teaching is a cultural phenomenon; the content taught and the way it is taught are influenced by the cultural values of the country (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018). Thus, teachers need to be aware of the pedagogical approaches that dominate the education system of the host country; otherwise, many problems may arise in the teaching process. For example, Chinese teachers, mainly adopting didactic approaches, experience serious problems while teaching while working in Canada, where teachers are supposed to take a facilitator role, due to the different teaching approaches of the two countries (Wang, 2003; as cited in Niyubahwe, et al., 2013). These differences may make migrant teachers professional adaptation challenging.

While migrant teachers develop a unique educational philosophy and cultural awareness (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2014), these problems experienced during migration may discourage them from developing themselves professionally. Lashley (2018, p. 33), who is also a migrant teacher and PhD scholar, stated in one of her studies “the multiple losses migrant teachers experience is not parallel to the remuneration gains.” It is also ethically questionable how migrant teachers are exposed to such problems even in countries that formulate strategies to attract well-educated and qualified individuals (Schmidt, 2010). Challenges migrant teachers are exposed to in the host country are essential to analyze in order to understand the professional experiences of migrant teachers in depth.

### The Objective of the Study

Exploring the professional experiences of migrant teachers from an international perspective is useful to shed light on the procedures immigrant teachers go through in the migration process. However, there are very few empirical studies in the literature on teacher migration and most of these studies are limited to Canadian and Australian migrant teachers; thus, it is difficult to establish principles about the phenomenon. Therefore, this study aims to provide information and evaluation of current immigrant teacher migration trends at the international level and their experiences using an interdisciplinary and international approach. The results are expected to contribute to education policies related to migration and guide future research on teacher migration.

### Methodology

Phenomenological research studies are designed to understand phenomena in-depth, through exploring the essence of lived experiences (Creswell, 2017). New meanings and appreciation that the participants develop can be understood by analyzing in their subjective experience on the phenomena (Lavery, 2003). The main phenomena of this study are migrant teachers’ professional experience and teacher migration trends. This phenomenological study is designed to explore experiences of migrant teachers with different backgrounds.

## Participants

In this study, migrant teachers were selected as participants to reveal the experiences and migration processes of teachers with different backgrounds. The participants were determined by purposeful sampling, which entails the identification and selection of individuals or groups who have significant knowledge or experience related to the phenomenon being studied (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Out of all the purposeful sampling methods, maximum variation sampling is adopted to select cases that differ significantly from each other so that it yields detailed, high-quality descriptions of each case, valuable for documenting unique aspects (Patton, 2002).

The potential participants were contacted via a social-media group including migrant teachers. The candidate participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the research and 12 out of 20 migrant teachers agreed to participate in the research, and video conferences were planned. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via video conference. The profiles of the participants are provided in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Profile of the participants

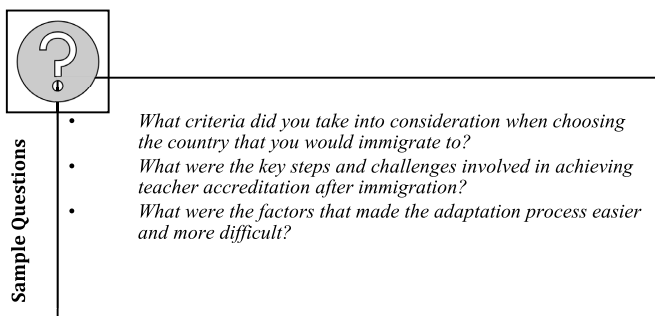
	Home country	Host country	Teaching subject	Age	Gender	Teaching experience
P1	United Kingdom	Thailand, Uzbekistan	Pre-school teacher	30	Male	7
P2	Turkey	United States	English	38	Female	16
P3	Turkey	France	English	36	Female	14
P4	Bosna and Herzegovina	United States	Pre-school teacher	48	Female	23
P5	Australia	Egypt	English	39	Female	20
P6	Philippines	Japan	English	48	Female	15
P7	United Kingdom	Thailand	Primary school teacher	52	Female	27
P8	Jamaica	United States	English	45	Female	26
P9	India	United States	Special education	39	Female	13
P10	United States	China	Sciences	45	Male	20
P11	United Kingdom	Egypt, Kuwait, Thailand, Germany, China (Hong Kong)	English	56	Female	20
P12	United States	Africa, South America, Turkey, Malawi	Mathematics	49	Male	24

Table 2 indicates that half of the participant teachers migrated from developed countries to developing countries. The others migrated from developing countries to developed countries. None of the participants of the study were forced migrants; the participants stated they had chosen to migrate abroad voluntarily.

