POLICY PAPER

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper discusses teacher migration through the professional and personal experiences of African American Expatriate Educational Professionals (EEPs) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Evidence suggests that teacher migration is a strategy employed by some African American EEPs to remain in K–12 schools in the UAE. Recruitment efforts and benefits attracting EEPs to the UAE appear to be effective, whereas retention efforts appear to be a concern. School leaders, thus, face high rates of teacher turnover each year. Few studies have examined why educators leave and where they go when they leave. The data and analysis presented are derived from a more extensive qualitative study conducted from September 2019 to May 2020. The study examines teacher turnover through the experiences of 13 African American EEPs who left K–12 schools in the United States (US) for schools in the UAE. A critical theme that has emerged from this study is a nuanced understanding of teacher migration, which forms a key part of this policy paper's discussion. The paper concludes with recommendations for implementing professional and personal development related to intercultural competencies and further studies to examine teacher turnover in the UAE.

Examining Teacher Migration in K–12 Schools in the United Arab Emirates: Perceptions of African American Educators

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Introduction

Each year, K–12 school leaders in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) struggle with high rates of teacher turnover as a result of annual departures of Western expatriate educational professionals (EEPs) and Emirati educators (Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development (OECD), 2015). Teacher turnover is comprised of two components: (1) teacher migration; and (2) teacher attrition. Teacher migration refers to educators moving from a teaching job in one school to a teaching job in another, and teacher attrition denotes educators leaving the teaching profession temporarily or permanently (Ingersoll, 2003). As described by Ingersoll (2003), high rates of teacher turnover can be viewed as a metaphor of a bucket rapidly losing water because of holes at the bottom. "Pouring more water into the bucket is not the answer if the holes are not first patched" (Ingersoll, 2003, p.17). In other words, continuous recruitment of teachers is not sustainable if problems causing teachers to leave are not first addressed.

In the UAE, Western EEPs not only teach in traditional international schools, which primarily serve expatriate students, but also in private and government schools, which mainly serve local, national students. Most countries tend to select amongst their locally trained teacher candidates to teach in public K–12 schools (Gallagher, 2019). However, Vision 2021, a national agenda implemented in 2010, presented an education reform for K–12 schools. Instruction transformed from Arabic-medium—which has chiefly relied on Arab EEPs—to including an English-medium—which primarily relies on Western EEPs (Gallagher, 2019). Since its inception, the educational reform has presented thousands of opportunities in government and private schools in the UAE for licensed teachers from Western countries, recognized for having effective education systems (Gallagher, 2019).

Education opportunities in K–12 schools have attracted Western EEPs to the UAE. Nevertheless, at the same time, as noted, hundreds of teachers are reported to be leaving schools annually. In 2019, over 425 voluntary resignations were submitted by Emirati teachers and EEPs in general to the Ministry of Education (MOE) (Nasir, 2019). In 2016, resignations from 319 Emirati educators were submitted to the MOE (Djani, 2016).

The annual resignations from Emirati educators are reportedly due to "leaving the profession because of overwork, low salaries, lack of motivation, and evaluation" (Dajani, 2016, p. 1). Thus, a significant concern is that it is neither practical nor cost-effective for teachers to leave and be replaced by new teachers every year (Ibrahim & Al-Taneiji, 2019). Moreover, reports about teacher turnover seldom distinguish if teachers, especially EEPs, migrate between schools or leave the UAE teaching profession altogether.

Implications of high teacher turnover have been associated with poor quality of instruction and negative student and teacher relationships in schools (Dajani, 2016; Nasir, 2018; Nasir, 2019). However, focusing solely on the negative impacts that turnover has on students obscures the negative impact on teachers and schools. Therefore, this policy paper aims to discuss teacher turnover through the perceptions of African American EEPs in the UAE. The paper discusses their subsequent decision to remain in the UAE instead of their decision to leave.

The paper is organized as follows. A background on the English-medium international school (EMIS) market is offered as context. Next, a brief literature review discusses teacher turnover. After, the profile of African American EEPs in this study is presented, and their perceptions of the reasons they remain in the UAE are examined. The paper concludes by offering policy recommendations suggesting the following: (1) Integrate professional and personal development efforts centering on diversity, equity, inclusion, and intercultural competency to improve cultures within schools; (2) Develop a database intended to gather information about educator turnover; (3) Create critical spaces for dialogue among educational stakeholders; and (4) Initiate further research investigating educator turnover in government, private, and public schools in the UAE.

