

## **THE BRAIN DRAIN OF TEACHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA: IDENTIFYING THE DYNAMICS OF ITS PUSH FACTORS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

South Africa over the years has been losing a considerable number of teachers and this has become a growing concern among policymakers. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to identify the factors that are responsible for enticing teachers to migration out of South Africa. Using a strict textual analysis of the relevant literature, this paper reveals that South Africa has failed to reduce the emigration of teachers due to poor salaries and working conditions, subsequently, this has seen as agents from developed countries (recently Asian countries) aggressively recruiting teachers from the country. Other factors include poor infrastructure and limited career progression opportunities. The study showed that the brain drain of teachers results in a shortage of teachers in rural areas and increased inefficiency in the public educational system. It is therefore suggested that the government should make the retention of teachers a priority through incentives such as promotion, better salaries and the upgrading of infrastructure. The study concluded that teacher emigration has been a long-existing issue in South Africa and the mere fact that there has been no clear cut plan on how to deal with it is deeply worrying, moreover, today in South African schools, the issue of security has become a focal point, the failure to guarantee the safety of teachers in schools has been seen as a new factor encouraging migration either within the country or abroad.

**Keywords:** Teachers; Brain drain; Migration; Education; South Africa

### **INTRODUCTION**

Migration can be defined as a form of mobility/movement between two clearly defined geographic units that involves a permanent change of usual residence (Kpedekpo, 1976). Migration can either involve the crossing of international boundaries (international migration) or within the borders of the same country (internal migration) (Palamuleni, 2019). Different sectors across South Africa are battling to reduce the outflow of skilled professionals whose loss will negatively impact the country's quest for inclusive and sustainable socio-economic development. While the government have been trying to understand the core causes of emigration by South Africa's professionals, the emigration of teachers has become a huge cause of concern, especially considering that failure to reduce it complicate South Africa's educational output and compromise the country's overall developmental objectives.

According to Jones (2012), the emigration of teachers from South Africa is motivated by numerous socio-economic factors that have been in existence for years. Grobbelaar (2011) states that there are roughly 5400 foreign teachers in South Africa, with the bulk coming from Zimbabwe. Although in the short term, this a good way of filling the void, De Villiers (2012) of the University of Pretoria's Faculty of education stated that having an increase in foreign teachers in South Africa requires a significant increase in the budget as they have to be trained to understand country's curriculum (Jones 2012). Another disadvantage is that these

teachers, after training, may opt to migrate and leave the country, a situation that leaves the government with huge financial losses in training costs.

South Africa's basic educational system is experiencing a severe shortage of qualified teachers, especially in mathematics and science. (Govender 2016). It may be argued that besides the emigration of skilled teachers, the constant changing of the school curriculum is also a major problem affecting South Africa's basic educational output. The World Economic Forum's 2014 Global Information Technology Report rated South Africa's primary school sector out of 144 countries as follows: 132nd in quality of teaching; 115th in access to primary schools and 143 in the quality of science and Maths teaching (Reprobate, 2012).

Unfortunately, South African universities have been producing teachers who mostly specialise in History, Geography and the Arts compared to Mathematics and science subjects. By 2006, there were roughly 400 000 teachers in South Africa by 2006 and annually South Africa produced 9000 fully and partially qualified teachers were produced annually thereafter. This is a significantly low number considering that South Africa needs between 17000 and 20000 teachers a year to complement the existing levels (Anganoo, 2014). Rondganger (2016) states that the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) province alone loses 4500 teachers yearly to emigration while producing only 700 teachers a year. Painting the gloomy picture of the province's education sector, former KZN premier, Senzo Mchunu stated that of the 75 437 teachers employed by the province, about 15000 were either unqualified, or under-qualified. In the 2011/12 fiscal year, South Africa allocated R189bn towards basic education, a significant increase from the R165bn that was allocated the previous (Butler-Adam, 2013).

