



Original Research Article

A reflection on the professional and cultural experience of migrant teachers: the case of postcolonial Guyanese teachers in British mainstream primary schools

Received 17 January, 2018

Revised 16 February, 2018

Accepted 19 February, 2018

Published 22 February, 2018

Lidon Lashley^{1,2}

¹Department of Foundation and Education Management, Faculty of Education and Humanities, University of Guyana

²Commonwealth PhD Scholar 2017-2020/Research Student - University of Roehampton, UK

Author's Email:
lidon_lashley@yahoo.com

Tel.: + (592) 592 6091891/
+ 44 7496187260

This study explored the professional and cultural experience of migrant postcolonial Guyanese teachers in British mainstream primary schools. It investigated the experiences of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers as they attempt to integrate into British mainstream primary schools. A descriptive survey approach was employed in this study. A qualitative approach was embraced to show new understandings of the lived experience of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers. It relied on the first person accounts obtained directly through participant unstructured interviews. The exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was done to gather ten participants. The study revealed that postcolonial Guyanese mainstream teachers face a lot of bureaucratic hurdles to get into the mainstream systems in the United Kingdom. In addition, those who make it into the system face exploitation, marginalization, xenophobia, constant micromanagement, lost of professional identity, confusion among other stresses. These include having your professional practices constantly assessed by parents, learners and even newly qualified native teachers with less experience and lower qualifications. The professional and cultural experiences of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in mainstream primary schools within the United Kingdom are very challenging. Their professional autonomy is challenged by the bureaucratic and cultural structures of the United Kingdom. Xenophobia has also contributed to some of the challenges postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers face in mainstream schools in the United Kingdom. It is recommended that postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers capitalize on their unique skills and talents to become the most effective teachers with professional integrity and authenticity in practice. This should be backed by their qualification and experiences from postcolonial Guyana. This way, they will make a remarkable impact despite the challenges.

Key words: Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers, British mainstream primary schools, xenophobia migrant teachers' professional and cultural experiences.

INTRODUCTION

I am a Guyanese trained mainstream teacher. I was a mainstream teacher with a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction. When I first migrated to London, I had over a decade of teaching experience at the senior level. I was at the top of my professional teaching

career in postcolonial Guyana. I grew up in that context and I knew the culture well. I was aware of the norms and forbidden behaviours. I held a senior position and was in the curriculum revision committee. I begun practising as a curriculum consultant and was involved in guiding and

assessing trainee teachers.

There are many ways of getting into teaching in the United Kingdom (Douglas, 2015). When I migrated to the United Kingdom, the culture was different. The professional practices were vastly different. Teachers from postcolonial Guyana could not directly enter mainstream teaching or the PDCE programme without some practice as a supply teacher. Despite doing a second Masters of Art Degree in Special Education Needs in the United Kingdom, I found the conditions in which I was placed to operate very challenging. There were schools with extremely challenging behaviours. The problem was neither content nor pedagogical content knowledge. It was neither managing challenging behaviours nor safeguarding practices. It was not even the challenges of getting acculturated socially and professionally while teaching children who were more culturally diverse and from the capital city of this first world industrialized country (Roskell, 2013).

The problem was being treated as a second class teacher by native teachers who in most cases were less academically qualified than I was at the time. They used their native experiences and cultural knowledge to exercise superiority over me. This experience is the phenomenon of interest this study explored. I began wondering how many other postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers were having these experiences.

I explored the phenomenon of interest in relation to the literature on teacher migration to industrialized first world countries and their placement in public or state mainstream schools. There are gaps in the literature on the cultural experiences of teachers (Roskell, 2013). To the point of the completion of this study, I have not found a similar research on the issue that focuses directly on postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers.