Background: English–Medium International School Market in UAE

The globalization of education in the twenty-first century has resulted in substantial growth in the EMIS market. EMISs have increased from over 2,500 schools in the year 2000 to nearly 11,500 schools in 2020 (International Schools Consultancy (ISC), 2020). EMISs are defined as schools that deliver curriculum in English outside of an English-speaking country and schools that offer an English-medium curriculum other than the country's national curriculum (ISC, 2020). EMISs provide education to approximately six million students globally, produce a revenue of $54 billion in fee income, and employ over 560,000 staff (ISC, 2020).

In 2018, the UAE was rated second after China in a list of the top 10 leading countries within the EMIS market (ISC, 2018). Moreover, Dubai was rated as the top city, having the largest population of students enrolled in international schools (ISC, 2018). Currently, 670,000 students are

enrolled in EMISs in the UAE. Ambitious predictions for steady growth in the student population suggest increasing opportunities for EEPs (ISC, 2020).

Studies on Teacher Turnover

Teacher turnover is not an occurrence that is unique or limited to the UAE. Nevertheless, turnover is under-researched, and few studies, to date, have investigated turnover concerning teacher migration in the UAE. Educational studies examining factors such as test-based accountability (Ryan et al., 2017), teacher satisfaction (Ibrahim & Al Taneiji, 2019), and teacher characteristics (Gomez, 2017; Mancuso, Roberts, & White, 2010) reveal relevant findings that are applicable to understanding turnover in the UAE.

Educational scholars who have examined teacher turnover have focused on factors associated with the reasons teachers leave schools. Ryan et al. (2017) argue that test-based accountability is the most significant factor contributing to stress, attrition, and burnout of teachers in the US. Linking high stakes testing, accountability policies, and teacher attrition, the authors suggest that test-based accountability causes higher levels of psychological or behavioral symptoms and eventually result in teacher turnover. Findings from this study are particularly applicable to the UAE because of the nature of standardized test-taking in schools. The national educational agenda attracting Western EEPs to schools in the UAE was built to develop a first-rate education system that enables Emirati national students to compete and rank highly based on international education standards (vision2021.ae). The relationship between standardized testing and teacher burnout, which results in teacher attrition, is problematic and leads to elevated test stress and burnout (Ryan et al., 2017).

A study examining satisfaction in international schools in the North East South Asia (NESA) region argues that a lack of satisfaction also contributes to teacher turnover. Significant predictors of turnover related to teachers' satisfaction are salary, their perceptions of their school head's supportive leadership, and their perceptions of the degree to which their school head solicits input into decision making (Mancuso et al., 2010). Such predictors are similar to those in findings from studies in the UAE that examine teacher satisfaction, thus, aiding in understanding turnover in the UAE. For example, Ibrahim and Al Taneiji (2019) argue that dissatisfaction for educators in the UAE is influenced by feelings of job insecurity, perceptions of heavy teaching loads, and stagnant salaries. Salary remains a consistent factor in both studies.

Teacher characteristics are also a factor contributing to teacher turnover. However, scholars disagree on how the characteristics of teachers affect migration. For example, Mancuso et al. (2010) argue that middle-aged teachers, teachers with higher years of experience, and teaching

couples in the NESA region are more likely to depart international schools than their counterparts. In a study that examined turnover through schools affiliated with the Association for the Advancement of International Education (AAIE), Gomez (2017) found that younger teachers are more likely to leave their teaching positions earlier than their older counterparts. He further argues that expatriate teachers with more children tend to stay longer in their international position (Gomez, 2017). The contradictions between these studies' findings reveal a nuanced and relevant relationship between societies and teacher characteristics. Gomez (2017) examined educators' decisions in schools in over 20 countries across the globe, whereas Mancuso (2010) examined educators' decisions within 20 countries within the NESA region. Factors such as educators' age, years of experience, and number of children not only contribute to teacher turnover but also their preference for the countries in which they choose to remain and countries they choose to leave.

Overall, discussions about teacher turnover in academic research disclose a significant gap that warrants further investigation about turnover in the UAE. In the next section, findings from the study are discussed, following a statement of the research questions and methodology.

Profile of African American Expatriate Educators

The more extensive study from which this policy paper derives examines the decision-making of African American expatriate educators who left US K-12 schools for K-12 EMIS in the UAE. Within this context, the following questions shed light on teacher turnover in the UAE:

1. What school and societal factors impact the decision-making of African American expatriate educators to remain in the UAE?

2. What strategies are employed by African American EEPs to remain in the UAE?

To address these questions, a qualitative research design was utilized for conducting in-depth interviews with 13 male and female educators working in various positions, including teachers, counselors, and upper and middle-level administrators in private and public K-12 schools across the UAE (see Table 1). These interviews were conducted between September 2019 and May 2020.