In 2016, the figure rose to R205bn. Although this has been largely welcomed, an increase in the budget has not dealt with the push factors behind teacher emigration. Smuts (2016) states that this has not helped the South African education system and has not improved the quality of education, as most teachers who are highly skilled and qualified are either poached or motivated by higher earnings abroad.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

It may be argued that globalisation has led to the opening up of borders to facilitate the free flow of skills between regions. The fast-growing economies of Asia coupled with the need for rapid integration in the world has no doubt resulted in numerous countries recruiting foreign teachers, especially English teachers (Williams 2017). These countries have often targeted teachers from developing countries where teachers are often poorly paid. When financially rewarding opportunities present themselves abroad, teachers are often left with little but no choice than to accept (Vegas, 2007). This has unfortunately been the case for South African teachers. This was further argued by Ansah (2016), who argued that a specific characteristic of African migration to Europe and other parts of the world is the spectre of invasion and images of desperate Africans fleeing from poverty, civil war, economic suppression, disease and political oppression. The author also argued that there is a growing interconnection between globalization and migration, especially from an African perspective.

The inefficient allocation of resources and investments in infrastructure, as well as the failure to retain skilled personnel within the education sector, has been the major factors undermining its stability and prosperity (Dirks 2013). The budget for the education sector has increased significantly in the last decade, but ordinary South Africans have not seen any improvements in terms of infrastructure provision in schools, skills retention strategies and the continuous professional development of teachers (Khumalo & Mji 2014). One might, therefore, conclude that while globalisation has resulted in skills mobility, internally, South

Africa's socio-economic issues have also contributed significantly to the brain drain of its skilled teachers. While many teachers in South Africa are citing better salaries in other countries as major reasons for emigrating, it's also worth noting the influence of other factors such as classroom overcrowding and poor working conditions in the sector.

Hill (2014) argues that foreign teachers in China (especially cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong) are attracted by tempting financial rewards noting that these teachers can expect to earn anything from \$942-\$2500 and up to \$4700 per month for those teaching in international schools. On top of this, many foreign teachers in China (mostly English teachers) enjoy numerous perks such as flight allowance, furnished apartments, paid holidays and health insurance. With these, one may conclude that South African teachers migrating to China are lured by the promise of not only a satisfactory salary but these perks that are not available to teachers in South Africa.

**Table 4: South African teaching professional overseas (as of September 2015)**

Country	Number
UK	10988
Australia	3788
Portugal	1815
Sweden	387
Turkey	215
Canada	173
Switzerland	100
Greece	100
Austria	72
France	71
Denmark	20
Spain	6
Hungary	5
Norway	4
Germany	4
Japan	2
New-Zealand	1

**Source: Magubane (2016).**

The above table illustrates the number of South African teachers working and living abroad. Most teachers cited better financial rewards as the main reason for emigrating. Teachers suggested that the benefits of being a teacher in South Africa are not as good as in other countries. Homecoming Revolution, an organisation helping South Africans who want to return home, stated that 45% of South Africans who left the country cited career development opportunities available in other countries (Homecoming Revolution Insights Report, 2015). With the South African economy struggling to achieve any significant

economic growth, the migration of teachers will remain a problem for the South African education system to years to come.

Empirically, whilst insufficient salaries have been the major reason for teacher emigration from South Africa, deep scrutiny of the literature reveals that besides financial rewards there are numerous push factors that have contributed to the increase in the migration of teachers from South Africa.

