Overseas trained teachers in Australia: a study of barriers, skills and qualifications

Wei Guo and Michael Singh
Centre for Educational Research, University of Western Sydney, Australia.
w.guo@uws.edu.au, m.j.singh@uws.edu.au

Abstract

This paper investigates how overseas trained teachers (OTTs) gain recognition for their qualifications and work experience to meet local Australian employment requirements so they can meet expectations about maintaining Australian teaching quality. There are concerns about whether overseas teachers who have had length teaching experience overseas should be judged as beginning teachers in Australia; and if not should they be able to reclaim their previous level of status in accordance with their work experience and teaching competences. The problem is that it seems that they require local qualifications and experiences. This paper focuses on the problems and difficulties overseas trained teachers face under the current NSW teachers registration and employment process. Overseas trained teachers, face difficulties, if not barriers blocking their registration for employment as teachers, jobs hunting and securing on-going employment as teachers. These barriers impact on their confidence and self-determination. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital and field are used to interpret the practices of overseas trained teachers and those whom they engage. It analyses official documents, survey and interview data to identify the kinds of barriers that impede overseas trained teachers in developing their teaching careers in NSW. This paper provides analysis of evidence relating to registration, acceptance, employment and language barriers, the main barriers confronted by the interviewees. The evidence helps us to understand how overseas trained teachers think about how they are positioned in the Australian education context. Most of the interviewees were well-trained and experienced, but some could not find proper teaching positions or quit the profession. The paper recommends that professional and personal support could lead to changes so that more overseas trained teachers can continue their career
in Australia. This assumes that the experiences and qualifications of the overseas trained teachers are acceptable and valuable under Australian guidelines.

1. Introduction

Overseas trained teachers face difficulties, if not barriers blocking their registration for employment as teachers, in job hunting and teaching work. These barriers impact on their confidence and self-determination. Most of the interviewees who participated in this study talked extensively and sensitively about their concerns. It is important to recognise that the voluntary self-selection process may have led these interviewees to focus on certain concerns rather than on other issues. Even so, their accounts help us to better understand how such OTTs think about how they are positioned in the Australian education context, and how they might position themselves. Most of the interviewees were well trained and experienced, but some could not find proper teaching positions, nor could they quit teaching as a career. The question is how can OTTs gain qualifications and work experience to meet local Australian employment requirements so they can meet expectations about maintaining or improving Australian teaching quality? This assumes that the experiences and qualifications of the OTTs are acceptable and valuable under Australian guidelines. This paper focuses on the problems and difficulties these OTTs face under the current NSW employment process and teacher registration. It analyses official documents, survey and interview data to see what kinds of barriers impede OTTs in developing their teaching careers in NSW.

Figure 1, drawn from 111 valid survey respondents, indicates the difficulties that OTTs have faced in NSW. The key difficulties focus on the acceptance of their qualifications and previous employment records (36.94%, n=41), the registration process (32.43%, n=36) and the NSW school system (15.32%, n=17). A variety of responses such as ‘difficulties in entering the system’, ‘unemployment’, ‘qualifications are not recognised or valued’ can often be found in one returned questionnaire. Only 6.31% (n=7) of the 111 valid survey respondents claimed that they never faced any difficulties in the NSW education system. However, the survey respondents reported that problems to do with discrimination, the English language proficiency test and lack of support did not often affect them.
This paper is divided into four sections, providing an analysis of evidence relating to registration, acceptance, employment and language barriers. The initial open coding of the data revealed these to be the main barriers confronted by the interviewees. The barriers may happen before, during or after the employment and registration process, PEAT, or the Pre-employment Program. The researcher put them together here to explore the theme of ‘barriers’. The first section analyses the registration barriers the OTTs faced at the beginning of the process.

2. REGISTRATION BARRIERS

Walsh and Brigham (2007, p. 2) found that ‘systemic barriers include difficulty in gaining accurate information about having credentials assessed (and the cost of doing so), having to return to school for additional education, and also the necessity of somehow gaining “[local] experience” in the school system’.

Anna was a teacher from the UK who came to Australia with her husband. She was very keen to continue her teaching career in Australia as she came from a family of teachers. However, she found that the registration issues did not happen in the way she had expected. Anna thought that a teacher from the UK would not meet much trouble in becoming a teacher in Australia as these two countries share much related curricula and comparable teaching methods.

I thought I will just do some temporary or administration work or anything
that came along just to get some money in the meantime. It took them a very long time. This was not only due to them. It was partly due to the people back in the UK being very slow in giving me proof of where I had taught. It was an absolute nightmare trying to prove that I had done any supply work so I just gave up trying to prove that. I did not even put that in the list because I could not get proof from all the different schools for different days because they do not have such a long record back in the UK (Anna, 19 August 2008).

To get a casual job teaching while waiting for registration can take a long time, because of the need for verifiable evidence. Anna said it might partly be due to not all of her previous working places being able to provide evidence to show her previous work experience. Anna questioned the registration process, which seemed so obscure because she could not find the right person to answer her questions. She was frustrated when the accreditation authority did not allow her to provide original transcripts of her qualifications and verifications of the previous working experience but demanded certified copies:

They would not allow originals. I had never had a proper transcript. So I asked for 3 copies knowing that they would want one and that I should have a couple around. But they did not want an original so I had to copy it and get it sent anyway. I think they have little rules that they are quite funny with. They do not use common sense with a few of these things. They may not do that anymore. They did not want the real thing (Anna, 19 August 2008).

Certification of evidence can prove to be a challenge, not the least because candidates are trying to second-guess the reasoning behind employers’ requirements and may misconstrue the registration process. The request for photocopies of the qualifications was not the last thing that Anna had experienced. The official processing her case then asked for the signature of a Justice of Peace on her copied documents. She could understand that the documents had to be verified by some authorised person but, according to Anna’s experience, the officials who signed her documents were not particularly qualified to sign her documents. ‘So why did it have to be a Justice of the Peace’? After waiting for a long time to pass the assessment stage, Anna received a letter from NSW DET asking her to attend the Pre-employment Program for two weeks. In the meantime Anna had already found a good job that could provide her with a good living:
I had a job which was giving me stability and definite income. I got the letter [for attending the PeP], I’d have to take 2 weeks annual leave to do the course, and then after that I could only get casual work. I was not sure whether I was willing to give up a full-time position where I get holidays and a definite income and all these other things, to work casually (Anna, 19 August 2008).

One’s motivation for becoming a teacher in Australia can be testing. Should an immigrant worker give up a good income in a stable job for an uncertain chance of getting back into teaching? From the perspective of financial motivation, most of the OTTs wanted to start work as soon as possible after arriving in Australia to support themselves, even though they had the passion to continue teaching. The many registration hurdles involved in examining the qualifications and the work experience of OTTs became barriers. These functioned negatively to slow down recruiting the OTTs to fill the gaps in teacher shortages. Paul also suffered a long time waiting for the assessment of his qualifications:

When I got here I was surprised. I was surprised and disappointed at the bureaucracy involved in actually trying even to get my qualifications assessed by New South Wales Teach [NSW Institution of Teachers] or whatever they call themselves. It was simply it was taking too long so I had to get something to get a roof over our heads (Paul, 6 June 2008).

The registration process can feel very ‘bureaucratic’ and lead to ‘surprise and disappointment’ at the time consuming assessment process. This made Paul find other jobs to support the family. The accreditation authority asked Vanessa to prepare the documents with a Justice of the Peace’s verification, which she felt hard to find:

I was speaking to them [case processing officials] and telling them all the things they could get and things that they should not bother with and where to find this and that. I cannot remember anything specific other than saying, managing to find Justices of the Peace for them, because they did not like my things when they were verified by somebody in an official position (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

The matters led Vanessa to comment that ‘NSW has a reputation for being fussy and doubts the authenticity of overseas qualifications’. Rose, another OTT from the UK, said:
I’m not an unintelligent person. I came out here without any transcripts for my degrees because that was sort of on the last page in the tiny blurb after you’ve done everything else. So, there I was with all of the forms submitted to join the program here and the most crucial piece of evidence that I needed was not with me. Therefore, I had to get that from overseas which was a pain. I had not found the overall process of becoming a teacher here particularly easy to follow. From there on in, I had no idea how recruitment operated until I started to look at applying for jobs. Now, I can honestly say that I can see I’ve gone in cycles. For the first six months that I was in Australia I was not able to teach because I still had to go through that whole Pre-employment Program (Rose, 19 August 2008).