Each participant had worked for a minimum of two years in the US, held state-certified licensing credentials, and worked for a minimum of one year at a private, public, or international school within the UAE — in the emirates of Ras Al Khaimah, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah. For the participants, the average number of years as an educator was nine years in the US; in the UAE, the average number of years as an educator dropped to five years.

Table 1. Profile of African American Expatriate Educator Professionals and Employment Status after 2019/20 School Year

	Location of School	Number of Years Teaching in UAE	Total Number of School Migrations	Employment Status at End of 2019/2020 School Year
Remained in Same School				
1. Male Vice Principal	Abu Dhabi	5	2	Remained in same school
2. Female Counselor	Abu Dhabi	3	1	Remained in same school
3. Female Vice Principal	Abu Dhabi	6	2	Remained in same school
4. Female Teacher	Ras Al Khaimah	8	3	Remained in same school
5. Female Teacher	Ras Al Khaimah	5	3	Remained in same school
6. Male Teacher	Ras Al Khaimah	6	2	Remained in same school
End of Service and Voluntary Resignation but Remained in UAE				
7. Female Teacher Coordinator	Sharjah	6	3	Voluntary resignation and working for new educational company
8. Female Teacher	Ras Al Khaimah	6	2	End of service and working in new school
9. Male Teacher	Ras Al Khaimah	5	2	End of service and working in new school
10. Male Teacher	Abu Dhabi	5	2	Terminated and working in new school
Incomplete Contract, Termination, and End of Service				
11. Female Teacher	Abu Dhabi	3.5	2	Incomplete contract and returned to US
12. Male Teacher	Abu Dhabi	6	2	Terminated
13. Female Teacher	Ras Al Khaimah	2	1	End of service and returned to US

Factors Contributing to Teacher Migration

A critical finding of this policy discussion centers on teacher migration. Instead of leaving the UAE after a termination, involuntary transfer, or end of service contract,[1] teacher migration describes the trajectory of EEPs who decided to remain and voluntarily sign a new contract with a different school. Four of the six EEPs listed under the section Remained in Same School in Table 1 were recent arrivals at their current school. After working at a previous school, they migrated to their current school within the past two years. Overall, 85% of the participants in this study worked at between one and three schools during their years of teaching in the Emirates. Therefore, evidence suggests that migration between schools is an agentic strategy to remain in the UAE.

Contrary to termination and resignation, which results in educators departing the UAE, teacher migration indicates that educators depart one school and migrate to another. From this perspective, teacher turnover is not just an issue of teachers leaving schools but also an examination of where they go after they leave a particular school. High teacher turnover could result from teacher migration rather than teacher attrition, which is defined as teachers leaving the profession altogether (Ingersoll, 2003). Factors including racialized class assignments, lack of involvement in decision making, questionable integrity of school leaders, and societal characteristics directly contribute to teacher migration. Thus, these factors impact teachers' decisions to leave one school for another rather than leave the UAE all together.

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[1] An end-of-service contract marks a completed two-to-three-year initial contract. After completion, the EEP has a choice to either remain at the same school, leave the UAE, or seek a position at another school.

Racialized Class Placements

Racialized assumptions that strategically impact classroom placements is one of the factors contributing to teacher migration. Evidence suggests that some school leaders perceive African American EEPs, and Black EEPs in general, in the UAE to have reputations as strong and tough teachers. Some African American EEPs note that, compared to their counterparts of different nationalities, they are placed in classrooms that are deemed to be more difficult. A participant in Ras Al Khaimah alluded to a distinct mismatch between what school leaders say they want and what school leaders actually want. She perceived race to play a role not only in her classroom placement but also in a denied request for a grade level change.

Despite having over 15 years of experience in education, this participant perceived racialized character assumptions of black EEPs to determine which classrooms and which grade levels she had access to teaching. The sarcasm expressed in her perception about strength exposes contradictory views between the strength of the teacher's educational background and the strength of one's disciplinary abilities to "keep kids in the classroom," as she suggested.

> You [school leaders] say you want a strong teacher. You [school leaders] say you want a teacher that has various backgrounds… the resumé looks really nice. But, what you really want is someone who can maintain control in the classroom. Keep the kids in the class. Period. 'You teachers of color are known to be able to do that. That's why we hired you.' And, that's unfair because they stick teachers of color in the hardest classrooms and they give, normally the Irish teachers, easier job roles.

