

## **Principals' Perspectives and Experiences on Coping with the Reality of Teacher Migration A Conversation with Four Principals**

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### **Abstract**

This study shifts away from traditional, hegemonic frameworks to examine teacher migration through the lens of four school principals who faced the sudden challenge of teacher shortages due to teacher migration at the start of a new academic year. These principals, representing various educational levels within a small island developing state (SIDS), recounted inclusive, context-sensitive leadership strategies they employed to navigate the complexities of sudden teacher migration. Rather than focusing on the causes of migration, this research addresses gaps in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of selected school principals in Jamaica as they adapted to these disruptions.

Key coping strategies developed by these principals included setting up mentorship programmes to provide continuous support and training for new staff, leveraging alumni networks and public-private partnerships, engaging final year students from teacher colleges, sharing teachers across schools within proximity, and incorporating technological tools to facilitate learning. Although these strategies emerged out of necessity at the start of the 2023 new school year, they evolved into structured approaches through collaboration and gained further relevance through acceptance by the community and the Ministry of Education, Skills, Youth and Information, Jamaica. Ultimately, these adaptive measures have become integral to informing school planning, policy development, and practices aligned with the academic and strategic goals of the respective schools.

*Keywords:* Teacher migration; Principals; School leadership strategies; Coping mechanisms for teacher shortages; Small Island Developing States (SIDS); Inclusive leadership in education; Caribbean

### **Introduction**

Schools across Jamaica, at all educational levels, continue to address the issue of teacher migration. School leaders, specifically principals, are the stakeholders who face the brunt of this problem to locate appropriate replacement. Sometimes this problem is noted on the day school reopens because staff members might not have been forthright to disclose—ahead of time—that they are leaving for overseas employment. Principals' realities and their coping strategies when confronted with teacher migration, planned or unplanned for, are the core issues addressed in this paper. Four Jamaican school principals were invited to the 6<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Caribbean Centre for Educational Planning (CCEP) on December 8, 2022, to tell their stories about their coping strategies with the issue of teacher migration affecting their respective institutions. Their narratives form the crux of this paper and are

analyzed for relevance, recommendation and points of reference for adaptive measures. Although these measures are not intended to stem teacher migration, they can be integral to informing school planning, policy development, and practices aligned with the academic and strategic goals of schools in small island developing states (SIDS) facing a similar dilemma.

### **Problem Statement**

When teachers decide to leave, sometimes with sufficient notice or unexpectedly, some of the resultant challenges experienced at the institutions include, but are not restricted to, the loss of subject experts, the loss of senior and master teachers, and a break in the school's succession planning agenda. Recruiting institutions tend to go after teachers of the STEM subjects and those with the most experience, which often translates into them luring away those teachers slated to take on the next round of leadership because they have offered them the tempting practicalities of better salaries (Boffey, 2015; Gentles, 2020; Rudder, 2011). While these losses affect the country's education system at all levels, it is the principals who are most burdened by the reality of teacher migration (Miller, 2018). Everyone looks to the principals for the solutions to the worrisome issues stemming from sudden teacher migration, of managing staff turnover, creating supportive work environments, and addressing key concerns related to staff availability to support classroom instruction and fuel student engagement (Gentles, 2020).

Sadly, many school principals in SIDS, and in this specific context of Jamaica are not adequately trained to handle these associated challenges. While research has been carried out on the causes of and impetus for teacher migration (Cole, 2023; Cole et al. 2024; Gentles, 2020; Thompson et al. 2023), there is a paucity of research on the coping capabilities of principals within the context of sudden teacher migration. This paper, then, seeks to address a gap in the literature by extending the discourse to share insider perspectives on the experiences of Jamaican school principals' coping mechanisms and strategies they have employed in addressing teacher migration. Their narratives bring to the fore potential strategies school leaders could adopt to help mitigate the challenges of sudden teacher migration, and offer useful insights for shaping educational planning, practices and policy decisions in Jamaica and other SIDS where this problem is rife. Therefore, in this regard, the main research question and sub-questions which guided this qualitative phenomenological study were:

1. What are the experiences of selected school principals as they re-

spond to the challenges of sudden teacher migration affecting their institutions?

(a) What strategies/approaches have these school principals adopted, beyond the Ministry of Education's recommendations, to navigate the issues at their institutions which have resulted from sudden teacher migration?

