

## Immigrant Teachers in Singapore Schools

### Demographic Profiles and Self-reported Social and Professional Integration

Yang Peidong

#### KEY IMPLICATIONS

1. Immigrant teachers are recruited mainly for their language expertise (Mother Tongue [MT] teaching) but there is potential to tap into other ways in which they can add diversity to the Singapore education system.
2. Overall, immigrant teachers report a high degree of social and professional integration. However, teachers from mainland China fall slightly behind and thus may need additional support.

#### BACKGROUND

Teachers of immigrant backgrounds make up a modest and under-researched segment of Singapore's teacher population. An "immigrant teacher" is defined as someone born or raised outside Singapore, not educated in Singapore at the K-12 stage, and working as a teacher in a mainstream MOE primary or secondary school. An immigrant teacher may hold a work pass, or permanent residence (PR) or citizenship status.

#### FOCUS OF STUDY

The focus of the study (OER 16/17 YPD) was to find out about the immigrant teachers' migration and career trajectories, their social and professional identities as well as integration situations and experiences. This Research Brief only touches on the immigrant teachers' demographic profiles and self-reported social and professional integration.

#### KEY FINDINGS

The two most significant sources of immigrant teachers in Singapore schools are China (mainland) (45.5% of the sample) and Malaysia (36.4%), together accounting for over 80% of the teachers sampled; the rest came from India (11.9% of the sample) and a range of countries/territories around the world.

Nearly 80% of sampled immigrant teachers turned out to be MT teachers – predominantly teaching Chinese (Mandarin). The remaining immigrant teachers taught a wide range of subjects ranging from the sciences to the humanities.

On the whole, immigrant teachers were well-settled in terms of their residential status. At the time of survey, 40% of the respondents held Singapore Citizenship, and slightly more than half (51.39%) were Permanent Residents (PR), whereas work pass holders only accounted for 8.33%. Virtually all China-background (63 out of 65) and Malaysia-background (50 out of 52) teachers were citizens or PRs (thus “resident population”), but for teachers from India – the largest minority group – 7 out of 17 were still holding work passes. Teachers from non-China/Malaysia/India backgrounds were predominantly non-resident in status.

On the whole, immigrant teachers considered themselves well integrated both socially and professionally. However, teachers from Mainland China consistently rated themselves slightly less well integrated compared to other groups.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF FINDINGS

Implications for policy and research: Currently, the main rationale for recruiting immigrant teachers appears to be to support MT language teaching. There may be potential for immigrant teachers of other ethno-

cultural backgrounds and life experiences to add diversities and further enrich Singaporean students’ learning and development. Future research may look into how immigrant teachers of diverse backgrounds impact students and the education system as a whole. Future policymaking can more consciously tap into immigrant teachers with diverse cultural capital and social experiences to offer.

## PARTICIPANTS

The survey gathered 144 valid responses from immigrant teachers; 23 immigrant teachers (China-background = 7; Malaysia-background = 7; India-background = 5; other backgrounds = 4) took part in one-to-one interviews. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with immigrant teachers. Four FGDs were carried out with local school leaders and teachers to obtain their perspectives and experiences working with immigrant teachers.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The study consisted of an online survey, semi-structured interviews and FGDs.

## About the author

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Contact Dr Yang at [peidong.yang@nie.edu.sg](mailto:peidong.yang@nie.edu.sg) for more information about the project. A more detailed report of project findings can be found at [www.shorturl.at/htGH7](http://www.shorturl.at/htGH7)

This brief was based on the project OER 16/17 YPD: Immigrant Teachers in Singapore Schools: Trajectories, Identities, and Integration.

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