

BARRIERS TOWARDS FURTHERING OF EDUCATION FOR MIGRANT YOUTH IN SOUTH AFRICA: THE CASE OF MUSINA, LIMPOPO PROVINCE

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ABSTRACT

Several studies show that the world witnesses the era of unprecedented human mobility. A large number of people, particularly youth, migrate internationally. The international migrant population in Southern Africa is constantly in flux. In South Africa there is a significant struggle for the provision basic social and educational services to the international migrants and this area has not been rigorously explored both in practice and research. The international migrant population have challenges around access to basic education compared to their native peers. It is from this background that this study aimed to explore barriers towards furthering of education amongst migrant youth in South Africa. A qualitative approach with a case study design were used to purposefully select ten (10) migrant youth (5 males and 5 females) in Musina town. Semi-structured individual interviews were used to collect data which was analysed thematically through the assistance of Nvivo software. Findings show that migrant youth are willing pursue studies in South Africa but due to barriers, such as; lack of motivation, unawareness of their constitutional rights to education and local language competency they are unable to do so. It is thus imperative that the education sector in South Africa be robustly empowered about immigration policies on the rights of immigrants' access to education so as to develop multicultural pedagogies and curricula.

Keywords: access to education, barrier, immigration policy, migrant youth, South Africa

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The international migrant population movements is a global concern requiring professionals and scholars from across disciplines to rigorously and robustly mitigate it. The world witnesses an era of exceptional human mobility (Bartlett, 2015). The same has been observed by the United Nations Headquarters [UNH] (2016) that the international migration has increased drastically. Southern Africa has become a region on the move with a large number of youth from other countries, particularly those from Sub-Saharan African countries, migrating to South Africa. Some studies highlight that youth play a pivotal part in the international migration (Spren & Vally, 2012; You & Anthony, 2012). Around twelve per cent (12%) of international migrants (roughly one out of eight) are youth - defined here as those between 15 and 24 years of age (Spren & Vally, 2012). The United Nations (2017) in 2017 reported about 10 million international migrants from other African countries who migrated across the world wherein the majority of them were young people. In support of this statistics, South Africa had 4 million international migrants (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2017). Rapholo (2020) emphasised that South Africa has a volume of migrant youth wherein some are exceptionally in Musina town in the Limpopo province which is 18 KM away from Beit-bridge border post bordering South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Young people migrate to other countries due to a number of motives. Findings on motives for migration confirmed existing literature highlighting the centrality of economic motivations among Zimbabwean migrants to Botswana, Malawi and South Africa, although economic motivation and reasons related to persecution and violence are not mutually exclusive (Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation [CHRR], 2007; Ditswanelo 2007). Another study conducted amongst asylum seekers in South Africa, for example, only cited economic reasons as their reasons for migrating, while others listed economic reasons alongside various forms of persecution and/or civil conflict (Rugunanan & Smit, 2011). In addition to these motives, some international migrant youth migrate for better jobs to help their families and provide them with remittances (Devictor, 2016; Browne, 2017; Rapholo, 2020). It can thus be deduced from this background that inter-regional migration, not only for youth but other age groups has become a survival strategy for their resilience.

