

## Homeward Bound: Educational Leaders' Perceptions of Hiring Repatriating International Teachers

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine how educational leaders interpret job applications from international teachers who are planning to repatriate. Ten rural and urban educational leaders from the Canadian province of Manitoba were presented with three different fictitious cases to screen and analyze for shortlisting purposes. The findings suggest that international teachers need to clearly communicate their work experiences and explain how acquired intercultural and linguistic competencies would be advantageous for the school community. Educational leaders should apply an international awareness when screening job applications. Recommendations for both leadership development and global teaching careers are offered.

**Keywords:** Teaching overseas; Repatriation; Hiring practices; Educational administration

### Introduction

Over the past decade, the teaching profession has become globalized, creating various types of primary and secondary teaching opportunities worldwide (Bates, 2011; Sharma, 2013). These opportunities mean that certified teachers can, for the most part, seek out work in different countries and become international teachers. The

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reasons for teaching overseas vary from contending with work shortages in the home country (Stanley, 2011) to seeking employment as a trailing spouse (Marx, Housen, & Tapu, 2016) and from pursuing travel interests (Savva, 2013) to searching for better work and life conditions (McGregor, 2008). Global teaching opportunities can positively influence the careers of teachers by cultivating skills such as cross-cultural competence and the ability to work within multicultural and multilingual contexts (Biraimah & Jotia, 2013; Chandler, 2010; Savva, 2013). What the literature rarely considers, however, are the experiences and perceptions of international teachers when they begin to repatriate to their home countries.

Repatriation is motivated by varying factors that can include quality of life (e.g., personal freedom), career push (e.g., transfer knowledge to home country), personal network (e.g., families and friends), and social context (e.g., raising children, home ownership) (De Cieri, Sheehan, Costa, Fenwick, & Cooper, 2009). Adjustment in this context may mean dealing with reverse culture shock (a disorientation as a result of having lived in a different country), re-establishing personal and professional relationships, navigating changes in job markets after an extended absence, and effectively communicating to hiring committees insights and skills gained while working internationally.

This article tackles one aspect of the repatriation process for international teachers: how educational leaders (e.g., school principals, superintendents) will interpret their work experience overseas. Educational leaders play an important role in shaping internationalization in their schools through, in part, hiring internationally experienced teachers. International teachers may be better able to connect to migrant students and their families and apply international perspectives in their pedagogy, on the curriculum, and through extracurricular activities. Without having much guidance, however, educational leaders may struggle to understand the nature of teaching overseas and various school contexts, and how such global experiences can enhance school life and pedagogical practices; they may question if international teachers will remain in their job given their wanderlust. These struggles may result in international teacher applicants being excluded from the screening process.

Considering that Laura Crane (2015) called for additional research on principals' hiring practices of international teachers, the purpose of this study was to determine how educational leaders screen fictional applications from domestically certified international teachers wishing to repatriate. Jerome Cranston (2012), citing Rebores, wrote that "screening can be regarded as a process that evaluates and identifies applicants who are to be interviewed for available teaching positions" (p. 354). The research questions centring this study were: What are the views of educational leaders when they receive applications from teachers who are currently teaching overseas? What is informing these views? From the viewpoint of educational leaders, what could teachers wishing to repatriate do to bolster their chances of securing a job interview? These questions aimed to generate an inquiry into educational leaders' priorities and concerns when they assess job applications from international teachers and to foster an awareness about how educational leaders interpret teaching overseas. This article continues with a theoretical lens and review of the relevant literature on hiring preferences. The research design, data analysis, findings, and conclusion follow.

## Literature review

R. Michael Paige and Josef Mestenhauser (1999) argued that by researching the experiences of educators elsewhere, leaders can understand important content knowledge, including “historical, social, cultural, political, and economic influences on educational development” (p. 500). Educational administration as a field of study has resisted internationalization due to administrators focusing on problems in their present situations and viewing what is happening outside their countries as irrelevant. In light of globalization and neoliberalism, educational leaders need to pay closer attention to what is happening outside their borders, and to how these developments shape domestic education policy and practice.

