

Diaspora Educators: Exploring the Motivations, Skillset, and Perceptions of South African Educators in International Education

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Abstract

The international migration of South African educators has become an increasingly important feature of the global education market. This study investigates the factors influencing their transnational mobility while examining how they are perceived by international school leaders and colleagues. A pragmatic mixed-methods design combined data from quantitative survey data from 100 South African expatriate educators employed across Asia, Europe and the Middle East with responses from 65 international school administrators and 30 semi-structured interviews involving key educational stakeholders. Survey and interview evidence showed that domestic institutional inefficiencies—including systemic resource shortages and safety concerns—encouraged educators to seek employment abroad, while competitive remuneration, improved working conditions and stronger professional opportunities attracted them to international schools. International administrators consistently described South African educators as resilient, adaptable and culturally responsive professionals whose pedagogical expertise and English language proficiency make them valuable contributors to diverse educational environments. The findings provide practical guidance for international school leaders seeking to strengthen recruitment, professional learning and teacher retention, while also offering South African policymakers evidence to inform strategies aimed at reducing educator migration. By examining educator mobility through the complementary perspectives of talent management and diaspora scholarship, the research demonstrates how professional expertise developed within the Global South can be successfully transferred into international education systems.

Keywords: transnational teacher mobility, international school management, diaspora talent management, expatriate retention, educational leadership.

1. Introduction

1.1 Institutional Background and the Diaspora Phenomenon

The international migration of qualified educators has become a defining feature of the contemporary education landscape. As demand for experienced teaching professionals continues to grow across international schools, increasing numbers of South African educators are pursuing employment opportunities beyond their national borders. Researchers commonly describe the movement of highly skilled professionals from their country of origin to overseas labour markets as an academic diaspora (Manik, 2014; SACE, 2011).

Educators entering international schools bring professional knowledge, pedagogical expertise, intercultural understanding and practical experience developed through working within South Africa's complex and resource-constrained education system. Their experience also enriches school communities by supporting organisational learning, encouraging intercultural collaboration and strengthening professional practice across diverse educational settings.

The decision to migrate is shaped by a combination of structural challenges within South Africa's education system. Chronic resource shortages, underfunded schools, ageing infrastructure, persistent electricity disruptions (loadshedding), and ongoing concerns regarding personal safety collectively reduce professional satisfaction. For many educators, international schools represent an opportunity to access competitive salaries, stronger organisational support, safer working environments and clearer opportunities for professional growth (Mlambo & Adetiba, 2017; Towett, 2019; Employment and Labour, 2023).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Each year, increasing numbers of South African educators accept positions in international schools, creating ongoing challenges for teacher supply within the domestic education system. The South African Council for Educators (SACE) has identified educator migration as a contributing factor to workforce shortages across many communities (SACE, 2011). Understanding this trend requires more than identifying why teachers choose to leave South Africa. Understanding this trend also requires examining what happens after South African educators enter international schools, including how they are perceived, supported and integrated within their new professional environments.

Although labour migration has been widely explored across many professions, the experiences of South African educators within international schools have received far less attention, particularly regarding how their professional expertise is recognised and utilised (Manik, 2014). This research therefore examines two complementary perspectives:

1. **Expatriate Educator Perspectives:** Exploring the micro-level motivations, core competencies, and professional skillsets that South African educators deploy internationally.
2. **International School Administrator Perspectives:** Analysing how host international school management teams and global colleagues perceive, evaluate, and accept these diaspora educators.

By synthesising these two perspectives, this study provides a balanced understanding of cross-border educator mobility and offers practical insights to support the recruitment, integration, and retention of internationally mobile educators.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework: Push-Pull Migration Dynamics

To analyse the transnational mobility of educational professionals, this study uses Push-Pull Migration Theory. Transnational labour flows are rarely random. They are driven by negative 'push' forces in the home country and positive 'pull' factors in the host destination. In education management, skilled diaspora migration occurs when home institutional structures fail to offer safety, financial stability, or career growth. This pushes human capital toward international school markets that offer competitive compensation and stable working environments.

Although Push-Pull Migration Theory has been widely applied to explain skilled labour migration, existing research has focused primarily on the factors influencing migration decisions rather than examining how educators are perceived and integrated within host international school contexts.