Migrant youth upon their arrival in the host countries, face a number of difficulties. Barlett (2015) and Kyereko in McLean (2020) denote that it is really a pressing concern in all parts of the world to manage migrant populations and provide for their basic social and educational needs. South Africa is presently confronted with the need to cater for a number of migrant communities such as meeting their access to education. Schooling according to Kia-Keating and Ellis (2007) is not just a human right but a means of life continuity, job prospect, peer relationship through which immigrants construct their lives, self-esteem and develop their hope for the future. The South African government has come up with different policies (such as; The Admission of Learners to Public Schools Act of 2001, The Immigration Act of 2002, Aliens Control Act of 1991, The Refugees Act of 1998) which are all regulated by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996, for the administration of international migrants in as far as education a human right is concerned, however, in practice, there are still challenges of integration. There are unexplored barriers within the South African contexts which hinder the education integration of both migrant children and youth. Therefore, this study sought to explore barriers towards furthering education amongst migrant youth in South Africa, by using Musina town as a case study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Access to basic and/or furthering of education is a fundamental human right since the post-apartheid era in South Africa. Mavimbela (2001) and Slee (2010) argue that education as a human right should include all learners irrespective of their race, class, gender, disability, religion, culture, sexual preference, learning styles, birth and language amongst others. Despite these assertions, immigrants (migrant youth in the context of this paper) still face integration challenges into the educational system of South Africa. Previous studies confirm this notion by stating that the integration of immigrants into the welfare of South Africa which amongst others is access to basic education is ongoing and quite disturbing (Motha, 2005; Khan, 2007b; Crush & Tawodzera, 2013; Rapholo, 2020). Rapholo (2020) in his study on the perceptions of church leaders on the integration of migrant youth into South Africa which was conducted in Musina town recommended that; to mitigate the issue of integrating immigrants into the South African welfare, stakeholders should collaborate their services. The government of South Africa has adopted immigration and refugee policies to manage and administer the admission of immigrants in the South African schools which are aligned to the constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996. For example, according to the Admission of Learners to

Public Schools Act of 2001, official documents such as residence permits are not required to for learners to enrol in public school, thus including immigrants. This is supported by the South African's schools Act 84 of 1996 in a far as the admission of learners to the public schools is concerned in that public school must admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating them in any way. The constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996) lay a proper foundation for a democratic society which embraces human rights, and in particular the right of learners to education irrespective of their distinguished identities. Despite these initiatives, there is still a lack of effective implementation for migrant youth' access to education in South Africa. It is from this background that this study sought to investigate barriers towards furthering of education amongst migrant youth in South Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

International migration is such a sundry and complex phenomenon that no single theory has been able to provide a satisfactory all-encompassing explanation. In order to understand causes of international migration one ought to incorporate a variety of factors and perspectives. Several studies show that people migrate from one country to another due to economic reasons (Centre for Human Rights and Rehabilitation [CHRR], 2007; Ditshwanelo 2007; Rugunanan & Smit, 2011; Rapholo, 2020) and for this reason, migration serves as their resilience strategy. It is from this background that this study was guided by both the new economics theory of migration in conjunction with a resilience theory. The new economics theory of migration which was found by Stark in in the 1980s holds a perception that the migration decision is often taken collectively, especially within households (Kurekova 2011; Stark 1991). Selected family members migrate to mitigate risks and diversify income resources for the entire family. If things go well in the host countries for those who migrate, they will provide support for their families in the country of origin, and vice versa. This makes an emphasis that migration for some immigrants is their resilient strategy. One of the pioneers of resilience theory, Norman Garnezy who founded it in 1974 argues that the heart of resilience is the mediating processes also referred to as resilience processes or protective resources which enable people to achieve better-than-expected outcomes in the face of adversity (Van Breda, 2001). In order to mitigate the economic hardships in their countries of origin, youth migrate to other countries for their resilience. It is quite disturbing that whilst young people migrate to other countries, they encounter a number of challenges such as access to basic education. The new economics theory of migration in conjunction with resilience theory were convenient in this study to understand the conditions of migrant youth in their host countries that pushed them to migrate to South Africa where they face adverse conditions in as far as access to education is concerned. The researcher through the guide of these two theories was able to assess opportunities for furthering education amongst migrant youth.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative case study design was followed in order to achieve the aim of this study. A qualitative approach in this study enabled the researcher to gain first-hand experiences from migrant youth as Creswell (2003) postulates. Through a qualitative approach, Musina town was used as a case study for the purpose of this study. Fouché and Schurink (2011) aver that

researchers who opt for case studies use a small number of instances to produce detailed description of cases. A non-probability sampling method was used to purposively select ten (10) migrant youth who come from African countries outside South Africa. In order to collect a qualitative data, semi-structured interviews with open ended questions were used and thereafter findings were analysed thematically through the help of the Nvivo Software. Credibility (through prolonged engagements with participants, member checking and peer examination), conformability (field notes were written directly after each interview with each participant and audio-recording device was used for auditing purposes), and dependability (through correct coding of data) were followed in order to ensure the quality of the research findings.