(b) How do these principals evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies/approaches in meeting stakeholder needs and shaping school planning, practices, and policy decisions?

### **Literature Review**

Teacher migration has been an ongoing issue in Jamaica that has contributed significantly to a shortage of qualified and experienced teachers in the education system (Adams, 2022). Within the last five years, in particular, this problem of teacher migration has escalated and has been discussed in various media and fora (Cole, 2023; Cole et al. 2024; Datta & Kingdon, 2021; Gentles, 2020; Graham, 2022; Grizzle, 2022; Ming & Christian, 2022; Thompson et al. 2023). Emerging from these discussions is the awareness that some of the push and pull factors have been the need for better salaries and benefits, access to improved teaching/learning resources, opportunities to equitable strategic professional development, and resultantly, also the need for succession planning (CCEP Newsletter, 2023; Thompson et al., 2023). These are just some of the underlying factors influencing teacher migration which speak to the issues to be considered for Jamaica and other SIDS to retain qualified and experienced teachers in their education systems.

Faced with the problem of teacher migration, according to Dennis (2022), school principals must exercise resilience, creativity, and call upon the resources of a wider network to help them address the repercussions of teachers leaving their institutions. Williams (2022) concludes that principals are, therefore, forced to develop and employ various coping strategies to mitigate the impact of teacher migration on their institutions. While the literature mostly focuses on the reasons for teachers migrating (Jamaica Observer, 2022), researchers George et al. (2021) support the position that not enough research has been conducted on how school principals cope in the face of large numbers of their teachers from across the educational levels—elementary, primary and secondary – resigning from their posts for overseas teaching jobs. In response, this literature review explores three themes: principals' perspectives and experiences with teacher migration, historically and presently; principals' coping mechanisms in response to sudden

teacher migration; and strategies proposed by the Ministry of Education as a substitute, rather than treating with the root causes of the problems fueling teacher migration.

### **Principals' Perspectives and Experiences**

The experiences of Jamaican school principals regarding teacher migration have become increasingly complex and multidimensional. Over time, the role of principals has grown more demanding, both in complexity and workload (Pollock et al, 2014; Miller, 2016). This trend is particularly evident in the SIDS of Jamaica, where many teachers have been migrating to developed countries for better salaries and improved working conditions (Datta & Kingdon, 2021; Graham, 2022; Grizzle, 2022; Ming & Christian, 2022). Ferguson (2022) quotes Linnervern Wright, the president of the Jamaica Association of Principals of Secondary Schools (JAPSS), to describe the overwhelming crisis, edginess, and anxiety principals have experienced as they scramble alongside their school boards just days before the reopening of their schools in September 2022, to attempt to mitigate the unsettling impact of key teacher leaders and subject teachers' migration:

The word limbo would really apply to us, because we are in limbo about employment because if a person doesn't resign, then you can only employ with the hope that they will be respectful enough to send their resignation because sometimes that can cause problems. (Personal communication, Linnervern Wright, 2022)

Unfortunately, the experiences that many school principals have had are that teachers leave without giving prior notice of their intentions, thereby leaving principals with the additional challenge of finding suitable replacements to fill positions that were not formally vacant, almost instantaneously (Caribbean Times, 2022). Technically, when teachers have not formally resigned, their vacant positions cannot be formally filled (Ferguson, 2022). While immediate temporary replacement of these teachers may not adversely affect the schools, Appleton et al. (2006) surmised over two decades ago, a smooth adjustment to replace teachers will require a well-functioning human resources development system and increased funding to counter substitute staff replacements, onboarding of new staff, and continuous professional development to orient new staff into the institution's culture and climate. Arokiasamy (2013) and Arshadi and Shahbazi (2013) explain that the human relations process of employing a teacher can be sensitive, and if not properly handled and within a timely manner can cause havoc to the schools' curricula as students are left without

teachers, and in worse case scenarios, some subjects might have to be removed from the timetable listing.

Arshadi and Shahbazi (2013) suggest that when employees leave an organization, the added responsibilities placed on those who remain can create significant challenges. From the perspective of school principals, retaining seasoned teachers—particularly those who are the higher performers—not only enhances student outcomes, but also strengthens succession planning and fosters the growth of organizational knowledge and learning (Arnold, 2016; Arokiasamy, 2013; Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). Principals often express frustration over the gaps left by departing teachers, as these vacancies can be difficult to fill. Appleton et al. (2006), Morgan et al. (2006), and Sives et al. (2006) emphasize the unsustainable impact of brain drain on educational resources and national development by losing skilled teachers, particularly in critical subjects like mathematics and science, noting that inexperienced replacements often struggle to match the expertise and effectiveness of their predecessors.