### **Better salaries offered abroad**

South African teachers working abroad, especially in the United Kingdom, are likely to earn three or four times more than what they earn in South Africa. South African teachers working abroad repatriate roughly a third of the salaries to their families at home. Appleton, Morgan & Sives (2006) observe that international migration becomes desirable when teachers in one region consider the difference in terms of what they earn and the probable income they stand to earn when working in another region. Although some teachers in some developing nations are considered to be well paid, the prospect of earning more in another country motivates skilled teachers to emigrate. Research shows that South African teachers working in the UK earn 465 per cent more than they would have earned in South Africa while for those in Luxemburg it about 6 times more (Jones, 2013)

### **Poaching**

A study by the University of Pretoria found that more than 10400 South African teachers have migrated to the United Kingdom for better working conditions. Among others, the study revealed that the UK has been poaching a considerable number of teachers from South Africa. (Mbanjwa 2000). This has resulted in more than 10 000 Zimbabwean teachers now living and working in South Africa, with more them 4 000 of them fully trained science and mathematics teachers. According to De Villiers (2007), the increase in teacher demand in the UK was the main reason why South Africa has lost so many teachers, and unfortunately, most of these teachers were highly qualified and skilled in maths and science. Mbanjwa (2000) stated that the poaching of teachers by the UK has not been well received by Commonwealth countries, with South Africa warning the UK to refrain from poaching the country's highly qualified teachers.

In 2004, with Africa in need of 5 million more teachers, ministers of education of Commonwealth countries agreed on a series of rules that would prevent richer countries from poaching teachers from developing countries (Curtis, 2004). This was welcomed by the largest teachers union in South Africa, the South African Democratic Teachers Union.

While the poaching of South African teachers was rife between 1997 and 2006, South Africa has to some extent been able to reduce the number of teachers leaving the country's shores by increasing investment in the education sector, increasing salaries and investing in infrastructure. This has led to a significant reduction of teacher emigration; however, more still needs to be done.

### **Working conditions and job satisfaction**

South Africa's minister for Basic Education, Angie Motshekga, stated that from 2011 to 2015, 29734 teachers resigned with more than 8619 leaving in 2014 alone. During this period, KwaZulu-Natal had 6651 resignations, while Gauteng had 7616, Eastern Cape, 4422

and Northern Cape with the least number of 752. The New Age (2016) noted that for some of those teachers, working conditions had become unbearable; not only are classes overcrowded, but pupils also are undisciplined and resources are inadequate. News24 (2012) reported that long working hours and teacher shortages could lead teachers to embark on protests. The South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) stated that some teachers who normally work 26-and-a-half hours a week were now obliged to work more than 35 hours. The additional workload has resulted in the workplace becoming unbearable.

SADTU stated that they were not protesting because of salaries, but for improvements to the working conditions that would enable their members to perform at optimal levels. A report by the South African Council for Educators (SACE) (2011) highlighted the fact that poor job satisfaction, constant changes in policies and poor salaries among South African teachers were key factors that made them emigrate.

### **Other factors**

Apart from the aforementioned, there are other factors responsible not only for teacher emigration but that of skilled South Africans in general. These are a combination of social and economic issues

**Table 5: Main reason why skilled South Africans emigrate**

<b>Factors behind the migration of skilled South Africans</b>
Crime
Government Corruption
Metter future for children
load shedding**

Source: BusinessTech. (2015).

\*\*According to BusinessTech (2015), load shedding has been named as a new factor is that contributing to the migrating skilled professionals

The migration of teachers will undoubtedly have negative implications for South Africa's socio-economic development, which is why a comprehensive strategy is needed from both government and civil society to address it. But South Africans are not only migrating overseas. Within South Africa itself, many teachers are leaving the rural areas to urban areas with far-reaching implications for schools and learners in rural areas. So far, it seems the government has not developed a comprehensive plan to mitigate this phenomenon.

### **Rural–Urban migration of teachers in South Africa**

The focus of government and civil society has been to combat teacher migration to other countries. However, there is also the need to address the migration of teachers from mostly rural areas to urban areas. While South Africa has prioritised placing teachers in rural areas, it is evident that most teachers prefer working in urban areas. They tend to work in rural areas for a short time and then move to urban areas. This is why, as Tshamano (2017) demonstrates, it remains a challenge to find and place qualified teachers in rural areas in KwaZulu-Natal.

