

Migrant Academics and their Academic Development Training Needs

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Introduction

In 2014, whilst attending a European Educational Research Association (EERA) conference, we became intrigued by one of our colleagues who spoke about her transition into teaching as a migrant academic. Being both migrant academics, we were eager to explore to what extent the issues that she experiences were similar for us as well as other migrant colleagues. This resulted in us editing a book on a collection of personal narratives of migrant academics reflecting on their teaching journeys in the UK and elsewhere (see Hosein, Rao, Shu-Hua Yeh, & Kinchin, 2018 forthcoming). Through editing the book, it became increasingly apparent that migrant academics may have special academic development needs in relation to their teaching but it was not clear what these were and how they could be best catered for. Further, considering that migrants make up about 28% of academics within the UK, there was a lack of literature on how migrant academics are supported in their teaching journeys although a fair amount of literature existed on the learning support needs of international students. Also, the development of a shared understanding of working in international teaching contexts is still in its infancy which makes the transition for those moving into teaching positions (fully or partly) in other countries more complex. This is unlike international research collaborations which have allowed for more mature understanding of ways of working in research in and with different cultures.

It is these experiences and reflections which informed the research direction for our SEDA-funded study, which enabled us to look more closely into the academic development needs of migrant academics in their foreign pedagogic contexts. In this article, we will first highlight the possible current academic development opportunities available to migrant academics and will then turn our attention to the key outcomes of our research.

Academic Development and the Migrant Academic

Formal Programmes: Postgraduate Certificates

In most universities, there are formal programmes for academics to meet their teaching-related academic development needs. These often take the form of a Postgraduate Certificate (PGCert) that leads to the status of the fellowship of the higher education academy (FHEA). Primarily these programmes focus on early career academics usually within the first few years of their teaching journeys. For those migrant academics who start their teaching in the UK, PGCerts may meet some of their training needs as they are novices in the field and are still developing their understanding of teaching. However, for the more experienced migrant teaching academics who moved during their mid-career and are obligated to take a PGCert may find them patronising as there is an underlying assumption that they cannot teach.

It can be argued that even for the new migrant academics the PGCerts may not always be fit for purpose. The PGCerts often adopt a kind of 'deficit model' expecting academics to socialise into their new teaching culture and adopting the teaching approaches/pedagogic environment of their institution/department. This may not offer opportunities for the migrant academics to contribute to the teaching practices in their new environment based on their own prior learning/understanding of what they might consider as 'effective pedagogy'.

Further, PG Certs can often be quite generic in their content (a perennial issue raised at the discipline level) working on the model of 'one size fits all'. They often do not take into account the contextual differences of these migrant academics – the differences created due to their own previous learning journeys in their own contexts which may have developed their own understanding of good teaching. Further, PG Certs often make assumptions that migrant academics are aware of terminologies (such as the use of modules, semesters, module leader etc) and the governance structures and procedures of UK higher education systems (e.g. validation, second-marking). However, it is fair to say that even non-migrant academics may not be aware of these.

Other Training Opportunities

In addition to the PG Cert, there are other training opportunities available to the migrant academic such as the continuing professional development (CPD) workshops like those organised by Higher Education Academy's (HEAs) 'New to Teaching Workshops', and the learning and teaching days organised by universities which offer a space for pursuing learning and teaching conversations. However, as with the PG Cert, they are often generic and may not be tailored to the migrant academics needs. Further, institutional CPD frameworks accredited by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) can allow mid-career migrant academics to follow a route rooted in their experiences from which they can achieve both FHEA and Senior Fellow status without attending PG Cert programmes. However, the CPD routes are used to demonstrate capability, that is, accreditation, rather than catering to the academic migrants' developmental needs. Hence, these mid-career migrant academics may feel more isolated in their teaching environments as they struggle to find a community or help point to aid them in their academic development needs.

The Study

In September/October of 2016, an online survey intending to capture the pedagogic practices and experiences of academics was filled by about 250 academics from around the world. One of the survey questions asked the participants to share their experiences of the teaching-related academic development training that was offered by their institution and also the kind of teaching-related training they would have liked to have. In the next section, we present briefly some of the findings based on the responses of 53 migrant academics based in the UK.

Findings

The participants indicated that migrant academics had the opportunity to go on formal training for academic development such as a PG Cert and in one case a doctorate in education. There were mixed responses to the value offered by PG Cert in meeting their teaching-related academic development needs, with some finding it quite useful and others finding it 'meaningless'. These opinions were not specific to the stage of the academic career they were at. Participants appeared to have access to a range of CPD training (internal and external) as well as peer teaching opportunities and teaching exchange programmes such as ERASMUS+ (a European Union programme for education, training, youth and sport).