Paige and Mestenhauser (1999) wrote that an “international mindset” (p. 501) for educational administrators involved seven dimensions: integrative (involving knowledge gained from different settings, cultures, and languages); intercultural (understanding how culture informs educational policy and practice); interdisciplinary (drawing on multiple disciplines to inform practice); comparative (comparing different cultural contexts); transfer of knowledge-technology (learning knowledge in one setting and applying to another); contextual (analyzing context for historical, political, economic, and sociocultural influences); and global (becoming aware of global trends and influences on educational programs). A lack of these dimensions during the hiring stage may result in a reification of the status quo among staff and reduced potential for developing global awareness. John Collard (2007) cautioned that “leaders are also required to become transformative cultural agents working to create reflexive institutions and systems. There are times when they need to unfreeze established traditions and contest unexamined assumptions” (p. 751). He argued that within international scenarios, the values and norms of certain groups may not be comprehensible to other groups, and that a more complex understanding of teaching experiences may be necessary for educational leaders. One way to unravel this complexity and engage Paige and Mestenhauser’s (1999) concept of “international mindset” (p. 501) is to explore educational leaders’ assessment of job applications by international teachers.

## Hiring practices and school administrators

Hiring practices is a burgeoning field of study in educational administration. Hiring teachers is generally understood to be a complex endeavour, due in part to incomplete or superficial information about the applicant (Mason & Schroeder, 2010; Staiger & Rockoff, 2010). Identifying a “person–job fit” seems to be a common goal for educational leaders when hiring teachers. A person–job fit involves assessing applicants’ professional and personal qualities, and recognizing that the school’s demographic and organizational needs can benefit from a mix of these qualities (Chan, 2011; Harris, Rutledge, Ingle, & Thompson, 2010; Tamir, 2019).

A professional fit means that a candidate’s content knowledge, practical skills, abilities, and values correspond with the job qualifications and school improvement (Harris et al., 2010; Liu & Moore Johnson, 2006; Perrone & Eddy-Spicer, 2019; Rutledge, Harris, Thompson, & Ingle, 2008). Interviews, relevant work experience, certification(s), the writing quality of the cover letter and resumé, grade point average,

organizational fit, accountability to upholding government standards, and letters of recommendation help to determine successful candidates (Cranston, 2012; Diamond, Demchak, & Abernath, 2020; Giersch & Dong, 2018; Ingle, Rutledge, & Bishop, 2011; Laura, 2018; Mason & Schroeder, 2010; Mee & Rogers Haverback, 2017; Rutledge et al., 2008; Tamir, 2019). That said, hiring processes are not uniform across school divisions, and candidates may have different experiences, even within the same jurisdiction (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). Douglas Staiger and Jonah Rockoff (2010) called for teacher performance to be prioritized across hiring processes to reduce costly incidences of teacher turnover; however, they recognized that there is little research on how to determine teaching effectiveness at the hiring stage. If school principals believe that teachers' classroom management skills may be challenged in their schools, then that could cause additional work for them by way of mentorship and parent relations (Cranston, 2012; Liu, Liu, Stronge, & Xu, 2016). It is important for principals to hire teachers who can complete a host of tasks (e.g., assessment, collaboration, problem-solving) in order to make the principal's job easier and who have invested their time and resources to perform better at their jobs. School leaders want to market their teachers and their credentials to the community in order to draw students to their schools (Giersch & Dong, 2018).

Also, across various hiring contexts, personal fit includes qualities necessary to succeed in the job. In a study of educational leaders' hiring preferences in Belize, for example, teacher applicants who demonstrated motivation and a caring disposition in addition to expertise and teaching ability dominated study participants' preferences (Ingle, Thompson, & Abla, 2018). Lindsay Diamond, MaryAnn Demchak, and Tammy Abernathy (2020) found that rural elementary school principals in the United States preferred applicants who are recognized in the community or through their teaching evaluations. In a Chinese context, key personal attributes of teacher applicants can include establishing good parent relations, creating a supportive learning environment, showing enthusiasm, and being a positive role model (Liu et al., 2016). In addition to these studies, other researchers have noted enthusiasm, care, self-reflection, flexibility, work ethic, and commitment to professional development as important personal qualities (Davis, Ingle, & Choi, 2019; Ingle et al., 2011; Tamir, 2019).