The experiences and perspectives of some principals are that teacher migration has affected their schools negatively (Caribbean Times, 2022). However, the issue of ‘teacher shortage’ has often been dismissed at the higher administrative governmental level, countered by the claim that every year the education sector loses educators, and this will continually be the case (Williams, 2022). On the contrary, the difference being experienced is that of an ongoing crisis of teacher shortage which has resulted in some school principals having to find inventive solutions for addressing the issue (Ferguson, 2022). Morgan (2022) supports this point, highlighting the criticism of educator and parliamentarian, Darnion Crawford, that the plight of teacher migration seems to rest on the shoulders of school principals, given the seeming lack of concern of the Ministry of Education to offer more tangible relief.

### **Coping Mechanisms**

Teacher migration has been a persistent challenge for the Jamaican education system, with increasing numbers of teachers seeking better salaries and improved working conditions abroad (*Leadership Reimagination*, 2024). This trend, often described as a “modern-day exodus,” has significant implications for school leadership and planning (*Leadership Reimagination*, 2022). Responding to this pressing challenge, policymakers and principals at all levels have had to shift resources, rethink practices, enact policies and create strategies to ease the blow that teacher shortage has caused (*Caribbean Times*, 2022;

Ferguson, 2022; Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Jamaican principals have employed a range of coping strategies, evolving from reactive measures in the past to more structured current approaches.

Historically, school administrators have had to adopt ad-hoc strategies to manage teacher shortages (*Caribbean Times*, 2022). In earlier cases, principals and vice principals took on additional teaching responsibilities, often beyond their administrative roles. For example, some principals stepped into classrooms to teach critical subjects such as mathematics during those moments of crises (Sives et al., 2006). These efforts, while necessary, often led to burnout among school leaders (Arokiasamy, 2013; Arshadi & Shahbazi, 2013). Additionally, administrators redeployed existing teachers into unfamiliar subjects to maintain classroom coverage, although this approach resulted in a decline in instructional quality. For instance, principals assigned teachers with economics backgrounds to teach mathematics, highlighting the resource constraints schools faced (Appleton et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2006).

Other principals, due to the additional burden placed on administrative and academic staff, opted to provide emotional and instructional support to the academic staff to keep them motivated (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Some schools responded to teacher shortages by sharing teachers with nearby institutions (Ferguson, 2022). Specifically, Ferguson (2022) and Cole (2023) highlighted a strategy employed by the principals of York Castle High School and Brown's Town High School in Jamaica, where teachers were rotated between the two school campuses in close proximity to cover subject areas that were without assigned instructors. While effective in maintaining instruction, this approach incurred additional costs and was highly time-consuming traveling between the two campuses. In other cases, principals had to reassess their curricula, occasionally removing subjects that were most impacted by migrating teachers (Ferguson, 2022; Morgan et al., 2006; Sives et al., 2006). A further strategy involved increasing class sizes, which inevitably led to diminished educational quality, as teachers provided less individualized attention to students (Appleton et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2006; Sives et al., 2006).

In more recent years, the strategies adopted by Jamaican school principals, while they were spontaneous and born out of the need to respond to the pressing issue of sudden teacher migration trends, have had to become more innovative and collaborative using virtual learning tools introduced to fill instructional gaps for shared educational services across institutions (*Leadership Reimagination*, 2022). However, despite these efforts, teacher migration remains a significant challenge, driven by insufficient salaries, resource constraints, and

sometimes less than adequate working conditions. Surveys show that low pay and the absence of adequate professional support are among the top factors prompting teachers to migrate (*CCEP Newsletter*, 2023; GOV.UK, 2017; *Leadership Reimagination*, 2022).