Establishing effective discipline strategies is an issue faced by many school leaders. Nevertheless, the teacher's reference to being put in "the hardest classrooms" alludes to racialized assumptions of black EEPs. Other participants also mentioned that some school leaders assume that African American educators have a record of addressing disciplinary issues because of stereotypical views about US schools and teachers.

Lack of Involvement in Decision Making

A lack of involvement in classroom and school-wide decision making is the second factor contributing to teacher migration. Some participants mentioned rarely being approached by administrators and school leaders for opportunities to contribute their expertise on student learning. Discussing student outcomes, a participant in Ras Al Khaimah reflected on her previous teaching experience in Abu Dhabi. She pointed out that students across the

UAE were failing a standardized math exam, which raised concerns for school leaders and in her individual classroom. With little autonomy in the classroom and school decision making, she could not implement alternative strategies for teaching.

> We're coming into someone else's country where they already have been doing what they're doing. If they change things in the middle of their already planned school year, that's what they're doing. Okay, fine. You want to try to see if this might work? Fine. We are just here to teach.

In addition to a display of discontent, this reflection also illustrates a sense of impassiveness toward the accountability pressures placed on educators. This participant had concerns regarding the expectation to implement practices but have little to no involvement in decision-making and adoption of new practices. Furthermore, this quote also alludes to Ryan et al.'s (2017) findings of test-based accountability as a significant predictor of stress, burnout, and turnover. Taking on the role of being a guest in someone's country indicates a notion of distance, particularly for non-citizens. This understanding should be considered for future research examining attitudes of EEPs and their understanding of their contributions to the educational system in the UAE (Bense, 2016).

Questionable Integrity of School Leaders

The questionable integrity of school leaders is the third factor contributing to teacher migration. A discussion about the impact of COVID-19 and distance learning sparked concern about school leaders' integrity and transparency. For example, one participant received a one-week notice of a 50% reduction in her monthly salary; she believed that the school owners had taken advantage of government policies that allowed for salary reductions for employees. Conversations on tuition payments and financial afflictions led to questions about her future with the school. She noted that her plans were not to leave the UAE but instead to leave the school.

> It's not time to leave [the UAE], it's time to find a new company to work for, which is what I'm currently doing. I'm looking for a new company.

Hence, teachers can migrate between schools due to their judgments of the character and integrity of school leaders. Concerns with integrity impact the schools that educators work for and the school leaders under whose supervision they choose to work.

Societal and Teacher Characteristics

Societal and teacher characteristics comprise the fourth factor contributing to teacher migration. For African American EEPs, societal conditions within the UAE are prominent factors that impact their decision to remain in the country and migrate between schools. When describing societal comparisons between the US and UAE, several participants discussed notions of safety and the importance of finding safe conditions in the UAE. Evidence suggests that some African American EEPs deem conditions in the UAE to be safer than conditions in the US.

> " Safety is priority. Especially in the last four years with everything happening and the attack on African Americans in the US. I feel safe here and I don't feel the pressure that I felt at home. "

In addition to societal characteristics of safety, teacher characteristics such as age, years of experience, and marital status contribute to teacher migration. For instance, after living in the UAE for eight years, one participant's decision to migrate was due to her marriage plans. She left a school in Abu Dhabi for a school in Ras Al Khaimah.

> " I'm working in Ras Al Khaimah on purpose and with an intention to get married this year. I chose Ras Al Khaimah because I don't have any friends who live here. I've been here [UAE] for so long. So, I have a full social schedule. I had to come out of that place [Abu Dhabi]. I don't have any time for any of that distracting, partying, social commitment stuff. "

The dynamic between societal characteristics and teacher characteristics also affects migration. The choice to leave Abu Dhabi and move to Ras Al Khaimah, for this participant, was not based on a school preference. Instead, her decision to migrate was based on a societal preference to live in an environment that appeared to be family-oriented and calm, which she viewed not to be available in Abu Dhabi. As noted by Mancuso (2010) and Gomez (2017), teacher characteristics are significant indicators determining teacher turnover. However, evidence from this study found societal components to be relevant factors to determine teacher turnover. Notably, teachers migrate between schools because of a desire to remain in the country but live in an emirate that provides a lifestyle congruent with particular needs and preferences.

Together, racialized classroom assignments, lack of involvement in decision making, questionable integrity of school leaders, and societal and teacher characteristics are all factors contributing to teacher migration. This study indicates that turnover, in the form of teacher migration, can be an agentic strategy employed by African American EEPs who are seeking improved experiences within schools and in their personal lives in the UAE. Some educators, however, migrated between schools as a result of termination or involuntarily transfer.