OTTs are likely to have valuable experience, for instance as head teacher and/or a senior administrative officer. Rose had worked in several schools in the UK in such positions. She had remarkable work experience and qualifications. Her opinions on the NSW OTT registration system represented the views of many OTTs, who had already passed the skills recognition system of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC). She, like other interviewees had assumed that this proved that they were qualified to teach without further examination of their qualifications:

It seems fairly extraordinary but the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) don’t seem to have any communication with New South Wales Teaching. It’s like they are some kind of god. So even though my qualifications were assessed as good to go by [NOOSR] there was this additional level of having to reply and go through the rigmarole of the whole thing again. As I say when you arrive here, you have to get a job you know. You cannot spend time with somebody else assessing your qualifications (Paul, 6 June 2008).

The mismatch between the NOOSR skills recognition policy and the NSW OTTs registration policies misled the OTTs. Based on the NOOSR report Paul thought that he could apply for a teaching job directly after migrating to Australia. He was not aware that he had to pass another State-level registration process; that this would take a long time and that this was required so as to get approval to teach in NSW. Of course, it is the responsibility of the OTTs to check teacher recruitment information themselves. However, there appears to be no single website which provides all the information to let OTTs know the whole of the teacher registration process, which means more than passing the Federal skills recognition requirements. Perhaps no one really knows.
Another kind of registration barrier for OTTs concerned those who registered as teachers in Australian States other than NSW, but could not get that registration recognised in NSW. Magen registered with Queensland Teachers College and obtained a job with the Queensland Education Department. She also worked as a teacher in Victoria without any trouble. She was recognised in both jurisdictions as being qualified as both a secondary and primary teacher. However, she faced registration barriers in NSW so that she could only teach in NSW, which meant public primary schools:

The NSW DET said no. First of all, you are only trained for primary so you can only teach primary. You can do casual in secondary and primary teaching but you can only teach full-time in primary. So there is a disparity between now, which is very annoying, between the States (Magen, 15 May 2008).

Getting approval to teach in NSW secondary schools in remote rural communities, which are desperate for secondary teachers, is a challenge. After two years waiting, Magen still had not heard from the accreditation authority about her application. During this period, the high school that Megan wanted to work for was suffering severe teacher shortages. The Principal of the high school had to teach some classes and other teachers had to do double classes due to the lack of secondary teachers. Not surprisingly, Magen lost her interest in being a secondary teacher but obtained employment in the Catholic education system. She could not see any sign that her application would be approved in the near future:

I applied 2 years ago. I did not hear from them. Now you will not believe this and this is where I am really getting a little bit cross, but I am beginning to leave it, to say forget it, let them get on with it, because they did not answer and deal with my application, there is no record of them having done any work with me so I said to the deputy head, you do it, you get me through, you put up with it, I cannot (Magen, 15 May 2008).

The NSW OTT registration process may not recognise teachers registered as a secondary teacher in England and in other States in Australia. Magen is a very experienced OTT. For this reason she argued that teachers’ work experience should be considered as a measure of their teaching capabilities, and not just their qualifications:

In teaching, if I may say so from the little bit of experience I have had,
primary training, and especially the way it was done in England, is beneficial. I have taught actually children from 5 to 24. I can tell you the hardest thing to do is your infants, your 5 and 6 year olds, they’re the hardest, and the next hardest is your primary, in your actual method. Secondary, you are up to specialist subjects; it’s almost a free-for-all there, within the confines of the syllabus (Magen, 15 May 2008).

Qualification recognition is a first measure to see whether OTTs are qualified to teach in NSW DET schools. However, for an OTT who had gained recognition in different Australian education system, this does not seem them as matching NSW requirements. Teaching competence and experience are important. Classifying experienced teachers into categories according to the field in which they gained their initial qualification is open to question.

In NSW, the OTT registration process is quite stringent. For example, Sophie was from the UK, and a registered teacher with the ACT education authorities. She lives in a town which is only ten (10) kilometres away from NSW. She thought that there might be more opportunities for work in NSW than in the ACT as it was closing down many schools. However, when she asked to register with NSW DET, the answer was, ‘No. Even though you have worked in the ACT for two years, your qualifications are from overseas’ (Sophie, 12 August 2008). Depending on the initial field of study in which a teacher was trained, this is used to decide whether and where they will be appointed. There is no sense in which career change and professional learning are recognised. Most OTTs have to go through the whole registration procedure again, no matter whether they have worked in other States in Australia. The next section analyses barriers associated with accepting the qualifications and previous work experience of the OTTs.

3. BARRIERS OF QUALIFICATIONS AND PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE

Canadian researchers Walsh and Brigham (2007, p. 2) found that ‘general barriers include the sense that previous teaching experiences are not valued, as well as difficulties with language and accent, in terms of both personal concerns about proficiency and discrimination on the basis of accent regardless of proficiency’. Miller (2008, p. 21) argues that ‘non-recognition of overseas qualifications and prior
work experience can be attributed to a “deficit model” of difference’.

During the interviews, the OTTs quickly responded to questions about their qualifications and experiences, indicating that these were not readily accepted by NSW DET. There was a shared sense that teacher recruitment and employment policies were not accepting of the OTTs experiential knowledge gained through learning. This was as true of teachers from English speaking countries as others. Myles, Cheng and Wang (2006, p. 233) report that ‘although foreign-trained teachers bring invaluable expertise and experience to their new country, it has been virtually impossible for them to work in the [new country] because their foreign credentials do not meet the requirements for [local teaching qualifications]’.

Vanessa started with the stories of two of her colleagues; they were Australian-trained teachers who had few years teaching experience in Australia and had worked overseas for several years. However, she reported that they found they could not find appropriate jobs which matched their qualifications and experiences after going back to Australia. This was because their overseas teaching experiences were not accepted by the NSW DET. Vanessa said: ‘Just imagine what it is like for people not from here trying to negotiate it. I think there is something very badly organised and designed’ (13 August 2008). She continued with the claim that the NSW DET does not have:

a fast track or a different track or a let us negotiate track, it’s … you know I’m all for raising standards and everything else and I think if this all works in this country and people are true to those guidelines and those accreditations you will find that the dead wood will retire. Hopefully you will get that fresh staff (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

Familiarity with the details of the NSW OTT recruitment policies is a key requirement. Vanessa held the view, also shared by other OTTs, that the accreditation process should give recognition to teachers’ experiences and qualifications:

The intentions of [qualification recognition] are good but perhaps things have not really caught up with each other. This is a real difficulty for the image of the profession and for people coming in. I have no quarrels with the intentions, not at all (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

OTTs seek employment in the private or Catholic sector because they could not work
out how the NSW DET system worked. Vanessa also said they did so because of the inflexibility in treating the OTTs, their qualifications and experiences. These comments made it appear that there are no incentive mechanisms to inspire and attract the OTTs, only barriers. Vanessa said one of her friends faced the problem of relating her previous working experience and the NSW requirements:

She was a social worker, but she had not got the qualification. She understood her situation but even so, she had a lot of skills, she had done a lot of special education that I had done. But she was from a different background. There was absolutely no flexibility for her to do anything even as a teacher’s aide. She looked around, and the only thing she could find when she got here was working in a very exploitative situation in a tutoring college. She could see the only way she was going to get ahead or get a job was to go back to University full-time and do the ‘whole Australian thing’ (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

If this is true, the current system might be losing potential teachers due to a lack of acceptance of the overseas experiences and qualifications of OTTs. Even Australian-trained teachers who had overseas work experiences were also not given recognition for this. Sophie worked with ACT Education Department for two years for teaching music. She left Australia to work in Africa as an OTT due her husband’s job commitment. Sophie was surprised when she found that she could not find a job in the ACT after spending twelve years teaching in Africa:

I was away for 12 years and when I came back to the ACT. They said, ‘Oh, no. We do not take any references for people who have come from overseas. We will not accept any references older than three years.’ So I had to start again as though I was a beginner in the whole process, to get my qualifications all done (Sophie, 12 August 2008).