### **Ministry's Makeshift Strategies Rather Than Address Causes**

The Ministry of Education and Youth in Jamaica, since 2023, has implemented several strategies to alleviate the effects rather than seeking to stem the causes of teacher migration, focusing singly on recruitment and staffing solutions (Cole, 2023). School boards now have the authority to make early recruitment decisions, thereby reducing dependency on Ministry approvals to enable them to fill vacancies before the academic year begins (*Jamaica Information Service*, 2023). Schools have also been encouraged to rehire retired teachers and employ final-year teaching students to meet staffing needs (*Leadership Reimagination*, 2024). Additionally, the Ministry has allowed principals on vacation leave to be deployed to assist with classroom duties as needed (Jamaica Information Service, 2023). Another parallel response by the Ministry of Education has been the expansion of international recruitment efforts to include teachers from countries like Cuba, Ghana, and the Philippines, to supplement the local workforce (*Leadership Reimagination*, 2024; *Radio Jamaica*, 2024). While these initiatives reflect the Ministry's dual focus on retention and replacement, stakeholders emphasize that addressing the underlying issues of teacher migration, such as improving salaries and working conditions, remains crucial (*Leadership Reimagination*, 2024; *New York Times*, 2023). These measures are only intended to fill gaps quickly and ensure operational continuity despite persistent teacher migration challenges.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Design and Method**

This research used a qualitative phenomenological research design and a focus group method to achieve the main goal of the researchers, that of deepening the understanding of the phenomenon of teacher migration in the Jamaican education system, from the interpretive perspectives of school principals. The team of researchers wanted a comprehensive description, interpretation, and appreciation of the school principals' experiences, and a qualitative phenomenological research design was best suited to elicit the descriptions for the research team to develop an appreciation of this social phenomenon (Litchman, 2013).

A focus group method complemented this design because it also facilitated researchers' access to rich insights (Herrman, 2017). This is mostly because research participants often feel it poses less threat; hence creating an accommodating space for participants to fully discuss judgements, conclusions, beliefs, perceptions, and sentiments (Herrman, 2017; Krueger & Casey, 2000). In this case, the four school leader participants aptly provided purposeful and comprehensive descriptions during analysis, and recounted rich data during the focus group session about the factors of pressure and push that affect teacher migration, the coping mechanisms employed, and proposed options at the policy level of the education sector for addressing the phenomenon in Jamaica and, by extension, other SIDS.

### **Research Questions**

The main research question which guided this investigation was, *What are the experiences of selected school principals as they respond to the challenges of sudden teacher migration affecting their institutions?* To illicit a comprehensive and candid sharing around the issue, the researchers asked the principals the following sub-questions:

- (a) What strategies/approaches have these school principals adopted, beyond the Ministry of Education's recommendations, to navigate the issues at their institutions which have resulted from sudden teacher migration?
- (b) How do these principals evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies/approaches in meeting stakeholder needs and shaping school planning, practices, and policy decisions?

### **Research Participants**

Four school principals from among primary and secondary schools within Jamaica were purposively selected to participate in the 2022 conference of the Caribbean Centre for Educational Planning (CCEP). They shared in a mini-focus group discussion the coping strategies/mechanisms they have used to address the issue of teacher migration affecting their institutions. In purposeful selection, "particular settings, persons, or activities are deliberately selected to provide information that is particularly relevant to your research questions and goals, and that cannot be gotten as well from other choices" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Of the four invited school principals, one (SP1) was from a prominent traditional high school in Kingston, the most urban city in Jamaica; the second principal (SP2) was from a primary school in

St. Catherine, a parish known for having some of the large primary schools within Jamaica; the third principal (SP3) was from a traditional high school in Clarendon, a mostly rural parish with academically and sports reputable secondary schools in Jamaica; and the fourth principal (SP4) additionally occupies a prominent position within the Jamaica Association of Principals of Secondary Schools.

These selected principals were considered best suited to share on the matter because of their wide range of local and national professional services and practical experiences in the primary and secondary school sectors. Their institutions were also greatly affected by teacher migration, and from their positions as school leaders, they were receptive to sharing with the research team and at the CCEP conference their feelings, beliefs, experiences, and philosophies relating to the impact of teacher migration on their institutions. Therefore, the research team curated these school principals' collective points of view about the strategies and approaches they utilized to cope with sudden and significant teacher migration and sought to analyze the data to reflect a deep understanding of how the principals experienced the phenomenon and filtered the interpretation to present a nuanced essence of the phenomenon, in keeping with the tradition of phenomenological research (Ahmed & Kaufmann, 2022).