In the results section, the notation of “Home country” and “Host country” is adopted to clearly denote the countries from which the participants have migrated and their current countries of residence. If there is more than one country to which they migrated, their current location is written as a host country.

## Data Collection Procedure

A semi-structured interview technique was used to explore teachers’ migration experiences and migration processes. The semi-structured interview technique gives researchers the opportunity to reveal previously unknown and original information (O’Keeffe et al., 2019). The interview form questions were created by scanning the relevant literature in detail. The sample questions are provided in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Interview Form: Sample Questions

The interviews with 11 participants were conducted via video conference with all participants except 1 participant who agreed to answer the questions via e-mail. The interviews took place between October 2020 and January 2021. The shortest interview was 25 minutes long and the longest interview took 1.5 hours.

## Ethics Committee Report

Marmara University Research and Publication Ethics Committee decided that the current research was ethically appropriate with its decision numbered 2021/203 on 26.02.2021 and notified the ethics committee’s approval with the document numbered 2100082014.

## Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability are essential standards to evaluate the research in data collection and analysis processes (Mohajan, 2017). To enhance the credibility of the results, experts of education and migration were consulted for drafting the interview questions, and



participants statements were quoted in the Results section. To establish transferability, the profiles of the participants was provided in detail. The data analysis ended after an agreement was reached between two researchers to enhance the dependability of the research. Lastly, the data of the whole research process is preserved to ensure the confirmability of the research.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research includes processes of preparing, arranging, defining, classifying the data obtained from various sources for analysis, and reducing and interpreting the data into coding structures and various themes (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). The use of qualitative content analysis provides more comprehensive qualitative research that can be associated with conceptual issues and uses the technique of systematically coding and analyzing qualitative data (Braun & Victoria Clarke, 2012). Since most of the participants were female, the data collected was also analyzed within the framework of gender theories and concepts to understand how the experiences of women interact with gender structures and norms.

### Results

As a result of the analysis, some common experiences emerged and are presented in Figure 2 based on the two time periods: (i) experiences before migration and (ii) experiences after migration.

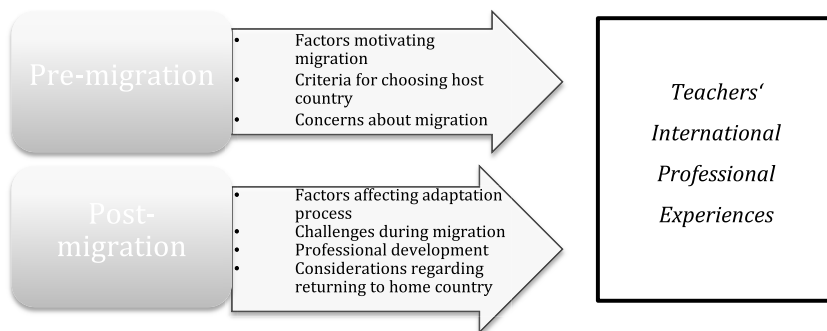


Figure 2. Themes and sub-themes

### Pre-Migration Period

#### Factors Motivating Migration

As observed in Table 3, most of the participants underscored they were motivated by economic benefits they would gain as a result of migration, like P6 (Philippines – Japan): “In my home country the teacher salary is quite low, so there are people who migrate abroad. Japan is a good opportunity to get better education and make more money.”