Internationally experienced Australian teachers may not get jobs in public schools. First, Sophie’s overseas teaching experience was not recognised by the ACT Education Department. Second, the ACT Education Department does not accept references older than three years. Ironically, this meant Sophie’s previous Australian work experience was not counted, as she had left Australia over twelve years previously. Due to the above two factors, Sophie had to start over from the beginning, gaining the qualifications and recognition as a new incoming OTT.
Another interviewee, Paul came from the UK, and holds a Bachelors degree in Computing Science and a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE). He said he could not register as an Information Communication Technology (ICT) teacher with NSW DET because his ICT teaching qualification was not recognised. Paul worked as a social worker and IT teacher in a British school for many years and came to Australia for a change of lifestyle. As the breadwinner of the family, Paul had extensive experience in social work and networking IT systems and was eager to continue his teaching career in NSW. However, he failed the qualification recognition assessment as an ICT teacher, even through it was listed on the Internet as a field of teacher shortage. He tried to negotiate with the NSW DET officials, arguing that his previous work experience qualified him to work in NSW public schools as an ICT teacher. The response was that he could only be registered as a Computing Science teacher due to an absence in his ICT teaching qualifications:

They didn’t really explain it. The short answer was it that it [networking] does not appear on your qualifications, as a subject you have studied. Therefore, DET’s assumption is that I was not qualified to teach ICT, but was qualified to teach computer studies. They were essentially assessing my qualifications rather than assessing what I’ve gained in experience and competency through being in the job (Paul, 6 June 2008).

Paul admitted that he did not hold the required qualifications in ICT networking and that he could not provide the evidence as demanded. However, he maintained the view that both his qualifications and his prior experience of teaching ICT in the UK should be considered during the qualification assessment process. Miller (2008, p. 17) points out that ‘several migrants, however, among them OTTs, have been polarised in terms of their qualification levels’. This suggests the need to weigh job applicants’ practical work competences and their qualifications:

It just seems so ludicrous because if only they’d sort of spoken with me during an interview, interviewed me and assessed me on my knowledge of networking, then they would have seen. I tried to prove myself… (Paul, 6 June 2008).

Prior teaching experience overseas poses challenges for respect and valuing. The difficulties in doing this led to previous work experience in this field being rejected. Judging OTTs only by the ‘paper work’ does not help to pick out those experienced
OTTs who might bring valuable knowledge and skills to Australia’s education system, although they might not have Australian qualifications. According to the 132 survey responses (Figure 2), 83.33% (n=110) of the OTTs considered that teaching experience and expertise were the most valuable strengths they brought to Australia. Besides teaching strengths, multi-language competence (5.30%, n=7) and diverse cultural knowledge (10.61%, n=14) were also reckoned as OTTs’ strengths. 16.67% (n=22) of the OTTs mentioned management skills as their strengths, which meant they had experience in senior positions of leadership in schools that might also benefit the NSW education system, and 15.91% (n=21) of 132 survey respondents mentioned more than one aspect of their strengths.

Unfortunately for Paul, the current NSW qualification assessment system did not give him the chance to prove his competence in ICT teaching. This might be due to the inflexibility of the system, with the power of teacher recruitment for NSW public schools being in the hands of a central Government agency. Such registration and employment requirements ‘have led migrants and their supporters to criticise those responsible for failing to move beyond tolerance and accept differences as valid and valuable expressions of the human experience’ (Miller, 2008, p. 16).

Qualification recognition problems can occur during the assessment process. Rebecca was a South African teacher who taught students from Years 4 to 9 and another two
subjects for Year 12, and had South African teaching qualifications. She was called a ‘middle school teacher’ in South Africa. However, there was no connection between Australian and South African teaching qualifications because officially there is no ‘middle school’ sector in Australia. As a consequence, Rebecca’s ‘middle school’ qualifications were only recognised for infant and primary teaching in Australia, even though that she had no work experience or studies as an infant teacher:

When I queried it they said to me obviously the original assessment was actually done at a Federal level … that is the way they do it. They actually have either primary or secondary, there is no in-between (Rebecca, 11 August 2008).

Having migrated to Australia as a secondary teacher it is possible for OTTs not to pass qualification assessments. Rebecca’s skills recognition was initially completed at the Federal level yet did not meet the State level assessment requirements. This means that passing the skills recognition at the Federal level does not guarantee OTTs passing the State qualification assessment. Being teacher at the State level does not match with skills at the Federal level. Miller (2008) points out that:

the claimed neutral assessment and measurement usually disguises itself under the cloak of ‘professional standard’, ‘quality’ or ‘excellence’ without questioning whose standard is put into place and whose interests it represents. Although migrants are allowed into the country, professional standards deny them access to proper employment in their professions (p. 23).

Living in a rural area where there is no ‘middle school’ sector but where they experience teacher shortage, eventually helped Rebecca get permission to work as a casual teacher in a high school. But by then, Rebecca was enjoying teaching in an infant and primary school, although she had no previous experience working with infants.

Anita has a Bachelors Degree in Education and a Masters degree in Child Development, with many years work experience in pre-primary and primary schools in India. During the registration process, the NSW DET misrecognised her qualifications, and designated her as a secondary teacher. This has meant she cannot get a job in primary schools with her Indian qualifications and experiences, which is what she wants:
Because I am a graduate and post-graduate, I was told that is why I am qualified as a high school teacher not as a primary school teacher. I argued a couple of times but they are so stubborn. They didn’t listen anything. They said, ‘No, you are approved under our guidelines’. I am approved only for being a high school teacher. I have to teach only in a high school (Anita, 27 June 2008).

Being trained as an early childhood teacher in India, Anita felt that she was not fit to teach in an Australian high school. She started looking for early childhood and primary teaching jobs but was not successful because she did not have Australian qualifications. This was despite her having considerable relevant work experience. Then she met another challenge:

When I went for interviews for childcare, they told me that they do not recognise this assessment because you should have assessment from DoCS [Department of Community Services]. So, I went to the Department of Community Services. They said, ‘OK, you have no primary teaching. You have to do an early childhood qualification from here. You may get some exemptions’ (Anita, 27 June 2008).

After being declined by many employers and after a bewildering assessment of her teaching qualifications, Anita had to seek local qualifications in order to work as an early childhood teacher’s aide:

Everywhere I am going they want to see the local qualification, the local Certificate III, have you done Certificate III, have you done the Diploma. So basically it’s a rejection of my overseas qualifications. They are not accepting these qualifications. Whatever else they are saying, that I can use outside this country; that’s not true. I have actually faced it; they are not accepting my overseas qualifications or overseas experience. Basically, it is discrimination (Anita, 27 June 2008).

Anita paid $1,600 Australian dollars to gain the Certificate III as a ‘knocking brick’ to apply for jobs. The Certificate III is a much lower level qualification compared to her Masters degree in Child Development. Even though she now holds the Certificate III, she is still not recognised as a qualified early childhood teacher, and so is paid at a lower level because she does not hold an Australian bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education. Miller (2008, p. 18) argues that ‘overseas qualifications and work experience are consistently undervalued, the result of which is wage gaps for
overseas trained workers, particularly those of colour’.

Disappointment and depression come with the devaluing of OTTs qualifications and experiences in the Australian education context. Anita came to Australia with her husband, who was a lecturer at a University in India. Prior coming to Australia, they had worked in Italy for two years. They came to Australia because it is an English speaking country with a pleasant natural and social environment. But the rejection of her qualifications and experience gave Anita a very bad experience, ‘I do not have local experience, local qualifications’ (Anita, 27 June 2008).

The devaluation of overseas qualifications devalues their intellectual capital: ‘Minority Ethnic individuals, especially from the Indian sub-continent, with high educational and occupational qualifications experienced downward professional mobility after arriving in the United Kingdom’ (Miller, 2008, p. 20). In addition to being asked for Australian teaching experience and qualifications, it is also difficult for school officials to accept the different educational philosophies brought to this country by the OTTs Australia claims to need.

Magen had experience working as a head teacher in literacy, and in Deputy Headship in a British school. However, she faced strong resistance when she offered her teaching ideas about literacy. She claimed that she had ideas to help students to learn more words in a short time but she met resistance from the school Principal, denying her the chance to bring her literacy expertise to Australia. She felt that as a foreigner, the education officials were saying, ‘do not come in here and tell us what to do’ (Magen, 15 May 2008). This raises the question of how to treat difference. Miller (2008) argues that:

> though minor differences may be gently affirmed in depoliticised and decontextualised forms such as food, dance and festivities, substantive differences that challenge hegemony and resist co-option are usually perceived as deficient, deviant, pathological, or otherwise divisive (p. 22).