### **Data Collection**

The researchers explained the purpose of the research to the principals, invited them to participate, and secured their consent. After this process, data were collected using two primary methods during the face-to-face mini-focus group at the conference, recorded via Zoom. Firstly, a semi-structured interview protocol provided the focus for the group discussion. This type of interview allowed the researchers to ask participants a succession of open-ended questions prior to being prompted with follow-up questions, to probe more into their answers and the research topic (Yin, 2009). Therefore, participants were deliberately stimulated to offer free and open responses. Second, guided by Maxwell's (2013) advice that the tools researchers need to collect data are their eyes and ears to make sense of the proceedings, those researchers not engaged in the question and answer were tasked to simultaneously take detailed notes. This enabled judicious notetaking of the participants' group and individual responses, and allowed for direct attention to nonverbal communication or what Gordon (1975) calls the proxemic, chronemic, and kinesic dimensions of focus group interactions. The notes emanating from this process were subsequent-

ly reflected on and summarized through a cross-researcher review of the notes and then digitized as part of the data set to deepen the team's understanding of the experiences and feelings of the principals about how teacher migration impacted their institutions.

### **Data Analysis**

A word processing transcription of the focus group recording was performed, after which the researchers read the initial transcript as the beginning of the thematic analysis process. The multiple coder technique (Creswell & Baez, 2021) was then employed, for the second round of reading among researchers, using the research questions as the codes for the anticipated themes. The researchers also simultaneously identified unanticipated or emergent themes among these predetermined categories and reported on them. The next step was to establish relationships among the thematic categories following within artifacts and among participants using the Boeije (2002) model of constant comparison. To reduce the intrusion of researcher bias and strengthen the validity or trustworthiness of the findings (Doyle, 2007) about teacher migration, researchers performed member checking with the participants. This allowed them to confirm the accuracy of the composite of data from researcher notes and transcript.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Researchers had sent letters of consent to the potential participant explaining the goal and objectives of the discussion on teacher migration, as well as a declaration that the discussion would be live streamed. This was important to assist the decision of participants whether to volunteer to participate publicly, which would reveal their identity and reduce the control of confidentiality by the researchers. Furthermore, this study did not expose participants to emotional or physical harm. Having received their permission, the researchers ensured that each participant had the opportunity to share their views on teacher migration. This active encouragement (Smithson, 2000) was a response to the understanding that within focus groups, verbalizing group norms may mute individual voices, especially where they differ (Kitzinger, 1994).

### **Research Findings**

The central and sub-questions of the study explored the experiences of selected school principals given the challenge they faced of sudden

teacher migration at their respective institutions, the strategies they employed to address the issue, and their evaluation of the effectiveness in applying these strategies. Based on analysis of the data, four key themes defined the principals' experiences: the importance of open communication; the benefits of establishing networking and partnership links; the value of supporting staff enrichment and development; and the need to restructure teaching and learning to address school context. These themes formed the crux of the strategies employed by the school principals in addressing teacher migration, as explained in research sub-question 1 (a) below.

**Research Sub-Question 1 (a)**

*What strategies/approaches have these school principals adopted, beyond the Ministry of Education's recommendations, to navigate the issues at their institutions which have resulted from sudden teacher migration?*

**Communication**

The research indicated that communication at all levels of the education system played a critical role in navigating the issue of teacher migration. SP1 shared that having a clear and open communication channel between the principal and staff provided an opportunity to make sound executive decisions based on realistic assessment of what the teacher retention status would likely be in the new school term or year. SP4 also spoke about having conversations and not "insultations" with staff regarding matters impacting teachers' self-efficacy and their sense of self, and why they often explored migration as an option for solutions to the problems they experienced with teaching in Jamaica. Teachers' net value, as well as their moral and social values, needed due attention. Teachers needed to feel respected within their profession, for their ideas. They wanted to feel that their voices were heard, especially in shaping key decisions linked to their career advancement. Communication among principals was also another useful strategy to develop a supportive community to share best practices on how to make teachers feel valued. SP4 spoke about the importance of open and constant communication among school principals to acknowledge more publicly the value of their teachers, the importance of their work, and the need to cultivate a supportive community for teacher mentorship and rescue, when needed. Communication with the government was also important and should be led by key educational entities such as higher educational and teacher training institutions. SP4 shared

that the education officials that have responsibility for reform and support of that process need to ensure that they receive key input from core educational personnel such as the University of the West Indies' (UWI's) School of Education as well as the teacher training colleges to weigh in on the conversations. It cannot be that government-led educational reports that inform policy be relegated solely to those outside of the real business of education to make decisions on educational transformation.

