

Internationally Educated Professionals and their Integration into the Workplace in the Francophone Minority Context in Ontario: The Case of Professionals from Sub - Saharan Africa who become Teachers

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Abstract: *This study explores the integration of internationally educated professionals from Sub - Saharan Africa into the teaching profession in Ontario, Canada. It examines their transition experiences, the challenges they face, and the strategies they adopt for professional integration. The research employs qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, to gather data. The findings reveal the diverse immigrant journeys, evolving professional identities, and the role of communities of practice in their professional integration. The study contributes to understanding the professional integration of immigrant teachers in minority Francophone contexts.*

Keywords: Internationally Educated Professionals, Professional Integration, Sub - Saharan Africa, Teaching Profession, Ontario, Francophone Minority Context, Immigrant Teachers, Communities of Practice.

1. Introduction

Canada continues to be one of the most influential first - world nations for immigration. One of the main motivators for most newcomer professionals is to improve their economic situation by obtaining employment in North America. As Bernard Perret and Guy Roustang (1993, p.233, cited in Duquet, Moreau and Moisan, 1997, p.9) note, "in our economically dominated [Canadian society], employment is almost a condition of access to full citizenship".

Sub - Saharan French - speaking Africans who emigrate to Canada are no exception to this reality, as they strive to integrate into the labour market of their host country. Their professional integration is of great importance as it can financially benefit themselves and their families, but more so, it benefits the host society and the society of origin due to the exchange of diverse ideas and practises that can lead to innovation. However, these newcomers often face challenges in accessing employment due to administrative requirements including the recognition of qualifications and skills acquired in the country of origin, accreditation and problems related to visible minority status. These obstacles inspire them to pursue different strategies for professional integration (Hébert et Wanner, 2010; Farmer et da Silva, 2012, p.20), which in turn lead some of them to change professions and move into a teaching career.

Teaching is a profession that is appealing to immigrant professionals who already have an undergraduate degree because it satisfies half the requirement of becoming an educator in Canada. Specifically, in Ontario, entry into the teaching profession requires a bachelor's degree in a university program followed by two years of training and

certification by the Ontario College of Teachers (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2021). Another reason why Sub - Saharan African professionals are more inclined to pursue teaching careers in Ontario is because the demand for French - speaking educators is extremely high while there is a scarcity of French teachers; thus, these newcomers are more likely to secure employment as an educator in Franco - Ontarian schools. The Ontario College of Teachers reports a shortage of teachers in Ontario (Mcintyre, 2017), especially in French - language schools, and that the government is multiplying local and international recruitment strategies (Mpoyo and Cayouette, 2018) in order to remedy this shortfall.

The process of integrating these immigrants into the educational workforce is fraught with many challenges. Some hurdles include social inequalities (Carr and Klassen, 1997), culture shock experienced by colleagues and hostschools, unfamiliarity with the Canadian school system (Gauthier and Cerqua, 2012) and the overall unaccustomedness to Canadian social, cultural and linguistic environment. Other challenges include disadvantages related to the recruitment of visible minority immigrant teachers, the language barrier, and problems related to the use of new technologies (Bascia, 1996; Myles and all, 2006; Phillion, 2003; Collin & Camaraille, 2013; Conseil des ministres de l'éducation [2014].

My research examined the post - immigration and transition experience of these newcomer non - education professionals in their current roles as French - language educators in Francophone schools. Furthermore, I dissected the barriers they overcame a pre - employment, and the obstacles they continue to endure after ensuring their teaching occupations.

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Overall, I leveraged my research to answer the following: What is the experience of integration for non - educational French - speaking professionals from sub - Saharan Africa into their newfound roles as teachers in Franco - Ontarian schools? Do the strategies adopted by these professionals meet their expectations?

This paper reflects on the issues that sub - Saharan African professionals experience in their teaching roles and how they overcame various obstacles while integrating into the Canadian labour market. It also provides insight on the realities faced by Francophone Africans during their integration process as educators in Franco - Ontarian schools, especially given French communities are considered a minority population in Ontario.

Numerous studies are devoted to the integration of immigrant teachers, most of which are focused on foreign - trained educators [Duchesne, 2017; Adamuli, 2010, p.3; Alboim & Matree Foundation, 2002; Phillion, 2003; Morrissette, Charara, Boily, Diédhiou, 2016]. Very little attention has been paid to foreign - trained Francophone immigrants who, after working in another professional sector, decide in Canada to enter the teaching profession. This research exemplifies the perceptions, experiences, trajectories, practices of those foreign trained in a non - education professional and became educators in Francophone schools. It is not limited to the mechanisms and situation of the labour market, nor the policy measures or the economic situation, but extends to the immigrant's experience and professional integration.

What is the value of this work?