**Table 3.** Factors motivating migration

Codes	f	Participants
Economic prospects	5	P1, P6, P8, P10, P11
Exploring different cultures / traveling the world	5	P1, P3, P10, P11, P12
Gaining overseas experience	4	P3, P4, P7, P9
Professional development	1	P9
Learning a new language	1	P12

P6's case could be evaluated as common when it is thought that economic prospects encourage people in developing countries to immigrate to developed countries (Van der Mensbrugge & Roland-Holst, 2009); however, it is not necessarily true. There are some cases, like P1, in which people of developed countries prefer to immigrate to developing countries to earn more. P1 (United Kingdom – Uzbekistan) decided to work abroad for economic benefits: “The salary and opportunities offered in Uzbekistan were very good and being able to save money for the future motivated me a lot because the cost of living is relatively low compared to other countries.”

Apart from economic gains, a few participants, like P3 (Turkey – France), mentioned their desire to have working experience abroad, which is one of the important motivating factors for them to migrate:

Every day felt like the same day, and I could not learn anything new. I used to feel as if I were in a vicious circle. I wanted to open the door to a different world and see through it.

The statement above conveys a deep sense of monotony and frustration, as P3 described feeling trapped in a repetitive daily cycle, unable to learn or experience anything new. It is a stimulator to enrich both the participants personal and professional life and to explore new horizons.

Other than economic and professional reasons, a few participants were simply motivated by exploring different cultures and traveling the world. For example, P12 (United States – Turkey) explained how he was fascinated by different cultures and languages: “There is a huge world out there! Learning different languages and cultures is exciting! Also, it's a great experience for my kids.” This paints a picture of an individual who is deeply inspired by the possibilities of the world and is keen on sharing these enriching experiences to foster a similar sense of curiosity and global awareness.

Traveling the world is one of the popular items in the wish lists of the people; therefore, it is not surprising as a motivator for migration. However, interestingly, one of the participants P11 (United Kingdom – China) mentioned that she used to be a lawyer, she dropped her profession, and she picked teaching as her new profession to travel the world:

I took time off from my job and went to university again to be a teacher, and as soon as I graduated, we moved to Cairo. We've always wanted to travel and see the world. ... we wanted to do something exciting and have an adventure.

The career change decision highlights a proactive approach of P11 to both personal and professional development, demonstrating a willingness to embrace change and seek new experiences.

### Criteria for Choosing Host Country

As observed in Table 4, the participants had different opinions on criteria for choosing the host country, which is not surprising when it is thought that the participants have different backgrounds. On the other hand, most of the participants paid attention to the profile of host countries so that the migration process would be easier. These participants took language and culture into consideration to facilitate their migration process. For example, P2 (Turkey – United States) stated that she took the language of the host country as a first criterion while choosing the host country: “The main criterion was the fact that the official language was English in the country I was going to.”

**Table 4.** Criteria for choosing host country

Codes	f	Participants
Language & culture of host country	5	P2, P6, P10, P11, P12
Life standards	3	P2, P3, P9
Personal development opportunities	2	P3, P10
Economic conditions	2	P1, P3
Security	2	P1, P6
Status of the teaching profession	1	P11

Similarly, P11 (United Kingdom – China) mentioned that the more cultures of home and host countries are similar, the easier the migration process becomes: “If I had had the chance, regardless of other factors, I would have worked [in] countries whose culture is similar to [the]United Kingdom. Except for Germany, the other countries were difficult for me to adapt to.” This statement highlights the significant role of cultural compatibility in the ease of adaptation for international professionals, underscoring the challenges faced when working in culturally diverse environments.

Remarkably, only one of the participants, P11, regarded the professional status of the teaching profession as important factor in choosing the host country: “After a lot of years abroad in different countries, I chose Hong Kong by knowing that teaching profession was highly respected by parents and society.” It underscores the importance of societal respect and recognition for the teaching profession in the choice of a working

environment, highlighting how professional esteem can influence the career decisions of teachers.

### Concerns about Migration

As observed in Table 5, the concerns about migration are mostly related to the cultural characteristics of the host country, which seems compatible with the findings on the criteria for choosing host country. For example, P8 (Jamaica – United States), explained her concerns about the culture in the USA and negative preliminary information regarding how teachers are disrespected based on stereotypes presented in the movies: “Before I went to the USA, I was worried about possible disrespectful behaviors of the students towards teachers. I was somewhat affected by the stereotypes I saw in the movies.” It highlights how media representations could shape perceptions and anxieties about professional environments, potentially influencing individuals’ expectations and preparedness for cultural and occupational challenges.