The misrecognition of the qualifications and work experiences of OTTs is a complicated issue in the Australian educational context. The evidence in this section was mostly from unemployed OTTs who were unsuccessful in gaining entry to the
system. However, the evidence might be different if it came from those OTTs who were successfully employed in the system. The evidence might also be different if it came from the NSW education authorities, given the difficult circumstances they face. Given the evidence that Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) is the agent responsible for initially recognising the skills of OTTs at Federal level, the barriers of accepting overseas qualifications and experience might create a set of expectations that could not be met by NSW DET. On the other hand, there is a Chinese proverb, ‘Hua wu chang hao, yue wu chang yuan’, which means ‘flowers cannot always be beautiful and the moon cannot always be perfectly round’. The OTTs also have to consider the problems that may occur and be prepared to face these before coming to Australia. However, as another Chinese proverb states ‘Jie ling hai xu xi ling ren’ which means ‘those who tie the bell can untie it.’ In other words, the education and immigration agents have to take responsibility to ‘untie the bell’ which they have assembled to attract skilled migrant labour. Besides barriers in the registration process and the acceptance of overseas qualifications and experience, the OTTs also faced barriers to employment in their job hunting process. The next section focuses on employment barriers for the OTTs.

4. EMPLOYMENT BARRIERS

This section discusses barriers that OTTs face before, or in the employment process, after gaining approval to teach. According to the survey and interview evidence mentioned in the above sections, the participants expressed their strong desire to find employment positions in NSW public schools. However, Figure 3 shows that 44.70% (n=59) of the 132 survey participants experienced unemployment in Australia. The duration of unemployment lasted from one month up to two years. However, 40.15% (n=53) of the OTTs had just recently arrived and were unable to answer this question. Further, 15.15% (n=20) of the OTTs have never experienced unemployment in Australia. The OTTs also have ‘concerns about whether they will be able to secure employment commensurate with their education and experience even after they have met the requirements for teaching qualification’ (Walsh & Brigham, 2007, p. 2).
A NSW DET (2003) report shows that once the OTTs are approved to teach in NSW public schools, they are qualified to apply for casual or temporary teaching positions in NSW public schools when there are vacancies. However, OTTs:

with approval for permanent full-time and permanent part-time employment may elect to teach on a casual or temporary basis only or on a casual or temporary basis until such time as a permanent position becomes available (NSW DET, 2003, p. 12).

This policy seeks to explain that interim employment opportunities, like casual or temporary positions, are the ones that OTTs can most often expect to apply at the beginning of their career in NSW. This is not unlike the situation for local teachers. All OTTs, as well as unemployed local teachers are placed on a ‘waiting list’, from which are allocated vacant teaching positions. Karen explained the ‘waiting list’ thus:

The gentleman [a NSW DET official] told us that in primary education they have quite a lot of teachers. They actually have a ‘waiting list’. … What happens is when a permanent position comes up you are allocated that position according to when you actually came onto the waiting list (Karen, 16 June, 2008).

This situation is far away from what the OTTs imagined the situation of ‘teacher shortage’ meant, before they moved to Australia. From advertisements and recruitment agencies in their homeland they understood that Australia is facing teacher shortage and OTTs could expect to get permanent positions immediately after migrating into Australia. However, in Australia they learn that:
demand for teachers exists in the secondary areas of mathematics, science (particularly physics), technology (particularly food technology with hospitality), and English (especially with drama), and also in the specialist areas of school counselling and special education. Employment prospects for teachers trained in these subjects are very good, especially if you choose to work in western and south western Sydney and in non-coastal, rural NSW. Teachers of all secondary subjects and primary teachers can find work as casual and temporary teachers throughout the State (NSW DET, 2009a, para. 18).

NSW DET (2009a) indicates that qualified and experienced OTTs have a chance to compete for jobs in some specific subjects, and in certain non-metropolitan areas. OTTs trained and willing to work in these particular subjects/sites may have increased opportunities to be employed permanently by the NSW public schools, but there are no guarantees. The NSW public schools have temporary and casual positions to employ primary and secondary OTTs once they have the requisite teaching approval. After getting teaching approval, the OTTs register their information and preferences online, including their qualifications, expected working places, preferred hours to work and employment status. The system will assign available positions according to the teachers’ preferences, depending on availability, due to competition from other teachers. The NSW Teachers Federation (2007) encourages OTTs to contact School Principals regarding employment possibilities in area where they would like to teach part-time or casually. The NSW Teachers Federation (2007) also suggests OTTs consider offers of work in NSW regional or rural areas so as to increase their chances of being employed permanently. For OTTs who want to gain permanent employment they have to wait until a position is available:

Permanent employment as a teacher is offered only to Australian citizens or permanent residents of Australia. Factors which influence a teacher’s permanent employment prospects include the geographic locations in which the teacher is prepared to work and their teaching area. For example, secondary mathematics teachers are in demand. Teachers who have permanent approval to teach are eligible to apply for advertised permanent classroom teacher positions. These positions are advertised on the Department’s Jobs@DET website (NSW DET, 2009b, para. 22-24).

The NSW DET (2009b) further indicates that the condition for being employed in permanent positions is that only Australian citizens and permanent residents are eligible for these jobs. The teachers who are in demand in specific subjects, or who
are willing to work in particular locations are more competitive in gaining permanent employment. Teachers with permanent teaching approval are eligible to apply for the permanent jobs when they are advertised. However, there is a lack of clarity as to whether OTTs will be employed on ‘a casual or temporary basis only or on a casual or temporary basis until such time as a permanent position becomes available’, or can apply for permanent positions immediately after having NSW DET teaching approval. OTTs can apply for permanent positions by competing for positions advertised on the website. NSW DET also provides another option for securing permanent employment, based on the availability of jobs in certain, mostly undesirable locations:

Under our new staffing procedures, you may be notified by us about other vacant permanent positions in geographic locations that you have indicated on your list of preferences. For these positions, you will have the opportunity to submit a short resume and may subsequently be invited to an interview (NSW DET, 2009b, para. 25).

The OTTs are asked to register online and to indicate their preferred work locations. The NSW DET will inform them when permanent positions are available, according to teachers’ preferences. The OTTs then may apply for these permanent jobs and compete for them through interviews. The NSW DET conducts the same employment procedures for Australian-trained teachers and OTTs, after the latter gain NSW teaching approval. Therefore, the following explanations and suggestions regarding the employment procedures recommended by the NSW Teachers Federation may also apply to the OTTs.

Application online is the first step in obtaining a teaching position. … You will be asked to complete a ‘Nomination of Schools Form’. This indicates the schools or school Districts in which you are prepared to teach. The Federation’s advice is: - Tick the boxes for ‘permanent’, ‘temporary’ and ‘casual’ employment. This will maximise your employment chances. If you tick only the ‘Casual’ box, you will not be considered for a permanent position. You will not be considered for either a graduate recruitment program position, nor be given a priority date for future permanent appointment. You will also be ineligible to apply for any PeP [Pre-employment Program] positions (NSW Teachers Federation, 2007, para. 1-3).

The NSW Teachers Federation (2007) explains the NSW DET’s teachers’ employment procedures in detail. The provision of applications online for teaching
positions is the first step after registering with NSW DET. The teachers are asked to fill out an online form to indicate their preferences for the kind of employment they would like. The three options are permanent, temporary, and casual. The NSW Teachers Federation (2007) suggests that teachers choose all three options to maximise their employment opportunities. This means if a teacher only chooses a ‘permanent position’, s/he will not be given any casual or temporary jobs; s/he will have to wait until a permanent position is available.

This is not practical, because neither online DET permanent position advertisements nor permanent positions by geographical locations are likely to be given to newly registered teachers without any local practical teaching experience. Thus, all teachers (including OTTs) who are newly registered with DET have to nominate all three categories and be prepared to start as casual or temporary teachers. Therefore, OTTs, even those with a considerable amount of teaching experience, have to start their teaching careers again in Australia as they are under the same employment procedures as the new Australian education graduates who also just register with DET. This suggests that their overseas teaching experiences are not being valued, but trigger employment barriers whereby more experienced OTTs cannot gain better employment positions:

DO NOT put down any school or area (School Education Area) you are NOT prepared to accept. If you are offered a school that you can’t accept, your application will be relegated to a later priority date. Your nomination list is not a ‘priority order’ list (first choice, second choice etc.) but ALL the areas in which you are prepared to accept an appointment. The list can be as small or as large as you wish to make it. You may list Districts (School Education Areas, schools, or a combination of both (NSW Teachers Federation, 2007, para. 4).