Background: Getting into teaching in the UK as a Guyanese migrant

To become a Guyanese professional mainstream teacher, your initial teachers' training is done immediately after your GCSE (CSEC equivalent in Guyana). This training takes two or three years at the Cyril Potter College of Education. The teacher then proceeds to the University of Guyana and complete a related Bachelor of Education degree (Lashley, 2017). Upon completion, this teacher is then considered a trained graduate. In postcolonial Guyana, this teacher would be considered professionally sound and with continuous professional development he or she would continue to develop and move up the professional hierarchy in mainstream education. This teachers' professional climb would be expedited with a Master's degree related to education or the teacher's professional practice. Teachers' professional growth are expedited by post graduate qualifications (Crehan, 2016)

Once this teacher migrates to the United Kingdom, the professional advantage his/her qualification guaranteed in postcolonial Guyana immediately vanishes. He/she will go from a leader in cultural and professional practices to a

beginning learner/trainee once again (Roskell, 2013). This is a belittling experience for the individual who in most cases has done more extensive studies than the newly qualified mainstream teachers in the United Kingdom. It starts with the National Academic Recognition Information Centre (UKNARIC) evaluation of the teachers' qualification which always results in the qualification reduced to a lower grade. This lowering of the value of the qualification is automatic because postcolonial Guyana is a third world developing country. The Bachelor of Education degree is down graded to an extended diploma. The Master of Education degree added to the extended diploma. This gives the teacher a complete United Kingdom recognized degree. The teachers initial teacher's training certificate or associate degree is down graded to a diploma or BTEC level three. This means that automatic entry in the British public mainstream school systems will never happened at the class teacher level (Douglas, 2015). The teacher is left with the option to start as a supply teacher or teaching assistant and then retrain to achieve British qualified teacher status.

The change of location does not affect a teacher's classroom knowledge and experience. The said teacher while working as a supply teacher or higher level teaching assistant (HTA) will be providing the school with high quality knowledge, experiences and practices at a reduced cost. In many cases after the postcolonial Guyanese migrant mainstream teachers have done some daily supply teaching, they may be given long term placements within British mainstream schools. However, they remain supply teachers. They are not given full teacher appointment. This leaves the teachers in a dilemma of always having to function at least thrice harder than the native teacher. The effort is never recognized and the supply experience can always be ended with a day's notice from the school. However, the teachers do not have the same privileges. Guyanese mainstream migrant teachers are not afraid of the challenge to retrain. Migrant teachers are more likely affected by the attitudes and practices in the schools which see them as second class teachers because they are migrant teachers (Adair et al., 2012).

Postcolonial Guyana is a member of the British Commonwealth of nations. Guyana's mainstream educated system is fashioned after the British education system. It is not equally recognized in the professional circles within the United Kingdom. This is ironic because the qualification which is reduced in value by UKNARIC when the migrant teacher is seeking professional employment. However, the said qualification retains its value when the teacher is seeking to attend graduate school at any university in the United Kingdom where the teacher has to pay overseas student fees. Hence, the postcolonial Guyanese mainstream teacher remains a supply teacher or teaching assistant with reduced pay while the schools benefits from the teachers wealth of experiences and knowledge.

Literature Review

This section presents the literature reviewed in relation to

the professional and cultural experiences of migrant teachers under several categories.

Caribbean Teachers in England

Miller's (2011) study on Caribbean teachers in England (United Kingdom) revealed that there was an intense shortage of primary and secondary school teachers in the UK which led to recruitment agencies hiring Overseas Trained Teachers (OTT's) from the Caribbean states. These teachers were placed in mainstream public secondary schools. While there was some research on the experiences of the teachers placed in secondary schools, there has not been any on the placement in primary schools. This apparent gap in knowledge may need to be filled as efforts are made to understand the underachievement of Black Caribbean heritage pupils in British schools. This phenomenon could be connected to the experiences of migrant teachers placed in the mainstream schools who understand the culture of these learners.

Overseas Trained Teachers (OTT's) experience a loss of professional status, culture shock, financial constraints, uncertainty and isolation (Miller, 2011). This is like taking the engine out of a car and still expects effective performance. The multiple losses migrant teachers experience is not parallel to the remuneration gains.

Migration and teacher employment

Migrant teachers seeking employment in the formal education sector in another territory encounter a number of bureaucratic and other hurdles preventing them from easily taking up employment (Manik, et al., 2006; Miller, 2008; Manik, 2011; Sharma, 2013; Anganoo, 2017). One of the major bureaucratic hurdles preventing postcolonial Guyanese from easily taking up employment is the lowering of academic qualification by UKNARIC.