**Table 5.** Concerns about migration

Codes	f	Participants
Cultural differences	5	P1, P2, P3, P8, P11
Negative information about host country	2	P7, P8
Discrimination, prejudice and racism	2	P6, P12
Teacher equivalency problems	1	P2
Not being proficient in the native language of host country	1	P5

Similarly, P5 (Turkey – United States), also had professional concerns related to cultural differences between her students and herself, which potentially raises some communication problems:

I was really concerned about establishing a bond with my students in the USA. It became very easy for me to connect with my Turkish students, and I wasn't sure if it would be that easy in the USA.

The statement above reveals her internal struggle with the potential challenges of forming meaningful relationships in a culturally different educational landscape, unlike the comfort and success experienced in a familiar environment. Lastly, P1 (United Kingdom – Uzbekistan), mentioned that he was really concerned about attitudes towards women in Uzbekistan which is a predominantly Muslim country:

Moving to Uzbekistan with two young daughters also worried me. However, it turned out my worries were in vain. The attitudes towards women are no worse than in other Asian countries here. I [was] relieved.

His initial concern about moving to Uzbekistan with his two young daughters highlights the gender-specific anxieties related to the treatment and status of women in a new cultural context. His worries are rooted in the understanding that gender norms and attitudes towards women could significantly vary across different countries and regions, potentially impacting his own and his daughters' well-being and safety. To summarize, the opinions on the criteria for choosing the host country differ, while the reasons for pushing teachers to migrate in the pre-migration process are similar. Pre-migration concerns, on the other hand, are mostly due to cultural differences between home country and host country.

### Post-Migration Period Factors Affecting Adaptation Process

As observed in Table 6, the factors affecting the adaptation process are mostly related to characteristics of host countries, which seems compatible with the findings on the criteria for choosing host country discussed in previous sections. The language of host countries was underscored by most of the participants, such as P11 (United Kingdom – China), as a facilitator or an impediment to adapt for migration:

There were some good things about the transition to Hong Kong, which makes things easier. Everyone here -China- speaks English, which is preliminary for achieving professional success here. Here's a bilingual country, so all traffic signs and some other things are bilingual.

This statement highlights the significant role of language accessibility in easing the transition and contributing to professional and personal integration in a new country.

**Table 6.** Factors affecting adaptation process

Codes	f	Participants
Language of host country	6	P3, P4, P5, P6, P9, P11
Culture of host country	4	P2, P7, P9, P11
School administration	4	P1, P4, P5, P10
Mentoring and orientation programs	2	P8, P12

However, the people's prejudice due to her culture and accent made adaptation difficult for P5 (Australia – Egypt): “When I immigrated to Egypt, I had a hard time because everyone was making fun of me especially when I was trying to speak Arabic”. Similarly, P3 (Turkey – France), also had problems with adaptation since she did not have a good command of a language of host country: “At first, I wasn't good at French. Also, the French generally do not prefer to speak English, which was quite challenging.”

Another factor affecting the adaptation process is the culture of host country and how host countries' people react to cultures other than theirs. P5 (Australia – Egypt) had

negative experience about it: “They tried to humiliate my hometown and culture. Even, they tried to impose their culture on me.” This statement highlights her experience with cultural discrimination and the imposition of another culture. It underscores the issue of cultural superiority, where dominant groups devalue and marginalize other cultures. The attempt to impose their culture indicates a lack of respect for cultural diversity and individuality, emphasizing the challenges of maintaining one’s cultural identity in such environments.

K9 (India – United States), migrating from India to the USA also underscored the effect of culture for adaptation: “What made it so difficult for me to get used to was that the cultures were so different. It took me a long time to adapt.” This statement captures the emotional complexity of cultural adaptation, highlighting the challenges of navigating significant cultural differences and the time and effort required to achieve a sense of belonging in a new environment.

P11 (United Kingdom – China), who had taught in different countries, explained how cultural differences and similarities between home and host countries shaped her adaptation process:

When we moved to Egypt in the early days, western food was very hard to find, whereas in Hong Kong, everything you need is very easy to find. We also had friends in Hong Kong, and having these people made a big difference for us because we had a great social life.