2.2 Macro-Environmental Push Factors and Domestic Realities

Education continues to be one of the professions most impacted by the loss of qualified professionals in South Africa. According to the South African Council for Educators (SACE), an estimated 1,000 skilled educators migrate out of the country every month (SACE, 2011). According to Mlambo and Adetiba (2017), educator migration is not the consequence of a single issue but rather the outcome of a confluence of social challenges, challenging working conditions, and economic constraints. Together, these studies demonstrate that educator migration is influenced by multiple interacting factors rather than a single determinant, suggesting that migration decisions are best understood as the cumulative outcome of professional, economic, and social pressures.

Financial considerations remain an important contributor. South African teachers earned an average annual salary of approximately R273,205 (USD \$19,452), placing them well below the remuneration offered in many international school systems and limiting opportunities for long-term financial security (BusinessTech, 2019).

Although these figures relate to 2019 salary data, Gustafsson and Maponya (2020) highlight that teacher remuneration should be considered as a total remuneration package, including employment benefits, and that meaningful international comparisons must account for purchasing power and broader economic conditions. While South African teachers are comparatively well remunerated within the domestic labour market, these considerations provide important context for understanding why financial factors continue to influence international educator migration.

Working conditions also influence migration decisions. Large class sizes, limited resources and increasing administrative responsibilities reduce the amount of time teachers can devote to classroom instruction. Vester (2018) reported that South African teachers spend only 66% of classroom time engaged in teaching compared with an international average of 78%.

Life beyond the classroom further shapes educators' decisions to seek employment abroad. Concerns relating to crime, personal safety and family wellbeing encourage many professionals to pursue opportunities in countries offering greater social stability (Towett, 2019). Legislative developments, including amendments to the Employment Equity Act, have also contributed to perceptions among some demographic groups that opportunities for career advancement within South Africa have become increasingly constrained (Employment and Labour, 2023).

2.3 Host Country Pull Factors and Compensation Architectures

International schools across Asia, Europe and the Middle East continue to recruit South African educators to address ongoing teacher shortages. Competitive employment packages remain one of the strongest attractions, particularly when compared with remuneration available within South Africa.

In addition to higher salaries, many international schools provide tax-free income, housing allowances, medical insurance and annual return flights. These financial benefits are often accompanied by smaller class sizes, modern teaching resources and stronger organisational support, allowing educators to devote more time to teaching and

learning while reducing administrative workload. Collectively, these conditions create an attractive professional environment that encourages skilled educators to pursue long-term international careers.

While the literature consistently identifies financial incentives as important pull factors, considerably less attention has been given to the professional experiences of educators after migration, including how their expertise is recognised and utilised within international schools.

2.4 Transnational Transfer of Pedagogical Competencies

Migration does not simply involve the movement of educators across national borders; it also facilitates the transfer of professional knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and intercultural capability between education systems. South African educators frequently enter international schools having developed professional competencies through teaching within a culturally diverse and resource-constrained education system. These experiences require educators to adapt their pedagogical practices, respond to diverse learner needs, and demonstrate resilience in the face of challenging educational conditions.

Research has shown that teaching within challenging South African contexts contributes to the development of teacher resilience, adaptability, and strong professional self-efficacy (Ebersöhn, 2014; Jonker et al., 2025). These qualities enhance educators' capacity to work effectively across diverse educational environments and to respond flexibly to the varied academic, linguistic, and cultural needs of international student populations. Furthermore, effective international school teachers are recognised for their adaptability, intercultural competence, and ability to respond to culturally diverse learning environments (Grant et al., 2024; Santoro, 2014).

The continued international recruitment of South African educators suggests that these professional capabilities are valued within many international school contexts (Cloete et al., 2023). Recruitment organisations similarly identify South African educators as well suited to international schools because of their English language proficiency,

experience teaching multilingual learners, and ability to work effectively across culturally diverse settings (GoTeach, 2023; MyCourses, 2024; TimePlan Education, 2023).

Although these sources are commercial in nature, they provide useful contextual insight into the professional attributes promoted within the international teacher recruitment market.

Collectively, these findings suggest that the competencies developed within South Africa's educational context are not only transferable but also highly valued by international schools seeking adaptable and culturally responsive teaching professionals. However, much of the existing evidence is drawn either from recruitment organisations or studies examining migration decisions rather than empirical research exploring how these competencies are perceived by both educators and international school administrators. Addressing this gap provides a more comprehensive understanding of how South African educators are recognised and integrated within global educational settings.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Philosophy

Understanding educator migration required evidence that captured both measurable trends and participants' lived experiences. Accordingly, this study adopted a mixed-methods research design in which quantitative survey findings were interpreted alongside qualitative interview data. A pragmatic research philosophy guided this process by allowing numerical patterns and participant perspectives to be considered together rather than in isolation. Combining these sources of evidence also strengthened confidence in the findings through methodological triangulation, whereby conclusions were supported by more than one form of data.