Migration brings people into contact with entirely new ways of life (Appleton et al., 2006; Washington-Miller, 2009; Lawrence, 2013). OTT bring new and differently innovative ways to be professional teachers, deliver curriculum and design instructional materials. However, opportunities are seldom for the migrant teachers to exercise this autonomy based on professional experiences. They are expected to immediately conform while being micromanaged. This also results in migrant teachers suffering from impairment which is characterised by confusion about one's status in the new education system (Miller 2011; Miller et al, 2014).

Xenophobia experiences of the migrant teacher

Migrant teachers experience xenophobia. Xenophobia is the irrational fear of the unknown, the fear or hatred of foreigners by nationals against non-nationals. Further, xenophobia can be defined as a sensation of fear or phobia toward a person or a given group of people deemed strange or foreign. Furthermore, xenophobia is largely based on

unfounded myths and stereotypes. Thus foreigners could be labelled for local problems being experienced by citizens (Krahn et al., 2000; Vorster, 2002; Handmaker and Parsley, 2002; Samari, 2009; Steenkamp, 2009; Jost et al, 2012; Landau, 2012; Gromova and Hayrutdinova, 2017). Native British mainstream teachers feel superior to migrant teachers even when they are less qualified. This contributes to xenophobia as well. This also results in migrant teachers being doubly blamed or sanctioned for any mishap within the school.

Additional negative experiences of migrant teachers

Migrant teachers face exploitation, discrimination and a lack of job security in the work environment in the host country (Iucu et al., 2011; Jost et al, 2012; Lawrence, 2013). Manik (2014; Araujo and Rodriguez, 2015) also recently explained that immigrant teachers feel exploited when they are not recognised for their qualifications and are paid below their expected salary bracket. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers are no exception to these exploitation and discrimination. They include being paid at a lower scale, being perceived as second class teachers, discrimination and lost autonomy and the social biases perpetrated by local teachers. Local teachers are under the impression that migrant teachers want to steal their teaching jobs (Singh, 2013; Henson, 2015; Kok and Collinson, 2015). This accounts for their attitudes towards migrant teachers.

Additionally, the migrant teachers or OTT's have the challenges in adapting to the new curriculum, such as understanding the philosophy of the host country's education system (Awases, et al., 2004; Matimba, 2016; Makonye, 2017). The migrant teacher has to do this while being under the judging lenses of all (learners, support workers, parents, teachers, governors, community etc).

Statement of problem

Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in the mainstream primary schools have varying negative professional and cultural experience. This study explored the professional and cultural experience of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers. It investigated the teachers' experiences and their feelings about their experiences. Migrant teachers face many challenging experiences when adopting the philosophy of a new country (Awases et al., 2004; Matimba, 2016; Makonye, 2017).

Research Questions

What are the experiences of the postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in the United Kingdom? In order to fully explore this phenomenon of interest, this research attempted to provide answers to the following research questions: -

- What are the professional and cultural experiences of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in mainstream primary schools within the United

Kingdom?

- How postcolonial Guyanese mainstream migrant teachers are handling working in mainstream primary schools in the United Kingdom?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

A descriptive survey approach was employed to conduct this study. The main aim of descriptive research is to provide an accurate and valid representation of (encapsulate) the factors or variables that pertain / are relevant to the research questions (Gentles, et al., 2015). The purpose of this study is to provide representation of the professional and cultural experiences of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in UK mainstream schools. A qualitative approach was embraced to show new understandings of human lived experience of migrant teachers, relying on first person accounts obtained directly through participant interviews (Creswell, 2013 and Gentles et al., 2015; Rahi, 2017; Etikan and Bala, 2017).

Sampling

Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling technique can be used when the researcher do not know how to directly contact potential participant (Creswell, 2013 and Gentles et al., 2015; Rahi, 2017; Etikan and Bala, 2017). Exponential non-discriminative snowball sampling was done to gather the ten participants. It was the most effective sample strategy because the participants were not known and their locations spread across the United Kingdom. The first subject recruited to the sample group was at the same mainstream primary school as I was but she had been there as a HTA for more than five years. She provided multiple referrals. Each new referral was explored until primary data from sufficient amount of samples were collected from ten postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in UK public mainstream schools.