Attitudes towards migrants are effective on their adaptation processes. When attitudes towards migrants are shaped by micro and macro effects (Pakot & Róbert, 2014), meso-level effects should be also taken into consideration especially for educational organizations, where human interactions are critically important among school stakeholders. Therefore, schools where the participants are working and how the schools are managed is expected to have an impact on their adaptation processes in addition to the language and culture of host country, and, not surprisingly, half of the participants mentioned the role of school management for their adaptation processes. Most of these teachers, such as P1 (United Kingdom – Uzbekistan), criticized the school management since they failed to guide migrant teachers at schools:

The school management team seems to have a lack of experience. Things did not start well and got even worse during COVID. The motivation of the employees is very low as we were little appreciated during this difficult period. Also, we don’t get enough support on the school curriculum.

Similarly, P5 (Australia – Egypt), also disapproved the fact that she was not supported at all during hard time she got through in the first months in host country: “I had a

hard time and did not receive any support. I had to find strategies for dealing with problems by myself all the time, which was frustrating.” Both statements capture a sense of disillusionment and demoralization among teachers, driven by perceived incompetence in school management, inadequate recognition, and lack of essential support, particularly during the challenging times of the COVID pandemic.

Besides these negative statements, two of the participants mentioned their positive experience in the school they work, which includes orientation and mentor programs. For example, P12 (United States – Turkey), appreciated benefits of a mentor program, and how this program facilitated her adaptation process:

Most of the schools I’ve worked have had an ‘orientation week’ or a ‘mentoring system’, which has been very helpful. ... it was very easy to get used to the new places.

This statement highlights the importance and effectiveness of orientation and mentoring systems in helping individuals acclimate to new settings. This emphasizes the value of structured support in fostering a welcoming and adaptable environment.

### Challenges during Migration

As observed in Table 7, the challenges the participants faced at school mostly emerged because of the attitudes of stakeholders of the school. Half of the participants underscored how they had to endure negative attitudes of their colleagues, school managers and parents. P6 (Philippines – Japan) mentioned that her colleagues avoided communicating with her: “I had lot of bad experiences with my colleagues. I think this is because English teachers who were not very fluent in the language thought I was a threat to them at work.” This statement highlights the emotional complexity of navigating professional relationships, especially in an environment where colleagues may feel threatened by perceived differences in skill or proficiency. It underscores the impact of workplace dynamics on personal and professional well-being.

**Table 7.** Challenges during migration

Codes	f	Participants
Adapting to the education system	3	P3, P9, P11, P12
Communication with parents & parents’ high expectations	3	P2, P9, P10, P11
Problems in classroom management	3	P4, P5, P9
Communication with stakeholders	2	P1, P6
Cultural conflict	1	P11
Prejudice & discrimination	1	P5

P1 (United Kingdom – Uzbekistan) considered school management responsible for the professional challenges she had to get through: “Management lacked experience and

expertise on how to communicate with teachers. We teachers are lack of management support. They avoid communicating with us.”

Besides school managers and other teachers, the participant teacher also mentioned they had some problems with parents for different reasons. For example, P10 (United States – China) admitted that she had to deal with unrealistic expectations of parents:

While Chinese students in general are very eager to learn and succeed in school, parents can still have unrealistic expectations for their children, and, sometimes, no success is enough for them, which makes things difficult for me as a teacher.

P10 experienced the emotional complexity of teaching in an environment where student enthusiasm is high but parental expectations is sometimes unattainable, creating a challenging and high-pressure situation for the teacher.

Similarly, P11 (United Kingdom – Uzbekistan), who also worked in China complained about the fact that parents tried to control decisions related to the school because of their high expectations for their children; that is why they tried to put teachers and managers under pressure. Moreover, she also mentioned how cultural differences between school stakeholders could result in conflict throughout the school by telling an anecdote:

The school I was working was a culturally rich environment. I mean, most of the teachers were Canadian and North American, but most of the parents and school management team members were Chinese. China is a more traditional society, Canada is more modern, and I, as an English person, have often been torn between two cultures. For example, a Canadian literature teacher assigned their students to review a novel on same-sex marriages. Chinese parents, naturally, did not approve it, they accused the teacher of badly influencing their children’s morals, and they tried to make a scene at the school. I had to calm two sides.