### ***Networking and Partnerships***

The findings spoke about the importance of establishing networking and partnership links among colleagues and stakeholders to address the loss of teachers to ensure continuity and success in the respective schools led by the principals. SP1 shared that partnerships with other schools and teachers' colleges nearby were used to leverage support and get student-teachers to fill the gaps, first as a practice teacher, and then being considered for vacant positions. SP4 shared that having a network of principals within the regional zones allowed the principals to access a contact list of short-listed teachers whom they had interviewed but might not have employed. Those not employed became part of a pool of possibilities for the principals to contact and employ to fill temporary or vacant positions caused by migration. The contact list also functioned as a verifiable collaborative human resources database for principals to consult for teacher employment in the moment of need.

### ***Staff Enrichment and Development***

Staff enrichment and development was highlighted as an important factor to ensure that with the loss of experienced and veteran teachers, new teachers were provided with the professional development, mentorship and support to excel in the classroom environment. SP1 shared that principals needed to build flexibility into their recruitment processes, meaning, principals must identify their teachers' needs and see how best their institutions could help to meet or match those needs. SP2 spoke to assigning mentor-mentee roles to teachers, in the last term, who indicated that they would be leaving so that they could work closely with a "shadow", hence, facilitating shadowing for professional development. This too allowed for a smoother transition for teacher replacements, despite creating a need for compensating teacher mentors for their additional labour and sometimes for teaching additional classes. SP3 also spoke to leveraging public/private partnerships with past

students, past teachers, local businesses, and other stakeholders to get their support in nurturing junior teachers and providing incentives for teachers. Reduced teacher quality is real, noted SP3, and so much must be done to help teachers within the profession to develop and excel. The partnerships also allowed schools to call upon relevant stakeholders to offer the kind of community support and leadership needed by the schools for their holistic development and growth. Lack of housing solutions for teachers was an additional known factor that influenced teacher migration, and so SP3 believed that institutions with on campus housing should keep the standard of the on-campus residential flats in better condition so that teachers can have more housing options and for the school to attract quality teachers, especially for the Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) disciplines. SP3 also shared that “bright” students leaving sixth form, particularly in the STEAM subjects, are encouraged to consider a career in teaching. By employing the “bright” students immediately after sixth form gives them the “early” experience of teaching for them to decide if they will remain in the profession.

### ***Restructuring Teaching and Learning***

Although this was a strategy that was minimally utilized, restructuring teaching and learning was useful in mitigating the loss of teachers. SP1 shared that review of curricula to collapse or cut back on direct instruction within subject area(s) most affected by teachers who migrated was used to address classroom or subject teacher shortage. Another substitute was to collaborate via online delivery to teach the same subject simultaneously across multiple schools to the students affected by the teacher losses. In this way, the content, quality and delivery remained consistent as well as a sense of permanence was recaptured from having the virtual presence of a dedicated, reliable online teacher of the subject. Sometimes the same teacher taught across the online spaces, while in some cases a team of teachers rotated to co-teach the subject online to ensure inclusivity for students across the schools. As explained by SP2, sometimes principals themselves were a part of the rotating/co-teaching team offering instruction to ensure that no student was left behind. This strategy called for the restructuring of time, duties and responsibilities of administrators and educators who assumed these additional responsibilities linked to active classroom teaching. When principals actively took on classroom instruction, SP2 explained, their administrative duties were often relegated to the end of the school day to be addressed only after school dismissed.

The results of the study indicated that the strategies employed in the core areas of communication at different levels of the education system, network and partnerships, staff enrichment and development, and the restructuring of teaching and learning were necessary to address the issue of teacher loss due to migration. It is during the unfolding of these necessary strategies that the school principals could reflect and candidly evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies/approaches in meeting stakeholder needs and shaping school planning, practices, and policy decisions, the crux of Research Sub-Question 1 (b).