Whilst some academics indicated that their institution provided sufficient training opportunities, other academics suggested that there should be more opportunities for dialogue to allow for an exchange of the different teaching cultures with the view to developing a shared inclusive teaching practice that is globally recognised and relevant. They felt their institutions were not offering sufficient opportunities to develop such an inclusive teaching practice where they could contribute fully to the pedagogic culture of their institution. Some migrant academics voiced the need for more practical sessions, such as workshops on stage/performance training and accent reduction as well as

practical sessions on how to teach. Further, migrant academics expressed the need for a specific induction that would help them understand some of the commonly used jargon in UK HE sector and also helps them to understand the policies and practices of the HE sector in the UK.

Recommendations

Given the findings, we have five recommendations for academic development units/colleagues to consider with respect to the teaching-related academic development needs of the migrant academics working in UK HE.

Pre-teaching information packs

Much of the guidance on how to teach is often offered whilst the academics are engaged in teaching. The native academics may have some advantage from their learning experience as students in the HE environment to adapt to the teaching role in the context they are familiar with. However, for the migrant academics who may not have been exposed to the foreign teaching environment unless they have engaged in a degree as a student at any level within that context, teaching in a foreign context can be particularly challenging. Therefore, on appointment, if they could be offered some sessions during the induction session to how to contextualise their teaching where appropriate/needed would be helpful prior to them embarking on teaching students. This could be supplemented with some online/virtual information that offers support with teaching to these academics.

Specialised workshops and Open Forums

If there are many migrant academics employed in an academic year, we recommend that the institution have a specialised induction workshop for their migrant staff to allow for better acculturation. In this workshop, the migrant academic can be introduced to the British schooling and higher educational system and all its nuances (such as the different school examination boards, the differences in the schooling systems in the four UK countries and the differences in the higher education system in the four countries) and the terminologies and processes within the higher education system (for example, the quality assurance procedures, the types of assessments etc.). In many higher education institutions, the knowledge of the processes is held tacitly and perhaps through these workshops, this tacit knowledge can become more explicit.

However, if there are a smaller number of migrant academics, an online workshop may work well. There is, however, the likelihood that this may make the migrant academics feel more isolated in the system due to limited interactions in a virtual environment and in some cases due to limited understanding of technology which might limit virtual interactions.

Our findings also indicate that the migrant academics feel as if their experiences are not being valued and this can lead to feelings of not feeling as if they belong. Forums should be provided in which migrant academics can share their ideas and experiences in teaching in global universities either at a generic or disciplinary level. These discussions at both the academic and student level can help all academics be more globalised citizens as well as aid in the internationalisation of the curriculum.

Mentoring programme

We recommend a mentorship scheme is established to mentor migrant academics into the teaching processes and practices, terminologies of their institution. The mentor could also help create an enabling environment for the mentee where they feel valued and confident to be able to contribute their pedagogical knowledge in their foreign context. It would be particularly valuable for the

migrant academic to have a more senior migrant academic as a mentor, someone they could relate to and someone who would be in a better place to understand the negotiations the migrant academics have to undertake when teaching in foreign contexts, having done these themselves.

Elocution Lessons

Often some migrant academics do not feel confident in speaking English and are particularly conscious of their accent. The offer of elocution lessons should be put in place for those migrant academics who wish to improve their confidence in front of a class. However, this is a personal issue and would need to be handled sensitively.

Modelling with Peer Observation

In many institutions, a peer observation system operates which is sometimes incorporated within the PGCert. Whilst the peer teaching is important for academics to share knowledge and observe how others teach, some participants may not have the requisite knowledge or expertise to determine what is a good practice. Perhaps, a developmental observation model may be needed to build these migrant academics knowledge first of how to effectively undertake and make use of such peer observation opportunities (Gosling, 2002). For example, participants can observe with an academic developer a more experienced teacher. They can then have a discussion on how the teaching is similar or different to their previous contexts and what pedagogic practices they might want to adopt from the observation. The academic developer could then together with the teacher whose practice was observed could help the migrant academic contextualise the teaching practice and explain why the teaching approach may work for that person given their student body, their personality and teaching experience and environment.

Final Reflections

The study provided food for thought on how migrant academics are often expected to come into British HE system and seamlessly fit in without any due consideration to their previous background and pedagogic experiences as a learner and/or teacher. We hope that this study would help draw the attention of the academic developers and help them reflect on the support currently being offered to the migrant academics and how they can adapt their current support and teaching programmes such as the PGCerts so that these can support migrant academics better.

Gosling, D. (2002). Models of peer observation of teaching. In *Generic Centre: Learning and Teaching Support Network*.

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