In terms of Francophone immigrants from sub - Saharan Africa, this research focuses on the reality of those who have already entered the teaching profession. It allows us to address the issues they face by better understanding the challenges in the Canadian education system and the realities of the practice communities.

In terms of the teaching profession, this study focuses on the lives and identities of the foreign professionals who changed their previous careers in their home countries to pursue teaching professions after emigrating to Canada. It allows us to understand the rationale behind why these professionals decided to pursue a career as educators, and the strategies they implemented to be successful in French - language schools in the Greater Toronto Area.

In terms of the experiences of these teachers, this research documented their professional integration journey into employment in French - language schools in the Greater Toronto Area and the development of a new professional identity.

Research Question

The main question is: How do professionals from sub - Saharan Africa, who were not trained in education, experience their transition as educators in French - language schools in Ontario? Three follow - up questions include: 1) How can their diverselived experiences influence their career choices and the strategies they implemented towards their professional integration? 2) How are their identities

impacted by the minority Francophone community in Franco - Ontarian schools during their migration? 3) How do they respond to the dynamic and reflexive process of integration in their professional environment?

2. Theoretical Framework

To better understand the issue of professional integration, I will leverage two theories which include insights of Claude Dubar (1991; 1992; 1998; 2000; 2001; 2002; 2015; 2017) and Etienne Wenger (2005; Wenger et al., 2002). Dubar approaches professional integration "from the perspective of professional socialization and the construction of social and professional identities." He presents professional integration as the person's experience over time, their relationship with others and their way of interpreting history. According to Dubar, during the professional integration, individuals develop different strategies according to their objectives. In addition, he explains professional integration as a process that influences individuals to develop their newfound professional identities. It also includes the external identity which is an exchange between the individual and the institution that they interact with. This identity is attributed by the institution and the people with whom the individual is in relation.

Etienne Wenger's theory (2005; Wenger et al., 2002) focuses on communities of practice, which he explains as being platforms, professional or social, that allow individuals to find collective solutions to the problems they encounter. These are places of "social participation" where learning is practised, i. e., individuals share their knowledge, appropriate theories, reflect on their actions and take action¹. This emphasizes the collective and reciprocal aspect of the professional integration process by stressing the importance of the individual's participation in their environment and the influence that said the environment has on their professional identity.

The theories mentioned above provide meaningful insights for professional integration and its evolution over time, the change it causes individuals, to their relationship with others and their environment. The theories lead us to understand the development of one's professional identity, which is linked to their relationship with others in any environment.

3. Research Methodology

Qualitative research is the most appropriate method of data collection, as it will allow us to better understand the realities faced by newcomers' sub - Saharan African educators during their professional integration into Franco - Ontarian schools through the use of documentary analysis, observation, interviews and logbook.

¹ Morrissette, Charara, Boily, and Diédhiou, in their research on coaches' strategies for the socio- professional integration of foreign-trained teachers, used the theory of communities of practice to shed light on "the process of integrating novices" because it "relies on a set of conventions, of valuations that allow for the harmonious coordination of activities." (2016, p. 8)

I practised qualitative research through interviews, otherwise known as “epistemological posture,” which includes dialogue with participants and drawing conclusions on the two voices that Chase (2005, pp.664) calls “The Researcher’s Authoritative” and “Interactive Voice.”

The first voice connects and separates the researcher’s voice and the narrator’s voice in a particular way, while the second voice includes an “intersubjectivity” between the researcher and the narrator. Furthermore, I used the ethnographic approach (Fortin & Gagnon, 2016) to conduct my research. This approach is based on a narrative analysis that focuses on the professional biographies and life experiences centred on the theme of migration and education.

I conducted a literature review that allowed me to build a collection of information related to the research topic. I also consulted various works of other researchers who have studied immigration, the Francophone identity, education, and communities of practice.

I conducted non - probability recruitment of participants using the snowball sampling scheme (Mayer et al., 2000). A total of 21 individuals expressed their interest in participating in the research, including nine women and twelve men from four African countries: Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Senegal, and the Ivory Coast. Of the participants, there were more single people than married couples who went through the migration process on their own. All of the participants already had an undergraduate degree from their home country before arriving in Canada and a majority of them also had a career prior to their migration.

Lastly, I observed participants in their community of practice called ACEI, which is a non - profit organization in Toronto with a mission to develop and strengthen the capacity of French - speaking teachers and newcomer parents. I focused my observations on their practices, activities, and the interactions between the organization’s members and I spoke to them about their experiences with professional integration through a semi - structured interview. These interviews focused on their trajectory, motivations, the practice of their profession, the difficulties they encountered and their reactions to these challenges. The interviews allowed me to perceive similarities or difficulties in terms of their experience with professional integration. Lastly, as a data collection tool, I used an interview grid, an observation grid and a logbook to record the impressions and reflections of these newfound educators.