3.2 Sampling Framework and Geographical Diversity

Participants were purposively selected to ensure representation across geographical regions, career stages, and professional responsibilities within international education. The study included both quantitative survey participants and qualitative interview

participants, enabling perspectives from classroom practitioners, educational leaders, and policy stakeholders to be represented.

The quantitative sample comprised two participant groups:

- 1. Expatriate Educator Cohort (n = 100):** South African educators currently employed abroad across major international education hubs in Asia (37%), the Middle East (35%), and Europe (27%).
- 2. Host Institutional Administrator Cohort (n = 65):** International school managers, supervisors, and foreign colleagues originating from Asia (40%), Oceania (20%), North America (20%), Europe (15%), and the Middle East (5%).

The qualitative sample comprised three stakeholder groups (n = 30):

1. Senior educational managers in South Africa (n = 10).
2. South African expatriate teachers currently employed internationally (n = 10).
3. Host international school directors and senior leaders (n = 10).

Participants were recruited through voluntary participation across professional networks and online platforms. As the total number of individuals who received or viewed the survey invitation could not be determined, a response rate could not be calculated.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected in two complementary phases that reflected the mixed-methods design:

Quantitative Phase: Two structured questionnaires were developed specifically for this study and distributed electronically to the respective participant groups. The questionnaires were reviewed by the doctoral supervisor to ensure content relevance, clarity, and alignment with the research objectives. Prior to distribution, they were informally piloted with a small group of individuals to

assess question clarity, wording, and functionality, after which minor revisions were made. The questionnaires comprised demographic questions together with a combination of multiple-choice, multiple-response, and five-point Likert-scale items. The expatriate educator questionnaire examined participants' motivations for international employment, self-perceived professional competencies, and comparative evaluations of South African educators in international contexts. The international administrator questionnaire explored perceptions of South African educators' professional competencies, workplace performance, work ethic, English language proficiency, intercultural competence, and adaptability within international schools. Multiple-response items were used where appropriate to capture the range of migration drivers and perceived professional attributes.

Qualitative Phase: To provide deeper contextual understanding of the quantitative findings, 30 face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted. The qualitative sample comprised 30 participants, split evenly across three stakeholder categories (10 participants per group): senior educational managers in South Africa, who provided perspectives on the impact of educator migration on local schools and workforce sustainability; active South African expatriate teachers, who reflected on their experiences of international employment and professional adaptation; and host international school directors, who discussed the professional performance, integration, and perceived value of South African educators within their institutions.

3.4 Data Analysis Protocols

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics to summarise participant characteristics, demographic distributions, and questionnaire response patterns. Frequencies, percentages, and cross-tabulations were used to explore patterns within the survey data and facilitate comparisons across selected demographic groups.

Qualitative interview transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis, a widely recognised approach for identifying and interpreting patterns across qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All interviews were conducted and transcribed verbatim by the

researcher. Each transcript was read repeatedly to achieve familiarity with the data, after which recurring ideas, concepts, and participant comments were manually coded. Codes were then reviewed, compared, and grouped into broader themes, which were refined iteratively to ensure that each theme accurately reflected patterns evident across the dataset. The perspectives of international educators and administrators were then analysed collectively to identify shared perceptions of the professional competencies and experiences of South African educators. Finally, the qualitative themes were integrated with the quantitative findings to facilitate comparison, corroboration, and interpretation across the two phases of the mixed-methods study.

To enhance trustworthiness, interview transcripts were reviewed repeatedly throughout the coding process to ensure that themes remained grounded in participants' accounts. Throughout the analysis, the researcher remained mindful of their role in interpreting the qualitative data and sought to ensure that the emerging themes reflected participants' perspectives as accurately as possible.

3.5 Ethical Safeguards and Data Integrity

To secure data integrity, strict ethical protocols were maintained. Every participant provided informed consent prior to data collection. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by removing direct identifiers from the datasets, ensuring that professional and personal disclosures could not be linked to specific individuals.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Participant Sample

The quantitative sample demonstrated distinct ethnic and age-based patterns among the participating South African educators employed internationally. White educators comprised the majority of expatriate respondents (71%), followed by Coloured (15%), Black (7%), and Indian (7%) educators. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of participants across ethnic groups and age categories. Cross-tabulation of age and ethnicity revealed distinct career-stage patterns within the study sample.