Data gathering

Unstructured interviews are natural extension of participant observation, because they so often occur as part of ongoing participant observation (Patton, 2002 as cited in Jones, 2017). Unstructured interviews were used as the data gathering instrument/tool. The conversations always started via telephone where a direct interview was arranged. I travelled to all participants and conducted all the interviews. The interviews commenced with the migrant teachers sharing their experiences without first being asked a direct question. Despite utilizing unstructured interviews the participants were all asked to provide data on their current school location and their teaching status before migration. In addition, all participants were asked about their current status in

teaching within the mainstream primary school in the United Kingdom. They were also asked about their highest qualification before migration, No. of years in the United Kingdom mainstream schools and whether they retrained in the United Kingdom. The data generated under these themes were tabulated while the experiences stated were reflected as they were stated by the participants.

Data analysis and presentation

This research was conducted following the interpretivist paradigm. Several researchers stated that interpretive understandings of human perspectives are shared with partialities, complexities, complications, contradictions and instabilities in their environment (Pohlmann and Colell, 2017). Recognizing that other researchers acknowledged that human perspectives have partialities, complexities, complications, contradictions and instabilities in their environment, I grouped the perspectives shared by the postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers. The perspectives shared were presented with all their stated partialities, complexities, complications, contradictions and instabilities.

FINDINGS

The findings were interpreted in the construction of knowledge on the experience of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers.

Professional and cultural experiences

The postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers had varying and similar professional and cultural experiences.

All the postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers all have more than five years experiences as OTT's in the United Kingdom. Despite having all this British mainstream teaching experience the teachers indicated still experiencing exploitation marginalization and the constant assessment and evaluation of their instructional approaches, materials and practices by even newly qualified native teachers. The participants indicated that the constant and continuous critical overshadowing presence made teaching more stressful than the actual demands of teaching. The teachers also indicated that they daily considered leaving the profession or teaching in the United Kingdom (Table 1).

Four out of ten postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers who retrained indicated that it took them more than eight years to save the money (£9000) needed to retrain and gain British Qualified Teacher Status. Even the teacher who achieved a second masters degree in the UK indicated challenges and marginalization when applying for promotion. It is a total restart of one's professional life once you migrate to the UK as a postcolonial Guyanese mainstream migrant teacher.

Five out of ten postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers

Table 1: The Academic and professional background of the participants

Teacher Code	School location	Status before migration	Current status	Highest Qualification Before migration	No. years in the UK mainstream Schools	Retrained in the UK
PGMT001	London	Senior teacher	HTA	Degree	5 years	No
PGMT002	Leeds	Head teacher	Class teacher	Post Grad- Masters	12 years	Yes – UK QTS
PGMT003	London	Class teacher	Supply teacher	Degree	12 years	No
PGMT004	London	Senior teacher	HTA	Post Grad- Diploma	12 years	No
PGMT005	London	University lecturer	Class teacher	Post Grad- Masters	10 years	Yes – UK QTS and second M.A
PGMT006	London	College tutor	Class teacher	Post Grad- Masters	10 years	Yes – UK QTS
PGMT007	Kent	Class teacher	TA	Degree	5 years	No
PGMT008	Kent	Class teacher	TA	Degree	7 years	No
PGMT009	London	Class teacher	Supply Teacher	Post Grad- Diploma	11 years	Yes – UK QTS
PGMT010	Portsmouth	Class teacher	TA	Degree	4 years	No

PGMT-Postcolonial Guyanese Migrant Teacher

HTA- Higher Level Teaching Assistant

TA-Teaching Assistant

Note: All participants have qualified teacher status in their country of origin

are currently functioning as teaching assistants. These teachers did not retrain to gain British qualified teacher status. They indicated that the compensation does not equal the stress, challenges and constant demands the average mainstream teacher face in the British mainstream classrooms. They indicated that as higher level teaching assistants (HTA) and regular teaching assistants (TA), they get to practice in mainstream schools utilizing their professional skills to help individual and small groups of learners without the stressful demands on the class teacher in addition to the stress associated with being a migrant teacher from postcolonial Guyana (Table 1).