Key Research Finding

After an in - depth analysis of the interviews and careful observation of the community of practice, the study allowed me to identify, understand and explain three themes: the immigrant process, the professional identity and the communities of practice.

In terms of the immigrant journey, there is great diversity and singularity in the paths of each person. A significant number of participants have immigrated multiple times from one country to another, before settling in Canada. There were also those who made “a double mobility”, which is

when an individual relocates multiple times in the same country (Vatz - Laaroussi, 2019). The direction taken by a migrant depends on many factors and people in similar life circumstances may have different reasons for leaving their country. However, it was difficult to conclude the dominant reason for why immigrants left their home countries and previous occupations to pursue educational careers in Canada.

A great motivator for sub - Saharan African professional to migrate to Canada is the significant economic benefit gained from entering the Canadian labour market, especially when compared to the economy in their home countries. Choosing a teaching career in Canada was not always a priority for most of these first - time entrants. However, to avoid inactivity and unemployment, these educators secured employment as teachers in Franco - Ontarian schools. Despite the desperation for secure work in Canada, the participants in this case study confirmed that they willingly chose to become teachers based on passion and a genuine fondness for the occupation. Many of the participants even developed strategies to sustain their education careers.

In terms of professional identity, the study highlights how the professional identity of these immigrants are constantly evolving. Their experience and perspective of teaching has undergone various influences in their original Francophone environments and other historical factors of their home countries. These educators were influenced by the educational methods of the pre - colonial and colonial eras, which are completely different methods of teaching compared to the education system in Canada.

The research revealed that there is no particular or singular method to becoming a teacher or to transition into teaching from a different profession. For some people, pursuing an educational career is a family tradition, where many family members embark on a job in teaching, whereas for others it is a vocation, they believe teaching is the most suitable profession for themselves. The latter was the rationale for why many of the participants chose to teach in Canada, as they had no previous experience with teaching in their country of origin.

The professional identities of these newcomer teachers are often intertwined and conflated with their role as educators, which is rarely the case for other professions (Gohier, 2001; Bialystok, 2016). Teachers of the immigrant origin have several roles in their school environment as they undertake the responsibility of educators and coaches, and also support students in building their own identities. A great advantage that teachers from foreign countries have been their innate ability to understand and empathize with certain cultural and social realities of other immigrant students, parents and families.

They are able to help immigrant students and their families navigate through the Canadian school system with ease. Since the French population in Ontario is considered a minority group compared to the English population, these French - language educators play an important role in bridging the gaps at Francophone schools for immigrant students and their families. A negative factor identified in

this research is that these immigrant educators are often victims to prejudice held by other parents, and school staff including other teachers, principals and administrative staff. These misinformed biases often cause these newfound educators to develop reluctance and lack of confidence in their teaching abilities. This also discourages other immigrant teachers from wanting to pursue teaching roles in Canada.

I have identified three types of communities of practice; the professional learning community; the informal community; and the external community. The professional learning community is institutionalized and focuses on the teaching styles of educators who teach the same grade - level or same subjects in school. This learning community is offered by the school administration. The second type of community operates informally. In this category, each teacher exchanges support on an ad hoc basis from a friend, an acquaintance or another teacher. The final community of practice is one that is outside of the school administration and specifically serves immigrants. This can be external organizations or programs, such as my observation environment, ACEL, which provides support and training to immigrant Francophone teachers so they can overcome the difficulties in their roles as educators in minority Francophone communities. Although these three communities of practices are unique and distinct, they complement one another with the goal of helping immigrant educators by exchanging ideas, experiences and resources. Educators must practise all three in order to overcome obstacles and barriers in French - language schools.

4. Conclusion

This study focused on the integration of foreign - educated French - speaking professionals from sub - Saharan Africa who immigrated to work as teachers in French - language schools in Canada. It examined how these professionals transitioned from non - educational careers in their home countries to Canadian communities of practice, and how these different communities influenced their new learning methods and identities. Furthermore, this research examined past social and professional experiences in sub - Saharan Africa; transitional processes from one workplace to another abroad; how these new educators viewed themselves; how did these methods in Ontario's French - language schools shaped their professional identities; and how their participation in different communities of practice influenced their choices.

In terms of the results and discussions, there were significant diversities and singularities within the pathways taken by each individual. The path on which a migrant request depends on different factors. And that the choice of a teaching career, while once an entirely instrumental approach for proficient integration, has realized to be a permanent life project.

The study also emphasized the fact that the professional identities of immigrants are evolving. Their personal and professional identities are often intertwined and conflated with their role as educators. They are, also victims to prejudice held by other parents and school faculty.

Finally, the research recognized the importance of three shapes of communities of practice that complement one another and empower educators' proficient integration through their resources and information exchanges.

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