Racial (In)Congruence on Teacher Mobility Patterns in Tennessee

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Ensuring all children succeed has become a lauded goal of educational practitioners and researchers within the United States. A strong component of this aspiration involves teachers, individuals often viewed as the gatekeepers of knowledge. Therefore, understanding the teacher workforce becomes imperative—especially teacher mobility patterns, as high teacher turnover may create an unstable learning environment for children.

Not only should we be concerned with mobility patterns but the impact of racial congruence on these mobility patterns. Racial congruence refers to the congruence of race between two individuals—in this case, the teacher and the student. As the demographics of the United States continue to change—including the K-12 sector, having a teacher workforce that is able to confidently respond to the varying needs of culturally diverse students is extremely important. However, if teacher turnover is high in areas serving predominately diverse student populations, the issue of racial congruence must be assessed and addressed. Therefore, this paper seeks to understand whether teacher mobility patterns within the state of Tennessee are influenced by racial congruence (or incongruence) between teachers and their school environments and the neighborhoods that these schools serve.

For the purposes of this paper, the dependent variable is a teacher’s mobility, assessed across four different categories: 1) teacher remained at school, 2) teacher moved to another school within the same district, 3) teacher moved to a school outside of the district, and 4) teacher left the Tennessee public education system. The dependent variable was assessed across three factors: teacher characteristics, school characteristics, and neighborhood characteristics. Teacher characteristics included teacher ethnicity, teacher gender, teaching experience, teacher satisfaction, and teacher congruence. School characteristics included school level (i.e. elementary, middle, high), school type (i.e. traditional public, charter, magnet), high or low minority student body, high or low student poverty levels, and school urbanicity (i.e. city, rural, town, or suburban school environment). Neighborhood characteristics include average degree attainment, racial demographics, and poverty rates. I expect to find that racial incongruence between a teacher and the school he or she works has a negative impact on the teacher leaving the school. I also expect to find that racial incongruence between a teacher and the neighborhoods associated with a school will have a negative impact on the teacher leaving the school.

The dataset being used in this paper are statewide administrative data collected through the Tennessee Department of Education and processed by the Tennessee Electronic Research Administration. The data contain survey information from teachers between the years of 2006 and 2015, excluding the year 2007, with 923,819 observations. The data in this dataset was treated as population data and assessed as such. However, observations missing data for the dependent variable or one of the specified variables for teacher and school characteristics were excluded from the dataset, resulting in approximately 414,000 observations between the years of 2006 and 2013. Data from the American Community Survey was also combined with the statewide administrative data.

**Literature Review**

Prior research has presented the negative effects high poverty and high minority schools can have on teacher mobility patterns. Hanushek et al. (2001) found that teachers are more likely to leave high poverty and high minority schools, with larger effects for high minority schools. With an ever increasing minority student population and the racial stratification of students across the United States, the need to understand the impact of racial compositions in schools becomes imperative. If predominately minority schools are more likely to experience teacher turnover, the question of equal and equitable access to education becomes a major concern. With this in mind, the United States must also become more knowledgeable about the impact of racial congruence and incongruence in teacher mobility patterns—as the majority of the teacher workforce in the United States are comprised of White females (“The State of Racial Diversity in the Educator Workforce”, 2016). Dee (2005) and Pigott and Cowen (2000) have found that racial incongruence between teachers and students often contributes to negative perceptions of minority students. Assessing whether racial incongruence contributes to teacher turnover and mobility patterns becomes important, as well.

Goldhaber, Gross and Player (2011) contributed to our current understanding of teacher mobility patterns by assessing teacher mobility across teacher-effectiveness through value-added scores. Using data from North Carolina’s schooling database, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Federal Common Core of Data; Goldhaber et al assessed the mobility patterns of elementary school teachers (i.e. grades 4 through 6) with four or less years of teaching experience. The authors sought to understand the impact of value-added on teacher turnover and transition.