Ethical Issues

For this study to be effective, an ethical clearance was obtained from Turfloop Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) of the University of Limpopo with a project number **TREC/74/2019: IR**. The organisations in which this study was conducted and the Musina Local Municipality in the Vhembe district of the Limpopo Province granted a permission. The aim of this study and the voluntary nature of participation by migrant youth was clearly explained to them, which was done after they verbally agreed to participate. Migrant youth also signed the consent forms. Names and identities of the participants have not been mentioned in this article so as to maintain confidentiality.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The new economics theory of migration in conjunction with the resilience theory were used to assess opportunities for furthering education amongst migrant youth in South Africa by using Musina town as a case study.

Profile of Participants

Ten (10) black African migrant youth (those between the ages of 18 to 35) participated in this study. Out of these participants, five (5) were males and another five (5) were females. Of these participants, two (2) Malawans, one (1) Angolan, one (1) Congolese and five (6) Zimbabweans participated in this study. The following themes emerged from the study:

Lack of motivation

A number of migrant youth frequently reported lack of motivation as a barrier to furthering of their education in South Africa. The other participant stated that ever since her arrival in South Africa, she has never seen any professional at the facility where they have been accommodated just to give a motivational talk in as far as education is concerned. It also came out during the interviews with migrant youth in Musina that professionals in South Africa have bad attitudes towards them which demoralises them to can think of pursuing studies on their stay in the country. This is what the participant echoed:

“....It is not like I don't want to go to school. The situation in Zimbabwe is very tough even though the quality of education at home is very good compared to South Africa, but the economic crisis really prohibits us to tap into the educational opportunities.”

The problem is that no one here in South Africa will motivate you to further your studies. Ever since I have arrived here, I never saw any professional coming closer to us just to motivate us. I mean I don't even know where to start if I were to pursue my studies here in South Africa”.

In the same breath, the other migrant youth stated that:

“Service providers here in South Africa have very bad attitudes against us. To them, a foreigner is deemed as an underserving service user. That really demoralises us to can think of pursuing studies here in South Africa”.

This finding on lack of motivation to furthering of education for migrant youth in South Africa as stated above is corroborated by another study on the concept of patient motivation where it was indicated that professionals' attitudes towards service users has an influence in as far as motivation is concerned (Maclean, Pound, Wolfe & Rudd, 2002). From the above quoted study, it was found that if service users get motivated by professionals, they are more likely to respond positively to the available programmes (i.e rehabilitation programme in the context of the quoted study). It can thus be deduced from the findings that migrant youth in Musina town are unaware of any available services to help them pursue their studies in South Africa. If migrant youth in South Africa can receive a professional motivational talk in as far as furthering of education in a host country is concerned, they will mostly if not all opt for that. However, it cannot be ignored that proper protocols which are informed by the legislation should be followed so as to include migrant youth into the South African education system. It is very imperative that despite how immigrants arrived in South Africa, professionals collaborate their services to include immigrants into the educational systems of the country.

Other participants purported that their conditions as immigrants are not motivational in nature. For example, the other participant stated that even if she is to go to school, what about the minor child she has given birth to after her arrival in South Africa. The participant has indicated that she cannot afford to take the child to the child care centre as the child will be without anyone to look after. This is what the participant echoed:

“The conditions we find ourselves into as immigrants really do not motivate us to think about furthering education here in South Africa. I mean my child whom I gave birth to here in South Africa will be without anyone to take care of her as I cannot afford the day care centre”.

In addition, the participant has indicated that even if she can consider taking the child to the child care centre, chances are that the child might be rejected from the centre because she is the child of a foreigner. The participant further indicated that she does not have legal documents which are also required at the child care centre for the enrolment of the child. This is the response from the participant:

“They will not consider my child at the child care centre to enable me to pursue my education because I am from a foreign country. I also do not have legal documents for my child to be enrolled in the child care centres”.