According to Lulamile & Ntshobane (2014), Wonga Ndzamela, the branch secretary of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union branch secretary in the Ngqeleni district in the Eastern Cape appealed to the government to try and introduce incentives for teachers to stay in rural areas. Central to his appeal was the observation that notes that rural areas today are deprived of education because teachers opt to go teach in urban areas. Agbor (2012), mentions that teachers generally prefer working and living in urban areas because these areas offer greater opportunities for them and their immediate families.

Majola (2016) highlighted the fact that provinces that are predominately seen or characterised as being rural account for most of the learners who fail matric, noting that provinces such as Limpopo, Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal were classified as South Africa's worse performing provinces. These provinces are characterised by poor infrastructure, are under-resourced and experience a chronic shortage of teachers. Due to the rural-urban migration of South African teachers, many schools in rural areas have had to employ foreign teachers (Singh, 2013). Singh specifically makes an example of the Limpopo province, where rural schools have employed a huge number of foreign teachers, mostly from Zimbabwe both in public and private schools. Although this seems to have helped alleviate the problem, training and equipping teachers with the necessary competencies needed for them to teach at South African schools may be huge cost to government. Therefore, it is imperative that government devise strategies to ensure that teachers remain in rural areas.

### **Teacher absenteeism**

Teacher absenteeism in South Africa has long been identified as a serious problem which is associated with the underperformance of learners (Chauke, 2014). The basic education minister, Angie Motshekga noted that in 2012 South African teachers were absent for close to 7.5 million schooling days (News24, 2013). Indeed, South Africa has the record for teacher absenteeism in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The Carnoy Chisholm study undertaken in 2012 shows that in the North West province, teachers only taught 52 of the prescribed 140 daily lessons for the year (Carnoy et al 2012). According to Govender (2016), a study found that teachers are bunking school more than learners, and are also guilty of coming to class after lunch breaks. According to Spaul (2013), on any given day, 10 and 12 per cent of teachers are absent in school, amounting to 39000 absent teachers across the country every day. Discretionary sick leave is said to be the most common excuse as it does not require teachers to produce any medical documentation to be given. Spaul highlights a report by the United Nations Children's Fund and the Human Sciences Research Council showing that schools in poorer areas are likely to witness 60 per cent of teacher absenteeism while urban areas are likely to witness 20 per cent. The study also revealed that teachers are likely to be absent on Mondays and Fridays citing flu as their reason. In KwaZulu-Natal, 800 teachers were on long leave in 2016, with some apparently being on full pay for as long 10 years. Teachers on extended sick leave cost the KwaZulu-Natal basic education millions.

Another problem facing South Africa's school system is the relatively high rate of HIV infection among teachers. According to Macupe (2017), more than 50 000 teachers in South African public schools are infected with HIV with the majority being found in the provinces of KZN, Mpumalanga and the Eastern Cape. It is reported that in 2015 alone, there were 2900 new infections (Cole, 2017).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study employed a strict textual analysis of the available literature relevant to understanding the brain drain of teachers in South Africa and its implications for educational development. The study was qualitative in nature. The purpose was to put into context an understanding of the underlying factors responsible for the emigration of teachers from South Africa and what can be done to reduce it from a policy perspective. The study touches on the implications of teacher migration, factors motivating the migration of teachers and why the country has failed to deal with these issues. Smith & Smith Jr (2008) assert that qualitative research uses the account of a setting or practice. Various scholars have tried to understand the root causes of teacher migration in South Africa; therefore, the study will have sufficient information to draw conclusions from.

### **Theoretical Explanation**

People move from place to place for different reasons and the difference in migration pattern tends to affect the overall process of migration. Although there is no theory that holistically explains the reasons for migration, it is nonetheless imperative for sociologists and geographers to study the phenomenon and try to uncover why people migrate. This paper sheds light on some of the theories that have been developed and how they aim to explain the causes of migration. In so doing, the paper will try and ascertain whether these assumptions can be used to explain the emigration of teachers from South Africa.