Six out of ten postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers are at schools in London (Table 1). They indicated that teaching in London as a postcolonial Guyanese migrant teacher is more challenging than any other parts of the United Kingdom. However, they choose to remain in London because it is more likely that they will find persons of similar Caribbean and South American heritage. This allows some cultural identity and socialization with others of the same culture and experience during school breaks. The participants indicated that it is necessary to relieve the stresses of being a postcolonial Guyanese migrant teacher in the United Kingdom.

Four out of ten postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers were senior mainstream school teachers and university tutors. However, none of the four retrained postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers re-attained status beyond class teacher status despite retraining and achieving a second post graduate qualification to the master's degree level. The participants indicated that the pathway to senior appointment for a postcolonial Guyanese migrant teacher is not clearly outlined because there are too many bureaucratic hurdles the migrant teacher has to overcome in order to be considered eligible for these appointments.

Finally, only three out of the ten postcolonial Guyanese

migrant teachers re-achieved formal permanent class teacher appointment in the mainstream primary schools (Table 1). The participants who re-attained formal permanent class teacher appointment indicated that they wished they had retrained as a nurse or some other profession because the stresses associated with this appointment leave them too exhausted to enjoy the rewards.

How postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers are handling the experiences

The teachers are handling the professional and cultural experiences in different ways as the challenges or opportunities arise.

Xenophobia from the learners and society

The postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in this study experienced direct resistance and challenges to their right to be mainstream teachers from Caribbean migrant and native British parents and learners. They challenge the teachers' knowledge, competence and skills just because they were migrant teachers and their accents were different. One teacher indicated that a St Lucian migrant parent attacked her credentials at a parent teacher conference. The teacher indicated that she felt confused and betrayed by a fellow migrant who was working as a cleaner at the local hospital. A child told me to my face that I am not a teacher. I should go be a lunch time attendant or cleaner. His father said that is the role of a migrant.

PGMT006

The parent was so verbose for a migrant like me. She worked as cleaner at the local hospital without any formal education.

What give her the audacity to question my professional competence because I am a migrant? I have qualified teacher status with a degree in Guyana and retrained and achieved British qualified teacher status as well. I did not just settle for a servant job like her. Now it would not have affected me if she had done it when we were alone. She loudly asked the head teacher in the presence of other parents and learners, what are my qualifications to be a year six teacher? How sure is the head teacher that I can deliver the curriculum? The head teacher stated that despite being a migrant I am the most academically qualified teacher in the school. This did not satisfy the woman. She was bold to say I am a migrant I do not know about UK education. This led to an entire month of parents and learners looking at me questioningly. This only ended when my class defeated the other year six in a quiz. It was an unbearably stressful and unsupported period for me.

PGMT009

The little native child in Year five screams at me regularly disrespectfully in class. He shouted that I should not be his teacher. I should not tell him anything. I should go to the cafeteria and serve lunch. He was the only child at the time being xenophobic but he made it spread like a contagious infection. For an entire term, I did not have normal teaching and learning day without at least three visits from senior leadership. It was like they were looking for me to fail. This made my daily experiences unsettling and I even started questioning my own competences.

Xenophobia from native teachers

Nine out of ten postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers experienced xenophobic attitudes by their native British colleagues in mainstream primary schools. The postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers indicated that it created an unsettling experience daily at work. Two teachers described it as:

PGMT005

It started as little indirect references during PPA time. Sometimes my parallel teacher who is newly qualified teacher would say we don't do it that way. How can she be telling me that we do not do it this way? I was at the school three years before her. She met me there. We were me and the other teachers before she came to the school. However, she could have only got such infantry because the other native teachers instigated it. Here the lesser experienced and lesser qualified teacher was daily questioning my planning and professional practices. This made me feel like an outsider all over again after being there so many years.

PGMT002

I was told directly by a teacher who and I were at university together doing the PGCE. I outperformed her at university. I was made to understand she worked hard for the award I

won. She told me directly that I do not belong there. She does not like me and I should not cross her path. How was I suppose to work happily at school when the teacher in the class next door told you to your face she is just waiting for you to make a mistake.