Expanding on personal fit, diversity has recently become an important consideration in teacher hiring (D'Amico, Pawlewicz, Earley, & McGeehan, 2017; Jack & Ryan, 2015; Laura, 2018), which is often rooted in cultural contexts. For example, gender parity has become a predictor in U.S.-based leaders' hiring preferences (Davis et al., 2019), whereas a teacher's gender is considered unimportant with respect to hiring preferences in Hong Kong and mainland China (Chan, 2011; Liu et al., 2016). Further, in Egypt, hidden criteria based on gender, age, religion, and appearance can influence educational leaders' hiring preferences (Abdou, 2012). While hiring for diversity holds value for schools, hiring teachers with diverse experiences, such as possessing international teaching backgrounds, can also be an important quality when diversifying the workforce.

## **Hiring international teachers**

Although the literature on hiring international teachers is relatively nascent, what

has been mentioned is that the process requires the school leader to be aware of the different contexts and be able to conceptualize the benefits and deficits of hiring an international teacher. For example, Ira Bogotch and Patricia Maslin-Ostrowski (2010) observed that faculty in an educational leadership department at a U.S. university purposely sought out international faculty as one way to internationalize the department. International faculty bolstered a global identity for the department, with the aim to generate comparative and analytical views on local education systems. Elspeth Jones (2013) described multiple global competences that form through the internationalization of learning environments: working with people from a broad range of backgrounds, communication skills, drive and resilience, self-awareness, global networking, negotiating with stakeholders from different countries, openness to different perspectives, and multicultural and multilingual learning. Yet, as Crane (2015) reported, while educational leaders have recognized that international opportunities can benefit teachers' skills and knowledge, international experience alone is not an advantage for hiring purposes, and educational leaders still need to adhere to policies around hiring decisions (e.g., qualifications, seniority lists). Crane (2015) explained that educational leaders need to learn about the quality of international schools. They often prefer "international" experiences to be similar to the home context (e.g., a Canadian teacher working in the U.S.) and feel that time abroad should be kept to one to three years in order to keep abreast of recent changes. While internationally experienced teachers bring clear benefits to an educational context, additional information is likely needed at the hiring stage.

## **Research design**

This qualitative research project consisted of one-on-one interviews with educational leaders as the method for data collection. Qualitative research can produce a deeper discussion of the issues related to hiring international teachers. The interview technique was semi-structured or focused interviewing (Lichtman, 2010), which frames interview questions as starting points that prompt a deeper conversation between the researcher and the participants. This interview technique is useful to help understand their values, insights, stories, reasons, and practices. The interview questions focused on educational leaders' background and current work experiences in relation to hiring international teachers. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, and study participants were able to check their transcripts on completion, giving them an opportunity to change or expand on information shared with the research team.

This study was situated in the province of Manitoba, Canada. Based on Edward Liu and Susan Moore Johnson's (2006) hiring categories of centralization and decentralization, the public school teacher hiring process in Manitoba is moderately centralized. This means that teachers are offered a position through the division office, but they still must interview at a specific school where the position is located. Teachers apply for a job posted by the school division. The school principal conducts the interviews with applicants and then makes a recommendation to the division as to their preferred candidate. The school principal cannot offer the position without authorization. A division representative will either notify the successful applicant or have the principal provide notification.