This anecdote illustrates the complex dynamics and potential conflicts that could arise in multicultural educational settings, where differing cultural values and norms often clash. P11’s role in mediating between these cultural perspectives highlights the need for cultural sensitivity and the challenges of balancing diverse expectations.

Reporting and grading generally differentiate across different education systems, which is one of the problems that a few participants, such as P12 (United States – Malawi) experienced: “The first few months in a new country everything is exciting but then things get harder to learn about a new education system, especially if it is totally different from [what] you are familiar with.” This statement captures the emotional journey of



transitioning to a new country, from the initial excitement to the subsequent challenges of adaptation.

Lastly, P5 (Australia – Egypt), explained how she had to handle prejudice and discrimination due to her religion: “I am a Muslim and people don’t want to hire me or they want to give me a much lower salary than any other foreigner could get, which discourages and hurt me.” This statement underscores the impact of religious discrimination in the workplace, highlighting how biases against Muslims could result in unequal treatment, such as hiring reluctance and lower wages. This discriminatory practice not only causes emotional distress and discouragement but also perpetuates systemic inequality, undermining fair employment opportunities and equitable compensation.

### Professional Development

All the participants stated that their professional development enhanced considerably because of overseas teaching experiences. As observed in Table 8, most of the participants such as P1 (United Kingdom – Uzbekistan) underscored that they improved pedagogical skills such as acquiring modern teaching methodologies, designing culturally rich lesson plans and developing new classroom management strategies:

I feel like I am a better teacher with teaching experience abroad. I learned lots of things that I couldn’t have learned in my own country. I have opportunities to experience new cultures, new languages and exotic countries.

**Table 8.** Professional development

Codes	f	Participants
Improving pedagogical skills	6	P1, P2, P6, P8, P9, P10
Learning a foreign language	3	P1, P2, P3
Gaining different perspectives	3	P7, P10, P11
Educational opportunities	1	P8

P8 (Jamaica – United States) appreciated the educational opportunities offered in the host country: “Professionally speaking, I feel more qualified. I learned lots of new strategies and skills. I got an education certification in Gifted Education. I could not have that opportunity in Jamaica.” These statements highlight the professional growth and opportunities afforded by working abroad, underscoring the transformative impact of international experiences on both migrant teachers’ qualifications. The acquisition of specialized certification in Gifted Education, unavailable in P8’s home country, exemplifies the unique professional development opportunities that could arise from international mobility.

## Considerations Regarding Returning to the Home Country

As observed Table 9, there are diverse factors that shape the participants' decisions about whether or not to return to their home countries or continue teaching abroad.

**Table 9.** Considerations regarding returning to home country

Codes	f	Participants
Personal satisfaction and lifestyle	4	P6, P7, P8, P9
Cultural identity	2	P3, P5
Family and emotional ties	2	P2, P11
Long-term career considerations	1	P4

Many participants who find joy and fulfillment in their host countries and choose to stay, integrating deeply into the local culture and sometimes even obtaining citizenship, as P8 (Jamaica – United States): “I am now a citizen of the United States. I go back Jamaica for vacations. I have built a life here so I won't be going back to my country to live.” She considers the United States her permanent home.

On the other hand, P3 (Turkey – France) wanted to return her home country for some time:

I am considering returning. No matter how many years one lives in a country, if it's not the one they were born and raised in, they do not truly feel they belong to that culture.

P3 reflects on the intrinsic difficulties of fully integrating into a foreign culture despite prolonged residency. Her sense of belonging makes it difficult for her to feel fully part of the community.

Decisions to return the home country may be also influenced by family and emotional ties. Some female participants face dual expectations—achieving career success while adhering to traditional caregiving roles within the family as P2 (Turkey – United States) and P11 (United Kingdom – China):

I'd like to return but my kids will resume their education in the USA so I can't. (P2)

I only think of going back only if my mother needs me as she gets older. (P11)

As the statements above indicate gender roles could influence the professional experiences and life decisions of women, such as the need to care for aging parents or manage children's education, which reflects societal expectations that women should prioritize family care.