**Research Sub-Question 1 (b)**

*How do these principals evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies/approaches in meeting stakeholder needs and shaping school planning, practices, and policy decisions?*

The indicator of “effectiveness” in this phenomenological study was unanimously interpreted by the principals to mean a lessening of the chaos, a reduction in anxiety, and the creation of practical, workable solutions to the confounding issue of teacher loss due to migration. At the start of the 2023 new school year when it was discovered that there were fewer than the ideal number of teachers returning to engage in the business of teaching, and most importantly, classroom instruction, these principals devised strategies to address the human resources shortfall. Those strategies, as identified above, were intuitively and organically instituted in responses to their respective school contexts; however, as the school year progressed the principals came to appreciate the efficacy of those strategies. As the strategies unfolded, the principals’ assessments were that they contributed to other positive spin-offs, namely, the importance of prioritizing stakeholder needs through strategic planning. SP1, also agreed on by SP2, SP3 and SP4, vocalized that encouraging open communication between principal and teaching staff was effective in helping to have a clearer idea of the number of teachers planning to leave, which facilitated better recruitment planning for teaching and learning, as well as coordinating for teacher mentorship support for novice or student teachers being recruited. This also led to improved communication between school, the Board, and the Ministry for the necessary support and authorization to be granted. This contributed to the principals experiencing better planning for the upcoming academic year to ensure educational continuity in their respective schools for achieving their planned educational goals. The open communication between teachers and their principals, the networking among other school principals, the partnerships facilitated for

the recruitment of student teachers and new teachers to fill the gaps, the arrangements for staff enrichment and development, all cohered to provide better opportunities for principals to cultivate and still retain a cadre of teachers well suited for continuing their schools' educational mission and objectives. Implementing these strategies, the principals explained, ensured that the quality of their teachers remained on par with standards that supported student achievement and fostered teacher retention, particularly in subject areas where there were high demands. Consequent of the crisis of teacher migration, there were some positive spin-offs for reshaping school practices and policies, for improved school planning and management, curricula revamping, and keener attention to content coverage and delivery for sustaining effective teaching and learning.

### **Discussion and Recommendations**

This study has found that school principals faced the challenges of teacher migration as a constant feature of their leadership and management of their schools. However, rather than engaging in a futile effort to prevent teachers from migrating, they proactively sought to develop management strategies for dealing with this unrelenting reality. This characterization as unrelenting resonates similarly with the work of scholars such as Datta and Kingdon (2021), Graham (2022), Grizzle (2022), and Ming and Christian (2022).

In response to their realities, principals developed a repertoire of management responses and coping strategies which may be described as psychological, managerial, collegial, and communal. Firstly, the psychological strategy served as a coping mechanism to reduce the stress levels of the principals. By encouraging teachers to be direct and open about their migration intentions, to efficiently determine retention status for the upcoming academic year, principals potentially preserved their energies to instead focus on problem-solving.

For SP2, the psychological mode of management involved a similar perspective of being realistic as SP1 but with a different manifestation. SP1 accepted that today's younger generation is more fluid with their job outlook and consequently does not commit to job security or to any one profession for the long-haul. These two characterizations reflect the principals' embrace of the reality of teacher migration, which they cannot undo. Therefore, their first response was to adopt a perspective that enabled them to candidly see and assess the situation for what it was, and this provided an adequate lens from which they could frame their responses and mobilize action. Their approach was consistent

with what Richard (2012), Wubbolding and Brickell (2017), and Corey (2018) posited in their respective interpretations of the original work of Glasser (1965).

The second layer of the response of principals to the reality of teacher migration may be described as managerial. This was evidenced in how SP1 pivoted to plan and execute a review of the curriculum to optimize for more efficient content delivery. SP2's leveraging levels of control were evident when he outlining how, in that institution, mentees were assigned and teaching responsibility were assumed to bridge the migration gap. SP3, on the other hand, tackled the problem with recruitment decisions which sought to leverage the competencies of "brighter" students to support the teaching effort. These decisions of SP3 to involve "brighter students" reflected a pragmatic response to the challenge of finding suitable replacements to fill vacant positions, given that the response to the existence of vacant positions must be instantaneous. Ferguson (2022) and Appleton et al. (2006) referenced a similar decision taken by other school principals to use the ready resource of capable students (obviously for the short term), a strategy which reflects principals' pragmatism, determination and skill, especially when under pressure.

The alternative of not seeking to contend with reality was always a possibility, but the exercise of choice is one of the key elements of reality therapy as Wubbolding and Brickell (2017), and Corey (2018) have emphasized. These decisions and strategies also reflected the resilience and creativity of which Dennis (2022) speaks, as well as an overall will to triumph.