Individuals who are currently superintendents or school principals of public schools and who have served on teacher hiring committees for at least one year were invited to participate in the study. Prior experience assessing applications from international teachers was not required, given that educational leaders are sometimes presented with unexpected job applications to assess. Leaders who do not hire teachers were excluded from this study. Recruitment was initiated by requesting division superintendents across Manitoba to distribute the study poster. Ten responses were received from the 32 requests sent out across the province. Six school boards approved participation in this study; three declined participation without providing a reason. The timeline for data collection was from March to May 2020. A larger context that shaped the research implementation is that the COVID-19 pandemic started spreading across the globe just prior to the start of data collection. Recruiting participants during the pandemic may have minimized participation from approved school divisions, but the participants who did volunteer for the study felt this was an important topic despite experiencing pandemic-related challenges. The pandemic resulted in each interview being done either over the phone or virtually. No participants withdrew from the study because of the pandemic.

Data collection drew on Paige and Mestenhauser's (1999) concept of "international mindset" (p. 501). Interview questions began with asking about the participants' background information (e.g., role, length of time in career, experience hiring teachers). Questions at this stage were integrative in nature (i.e., they explored assumptions and knowledge about the international job market). The next set of questions focused on what participants screen for when assessing job applications in general and what experience they have with the international teaching market. Questions were intercultural (i.e., they probed how knowledge of Canadian and international school communities informs hiring practices) and interdisciplinary (i.e., they allowed for participants to draw on multiple disciplines, such as leadership studies, globalization studies, and labour relations) in scope. The next part of the research interview focused on providing fictitious cases of international teachers currently working overseas to study participants. This approach functioned as a controlled condition to examine the participants' analytical process and hiring preferences. Given that Frank Perrone and David Eddy-Spicer (2019) reported that principals use the resumé to screen applicants for teaching effectiveness, motivation, commitment to the profession, and organizational match, the cases were written in a way that provided a detailed description of what is offered in the resumé and cover letter. This creative strategy helped clarify what further information the participant required about the international teacher applicant by placing the participants in an imagined hiring situation. Follow-up questions relating to each case study allowed for comparisons (e.g., comparing Canada or Manitoba and the international context), the transfer of knowledge technologies (e.g., conceptualizing what knowledge needs to be adapted for the Manitoba context), contextual analysis (e.g., analyzing various international school types), and mobility (e.g., reflecting on employment trends in hiring international teachers). Introducing various contexts (e.g., differences in school type and country) and backgrounds (e.g., experience levels, interests, gender, and training) enhanced the diversity of the cases.



The fictional cases included a) an international school that leases a Canadian provincial curriculum, b) an International Baccalaureate (IB) school, and c) a private English language school that hires international teachers. Each one of these schools has an elite student demographic that, through the skills and content knowledge gained in their schools, generally aims to study overseas after graduation. The cases were as follows:

1. You have an opening for a high school physical education and general science teacher. You receive an application from Mr. John Smith, who has been teaching for three years in this role at both middle- and senior-year levels at a Manitoba curriculum school in Nairobi, Kenya. Mr. Smith coached the senior boys' basketball team in a league of international schools. The team did not score very well in the rankings but the coaching experience has been invaluable to Mr. Smith. Mr. Smith also plays the guitar on the side. Mr. Smith indicates in his cover letter that he wishes to return to Canada and work in your division. He is originally from Regina, Saskatchewan, but has Manitoba teacher certification as a result of working for the curriculum school.
2. You have an opening for an elementary school teacher. You receive an application from Mr. Bradley Harrison, who has been working at an IB school in Egypt for five years, teaching grade three. In his cover letter, Mr. Harrison explains that he is very active in directing the school's theatre production each year and takes the students on field trips to different parts of Cairo. Last year, he was promoted to the position of program leader for early years education. Mr. Harrison speaks fluent Arabic. He is interested in returning to Canada and working in your division. Mr. Harrison is an avid chess player. He is originally from Toronto, Ontario, and writes that he is moving to Manitoba to be closer to his partner's family.
3. You have an opening for a middle-years teaching position. You receive an application from Ms. Carolyn Huckson, who has been teaching English language at a private language school in Beijing, China, for one year. In her cover letter, she states that she has the necessary qualifications for the job and feels as though her teaching experience will be useful. Ms. Huckson volunteered at a local orphanage for Zhuang children, an Indigenous community. Ms. Huckson states that she feels confident in teaching controversial topics considering her work experience in China. Ms. Huckson speaks beginner-level Mandarin. Prior to teaching in China, Ms. Huckson was a teacher candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. Ms. Huckson enjoys hiking as a hobby. She is originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## Data analysis