To sum up, apart from the culture and language of host country, the participants mentioned the importance of the support of school stakeholders; however, they could not get enough support, which made their adaptation processes challenging. All the participants stated that their professional development enhanced because of international migration. They have different considerations regarding returning to their home country or staying in the host country, though.

## Discussion and Conclusion

Teacher migration is a phenomenon that can be explained within the framework of both international mobility and brain drain. That is, some teachers migrate from developing countries to developed countries, which could be regarded as an extension of brain drain, and others migrate from one developed country to another, which could be seen as a part of international mobility. The participants of the current study provided cases described these two concepts.

In this research, the experiences of the participants are examined chronologically: pre-migration and post-migration processes. In the first sub-theme of pre-migration, it was concluded that most of the participants were motivated by economic factors regardless of whether their home country is developing or developed, which is compatible with the research by Chen (2007). That is, high salary expectations are among the most important factors that motivate teachers to migrate to other countries. Secondly, to explore different cultures is another prominent factor among the reasons for teachers to migrate. A teachers' desire to explore different cultures could be interpreted as an effect of globalization on education. The fact that teachers are willing to gain international experience is not surprising when education is considered a phenomenon beyond borders and time, and the roles of teachers are defined in accordance with this new paradigm (Chen, 2009). What is interesting is the fact that teaching was defined as a 'mobile' profession by one of the participants, and the desire to travel the world made her change her career path.

In the second sub-theme of pre-migration, the criteria for choosing host countries are explored. The culture and language of host countries were preliminary considerations before deciding on host countries. The research by Bense (2016) and Caravatti et al. (2014) also indicated that the culture of host countries and whether it is similar to or different from home country is an important criterion. As for a language of host countries as criterion, it could be explained that English is a *Lingua Franca*, which is the common mode of communication among speakers with different cultural and ethnical backgrounds (Jenkins, 2009). However, other aspects a host country's language as a criterion emerged in this study. Pragmatically, whether a language of host country improves teachers professionally is one of the aspects. Similarly, one of the participants stated that the professional status of teaching profession was important in choosing a host country. This means that

teachers are also career-oriented when determining the country that they will migrate to, and they attach importance to their professional dignity and professionalism. A high standard of living is another prominent criterion for those who migrated from developing countries to developed countries, which is in line with the conceptual framework that explains teacher migration in the context of brain drain.

In the third sub-theme of pre-migration, the participants' concerns about migration is examined. The cultural difference between home country and host countries was a factor that made teachers feel anxious about migration, which is expected when it is thought that difference between home culture traditions and the dominant cultural elements of host country poses a dilemma for migrants (Peeler, 2002). Some participants also stated that they had concerns about the pedagogical approach and communicating with students from different cultures. These participants are obviously aware the fact that teaching is a cultural phenomenon; it is affected by the cultural values of the country (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018). Moreover, Tran and Pasura (2019) found in their research, as in the participants in this study, teachers working in culturally rich schools are also aware of gaps in their professional practices, since the professional development of teachers is closely and inextricably connected with the engagement between teacher and student in context.

The second theme was the professional lives of teachers after migration. As a first sub-theme of post-migration processes, the adaptation procedures of the participants are explored. The culture and language of host country seem effective on their adaption process. While these effects could be negative or positive, the participants generally explained their negative experiences, such as prejudice, bullying and mobbing, which is consistent with the studies conducted by Collins and Reid (2012), Fee (2010) and Oloo (2012). These studies also indicated migrant teachers were exposed to mobbing because of their home cultures and native languages. Linguistic problems create a barrier for their communication and developing a bond with the students and their colleagues, which makes them feel isolated and creates a low self-esteem because they are not given enough credit in a professional sense by the school administration (Niyubahwe, et al., 2013; Schmidt, 2010).