Teacher mobility served as the dependent variable of this study and was measured across four main categories: 1) teachers who remain in their schools, 2) teachers who make a within-district move, 3) teachers who make a cross-district move, and 4) teachers who leave the North Carolina public school system. The independent variables employed in this study included teacher characteristics, school characteristics and teacher effectiveness.

Goldhaber and colleagues found that teacher-effectiveness, as measured by value-added, has a slight effect on teacher mobility, but in a way the researchers had not anticipated. Teachers considered least effective and most effective were more likely to leave their original school. However, for the most part, effective teachers were found to stay in their school. The researchers also noted that teachers considered to be more marketable had a higher chance of leaving their school. More importantly—at least to the purposes of this paper, the researchers also noted that teacher race did not impact teacher mobility but student demographics did, with school having higher minority student and poverty populations having a negative impact on teacher turnover (Goldhaber et al., 2011).

In 2009, the Tennessee Governor’s Office of State Planning and Policy commissioned the *Teacher Mobility in Tennessee* document. Produced by the Center for Business and Economic Research at the University of Tennessee, the research document assessed the impact of teacher salaries on teacher mobility patterns within the state of Tennessee between the 2001-2002 and 2006-2007 school years. The researchers analyzed approximately 55,862 teachers within their dataset.

This research article also assessed teacher mobility patterns across four different categories: 1) teacher moving to another school within their current district, 2) teacher moving to another district, 3) teacher moving to a non-classroom capacity, and 4) teacher leaving the Tennessee education workforce. Unlike Goldhaber et al (2011), this article analyzed teachers that moved into non-classroom capacity. The independent variables employed in this study included teacher characteristics, school characteristics and district characteristics.

The Center for Business and Economic Research found that teacher salaries did not have a huge impact of teacher mobility patterns. However, a teacher’s education level did have a negative impact on teacher mobility—potentially due in part to marketability in the labor force for other forms of employment. Though a teacher’s race is found not to be impactful on a teacher’s mobility and transition, a school’s racial and socioeconomic makeup does have an impact (Center for Business and Economic Research, 2009).

Scafidi, Sjoquist, and Stinebrickner (2007) conducted a study on teacher turnover and mobility by assessing the impact of racial and socioeconomic composition of schools on teachers’ decisions to stay or leave a schools. The researchers looked at elementary school teachers in the state of Georgia from the years of 1991-1992 through 2000-2001. Using data from Georgia Professional Standards Commission, Georgia Department of Education, and Georgia Department of Labor datasets; the researchers drew a sample of 11,070 elementary teachers under the age of 27 between the years of 1994-1995 and 2000-2001. All of these teachers were relatively new teachers.

The researchers assessed teacher mobility patterns across # of different categories: 1) teacher remains in the school, 2) teacher moves to a school within the same district, 3) teachers moves to a school in another district, 4) teacher moves to a non-teaching job within the Georgia public education system, and 5) teacher leaves the Georgia public education system. The independent variables employed in this study included teacher characteristics and school characteristics.

The researchers found that racial composition of a school had a greater impact on teacher mobility than teacher salaries, test scores, and poverty rates. The researchers also found that teachers moving to different schools experienced greater decreases in school poverty and minority student levels (Scafidi et al., 2007).

Though previous research has laid a strong foundation for understanding the impact of school composition on teacher mobility, this article will take a close look at the impact of race congruence between teachers and their school environments. To extend this literature even further, this study will also employ the use of GIS (Geographic Information Systems) mapping and teacher satisfaction surveys. Previous research has not assessed the impact of neighborhoods on teacher mobility patterns with teacher satisfaction. Teachers do not only interact with their students but their parents and the environments they come from. By assessing the impact of neighborhood characteristics on teacher mobility patterns—along with teacher characteristics and school characteristics, a clearer picture may present itself about the factors affecting teacher mobility patterns.

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