As the Black and Indian participant groups each comprised seven respondents, findings relating to these demographic subgroups should be interpreted cautiously. These results are intended to describe the study sample rather than represent the broader South African educator population.

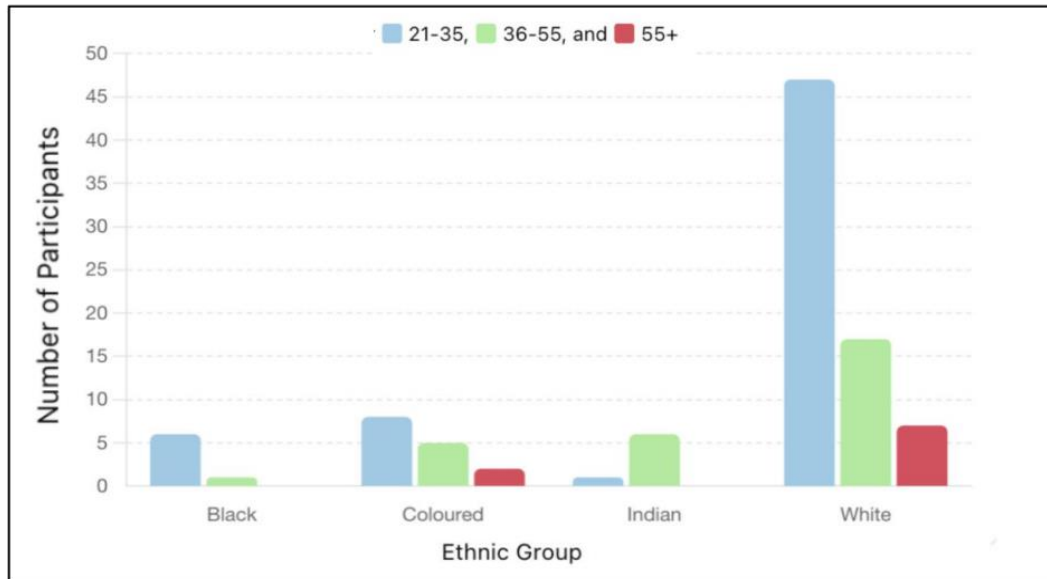


Figure 1. Distribution of Participants by Ethnic Group and Age Category

- The Younger Majority (Ages 21–35):** This bracket was the largest age group across all ethnic categories, including six of the seven Black participants and 66.2% of White educators. Interview data suggested that many younger participants were motivated by short-term financial security to establish themselves before returning to South Africa. As one younger expatriate educator explained during interviews: *"When I came here the first time it was for financial reasons and to further my studies... I would like to go back in about five years. The reason is my financial goals—to pay off my property and build enough disposable income so I can retire earlier."*
- Mid-Career Professionals (Ages 36–55):** This bracket includes 23.9% of White respondents and six of the seven Indian participants. Interview data suggested that many mid-career participants placed greater emphasis on family stability, long-term security, professional opportunities, and workplace conditions. A mid-

career educator stated: "Besides the money factor, my working opportunities were much better. I could not find a suitable school where I felt safe to go to every day." Another participant stated, "*My quality of living is just so high at the moment—who would want to give it up?*"

- **Late-Career Professionals (Ages 55+):** Comprising a smaller share of the sample (9.9% of White and 13.3% of Coloured educators), this age group was the least represented among participants. Interview data suggested that this lower representation may reflect factors such as host-country visa age restrictions and retirement planning. An older expatriate teacher noted: "*The goal is always to work abroad and then take my experience back home. I looked at the working hours, benefits, and the opportunity to complete my master's. Working abroad gave me this time allocation.*"

4.2 Gender Distribution and Migration Drivers

Gender distribution analysis revealed a similar pattern across both participant cohorts. Within the study sample, women represented the majority of respondents in both cohorts, accounting for 68% of South African participants and 60.7% of international participants. Conversely, the smaller male cohort (32% South African, 39.3% international) was consistent with the lower representation of men within the teaching profession internationally. However, interview participants suggested that male South African educators who relocate internationally are often perceived by administrators as demonstrating strong leadership potential and workplace resilience.

Beyond the demographic characteristics of the sample, the survey explored the principal factors influencing educators' decisions to pursue international employment. Figure 2 presents the proportion of respondents who identified each domestic push factor and international pull factor influencing their decision to seek employment abroad. Percentages represent the proportion of survey respondents selecting each factor. As respondents were permitted to identify multiple push and pull factors, percentages are not intended to total 100%.