The NSW Teachers Federation (2007) explains the meaning of the permanent preferences areas on the ‘nomination list’, because teachers may misunderstand it as a ‘priority list’. The teachers can write down several schools or areas where they are willing to work, on their preference list. Some teachers may put down areas that they do no intend to work in, but that are likely to provide a quicker track to permanent employment, like rural or regional areas. However, they might change their minds when they are offered work in a school in these areas. Under this circumstance, the
A teacher will be reassigned to the bottom of the waiting list, and this in turn will dramatically influence their future applications for employment. Therefore, the choices on the ‘nomination list’ are most important to a teacher’s employment.

when your name comes up apparently you’ve got 2 days to say yes or no. If you say no, you go back to the bottom of the waiting list. Some people have been on this list for a couple of years (Timothy, 26 August 2008).

Teachers generally indicate a willingness to teach in metropolitan areas. Not many make schools in rural or regional areas a priority employment choice, unless they really want to work in those areas. The NSW Teachers Federation (2007) suggests that teachers think twice before making this decision, because choosing only a few cherished locations will limit their employment prospects.

Timothy’s understanding of the ‘waiting list’ saw it as an employment barrier for both teachers and schools. For him, the system did not seem to be based on finding the most appropriate teachers for the children, but depended on one’s position on the ‘waiting list’. This might be harmful for maintaining teacher quality:

my school or the school closest to where I live for my son could be good now, but if those teachers decide to get a transfer next week or year, random teachers could be employed because they would be at the top of the list, not because they are the best teachers for the school. Therefore my view is, the children are not getting the best service. They are getting worse things in my view. This is a strange way of running a system of education (Timothy, 26 August 2008).

The ‘waiting list’ encourages casual or temporary teachers to leave the profession if they can find relative stable positions in other fields. Timothy doubts if children receive quality education under these circumstances, as the teachers appointed to succeed those leaving schools might not be the most suitable but are merely the next on the ‘waiting list’. Timothy doubted the argument that, ‘No one would go to schools in rural areas if they were allowed to choose their jobs freely’. He argued that, as in England, ‘Principals are entitled to more power in employment’ (Timothy, 26 August 2008). Timothy thought that people were trying to protect their own jobs and using rural communities as an excuse, rather than addressing their needs. For him the ‘real’ purpose of this system was to set up barriers ‘to restrict competition and to sustain the
interests of the dominant groups’ (Krahn cited in Miller, 2008, p. 23). Timothy said he did not understand the system:

I really do not understand it. No one has given me a really good reason as to why it works like this. People just defend it and defend it. … I tend to find, a lot of your old school teachers, who were in England in the 80’s they had a job for life. Nobody could take that job from them. Once things changed the quality of teaching went up (Timothy, 26 August 2008).

Timothy considered that the current employment barriers are a key issue influencing the quality of teaching in Australia. In particular, the practice of teachers keeping their jobs for their whole life was questioned. Under these circumstances, teaching has been considered as a life long career, to do forever, without changes. Timothy took England’s experiences as a contrary example:

I do not know the quality of the teaching here. The people who tend to defend the status quo the most tend to be old school. The ones who think well if we change this, ‘he does not just hire but he also fires’ he might just get rid of me. That is my understanding of it (Timothy, 26 August 2008).

Teachers who have been in teaching service for a long time fear changes that might mean they could lose their jobs if the employment process were changed. The principals would have more powers to select the most appropriate job applicants. They would also lay off staff due to the limited number of positions. Whether the refusal to change employment practices is one of the reasons causing the long ‘waiting list’ is open to question. For those teachers who are employed, they struggle to maintain their labour rights and benefits by striking. The new incoming OTTs are asking for positions which they were led to believe were available. Timothy mentioned that some teachers have asked him to join the striking teachers, ‘I get people telling me we are striking for this and we are doing that. I am of the view of I just want to get a job’ (Timothy, 26 August 2008).

A key concern for OTTs is to find appropriate teaching positions that can match their skills and experiences; or otherwise to find another job. For OTTs, lacking Australian qualifications and local experience, this places them at a disadvantage. However, their overseas work experience and the specific skills they have are supposedly in demand in Australia, but are not acknowledged and recognised when seeking jobs in Australia.
In particular, the data indicates that most of those interviewed faced employment barriers when they were trying to enter the NSW schooling system. Concerns about their overseas qualifications and teaching competence had not stopped their immigration, but once in Australia it affected their prospects for employment. It is understandable that most of the OTTs expected to start work as soon as possible after arrival. Stable work and better workplaces in Australia were what they thought immigration would provide. However, as Miller (2008, p. 15) points out, ‘these expectations are dashed, if their qualifications and work experience, gained in their home countries, are not recognised as legitimate by potential employers and accreditation bodies’. However, the current complex employment process for teachers severely influences their post-arrival settlement, keeping at least some OTTs out of the NSW public school system. The employment barriers mean schools lose opportunities to employ the OTTs which Australia’s multicultural education system should have.

The experiences of Vanessa and her sister provide a good means to compare the employment process of an Australian-trained teacher and an OTT. Vanessa arrived in Australia at the same time as her sister just finished a teaching degree from an Australian university, and prepared for life as an Australian-trained beginning teacher. Vanessa had several years teaching experience in Special Education in South Africa and the UK; her sister was a beginning teacher with three years of teacher education. The outcomes were not as Vanessa had expected. She thought that her sister would find a job easier than her:

I was prepared to go anywhere. I was not thinking I must get a job within five kms of where I live. I was very open, but I then put my papers into the Department of Education. They wanted all my qualifications (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

OTTs who do not have a strong preference regarding their future work location when applying to migrate into Australia increase their employment prospects. Vanessa took her qualifications and other documents to the Catholic school system, where she completed all the required assessments, including interviews. Within two weeks she was given a permanent job offer from a Catholic school. Her sister was still waiting for an initial response from the NSW DET. After getting another job offer, Vanessa
left the Catholic school. The two jobs indicated that Vanessa’s qualifications and previous work experience were highly valued in Australia, at least in the Catholic sector. The time for the DET assessment ground on and it lost another potential qualified employee. As a newly graduated, Australian-trained teacher, Vanessa’s sister secured a Catholic school job offer a week before classes started. There was little time for her sister and the school to get to know each other; it was just like a blind date. Vanessa said,

She just took herself off to the school, had a wander around for a couple of days before school started. She turned up on the first day, ‘Hello I am here. Hello everybody’. … She could have said no, but by the sounds of it, you never say no to those because they are like hen’s teeth and you have to take them. … Now she feels well stuck in a sense. Once you get a permanent job you do not feel you can change into any other. You cannot go out of the Catholic sector into the DET sector (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

It is very hard for teachers to forgo a permanent position in one sector and move to another. Vanessa’s sister is now ‘stuck’ in a sector she did not want to work in. Both OTTs and Australian-trained teachers face employment barriers, including not having many chances to transfer across different schooling sectors. Therefore, the employment barriers among the different schooling sectors influence teacher circulation:

Now, she [her sister] was fully into the Department, you know targeted graduates. Now she feels she cannot move anywhere because if she moves she will lose her permanent job. You cannot go back to it, you know. Everyone just feels they’re stuck. I think they are. They just hold on because they are too scared if they go anywhere else they will never get back to where they were in terms of security (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

Being used ‘stuck’ in a job one does not like focuses attention on this particular employment-inhibiting movement across different education sectors. Apparently, it is difficult for teachers to transfer among Australia’s different educational sectors. Perhaps this is because the education system does not have many opportunities for more appropriate employment. Vanessa concluded that this indicated a ‘lack of competition’, favouring ‘traditional protected employment’. She also said, ‘Australia has got a reputation which is, if it is not Australian then it is regarded with deep suspicion’ (Vanessa, 13 August 2008). Timothy explained:
I think the [qualification] accreditation is good because you make sure you are getting people who can do the job correctly. Any amount of paperwork that I’ve sent in for the last 18 months can say what it needs to say. So accreditation proves it. But once you have actually got it, to get a job I find that really frustrating and this is where the problem lies (Timothy, 26 August 2008).