Understanding where educators go is as equally important as understanding the factors for their departure. Some leave the country altogether, whereas some depart one school for another. Undoubtedly, turnover negatively disrupts instruction and teacher/student relationships (Nasir, 2018; 2019). However, the results of this study urge for further examinations about teacher turnover in the UAE.

Policy Recommendations

For educational stakeholders, teacher turnover in K-12 schools should be a primary concern as hundreds of teachers leave schools each year. Despite the difficulty and challenges in imagining how a "sustainable, long-term, high-quality education system can be built upon a floating population of teachers in a low-status profession," addressing educators' concerns is still imperative (Gallagher, 2019, p.141). In the case of Emiratization efforts, according to media reports, it appears that Emirati teachers are more prone to teacher attrition, leaving the teaching profession altogether. In contrast, evidence from this study suggests that African American EEPs are more prone to teacher migration, leaving one school for another. To sum up, for African American educators, resignation and termination might be ending a contract with one school; however, they remain in the UAE teaching profession by migrating to another school.

In order to address concerns of teacher turnover in the UAE, educational stakeholders should consider the following policy recommendations: (1) Integrate professional and personal development efforts centering diversity, equity, inclusion, and intercultural competency aiming to improve cultures within schools; (2) Develop a database intended to gather information about educator turnover; (3) Implement critical spaces for dialogue among educational stakeholders; and (4) Initiate research further investigating educator turnover in government, private, and public schools in the UAE.

Integrate Professional and Personal Development Efforts Centering Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Intercultural Competency Aiming to Improve Cultures within Schools

In a cosmopolitan country such as the UAE, implementing professional and personal development initiatives centered on diversity, equity, inclusion, and intercultural competency is needed. To assist with the development of personal

and professional skillsets, such initiatives could improve school cultures by enhancing cohesive and collaborative communities. By integrating instruments such as Milton Bennet's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (IDRInstitute, 2018), one of many tools that can address cultural differences is differences amongst backgrounds, cultures, languages, and nationalities become assets within school communities.

Develop a database to gather information about educator turnover

A lack of statistical and qualitative data measurements about teacher turnover in the UAE is problematic. Information about factors contributing to why educators migrate between schools and why they leave the UAE all together is needed. Teacher and administrator data, including nationality, race, years of experience, years in the UAE, and other demographics, would facilitate more in-depth research. Such data could be collected through exit surveys of departing educators, then entered into a database that generates reports about educators in the UAE, to be made available to educational stakeholders such as researchers.

Due to the multitude of schools and vast differences between schools in the UAE, surveys should be dispersed and collected through a neutral stakeholder such as the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research. Neutrality would assure anonymity to those completing exit surveys and encourage a safe space for educators and administrators to provide authentic feedback. Such information can initiate partnerships between educational stakeholders that will impact school cultures positively and provide resources to assist schools with implementing initiatives to improve school cultures.

Critical Dialogue about Teacher Turnover

It is imperative for educational stakeholders such as educators, school leaders, and policymakers to engage in critical dialogue about teacher turnover. This study indicates that policies implemented from a top-down structure hamper educators' potential to contribute their expertise to aid in the execution of educational policies in schools.

Further Research on Educator Turnover in Government, Private, and Public Schools in the UAE

Location is a critical variable to be considered in examinations about teacher turnover. International schools located in countries experiencing turmoil are described as hardship placements by recruitment agencies and school leaders. Contrary to hardship, descriptors such as safety, comfort, and freedom were used by participants to describe why they choose to remain in the UAE. Findings show that the UAE can be described as a comfort placement, indicating ease of living.

This recommendation intends to warrant further examinations on the relationship between teacher characteristics and societal conditions as factors contributing to turnover. It is not to imply that marketing strategies for teacher recruitment should include a comfort placement campaign. For African American EEPs in the UAE, their perception of safety and comfort are not generalizable and is most likely different from the perceptions of EEPs from other countries. A question for consideration is what it is about the UAE that makes African American EEPs feel safe? Such an examination could focus on educators' perceptions about how they feel they are regarded in particular countries.

Limitations

Participants included in this study are African American EEPs. Their perceptions are not generalizable and do not depict the experiences of all African Americans in the UAE. Moreover, they do not depict the perceptions of other Western EEPs in the UAE. As part of a more extensive study, this policy paper is based only on data that engenders an understanding of how and why African American EEPs remain in the UAE.

Author

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• to enrich the local public sector, especially education, by providing educators and civil servants in Ras Al Khaimah with tools to make a positive impact on their own society; and

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