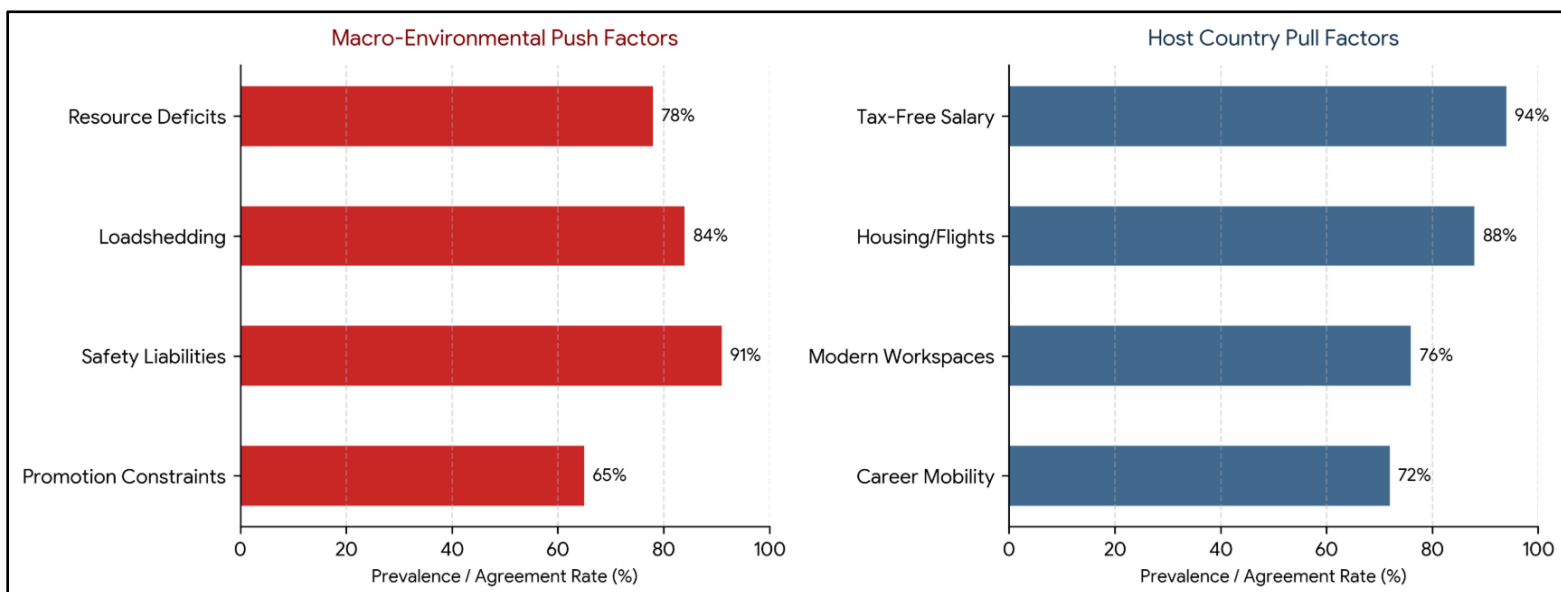


Figure 2. Reported Push and Pull Factors Influencing International Migration

As illustrated in Figure 2, respondents identified a combination of domestic challenges and international opportunities as key drivers of migration. Prominent push factors included resource limitations, safety concerns, limited career progression and workload pressures, while the strongest pull factors centred on competitive remuneration, improved working conditions, enhanced career opportunities and a higher quality of life.

4.3 Qualification Mapping and Professional Alignment

Comparative analysis indicated that the qualification profiles of South African respondents closely aligned with those reported by the international administrator cohort. A clear majority of South African respondents (53%) hold a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree as their highest qualification, while 38% hold a specialised Bachelor's degree paired with a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) or equivalent. This distribution closely aligns with the qualification profile of the international administrator cohort, in which 56.6% held a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and 31.7% held a bachelor's degree together with a PGCE. Only a small minority (9% South African, 11.7% international) rely solely on non-formal certifications like TEFL diplomas. These findings suggest that the qualification profile of South African

respondents broadly aligns with the academic expectations commonly associated with employment in international schools.

Table 1 (below) summarises the qualification profiles of both cohorts and demonstrates the strong alignment between South African educators and the qualification expectations commonly observed within international schools.