Table 1 represents the demographic profile for the study. The participants' names and locations have been anonymized in the data for confidentiality. In total, there were 10 participants in Manitoba with diverse locations, professional roles, and genders. None of the participants received training on international education in their leadership programs. Only three participants had direct work or life experience overseas, other than for tourism purposes.

**Table 1. Study participant demographics**

Name	Position	Rural/urban	Prior international experience
Steve	Superintendent	Rural	Worked as an inspector of international schools
Lisa	Principal	Urban	No
James	Principal	Urban	No
Dalil	Principal	Urban	Worked as a teacher in Thailand
Scott	Principal	Urban	No
Hannah	Superintendent	Rural	No
Donna	Principal	Urban	Immigrated to Canada as an adult
Lilian	Principal	Urban	No
Susan	Principal	Urban	No
Frank	Principal	Urban	No

Data analysis for this study began by assigning codes to the interview transcripts to identify recurring concepts across the transcripts. Codes with a high degree of frequency were then organized into categories to organize and interpret the data and to develop some themes from the categories (Lichtman, 2010). Table 2 shows the codes, themes, and categories of the data, followed by a broader description.

**Table 2. Codes, categories, and themes in the data**

Significant codes	Category	Theme
Awareness of international contexts, global Indigenous connections, seeking clarification, curriculum	Heighten communication	Describing the work context
Person fit, loss of professional connections, recent changes in Manitoba education, time as a concern	Heighten communication	Maintaining connections
Concerns in transferability of skills, teaching benefits, interest in hobbies, linguistic diversity, connection to migrant students, applicant preferences	Bridging skills	Transferability of skills

### **Heighten communication**

The data suggested that heightened communication from international teacher applicants is paramount given the contextual differences in international and Canadian work situations. Two sub-themes are associated with this broader theme: describing the work context and maintaining connections.

### ***Describing the work context***

Each study participant expressed an ongoing desire to understand each case vignette and to adapt their understanding of case aspects to their local context. The three internationally experienced participants engaged their prior work experience to make sense of the various contextual differences and expand the discussion to involve notions of privilege, inclusion, curricular connections, or classroom management. Donna shared,



It's interesting to see what different systems offer, and do they have a global view of the whole idea of identity and of privilege. I think we sometimes can get tunnel vision into the outcomes and the numbers and the percentages, especially when it comes to some students who don't fit the mould. We think it's "bums in seats" and "desks in rows." As we enter the twenty-first century, we need to develop a more global view of education. No one is going to stand up at a staff meeting and declare, "I've taught five years in Japan and I learned this." It's not about that. It's about how we personally conduct ourselves in our interactions with students, and how we talk about different structures.

The other seven participants were partially aware of issues relating to teaching overseas, but their awareness was perhaps not as in-depth as the three participants with experience overseas. When reflecting on Mr. Harrison's IB school experience, Lisa shared, "IB schools are super intense. His school may be, I don't know, maybe he might push too hard on kids? I would be worried about—how intense is he?"

In addition, Frank admitted that his lack of experience and knowledge stifled his judgment of the cases. He shared, "It could be the stigma that gets attached to who gets to go to school in the Philippines. Is it not rich kids or the kids that can afford it? These are just things that could be urban legend because I never taught in the Philippines."

All study participants broadly recognized that teaching overseas can positively shape a teaching career. James explained that from teaching overseas,

you acquire those coping skills from dealing with adversity and uncertainty. What better way to get good at developing those coping skills than travel and working abroad? I think you come out of working abroad with a greater sense of confidence. Just being aware of diverse cultures. . . . I think you're a better educator when you've experienced a variety of places and people.