The qualification recognition provides the evidence to show the skills of the OTTs are necessary, to help employers to select the right person to teach. However, after spending eighteen months trying to get his NSW DET teaching approval, Timothy had become disappointed with the process. It was really hard for him to find a position, even a casual one:

To get my NSW accreditation you have to do two weeks [PeP] to prove that you are a teacher. This is so, even though you have gone through an 18 month application process to show every single CV, every single written reference. You have backed it up with evidence upon evidence. When you get here, they still will not let you teach. You then have to go again… I said to them, ‘I have already given you this.’ They say, ‘No, this is a separate process, you can now get accredited’ (Timothy, 26 August 2008).

Getting accredited only means the OTTs are qualified and approved to seek a teaching position in NSW public schools. It does not mean they are assigned automatically to a teaching position:

Their way of getting permanent staff is very off-putting. I can see it will take a while. You can see why people that have gone through the old system want it to stay that way because if they have been waiting 6 years to get this position they have been promised at the end of doing whatever after 6 years. You can see why they do not want it to be stopped. I suppose there has to be a line somewhere. It’s like anything where you want change doesn’t there? Speaking to Australian teachers, some of them who have been out for 5 years or whatever are very annoyed at the thought that jobs can then come down to interview. Other people think it should be very transparent. All jobs should be available to everybody. You should be just interviewed to get a position. I never in my wildest dreams thought that it would be anything different than that anywhere else. It was quite a surprise that they do it with this ‘waiting list’ method in NSW (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).

In NSW, permanent positions are not advertised to attract the most experienced and qualified teachers but are allocated according to the length of service and the ‘waiting
list’. Some teachers, especially those who were in the teaching service for a few years but without permanent positions, could not move to available job vacancies easily because they were on the permanent job waiting list. They were afraid of losing their place on the ‘waiting list’ and losing the chance for a permanent position if they left for other jobs, like overseas vacancies. Such overseas work experience might not be counted after they returned to Australia. Therefore, some Australian-trained teachers with overseas work experience might have to start over again at the bottom of the waiting list.

The ‘waiting list’ seems to favour those casual or temporary teachers who work hard and are loyal to their schools. But it might be unfair to those highly experienced teachers, qualified university graduates and newly arrived OTTs. The competition for teaching positions does not seem to be built on competence but on one’s position on a waiting list. This means, there are few chances for OTTs to show their specific teaching skills to get permanent positions directly. They are largely judged by their documents, the PeP Practicum and their willingness to persist with the ‘waiting list’. This represents a type of ‘protected employment’. A dilemma in this situation is that schools lack the administrative power to advertise job vacancies to recruit the most appropriate teachers.

Those with the symbolic capital, the established group, hold on to it by producing barriers to prevent latecomers from entering the system. The ‘waiting list’ method may have negative effects by pushing the teachers who cannot afford to wait out of the profession. This might be contributing to Australia’s teacher shortage. The teachers on the ‘waiting list’ do not want to teach in rural or regional areas, but are waiting for metropolitan positions. Apparently, the teachers who would like to teach in rural areas do not see the chance to apply for these jobs as they see themselves at a lower position on the ‘waiting list’:

It is unfair for the school to only be able to offer one job every however many years to somebody on a permanent position. It’s just very strange. A lot of teachers put up with being temporary jobs and not knowing what to do. Not being able to secure a full-time job, they do a lot of casual work. They just do it because that is the way it is. I came from a place where that is not the way it is. I find it quite hard to accept that it’s so different here (Vanessa, 13 August 2008).
It can be difficult to understand the NSW school employment system. The OTTs interviewed in this study could only get temporary or casual jobs, waiting many years for a permanent position. The ‘wait time’ for a permanent position leads some OTTs to either choose to do temporary jobs for an uncertain period in the hope of securing permanent employments, or they get a job in another sector, or they leave the profession altogether.

Edward is from the United States of America. He studied in an Australian university as an exchange student. He has a Bachelors degree in Science Teaching, which was designed for students to teach Science and Physical Education in US schools. He came to Australia to marry an Australian woman. After completing the NSW DET OTTs registration process, he thought that he would find a casual job around the area where he lives. However,

I went around to all the schools in Wollongong. They all turned me away saying, that their casual lists were full. That I had to try at the beginning of the year and then they would let me in. (Edward, 24 June 2008).

According to the NSW DET teacher employment system, Edward, an OTT, can apply for temporary or casual teaching positions in NSW. He wanted to apply for teaching positions near his home so he could live with his wife, who was doing a teacher education course in Wollongong. However, there were no casual teaching jobs available in the Wollongong district in the year he gained the NSW DET teaching approval. Then he had to wait until the following year to see if there were any available positions, if he wanted to teach in that area.

To support the family, Edward finally chose to work as a salesman in an electric goods store. The limited casual or temporary employment positions might be another employment barrier for qualified OTTs to hurdle if they wanted to enter the NSW public school system. Some of those OTTs who did well in their PeP practicum could not get casual positions, as these were not always available in local schools:

Trying to get your foot in the door here is almost impossible. I got the job by word of mouth. The reason I got the job was because I had done my placement at a local school. I got on really well. I thoroughly enjoyed it. They wanted to have me this year, but did not have a post to fill (Rose, 19
Finding a job in the Sydney metropolitan area can be a challenge. Rose emphasised that her previous overseas work experience had brought her respect from employers. She did well in the PeP practicum and the school wanted her to join them. However, she had to wait because the casual list was full that year.

Edward and his wife finally received two teaching positions in a remote area school. His wife was given a permanent position because she is an Australian citizen. However, Edward could only get a casual job because as he explained:

It [marrying an Australian] gives me employment rights but not with the government. I can only work casually with the Department. I do not think I cannot take any government position that is as far as I understand it (Edward, 24 June 2008).

Edward understands the NSW DET only employs Australian citizens and permanent residents in permanent positions, even though he was prepared to teach science in a remote Indigenous community. Marrying an Australian did not give Edward citizenship or permanent residence rights. The immigration laws are such that:

The spouse visa allows you to enter or remain in Australia on the basis of your married or de-facto relationship with your partner:
1. on a temporary visa (usually for a waiting period of approximately two (2) years from the date you applied for the visa)
2. on a permanent visa if, after the waiting period (if applicable), your partner relationship still exists and you are still eligible for this visa (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2009).

Edward did not know whether he would have to leave the remote area school, given the year it would take to get Permanent Residence. On the one hand, his wife would lose her permanent employment if she left with him. On the other hand, Edward could not gain a permanent position before becoming an Australian Permanent Resident:

The Principal [of the remote school] knows everybody. This guy has been around teaching forever. He is ancient. He knows everybody. He has gotten on to politicians. You name it he has contacted them to try and get me into this permanent job. The Department keeps saying no, because I am not a Permanent Resident. So they cannot employ me permanently. So what he is
doing now is to try and get Immigration to speed up my Residential status (Edward, 24 June 2008).

The School Principal tried to raise Edward’s salary to a similar level as that of permanent teacher, to try to keep him in this remote Indigenous school. The School Principal was also keen to get Edward a permanent position in order to try to keep this couple in this remote school that suffers greatly from teacher shortages. However, the NSW DET continued to decline the Principal’s application because of Edward’s temporary residency visa. Therefore, the Principal asked DIAC to speed up Edward’s process for obtaining Permanent Residence. From Edward’s experiences, we can see that OTTs’ residence classification becomes another employment barrier for gaining a permanent position, even in a remote school where there is a teacher shortage. When asked, ‘given the teacher shortage in remote Australia, do you think it could be much harder for you to get a job in this country’, Edward answered:

How much harder, I honestly do not know. It was such a pain in the arse for me to get the certificate that says that I can teach in public schools. That was probably a 3 month process. You could not make it much more difficult (Edward, 24 June 2008).

The teacher employment system in NSW can be a cause for disappointment for some OTTs. As a science teacher, Edward can only get short term casual teaching in a remote Indigenous community. Permanent positions are so hard to get because of his temporary residency, despite having an Australian wife. He expressed his intention to move to other areas for teaching, although his wife’s permanent position would be sacrificed. A similar experience also happened to Veronika, from Russia. She tried to find a permanent position teaching Russian.

It took me quite a while to get my permanent residency. It was not a straightforward procedure. Getting permanent or casual approval employment all depends whether you are an Australia permanent [resident] or not. Therefore, for some time I could not get into that field (Veronika, 27 May 2008).