Table 1. Professional Qualification and Alignment Matrix

Qualification	SA (%)	International (%)	Degree of Alignment
Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.)	53.0	56.6	High
Bachelor's Degree + PGCE	38.0	31.7	High
TEFL/TESOL Only	9.0	11.7	Marginal

The close alignment observed between the two cohorts suggests that the qualification profile of South African respondents is consistent with the academic qualification standards commonly expected within international schools. Consequently, formal qualifications are unlikely to represent a significant barrier to international employment. Instead, the findings indicate that professional experience, intercultural competence, and personal attributes are likely to play a greater role in recruitment decisions, supporting the perceptions explored in the following section.

4.4 Host Institutional Appraisals and Perception Dynamics

Quantitative findings from the international administrator survey revealed consistently high evaluations of South African educators across multiple professional competencies. Figure 3 presents the proportion of international school administrators who identified each professional competency as characteristic of South African educators. Percentages represent the proportion of administrator respondents selecting each

competency. As administrators were permitted to identify multiple competencies, percentages are not intended to total 100%.

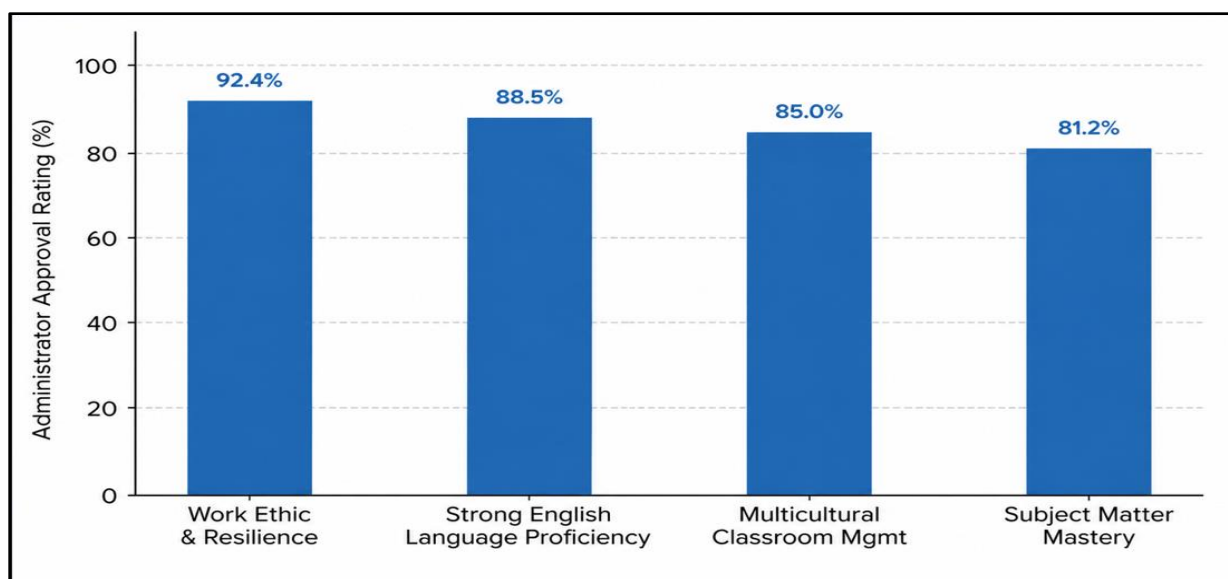


Figure 3. International Administrators' Perceptions of South African Educators

As illustrated in Figure 3, international school administrators consistently rated South African educators highly across all measured competencies, particularly in relation to work ethic, English language proficiency, multicultural competence, resilience and adaptability. These quantitative findings are reinforced by the qualitative interview data presented below.

Beyond the quantitative findings, qualitative interviews with international teachers and school leaders (n = 10) revealed consistently positive perceptions of South African educators. Participants frequently characterised them as adaptable and resilient professionals who combined strong pedagogical expertise with effective communication and an ability to work within culturally diverse educational environments. Rather than identifying isolated strengths, respondents often described these characteristics as complementary attributes that contributed to South African educators' effectiveness within international schools. Their work ethic, commitment to students, multicultural awareness, English language proficiency, and willingness to adapt teaching practices were frequently cited as qualities valued by international employers.