Despite the benefits, all participants agreed that although international experience stands out in an application, it does not guarantee that the candidate will be short-listed for a teaching position. For example, the study participants wanted to know more about the process to become a program lead, what it means to teach "controversial topics," connections to the Manitoba curriculum, classroom management in certain countries, and how field trips promote critical awareness and analytical thinking skills. Global Indigenous peoples, work conditions, community involvement, and navigating social issues that stem from living in certain countries were not dominant concerns. All participants endeavoured to interpret the employment context through their lens, and needed additional information about how a candidate's unique experience would impact their relationships with students, foster student development, and enhance their pedagogy.

Seven participants mentioned leading with professional fit in the cover letter rather than internationalization. Donna shared, "Talk about how they grew from the international teaching experience, just don't state it; talk about why this is an asset.

How does the experience go to the ‘plus’ column with all things being equal?” A stronger application for these participants meant connecting experiences in the school and community to pedagogy, student achievement, learning outcomes, and student skills development. Experience with teaching the Manitoba curriculum was not a priority for these participants. For example, when reflecting on Mr. Smith’s experience in a Manitoba curriculum school, Hannah shared,

A teacher can figure out the curriculum if they understand the way that we want them to have professional relationships with young people. That they realize that it’s not just about having a relationship with young kids but having an instructional relationship that models what it is to be a good person. That kind of deeper level of what it means to be a teacher is more important than understanding the content. It’s not unimportant that he’s taught the Manitoba curriculum, but if he hadn’t, I would still be open to hiring him if he could impress me on some of the other fronts.

### ***Maintaining connections***

A second sub-theme, as mentioned by each participant, is that applicants maintain their connections to their professional network in Canada. Frank described receiving emails from past colleagues updating him on their international lives. This approach helped maintain their professional relationship and lay the groundwork for potential collaboration. Scott explained how domestic applicants can edge out international applicants, as domestic teachers can provide recent teaching practicum reports, volunteer experience, or substitute teaching experiences. Scott shared,

I’m looking around when I’m looking for positions to be filled. Who’s been subbing in my building who I’ve actually seen teach? Who may be a really good fit for the role that I’m looking to fill? I think that if you’re out of the country for two to three years, it might be hard to maintain that network.

For rural schools, however, the situation may be a bit different. Steve reflected on some of the inequity in hiring practices and shared,

From a rural perspective, if they [a teacher based internationally for an extensive period of time] applied for a position in a remote community, I’d absolutely interview them if they were one of three or four applicants and they seem to fit the skillset. But I think it might put them at a disadvantage with a hiring committee, just with that perspective that they perhaps have spent a great deal of time away from the Manitoba and Canadian school system, and a teacher who might have more recent experience or education might have an easier time with that transition. That might be an unfair perspective, but I definitely think it might cross the minds of individuals on a hiring committee.

The participants mentioned the length of time overseas with respect to maintaining connections. However, there was no clear preference among the participants. Four participants (Scott, Donna, James, Dalil) identified that an applicant being away for a

longer time period was not a problem. Dalil offered, “To me any experience is better than no experience.” In addition, five participants (Frank, Steve, Lisa, Hannah, and Lilian) identified that the longer someone is away from Canada, the greater their disconnect with current topics and changes in education. This extended time away from the country might result in their application being viewed in a negative light. Frank shared, “After 10 years in Japan, why do you want to come back? I think that the longer that you are in any situation, the more removed you are from another situation.”

### **Bridging skills**

A second theme that emerged in the data was how teaching skills transferred to the Canadian context. Most study participants ( $n = 6$ ) preferred Mr. Harrison’s case, and it was largely due to his linguistic ability, leadership experience, and community outreach. The second preference was Ms. Huckson ( $n = 3$ ) due to her relationship with Indigenous communities, less time overseas, and emerging linguistic diversity. Mr. Smith was the least favourite ( $n = 1$ ) of the fictitious applicants due to questions around his certification and less obviously transferable skills. Teaching in a Manitoba curriculum school overseas may be an advantage due to curricular similarity, but it was not significant enough to put him over the top. This may be because Manitoba curriculum schools are not widely understood, or educational leaders prefer teaching skills over curriculum experience. Concomitantly, working in a private language school, where teaching the English language is the only mandate of international teachers, did not dissuade most study participants from seriously considering Ms. Huckson.