Consistent with the studies by Peeler and Jane (2005) and Niyubahwe et al. (2013), the participants stated that orientation and mentor programs are highly beneficial for the adaptation process. Especially in a culturally rich schools, there is a corporate awareness for what processes migrant teachers go through, and that makes the integration process of migrant teachers healthy (Niyubahwe, et al., 2013). The fact that one of the participants in this study stated that the mentoring system facilitated his own adaptation process and that he even mentored newcomers, could be given as an indicator how important corporate awareness about cultures is for the adaptation of migrant teachers.

The opinions regarding challenges that the participants face differentiate each other. Firstly, different countries have different pedagogical approaches; migrant teachers need

to be aware of the education system, culture and pedagogical approaches that dominate the education system of the host country (Niyunbahwe, et al., 2013); otherwise, problems such as grading and reporting may arise, which were also stated by a participant in this study. Secondly, other challenges migrant teachers had to face were related to communicating with school stakeholders; some of the participants stated that their communication with the school administration was limited, and other teachers had a negative attitude towards migrant teachers. In parallel with the findings of this study, research by Niyubahwe et al. (2013) and Schmidt (2010) indicated that migrant teachers felt professionally isolated. Furthermore, the study conducted by Remennick (2002) showed that migrant teachers could be perceived as a threat by teachers in host countries, which was also stated by one of the participants in this study. Thirdly, expectations of parents from teachers generally differ from culture to culture (Fee, 2011). In this study, two migrant teachers in China complained about the high expectations of teachers from Chinese parents, which they were not familiar with in their host countries. The reason for this difference may be the different values that societies place on education. This difference becomes even deeper in terms of the expected values of students and the professional status of teachers, which are generally distinct for individualist and collectivist societies (Mercado & Trumbull, 2018; Niyubahwe, et al., 2013). It turns out that it is an important factor for professional adaptation was to not only understand the culture of the host country in the big picture, but also to thoroughly grasp its effects on school culture.

In the third sub-theme of post-migration processes, the professional development of migrant teachers is explored. The elements such as developing teaching skills, field specializations, learning a foreign language, and gaining different perspectives were expressed by the participants. Similarly, the study conducted by Cushner (2007) indicated that the abroad experience contributes to teachers' professional development in terms of teaching different student profiles, improving self-efficacy and cultural knowledge, and developing global perspectives. The experience abroad enables teachers to become global educators (Cook, 2009); that is, global educators are aware of the differences and diversity in the communities, so that their students could acquire open-mindedness skills with different perspectives. Thus, professional gains as the result of teacher migration could be highly beneficial for students to equip them with 21st century skills; therefore, it could be valuable to encourage teacher mobility as an educational policy.

In the fourth sub-theme of post-migration processes, considerations of migrant teachers regarding returning to their home country is explored. Personal satisfaction and lifestyle, cultural identity, family and emotional ties and long-term career considerations shaped their decision about whether to return to the home country or continue teaching abroad. It is remarkable that some female participants faced dual expectations—achieving career success abroad, while adhering to traditional caregiving roles within the family. Similarly, the study by Gannerud (2010) found that female primary school teachers are

driven by a strong intrinsic motivation to advance in their careers independently, while societal pressures and traditional cultural values heavily influence their lives, compelling them to prioritize starting and maintaining a family as a fundamental obligation. Female teachers' struggle to balance the dual demands of traditional roles and professional roles should be addressed to enhance fair employment opportunities.

### Limitations and Future Directions

This research highlights various aspects of teacher migration, identifying significant adaptation challenges faced by migrant teachers in developed countries. It suggests that policymakers might design formal arrangements to facilitate the adaptation process for these individuals.

However, this study was conducted within certain limitations regarding its theoretical framework and participant selection. Notably, the phenomenon of forced migration was not explored, which might have illuminated critical aspects concerning the status of forced migrant teachers. This exclusion was primarily due to the lack of access to forced migrant teachers because of the adverse conditions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research could address these limitations by including a broader range of teachers, particularly forced migrant teachers, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the migration experiences of teachers. Lastly, as is typical in phenomenological studies, the number of participants in this study was limited. Future studies could adopt quantitative methods to gather data from a larger sample of teachers across different countries enhancing the generalizability of the findings and providing a deeper exploration of teacher migration. Also, to provide a richer analysis, it might be beneficial to adopt mixed methods approaches in future studies.

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