The third layer of the response of the principals to the reality of teacher migration and its impact on their schools may be described as collegial and communal. SP1 described how the support of community and stakeholders converged to address the needs of teachers for them to want to stay at the institution, while SP3 and SP4 outlined the urgency of building symbiotic and collaborative networks. These principals' extended recounting highlighted the value they came to place on community partnerships and their role in amplifying learning opportunities and opening access to available, though limited, resources. Additionally, involving the community also functions as a type of civic enterprise which exposes the wider community to the challenges the schools face resulting from teacher migration. This could catalyze greater support for the educational struggles of schools beyond the limits of their walls.

Emerging from this research on the problem of teacher migration, two sets of recommendations are being proposed: for school principals

on the one hand, and for policy makers on the other. For school principals (SPs), they should accept the reality that teachers will always be seeking opportunities, whether locally or overseas, to expand their personal and professional development. That being the case, SPs ought to explore ways to incentivize teachers to stay. To the extent possible, SPs should also collaborate with schools within proximity for teachers to teach subjects for which losses have occurred, cognizant that the implementation of these strategies will often require technological resources to support online delivery. SPs should strive to develop management strategies for dealing with sudden resignations or resignations communicated at an early stage and include the help of departing teachers in identifying suitable replacements.

For the policy makers, it is recommended that they consider including an improved salary package, to seek to retain teachers. They should also consider a range of incentives that address teachers' reality, as proposed in the study done by Cole (2023) and Cole et al (2024). Finally, they are to allow schools greater autonomy in responding to the challenges of migration facing them as a one-size solution might be restrictive.

### **Conclusion**

The main purpose of the study was to identify the strategies or approaches used by school principals to navigate issues that resulted from teacher migration and to determine the effectiveness of these measures in meeting stakeholder needs and shaping school planning, practices, and policy decisions. The study indicated that School principals utilized transparent communication with teachers to determine forecasted teacher migration. This provided the opportunity to start early recruitment for the new academic year. Pooling and having access to a cadre of already interviewed and qualified candidates from other schools was another useful approach to recruiting new teachers in a timely manner. Curriculum review was utilized to collapse subject offerings to correspond to the size of the teaching staff, and where necessary, networking of schools for merged online instruction or partnerships with teacher training institutions provided the opportunity for pre-service teachers to address the loss of teachers. Provision of quality campus housing and the use of incentives for additional duties taken on by teachers was another approach implemented. School principals also facilitated mentorship for new teachers, thereby cultivating a nurturing environment built on support, respect and open communication to address needs, and by extension teacher migration. The strategies implemented were useful to the school principals as they ensured pedagogical needs were met to support the continuity of teaching and learning at their schools.

The matter of teacher migration has not decreased, and constructive interventions have taken place to address the factors that influence this phenomenon. It is therefore imperative that school principals and administrators remain vigilant in preparing for the challenging threats accompanied by silver lining opportunities that will occur. The research provides knowledge on how school principals have navigated the challenges associated with teacher migration and how effective the contextually responsive strategies or approaches have been. It also provides an analytical lens that prioritizes transparent communication, networking, and staff enrichment as the basis for best practices that can be used to temporarily address the issues of teacher migration in schools.

A teacher plays a critical role in fostering national development (Moore, 2023) and hence, we need to create conditions that will encourage more of our teachers to want to remain in our schools to drive local development, and even beyond that regional development. Within the SIDS of the Caribbean, principals as educational leaders are central to safeguarding workforce sustainability and student success. Principals navigating the challenges which accompany teacher migration have inadvertently fostered stability of learning environments, provided opportunities for stronger stakeholder engagement, built up partnership networks, reduced the costs associated with teacher recruitment, and have shifted the focus to maximizing the human capital and resources that exist in the schools. Ongoing mentorship, the training and professional development of our teachers, is also a key success initiative. It must be noted that these micro level strategies shared in the study can drive policy development to address the issues from a macro-level.

A strong research agenda on this central phenomenon is required and would serve to create a knowledge economy, inform policy decisions and transform the education sector. Moreover, advocacy and representation must be led by our experts, researchers and scholars at all levels of the education sector, who in turn must hold our regional leaders accountable to ensure that teacher migration is addressed. Further research is required to get a comprehensive understanding on strategies implemented and their impact across a wider section of the education system, at all levels.

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