Study participants who work as school principals expressed concern over classroom management and parent relationships. For example, Dalil explained how he would be concerned about teachers not being able to control their classrooms or foster a healthy learning environment, which would lead to an increased workload for him (e.g., more instructional leadership and dealing with disgruntled parents). Lilian also offered, “What I would need to know is: Do you have any experience dealing with children who have exhibited challenging behaviours? Or dealing with students who have significant defiance? And then how would you deal with this? That [*sic*] would be some of my key questions for the interview.”

Furthermore, study participants were excited by the extracurricular interests in the cases. Coaching experience, playing guitar, leading school trips, creating school musicals, and so forth all strengthened a fictitious applicant’s position. For urban educational leaders, there was also widespread enthusiasm for diverse language abilities, which would improve the school’s ability to connect with migrant students and their families. Lilian expressed that it would save translation costs if she had a staff member who could speak the same language as her students and their families.

### **Summary of findings**

This study demonstrated that there is no consistency when it comes to assessing applications from international teachers, supporting Richard Mason and Mark Schroeder’s (2010) point that hiring can be a very subjective process that varies across schools and school divisions. The study findings mirrored some of what was already

reported in the literature, particularly how educational leaders prefer organizational fit (Rutledge et al., 2008), high-quality applicants (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2010), and personal and professional diversity (Harris et al., 2010). The findings also echoed Crane's (2015) conclusion that international teachers need to share more information when they are applying for teaching positions in Canada, and that without having their own international experiences or training, educational leaders may not be informed of the differences in school contexts. This unawareness can lead to inequity, as it means educational leaders need to base decisions on assumptions that may not be entirely accurate or complete. While they did not express overt bias, most of the study participants ( $n = 6$ ) did not know the intricate details of international work contexts. They were, however, able to identify the extensive benefits of working overseas to teachers and to their schools. Dalil, for example, recognized that working overseas builds character and resilience among teaching staff, which is something he experienced as an international teacher. Gaining exposure to various international education contexts may help leaders in determining which candidate may be a good fit.

Of significance in the data is when the fictitious applicant offered something familiar to the study participant (e.g., coaching a losing basketball team or directing a school musical), the conversation gravitated around that familiarity. Relatability influenced how the participants interpreted the fictitious cases. For example, if a participant could not relate to living in China, they found other aspects of the application to discuss rather than researching or learning about China's private language schools. In the case of Mr. Smith, the notion of a Manitoba curriculum school was not widely understood and, therefore, did not gain a great deal of currency in comparison to coaching a losing basketball team, which many participants could commiserate with. Mr. Harrison became the clear favourite due to his language ability, theatre production skills, school trip leadership, ability to play chess, and formal leadership experience—all of which can be recognizable traits in a Canadian school. Disconnects led to minimal discussion about other benefits of teaching overseas. For example, there was no mention of working in Egypt, a country with a history of civil and political unrest and extreme violence that makes teaching a difficult and complex endeavour. These difficult experiences could educate students on peace and conflict resolution and improve relationships with Egyptian parents in Manitoba. In the case of Ms. Huckson, all participants mentioned her recent Manitoba experience as being valuable. Yet all participants questioned the "controversial issues" that Ms. Huckson said that she could teach; her meaning was unclear and led to what Lilian, Hannah, and Donna referred to as "red flags." A "red flag" signals warning or caution, but it can also be interpreted as an effort to stave off extra work for principals (e.g., mitigating parent complaints due to questionable pedagogical practices). This data point reinforced the view that educational leaders are concerned with hiring teachers who they perceive will struggle in the classroom (Cranston, 2012; Giersch & Dong, 2018). Overall, the data demonstrated that contextual familiarity increased a sense of relatability for the leader. Relatability adds to an "international mindset" (Paige & Mestenhauser, 1999, p. 501); leaders need to form some connection to and make sense of global issues and lives. A lack of familiarity or awareness decreased leader

relatability with the international teachers presented in the cases, resulting in uncertainties, assumptions, or red flags. Leaders' inability to readily identify with the unique skills gained through international teaching (e.g., intercultural communication, adaptation skills, conflict resolution, innovation, resilience) may result in the exclusion of international applicants.