### **Neoclassical theory**

The neo-classical theory of migration argues that people migrate mainly because of differences in terms of wages between two locations. The theory states that labour usually flows from low wage regions to regions characterized by high wages (Kurekova 2011). By implication, teachers in South Africa are likely to respond to the regions characterised by high wages.

### **Historical theories of migration**

Historically, migration is not something new and many theories have been proposed over time to explaining it. This paper discusses two of these historical theories, namely Ravenstein's laws of migration and Lee's push/pull theory.

According to Battistella (2014), Lee's push/pull theory of migration was a reformulation of Ravenstein's laws of migration; however, Lee placed more emphasis on the internal (push) factors that drive people to consider migration.

The assumptions of Revenstein's laws of migration are as follows:

- i. Migration is influenced by unfavourable circumstances at the place of origin, including high taxes, unemployment and crime. These are the push factors.
- ii. The primary cause of migration is to seek better economic opportunities
- iii. Migration usually happens in stages.
- iv. Migration tends involve more females than males if the distance travelled is short.
- v. Migration tends to flow from rural areas towards urban places

In 1966, Lee categorised the causes of migration into push and pull factors. Lee argued that push factors are the things that are unfavourable in one's current living environment and push the individual to migrate. Pull factors are those things that are favourable in the place of destination (Lee, 1966). In his analysis, Lee noted that there are barriers that often exist between the place of origin and destination. These he called the intervening factors which might influence the decision to migrate. Later, Harris and Todaro (1970) extended the migration theory by Lee (1966), by adding up rural-urban labour movement dimension, known as "the two-sector model" (De Haas 2010). The two-sector model emphasises on the income disparities between the lagging and the leading areas, which finally contributed to the unemployment crisis in the urban area due to massive rural-urban migration (Harris & Todaro 1970). Not only the income disparities, but the migration determinants also is a result of individual and household decision which influenced by the socioeconomic environment of local, national and international level (Rashid et al, 2014)

**Table 3: What causes teachers to leave South Africa?**

Push factors	Pull factors
Unemployment	Higher Salaries
Low Salaries	Professional development opportunities.
Unemployment	Travel opportunities.
	Friends and family overseas.
	Recruitment agency persuasion.

Source: Jones (2012)

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

- i) **The four major findings of this article are discussed below.**

### **Reduction in skilled and experienced teachers**

Teachers are the backbone of any educational system around the world, and without qualified and skilled teachers, South Africa risks falling further behind the pecking order in terms of educational output and quality. South Africa's educational system is drastically underperforming and while the country's education budget increases yearly, it is not matched by the results (Bauer 2015). Research shows that of the 16851 Maths teachers in the Eastern Cape, only 7090 were actually teaching. Between July 1997 and July 2006, more than 10 000 teachers migrated to work in the United Kingdom. Its worth to note that, most teachers who are emigrating are skilled and experienced teachers, who are familiar with South Africa's teaching environment. This therefore significantly reduced the availability of skilled and experienced teachers.

### **Poor Educational quality output**

A well-oiled education system is characterised by the availability of resources, teachers and infrastructure provision. Despite the constant increase in South Africa's basic education budget, South Africa's education system is clearly in shambles and is showing no sign of



improvement going forward. This, by implication, means that learners in some schools go for months without a teacher and hence the output is greatly affected. Matthew (2017) states that with more than 5139 teachers in South Africa not qualified or under-qualified for the job, poor educational output in South African schools can be expected unless these issues are rectified going forward. Matthew adds that teachers who are teaching yet are not qualified to teach those particular subjects are contributing to the poor rates of educational output in South Africa. The unavailability of teachers therefore contributes to poor learner output across rural South Africa.