It is not possible to be employed as a permanent teacher if one’s visa classification is not that of Australian Permanent Resident. Veronika was told that teachers of Russian were in demand, but only one school in Sydney provided the course at that time.
Veronika finally gained a permanent position after completing the Permanent Residence process, which takes several years.

Medlyn was a primary teacher in Ireland who majored in languages. She came here with her Australian fiancé. Medlyn did not try to find work through the public school system but with the Catholic and private sectors. She applied for a job advertised in newspapers. A private school provided her a chance for an interview:

I did not get anything from the State, I was told there was a thirteen year ‘waiting list’ for a job. The Catholic people said, ‘Oh, besides the fact that you have taught already we still want you to pass a 2-3 week free teaching’. I did a couple of weeks with them. I thought this is going to be difficult to get a job. Luckily I got into the private sector. I did not have to deal with any of the red tape (Medlyn, 18 August 2008).

Among the reasons Medlyn did not try to find a job with the NSW DET was that she did not receive any employment information from the Department and was told that it would take a long time to wait for a job. Medlyn’s comments reflect the worries and anxieties among OTTs about their employment futures. After a series of job interviews, Medlyn succeeded in getting a teaching position in a private school in Sydney. She felt relieved that she did not have to deal with the amount of documents to prove her teaching competence, although the private school income would be less than the government schools.

Sophie lives on the border of NSW and ACT. She registered with both the ACT and NSW Education Departments but could only find casual positions on either side of the border. She does relief teaching in the ACT and crosses the State border to do casual teaching in NSW. She found that:

it was awkward because you would be offered this work for 1 day here [in ACT], and then you would be offered work from another school [in NSW]. They would say we want you all week. I would say, ‘Well I have committed to doing a day for this other school. It was very difficult to get regular work (Sophie, 12 August 2008).

The unstable job commitments in both ACT and NSW made Sophie feel tired as she commuted from one State to the other during the week. She felt it was very hard to find a fixed teaching position with regular income in either State to support her family.
Finally, after struggling to find secure employment, Sophie quit her teaching career, after finding full-time work as a teaching assistant.

Given the evidence analysed in this section, it can be clear that these OTTs have faced employment barriers hindering them in getting a job. However, it should also be noted that some of these employment barriers, such as the ‘waiting list’ system and the online teaching preference registration system, are not directed against OTTs in particular but apply also to Australian-trained teachers. The following Figures 6.4-6.7 may help us to better understand the employment status of the OTTs.

Figure 4 indicates that there 41.67% (n=55) of the 132 survey respondents started teaching in Australia between 2005 and 2008 and 5.30% (n=7) started teaching before 2000. 12.88% (n=17) started teaching between 2000 and 2004. Due to the survey, there was a large number of OTTs who had just arrived; 40.15% (n=53) of these 132 survey respondents had not started teaching yet.

**Figure 4**

*When did the OTTs first start teaching in Australia?*

There are 79 (59.85%) of 132 survey respondents had taught in NSW until 2008, if we calculate the figures in Figure 4. Figure 5 shows localities of the first teaching job of these OTTs. There were 64 valid responses within these 79 OTTs who had taught in NSW; 70.31% (n=45) of them started teaching in NSW metropolitan areas, and 29.69% (n=19) had their first Australian teaching job in NSW rural or regional areas.
Figure 5
Place of first Australian teaching job

Figure 6 shows the current teaching places of 62 valid survey responses. Due to similar numbers of valid responses in Figure 5 and Figure 6, the researcher considers there is comparability between these two Figures. Fifty nine point sixty eight (59.68%, n=37) of the OTTs are teaching in metropolitan areas; this has decreased in comparison with 70.31% (n=45) in Figure 5. The number of OTTs who are teaching in rural and regional areas increased from 29.69% (n=19) to 40.32% (n=25) in Figure 6. This might be a positive signal that strategies for attracting OTTs to teacher shortage areas are working. There are 67.11% (n=51) of OTTs teaching in government schools and 32.89% (n=25) of the OTTs are working in the non-government sector, within the 76 valid responses.

Figure 6
Current teaching locations of OTTs

Figure 7 shows the general employment status of these OTTs. There were 101 valid responses for this question; 70.30% (n=71) of the survey respondents were employed
or would be employed as temporary or casual teachers, while only 29.70% (n=30) of the OTTs had permanent teaching positions.

![Bar Chart](image)

**Figure 7**

**Employment status of OTTs**

If we compare figures in Figures 6 and 7, it is not difficult to find that 30 OTTs with permanent teaching positions represent 48.39% of the 62 OTTs who are working in NSW schools. This figure may help to understand teacher employment strategies conducted by the NSW DET (2009a), where OTTs may start from temporary or casual positions in their first years, like the 41.67% (n=55) of the 132 OTTs (see Figure 4) who started teaching in Australia after 2005; many of them might have not been yet promoted to permanent positions.

It is not difficult to understand that most OTTs might expect to be employed immediately after arriving in Australia, as they have to support their families and many are aware of Australia’s skills shortage. The registration and employment barriers may keep some of them out of teaching, and lead some to transfer to other professions or occupations to ensure they have stable incomes. However, we may also see that the OTTs, as new incoming teachers, have disadvantages, associated with the lack of local teaching experience and not being familiar with the system, although they may have many years teaching experience overseas. It may difficult for the education authorities to believe that OTTs are capable of taking permanent teaching roles in just a short time. Thus, OTTs typically start as temporary or casual teachers, like many university teacher education graduates. Among the employment barriers, it is the temporary visa that is the barrier that goes against only the OTTs, and this is a
‘problem’ and this may be caused by the DIAC. In addition to the registration barriers, barriers to acceptance of their qualifications and work experience, and employment barriers, the OTTs also face language barriers in the Australian education context. The language barriers exist not only for NESB OTTs but also for native English speaking OTTs.

5. LANGUAGE BARRIERS

The survey participants were asked to indicate what they considered their English competence to be, in terms of their general English language capability, knowledge of students’ informal language, and their knowledge of subject-specific language. Figure 8 indicates the confidence of OTTs’ in their English language abilities. The survey responses (N=132) indicated that 94.70% (n=125) of the OTTs were confident with their English proficiency. They claimed to be able to communicate in English without any problem. The survey respondents were less confident with their ability to understand and use the informal Australian English of their students. 64.39% (n=85) of the NSW 132 survey respondents were confident with Australian students informal language. 90.91% (n=120) of the 132 survey respondents indicated that they were fairly confident with their abilities in subject specific language. There were no noticeable differences between the presumed language proficiency of survey respondents who had experienced unemployment, compared to those who had not rated themselves highly across all three areas of English.

Grenfell (1998) indicates that ‘language arises out of interactions with language and between people, which are constructing and constructed according to intent, the limits
of context, and degrees of shared meaning’ (p. 74). The interview evidence shows that some of the OTTs still had some problems which made it difficult for them to fit into the Australian education system. However, most of them considered their English competence was good enough to teach in Australian schools. Interestingly, language barriers exist not only for teachers from non-English speaking countries, but also for native English speaking OTTs. A teacher from India felt she was made fun of; her accent was seen as a source of amusement by students and her colleagues, although she was a hard working teacher:

It is not our fault that our accent is not like you. English was our second language in our home country. They do not think that we are clever as them because we know so many languages. They know only English. We know Italian, we know Punjabi, we know Hindi, we know Urdu, and we know English. Five languages, [but] they don’t think like that (Anita, 27 June 2008).

OTTs from India know that their English accent is different from Australian English. Anita she had no problem communicating with the locals. But this difference seemed to be a barrier in her job hunting and teaching. However, she considered that people should focus on her multilingual competence and skills in managing these languages, instead of just looking at her accent as a deficiency. Veronika, who was from Russia said:

So I, being honest, I was not very comfortable. That is why I decided not to go ahead in that direction. I always felt conscious. I always felt that my accent was seen as interfering with my knowledge. So yeah, I was not comfortable. That is why I am dealing with primary, with little kids, because I would not, no I would not want to go into anything with the High School (Veronika, 27 May 2008).

OTTs may lose their self-confidence due to their ‘foreign’ English accent. This impeded Veronika’s career development, although her accent was hardly different from local Australians. Veronika felt herself to be inferior due to her accent. She could not fully contribute her knowledge to the Australian education system. She did not even want to try to teach high school students, as she was afraid that her accent might be ridiculed by them. The language barrier affects not only NESB OTTs. Native English speaking teachers face challenges: Australian educational jargon often confused Magen.
Educational jargon was the thing that got me a little bit. You know I found that confusing and disconcerting. But I had more to think about than what words to be using. You know, I wanted to get on with the job (Magen, 15 May 2008).