Many researchers have concluded that the negativity in migration coverage by host countries contributed to the xenophobic reactions experienced. These negative reports by journalists are generally narratives of threat, division and inhuman qualities of migrants or their country of origin. These contribute to natives in the host countries having negative emotions towards migrants despite their academic or professional qualifications or experiences. Emotions, particularly negative ones such as: anxiety or fear, also influence how strongly media affect people. This happens because emotions may cause people to interpret information in ways that match their feelings (Allen, Blinder and McNeil, 2017). Some of the experiences of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers are the results of negative reports and stereotypes associated with migrants.

The other participants who are either teaching assistants or supply teachers indicated that they face the xenophobic attitude of learners and teachers whenever they are providing individual support using an innovative Guyanese approach. The lingering eyes, the cynical stare and even the question: 'Are you sure you know what you are doing? We do not do it this/that way. This is a direct xenophobic act of fair of an unknown yet effective strategy or approach. All of the participants indicated that they endure the mainstream teaching system in the United Kingdom because despite the stresses and challenges the overall remuneration and opportunities for learning are better than their country of origin. While financial resources are important, we have seen time and time again that many places are not prepared to use new resources if they were made available, and in fact do not use resources that are readily available now (Duncan and Popp (2017; Nkrumah, 2017). This is the experience of highly skilled professionally and academically postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in the UK. Highly educated migrants like teachers are more likely to go abroad for work because more legal options are open to them, but they are also very likely to enrol in further education once abroad, partly because their qualifications are not recognised (Banerjee and Verma, 2009; Dodani and LaPorte, 2005; Browne, 2016, 2017). The fact is that postcolonial Guyanese teachers like other skilled migrants whose qualifications are not recognized in the host country still have their skills utilized.

Conclusion

The professional and cultural experiences of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in mainstream primary schools within the United Kingdom are very challenging. Their professional autonomy is challenged by the bureaucratic and cultural structures of the United Kingdom. Xenophobia

has contributed to some of the challenges postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers face in mainstream schools in the United Kingdom. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers continue to adapt and rise to challenges. They face the xenophobic attitudes. Some retrained to acquire British qualified teacher status and even do advanced postgraduate studies. On the other hand others used their skills as supply teachers and teaching assistants. This way they still make a remarkable impact despite the challenges.

It is known that countries have bureaucratic, cultural and professional structures to maintain their cultures, customs, traditions, values, curriculum, and perceived superiority. However, when these structures directly affect teachers effectiveness on factors such origin rather than professional integrity and authenticity in practice backed by qualification and experiences then the system is no better than that which it condemns. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers who are skilled and qualified like any other teachers in the profession should be judged on merit and professionalism rather than their nationality or a UKNARIC evaluation which is not actual classroom practices or experiences. This study also revealed that native teachers in an attempt to maintain their supremacy sometimes act in ways which affects the holistic views and practices of the migrant teacher by others and external bodies.

Recommendations

1. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers should try to educate themselves and colleagues about the professional and cultural challenges they are likely to face in the mainstream primary schools in the United Kingdom.
2. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in mainstream primary schools within the United Kingdom should learn the bureaucratic and cultural structures of mainstream education in the United Kingdom.
3. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers should recognize that xenophobia will contribute to some of the challenges they will face and they should prepare for those psychological challenges.
4. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in mainstream schools in the United Kingdom should be prepared to be dynamic and very adaptive. This is important since the practices in no two mainstream schools in the United Kingdom are the same.
5. Postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers should capitalize on their unique skills and talents to become the most effective teachers with professional integrity and authenticity in practice. This should be backed by their qualification and experiences from postcolonial Guyana. This way they will make a remarkable impact despite the challenges.

Conflict of Interest

The author has no conflict of interest to report.

Acknowledgement

I wish to extend gratitude to all the postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers who participated in this study. The lived experiences shared have contributed to the understanding developed about the professional and cultural experiences of postcolonial Guyanese migrant teachers in primary schools within the United Kingdom.

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