

Is the Grass Greener on the Other Side? Comparing Working Conditions and Wellbeing of Primary Teachers in State-Funded Schools in England and International Schools in the UAE.

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Abstract

Teacher shortages, once mainly a concern in developing countries, are now a global issue affecting both developed and developing nations. In the UK, following the 1988 Education Reform Act, the intensification of performativity and an emphasis on standardised testing in the educational system have diminished teacher autonomy and significantly exacerbated challenges faced by teachers, leading to poor working conditions and increasing teacher retention issues (Acton & Glasgow, 2015). As a result, many teachers are seeking opportunities abroad, particularly in the UAE, where there is a growing demand for qualified teachers (Goe et al., 2020).

This comparative study investigates primary teachers' perspectives on working conditions and wellbeing in England's state-funded schools versus international schools in the UAE, highlighting the factors driving teacher migration. The study is a sequential explanatory study (QUAN+QUAL), beginning with the quantitative phase, where findings showed significant differences in teachers' working conditions and wellbeing between the two countries. The focus for this paper will be the findings from the qualitative phase, where interviews were carried out with 16 teachers, 8 from each country. The findings revealed key themes affecting wellbeing in England, such as unsustainable workload, loss of autonomy, and unfair pay. Conversely, teachers in the UAE reported a better work-life balance, manageable workloads, and generous pay, though challenges like business-oriented school management and limited personal freedoms were noted.

The final phase will integrate both quantitative and qualitative insights to propose practical recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers aimed at improving teachers' working conditions and wellbeing initiatives in England.

Keywords: job satisfaction; teacher migration; teachers' shortages; wellbeing; working conditions.