The most frequently recurring theme was professional commitment and work ethic. Participants frequently described South African educators as driven, dependable, and willing to exceed expectations in supporting student learning. As one Canadian vice principal explained: *"South African educators have a natural drive to do the best they can and what they see as the best for students."*

Communication and cultural competence also emerged as defining characteristics. Although several participants acknowledged that South African educators' direct communication style may initially be interpreted differently across cultures, they commonly viewed this approach as promoting transparency, collaboration, and efficient problem-solving within schools. Likewise, respondents believed that South Africa's multicultural and multilingual context equips educators with an enhanced capacity to create inclusive classrooms, respond to diverse learner needs, and foster intercultural understanding. Reflecting these perceptions, one international school leader observed: *"Many South African educators have a very unique experience from their cultural context and history and are not afraid to take those experiences and teach life skills about empathy, understanding, justice and morals which goes beyond the curriculum."*

Participants further highlighted the strong English language proficiency of South African educators while recognising multilingualism as an additional professional asset when working with linguistically diverse student populations. As one international participant remarked, *"English proficiency is excellent and what is more impressive is that most teachers were multilingual."*

Respondents also consistently described South African educators as adaptable practitioners who readily modify curriculum, pedagogy, and classroom practices to meet the academic, linguistic, and cultural needs of their learners. Reflecting this adaptability, one international educator explained: *"Most South Africans take a curriculum and see how they can improve it and also adjust and amend it to make it more suitable to their level. Many times, teachers would just keep it the same and continue with it regardless of whether the students are capable of doing it."*

Collectively, these findings suggest that international colleagues perceive South African educators as academically competent and culturally responsive practitioners. Interview participants frequently associated resilience, flexibility, and a global outlook with their effectiveness in culturally diverse educational settings. These qualitative findings complement the quantitative evidence by demonstrating that the professional characteristics identified in the survey—including enthusiasm, dedication, resourcefulness, communication skills, and intercultural competence—were also frequently recognised by international colleagues and school leaders during interviews.

Despite these overwhelmingly favourable perceptions, participants acknowledged that positive professional reputations do not always eliminate structural barriers during international recruitment. Several interviewees indicated that South African educators may encounter discrimination or preconceived assumptions based on nationality, race, or broader perceptions of South Africa as a developing nation. As one participant explained: *"The racism they may face depending on the country they teach in. They tend to upskill and try to break the perception people have surrounding them."*

These findings suggest that while South African educators enjoy a strong professional reputation within international schools, institutional biases may continue to influence recruitment opportunities in certain international contexts. Nevertheless, participants consistently indicated that these perceptions were often challenged once South African educators demonstrated their professionalism, adaptability, and effectiveness in practice, thereby contributing to the positive perceptions described by international colleagues and school leaders.

4.5 Synthesis of Key Findings

Triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative findings suggests that the South African educators included in this study represent a well-qualified group whose international mobility is influenced by a combination of domestic push factors and international pull factors. Participants and international administrators consistently identified strong English language proficiency, resilience developed through challenging educational contexts, and formal teaching qualifications as characteristics that support successful

employment in international schools. International administrators also reported positive perceptions of South African educators' work ethic, adaptability, and intercultural competence, highlighting these characteristics as valuable within culturally diverse educational settings.

Beyond identifying the characteristics perceived to support international employability, the findings have practical implications for educational leaders seeking to strengthen organisational capability. Participants consistently identified adaptability, resilience, curriculum expertise, multicultural awareness, and effective communication as professional competencies that may be developed and supported through collaborative professional learning, mentoring, instructional coaching, and curriculum leadership initiatives. Collectively, these findings provide practical insights that may inform international recruitment practices and teacher retention strategies within South Africa.

5. Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

5.1 Discussion: Theoretical Alignment with Talent Management

The empirical evidence indicates that the international mobility of South African educators represented in this study is consistent with recognised push-pull migration dynamics. The findings suggest that participants' decisions to seek employment abroad can be understood as a response to a combination of domestic challenges and international opportunities rather than simply a desire to travel. Participants frequently identified factors such as remuneration, personal safety, career progression, and workplace conditions as influencing their migration decisions.

From an international talent management perspective, these findings suggest that South African educators represent an important source of experienced teaching professionals for international schools. Participants and international administrators suggested that experience within South Africa's resource-constrained education system contributes to the development of resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving skills. When these professionals relocate to foreign school markets in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East, international administrators frequently associated them with strong professional capabilities, English language proficiency, and intercultural competence.

Data from international school administrators suggest that these characteristics are perceived to contribute positively to the employment and professional effectiveness of South African educators within international schools.

These findings support the view that educator migration should not be regarded only as a workforce mobility issue, but rather as an educational leadership challenge for strategic organisational responses. Understanding the professional attributes identified by participants and international administrators may assist school leaders and policymakers in developing evidence-informed approaches to teacher retention and organisational learning.