### **Rural-urban differences**

The ratio of teacher shortages in urban areas compared to rural areas is very significant and this undeniably contributes to a huge disadvantage for learners in rural areas. Gater & Isaacs (2012) argue that the poor quality of education in rural areas can be attributed to the funding mechanism of the provincial and national governments. The authors argue that school funding is very important for quality education output noting the need for adequate investments (resources, infrastructure provision and human capital development) by the government in the education sector will increase the likelihood of better results. Weyss, Alilly & McLaren (2016), state that the South African school funding system reinforces rather than corrects what is perceived to be a historically unequal system. They highlight the fact that teachers in most urban areas are better paid than their counterparts in rural areas reinforces this unequal system. In countries such as Gambia, Malawi and Tanzania, teachers in rural areas are incentivised to remain and teach in rural areas. Also in South Korea, teachers working in areas classified as a disadvantaged benefit by getting additional incentives such as stipends, reduced classes and reduced teaching time (Weyss, Alilly & McLaren 2016).

### **Curriculum not entirely covered**

Schools in rural areas who have gone for long periods without teachers for certain key subjects risk not finishing the curriculum. Schools in mostly rural provinces such as KZN, Eastern Cape and Limpopo have attributed high failure rates to the inability to fill teacher vacancies. Another significant problem facing teachers is that they do not get enough training on the ever-changing school curriculum in South Africa (Nkosi 2012). Therefore, even if some teachers manage to cover the whole curriculum, their inadequate training on the new curricula poses significant challenges for learners. The above findings paint a bleak future for South Africa's school system. The implications of teacher migration will have far-reaching complications for South Africa's economic development. While it is very clear that South Africa is in dire need of science and medical-related skills, the migration of teachers makes it difficult for the country to achieve these goals.

#### **ii) Reducing teacher brain drain in South Africa: Possible suggestions**

Many civic organisations, journalists, scholars and politicians have made different suggestions on what can be done to stop or reduce teacher brain drain from South Africa. The country's main opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA) has proposed the following: The introduction of mandatory one-year community service before any formal qualification can be conferred.

- i. The establishment of satellite teaching colleges in collaboration with higher educational institutions in rural areas as well as the provision of bursaries to promising individuals who want to peruse a career in the profession.
- ii. The utilisation of skilled foreign nationals as a temporary relief measure and with the aim of sharing scarce skills and knowledge not only with learners but with other colleagues as well.
- iii. The establishment of satellite teaching colleges in collaboration with higher educational institutions in rural areas as well as the provision of bursaries to promising individuals who want to peruse a career in the profession.
- iv. Improving the working conditions of teachers.

Although South Africa (and other African countries) provides extra allowances for teachers in rural areas, these allowances are often so low that they do not sufficiently incentivise teachers to remain in those areas. For example, in Sri-Lanka, teachers are required to work in rural areas for at least 3 years during their employment period. In South Africa, one initiative which has been developed to try and address this has been the Funza Lushaka Bursary Scheme, which covers tuition, books and accommodation for students who are perusing a career in education. The scheme favours applicants who are from rural areas and who wish to teach in these areas (Salmon & Sayed, 2016). SACE (2011) has argued that the inclusion of a binding clause on every beneficiary of government funding might help mitigate this worrying issue. Such a clause would require teachers to teach for a specified period in rural areas.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main aim of this paper study was to identify the major push factors enticing teachers to emigrate from South Africa, to determine what are the implications for South Africa, and to propose suggestions of how teachers can be encouraged to remain in the country. Teacher emigration has been a long-existing issue in South Africa and the mere fact that there has been no clear cut plan on how to deal with it is deeply worrying. Push factors such as poor salaries, poaching, working conditions and job satisfaction have been identified as the major causes of teacher emigration from South Africa. Other problems facing the basic education system include absenteeism, rural-urban migration and HIV infection among teachers. Although teacher shortages have been slightly alleviated by the recruitment of foreign teachers, this cannot be considered as a long term solution as migrant teachers are not stable and may leave whenever they feel the need to do so.

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