Magen experienced trouble with Australian education jargon. She could not be understood by students, although she came from England. It was not a matter of Magen speaking standardised English. It has to do with the problem of OTTs having to fit into the Australian education system by learning its specific language. Magen said that she would get used to this as it was necessary for keeping the job.

6. DISCUSSION

The global circulation of workers in general, as well as of teachers in particular, exists for several reasons. However, for newly arrived immigrants, Australia is a society in which there is:

An ambivalent coexistence of outward-looking multiculturalism and Anglophile xenophobia [that] leads some to regard Australia as having a successful multicultural society in which over 100 diverse ethnic/linguistic groups live democratically together, and others to criticise it for its hostile treatment of some ethnic minority groups (Hickling-Hudson, 2005, p.341).

For Australian education, OTTs are a beneficial supplement for schools, especially in some specific subjects. Hartsuyker (2007) indicates that OTTs and teachers from non-English speaking backgrounds bring ‘a range of experience, cultural perspectives and languages to … schools, and are important in a multicultural school context’ (p. 48). This situation would seem to offer opportunities for OTTs who have relevant Bachelors or Masters degrees and several years of teaching experience in their countries of origin. It might even suggest they could become one of the key sources of labour for the Australian teaching force. Hickling-Hudson (2005) argues that ‘individuals have not a single, fixed “essence”, but that they construct multiple identities in a process of refining and reworking values, beliefs and ways of seeing the world’ (p. 343). OTTs have to draw on this when confronting barriers to making a teaching career in Australia.
Most of the issues raised by the interviewees focus on the complicated and lengthy registration process; their overseas teaching experiences not being accepted and valued, and issues concerning their employment status. Miller (2008, pp. 16-17) indicates that “in deciding who are most desirable for “admission”, the state sets the parameters for the social, cultural and symbolic boundaries of the nation as manifested in the “race nature” of immigration policies. And the non-recognition of qualifications and experiences acts as a barriers to integration’.

However, the OTTs interviewed for this study report confront a range of barriers. Acquiring Permanent Residency status is essential for applying for permanent teaching positions in NSW; this is a first barrier. OTTs with temporary visas cannot be employed in permanent teaching positions even in specific instances of severe teacher shortage, for instance, for a Science teacher in a remote Indigenous community. This can be understood in terms of citizenship being ‘a legal status based on rights, in the whole, compatible with the conservative ideology of the duties and responsibilities of citizens and is a strongly state-centred conception of political community’ (Delanty, 2007, p. 15). It is not difficult to understand that citizenship is a special kind of membership that entitles the members to rights but also to obligations, such as contributing to forming the nation’s citizens through education (Slaughter & Hudson, 2007). Delanty (2007) argues that in the context of contemporary globalisation:

migrant groups have become more and more a part of the mainstream population and cannot be so easily contained by multicultural policies and, on the other side, the ‘native’ population itself has become more and more culturally plural due to the general pluralisation brought about by post-industrial and post-modern culture (p. 18).

However, the restrictions of residential status on positions of permanent or full-time employment ‘excludes a large number of undocumented workers [or temporary workers which] will contribute to the formation of an immigrant underclass that is legally as well as economically disadvantaged’ (Sassen, 1998, p. 49). Hence, restraining the potential contributions of temporary OTTs, either in educational or economic terms, has the potential for negative outcomes. Hickling-Hudson (2005) argues that:
discourses of who are the real and less real Australians reflect and are constitutive of power relations dominated by British-derived cultural hegemony, still entrenched despite the growing diversity of the population, the increasing support for various levels of multiculturalism, and the articulation of multicultural aims by governments (p. 341).

Australia is an immigrant country. However, it is very much like Miller’s (2008, p. 16) characterisation of England, namely that ‘the openness and tolerance has been increasingly threatened by a series of government initiatives targeted at restricting the privileges and freedom of migrants’.

The Australian education context is promoted as a field in which OTTs are recruited to practise (Hartsuyker, 2007). This ‘field’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is a network where the relations between Australian education authorities and the OTTs have been configured in certain positions. The structure of this field depends on the amount of capital and power their counterparts possess or lack. Grenfell (2007) argues that ‘entry into the field depends on accepting, at least implicitly subscribing to the pre-existent forms of the field’ (p. 55). The OTTs have to accept the Australian education and employment rules that are the field in which they operate, although ‘acceptance and the logic of practice implied by it, is therefore a kind of “self-deception” but one which might still bring its rewards’ (Grenfell, 2007, p. 55). With regard to cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), such as the education qualifications and work experience of the OTTs, these ‘have value to the extent to which what passes as having legitimate value is known and recognised’ (Grenfell, 2007, p. 61). Despite the OTTs having such cultural capital, ‘the capital accrued from educational institutions only has value in fields that recognise and share this value’ (Webb et al., 2002, p. 111). Thus, within this specific field of Australian education and employment, the capital that a certain group has but other groups do not have, creates a basis for distinctions among different social groups, and creates divisions between upper, middle and lower social groups (Grenfell, 2007). Therefore, this mechanism ‘occurs in a “misrecognised” form; part of its power is that it is “occluded”, or at least not open to conscious control or acknowledgment’ (Grenfell, 2007, p. 61).

The OTTs then are classified as non-Australian teachers who have deficits in their qualifications and a lack of local work experience, despite an immigration process
that leads them to assume otherwise. Therefore, different terms and regulations are generated, ‘to differentiate between Australians considered “real” and “non-real”’ (Tsolidis cited in Hickling-Hudson, 2005, p.341). This leads to a misrecognition of the qualifications and work experiences of the OTTs at various points, some of which become barriers to their careers as teachers. The cultural capital that the dominant agents—NSW education authorities—possess, becomes ‘associated with ‘highbrow’ aesthetic culture and analytically and casually distinguished from technical forms of knowledge or competence’ (Swartz & Zolberg, 2004 p. 7).

According to Bourdieu (1986), language can be taken as a form of cultural capital. Thus, besides the registration and acceptance barriers, for OTTs from non-English speaking countries, language becomes evidence of another capital they are lacking, namely being native English speakers. Webb et al. (2002) indicate that language is one form of cultural capital that with others, ‘shape, determine and help reproduce social relations, and the different power relations that pertain in our culture have no necessary basis’ (p. 117). What does this mean for OTTs from NESB countries? Grenfell (1998, p. 73) indicates that ‘words are never just words; language is never just a vehicle to express ideas. Rather it comes as the product and process of social activity which is differentiating and differentiated’. Thus, there is no doubt that overseas trained teachers should have sufficient English competence to support their teaching in Australia.

However, Brubaker (2004) finds that the examiners of people’s English language proficiency are not, and cannot be neutral with respect to the test-takers’ social origins, and may over-emphasise certain aspects of language and style ‘which more than any other aspects of educational performance, are heavily dependent on cultural capital’ (p. 42). Grenfell (1998, p. 73) argues that ‘language should be examined in terms of the relationships from which it is generated’. The field of Australian education is multivalent; thus, ‘forms of thought are developed not simply in terms of the content of knowledge but through a whole relationship to language, which itself was acquired ipso facto in the process of gaining linguistic mastery’ (Grenfell, 2007, p. 105). OTTs with language problems may enhance their language competence in the process of exercising knowledge, but they probably need to do this before migrating to Australia.
7. CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed evidence of the barriers when OTTs try to integrate into the NSW public education system. The barriers which were explored relate to registration, employment and language. The key problems the interviewees raised focus on the lengthy registration process for recognising OTTs’ qualifications; the requirement to have local Australian work experience and Permanent Residency status as essentials to gain permanent positions in the NSW public schools. There were also issues with language difficulties for some OTTs. The language difficulties affected communication with students, parents and teachers, with the issue of accents being a key concern. However, teachers from English speaking countries also faced language problems, especially in the use of different educational terminology. This paper raised a question of whether OTTs who have had long teaching experience overseas should be judged as beginning teachers in Australia? They aspire to reclaim their previous level of status in accordance with their work experience and teaching competence. This partly requires local qualifications and teaching experience. Additional professional and personal support could lead to some changes so that OTTs can continue their career in Australia.

Reference


Allen & Unwin.