It can be deduced from the above finding that xenophobic attitudes by local citizens significantly have an influence on the educational opportunities of immigrants in South Africa. These findings corroborates the previous studies which confirmed that immigrants in South Africa have challenges of being denied access to public services as a result of xenophobic attitudes amongst service providers (Bollini & Siem 1995; Nkosi 2004; Pursell 2005; Rapholo, 2020). It is therefore imperative that stakeholders in South Africa by following proper protocols, be motivational in as far as an access to education for immigrants is concerned.

Another participant made an addition on how their conditions in South Africa are not motivational by stating that education goes with resources such as a housing space. The

participant was of the view that it really does not work in their favour to further their studies in South Africa as they do not have homes. The participant further highlighted that it is unfortunate that due to their lack of proper documentations, they cannot be provided with the South African housing. Thus, such tempers with their oomph to want to pursue their studies in South Africa. This is what the participant echoed:

“We do not have a place called home and we are without a housing space. How will I complete school assignments, such as home works after school? Education goes with resources. It is unfortunate that we do not even qualify for the South African government housing as we do not have proper documents”.

These findings corroborate the study conducted by Rapholo (2020) in that immigrants in South Africa are subjected to poor living conditions. Data was collected from two churches at Musina which serve as shelters for migrant youth who participated in this study. It was observed that their living conditions in the churches are not convenient for their education as they share housing space at a very large number. The researcher is of the view that besides furthering of education, these immigrants are not safe during this era of Covid-19 because of the living conditions in the shelters. The migrant youth are overcrowded in the churches which is not good for their health. It can thus be deduced that the living conditions for migrant youth in South Africa have an impact on their willingness to further their education in the country, however, it cannot be ignored that a number of them migrated without proper documentations so that they can be provided with a proper housing accommodation whilst they pursue their studies.

Unawareness of constitutional rights of immigrants to education and inadequate legal documents

Another theme which emerged during this study as a barrier for migrant youth to further their studies in South Africa was problems around unawareness of constitutional rights of immigrants to education. Some participants have indicated that they are unaware of their rights to education in South Africa. Amongst these participants, some had permits whilst others do not have. Below is a response from one migrant youth:

*“.....Can I really further my studies here in South Africa? This is strange to me. I have completed A levels (**Literally meaning equivalent to the completion of a grade 12 in South Africa**) at my home country but because of the economic upheavals I could not further my studies back at home. I had to come to South Africa for a better living even though it is not like how I have anticipated. I wish one can really educate me about the South African laws in as far as an access to education for immigrants is concerned”*

In corroboration to the above, the other migrant youth said:

“I really did not even bother to try education in South Africa as I broke the law to come to South Africa. Won't I be exposing myself should I challenge going to school here in South Africa? Man.....it is very tough at home. It is not like I don't want to go to school but if I can really be educated about what the South African laws say about us as foreigners in terms of access to education, I really would not wait. We are starving. Maybe education can make a difference in our lives”

Findings are corroborated by Barlett (2015) who purported that policies on the rights of immigrants in South Africa are not well disseminated. It is thus imperative that the South African government make available immigration policies, policies on the rights of immigrants in particular. The immigrants' unawareness of their rights is also corroborated by Crush and

Tawodzera (2013) in that very few immigrants who participated in their study knew their constitutional right to education in South Africa. A possible reason for that could be that most immigrants in South Africa are without permits, however, it cannot be always an excuse as findings confirmed that some do have permits. Khan (2007b) and Motha (2005) provided a different reason that a possible reason why immigrants are unaware of their rights in South Africa could be that stakeholders such as the Department of Home Affairs personnel, public education officials and police themselves may be unaware or dismissive of laws regarding migrant children's right to education. The researcher is of the view that stakeholders should robustly be empowered about pieces of legislation which talk about migrants' right to education in South Africa. It is also very imperative that proper screening for migrant youth be effected upon their arrival in the country and all the relevant information such as the right of immigrants' access to education in South Africa, be made available.