5.2 Methodological Limitations

Despite careful research design, a few limitations apply to this study:

- **Geographical Scope:** The quantitative data relies heavily on participants located in Asia and the Middle East, leaving Oceania and North American contexts underrepresented.
- **Demographic Representation:** White South African educators comprised 71% of the survey respondents. While this mirrors migration trends identified in previous studies, the sample may underrepresent the growing number of Black South African educators moving abroad.
- **Self-Reporting Perceptions:** Both the quantitative survey responses and qualitative interview findings are based primarily on the self-reported perceptions and experiences of educators and international administrators. As with all perception-based research, these responses may be influenced by subjective interpretation and should not be considered direct measures of educator competence or professional performance.

5.3 Implications for Educational Leadership and Practice

The findings of this study provide practical guidance for educational leaders seeking to maximise the professional strengths of South African educators while simultaneously strengthening organisational capacity. Rather than viewing internationally recruited

South African educators solely as classroom practitioners recruited to address staffing shortages, school leaders should recognise them as experienced instructional practitioners capable of strengthening professional learning, curriculum development and organisational improvement. The professional competencies consistently identified throughout this study—including resilience, adaptability, multicultural competence, curriculum knowledge, and strong communication skills—can be strategically utilised to enhance teaching quality, collaborative practice, and organisational learning within international schools.

Professional Learning and Mentoring

International schools should establish structured mentoring programmes that intentionally pair experienced South African educators with newly appointed or early-career teachers, particularly within the same year level or subject area. Such partnerships provide opportunities to share curriculum knowledge, effective classroom management strategies, assessment practices, and high-quality feedback techniques. Beyond supporting individual teacher development, mentoring relationships promote collaborative professional cultures that encourage reflective practice, strengthen instructional consistency, and improve student learning outcomes across teaching teams.

Classroom Observation and Instructional Coaching

Educational leaders should implement structured classroom observation and instructional coaching programmes that allow colleagues to observe the teaching practices of experienced South African educators. These observations should focus not only on classroom management but also on lesson design, questioning strategies, differentiation, formative assessment, and feedback practices. Observation cycles followed by professional reflection and coaching conversations create opportunities for teachers to exchange effective pedagogical approaches while recognising experienced educators as instructional leaders within the school community.

Collaborative Curriculum Development

School leaders should actively involve South African educators in collaborative curriculum planning, assessment design, moderation processes, and professional learning communities. Their experience working within resource-constrained and culturally diverse educational contexts equips them with practical problem-solving skills and flexible pedagogical approaches that can enrich curriculum implementation. Encouraging collaborative planning across year levels and subject departments also facilitates the sharing of professional expertise while promoting greater consistency in teaching, assessment, and curriculum delivery throughout the school.

Teacher Retention and Organisational Reform

The findings also have important implications for educational policymakers in South Africa. While competitive remuneration remains an important consideration, sustainable teacher retention requires broader organisational reform. Educational authorities should strengthen leadership pathways for experienced educators, reduce excessive administrative workload, expand meaningful professional development opportunities, and recognise high-performing teachers through structured career progression. Addressing these systemic factors may reduce the push factors driving educator migration while simultaneously strengthening the quality and sustainability of the domestic education system.

5.4 Final Conclusion

This study examined the complex factors driving the transnational migration of South African educators and explored how these professionals contribute meaningfully to international education systems. Framing educator migration through a talent management lens highlights that participants and international administrators consistently perceived South African educators as offering far more than subject expertise alone. They were frequently described as demonstrating resilience, adaptability, multicultural competence, and strong pedagogical practice—qualities that

participants and international administrators consistently recognised and valued within international school contexts.

The findings suggest that these strengths should be intentionally leveraged through organisational practices that promote mentoring, collaborative professional learning, curriculum leadership and instructional improvement rather than merely being acknowledged during recruitment. International schools can strengthen organisational capacity by creating opportunities for South African educators to mentor colleagues, contribute to curriculum development, lead professional learning initiatives, and support instructional improvement. Simultaneously, South African educational policymakers can utilise these findings to inform evidence-based retention strategies that address the systemic factors contributing to educator migration.

Ultimately, this study contributes to the growing body of research on global teacher mobility by showing that understanding why South African educators migrate is only part of the solution. Equally important is recognising how their professional knowledge, leadership capacity, and educational expertise can be translated into meaningful organisational improvement and sustainable educational practice across both international and domestic contexts.

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