### **Limitations, implications, and recommendations**

Although the research contained questions about international teaching work contexts and realistic cases about international teachers' lives, resumés and cover letters were not a part of this study, thus limiting a more thorough assessment of the applicants. Further, study participants do not have government mandates to internationalize their schools or school districts, which may mean that participants are not fully educated on the various aspects of international education. However, the fact that all participants mentioned that they had experience with screening and hiring international teachers, and that an increasing number of school divisions in the province are internationalizing their programs (Elnagar & Young, 2021), suggests that discussions of a global theme are not entirely unfamiliar to educational leaders in Manitoba.

Policy that provides guidance on how to assess applications from international teachers will be useful to educational leaders. Apart from respecting language in collective agreements, the participants drew on their assumptions and experiences to assess the applicants because there was no policy direction from their school divisions. This raises equity concerns in hiring practices; if the educational leader is unable to effectively assess international work conditions, there may be an implicit bias that privileges domestic teachers. Further, if struggling migrant students seek to connect to educators with international experiences, those students may be at a disadvantage if there are none or very few. International teachers can also inspire students to consider global options when deciding career paths.

The results of this research project have implications for practice. The current study demonstrated that educational leaders need to be made more aware of the nuances of an international teaching career (types of schools, cultural contexts, teacher mobility issues, and trends). Leadership preparation programs can include the international teacher market, such as through its foci on personnel administration, community outreach, and school improvement. Leaders may need to support international teachers' work repatriation by focusing on their motives and experiences. Part of this support entails how international teachers, like any other expatriate group, experience reverse culture shock upon their return (Hurn, 1999).

The current study has generated implications for research. Further research on repatriated international teachers will not only support hiring processes but can also explore adjustment challenges to repatriation, the transferability of skills, and teacher-student relationships. Additional research can also explore how repatriated teachers shape school communities and improve student achievement and learning outcomes.

There are two general recommendations for educational leaders and international teachers because of this study. First, as internationalization is further entrenched in the field of education, it is becoming paramount to prepare school

leaders to tackle the changes that follow. While it may be a hard sell for most school divisions to send leaders overseas for professional development and international school exposure, it is recommended for leaders to obtain international educational leadership training as part of their professional development. Doing so may make the hiring process more equitable, reduce disconnects with international applicants, expand hiring preferences beyond teachers' geographic locations, and create a learning opportunity about diverse work experiences. International leadership preparation can include the nature of schools overseas, teacher mobility issues, and how to internationalize a school along equitable lines.

Second, in agreement with Crane (2015), international teacher applicants will be stronger if they help leaders understand the value and relevance of the global experience by explaining how their contexts and skills transfer to the new school context, what they gained from teaching abroad, and how they can contribute to the school community. Developing language and intercultural competences will bolster the employability of international teachers who are planning to repatriate, particularly in urban school divisions. Rural divisions may be one area for international teachers to target, given the lower amount of competition. However, as Diamond et al. (2020) shared, teachers may need more than one certification and should be aware of the differences of living and working in a rural community. International teachers may also wish to maintain some form of connection to educational leaders while working abroad, although this may be cumbersome if the teacher is unaware of when and where they will repatriate. Study participants recommended that international teacher applicants rehearse virtual interviews, have a website, and prepare to share stories prior to the interview. Overall, providing a wide-angle view of the work experience will assist educational leaders in assessing international job applications equal to those with only domestic employment backgrounds.

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