The other migrant youth reported that he does not have a permit as he has crossed borders illegally to arrive in South Africa. The participant echoed that:

"How do I further my studies in South Africa whilst I don't even have a permit? I have crossed borders illegally. Should I be granted the opportunity to pursue my studies in South Africa, I would definitely grab it".

The Admission of Learners to Public Schools Act of 2001 clearly indicate that official documents such as residence permits are not required for learners to enrol in public schools in South Africa. This corroborates section 5(1) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 which postulates that every public school must admit learners and meet their educational requirements without unfairly discriminating them. It can be deduced from the findings that in addition to migrant youth' unawareness of their constitutional rights to education in South Africa, lack of legal documentations also serve as a barrier. This is supported by several studies which have shown that migrant children and youth across the world face challenges in exercising their rights to education due to their lack of adequate documentation (Heckmann, 2008; Nusche, 2009; Buckland, 2011; Crush & Tawodzera, 2011; Greenberg, Adams, & Michie, 2016). The researcher is of the view that should the Department of Education and other relevant stakeholders integrate their programmes effectively, migrant youth who are in and outside schools in South Africa who are without permits would be assisted whilst they study so as to get their legal documents sorted. It is quite disturbing to note the applications for permits exceedingly take long and thus both migrant learners/students and schools may be vulnerable and that schools may be put into a position to enforce migration policies and thus suffer the consequences of mistreating immigrants.

Local language competency

Most migrant youth have highlighted the use of local language as a barrier to pursue studies in South Africa. Some have indicated that they are not competent with the language spoken by local citizens which might be problematic as some subjects are strictly taught in the learners' mother tongue. One migrant youth echoed that:

"Here in Musina they mostly speak Sepedi and Tshivenda which I am not conversant with. I don't think I will follow fluently at school should I opt to further my studies here in South Africa. There are subject which are strictly taught through the use of a mother tongue".

In the same breath, the other migrant youth stated that:

"I strictly speak shona which is not taught anywhere in South Africa. So, I think enrolling for education here in South Africa would require the education

sector to develop multicultural curriculum and pedagogies which would cater even us shona speaking people”.

It can be deduced from the findings that language proficiency plays a significant role in the access of education for migrant youth. These findings are similar to what Barlett (2015) and and Kyereko in McLean (2020) maintain in that language of instruction profoundly affects educational outcomes of immigrants. It is therefore imperative that the South African education sector develop language learning and support programmes for immigrants to learn how to speak and write the local language proficiently. This programmes should include skilled educators who would efficiently be conversant with multicultural pedagogies. The other migrant youth echoed that:

“I try to speak Tshivenda but I cannot read and write it. Thus, it would require someone to educate me how to write Tshivenda before I can enrol for education in South Africa”.

It is crucial to note that language learning for immigrants is very much essential. Section 6 (3) and (4) of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 provides that the governing body of the public schools should develop language policies which are non-discriminatory for learning purposes. Therefore, it is imperative that on the development of such policies, schools consider immigrants and their right to education in South Africa.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Universal access to education in the Sub-Saharan Africa countries is still elusive. It can be deduced from this study that migrant youth face enormous challenges for their inclusion into the education system of South Africa. Findings have shown barriers which should profoundly be attended to so as to create an enabling educational environment for not only migrant youth, but all deserving immigrants in South Africa. Findings signals that for migrant youth’ furthering of education in South Africa, attention should be given to: 1.) Professional motivational talk on education for immigrants; 2.) Dissemination of information pertaining to the rights of immigrants; 3.) the human right to education; 4.) the prominence of legal status and/or permits; 5.) Language learning and support programmes for immigrants; 6.) Language policies which embrace culturally responsive pedagogies and curricula, and 7.) The integration of services by stakeholders for meeting the educational needs of immigrants.

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AUTHORS’ CONTRIBUTIONS

I declare that I am the sole author of this article.

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