

African Migrant Learners’ Experiences of Xenophobia in South Africa

Jude Ifeanyichukwu Nnadozie

University of South Africa

nnadoziejude@gmail.com

Pholoho Justice Morojele

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Morojele@ukzn.ac.za

ABSTRACT

This article draws on the social identity theory to understand the real life schooling experiences of the migrant learners (from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe) within three South African schools. It adopted a qualitative, narrative research methodology, using open-ended interviews and photovoice as its methods of data collection. The findings reveal complex and pervasive dynamics of xenophobia. These took the form of denigrating stereotypical constructions of African migrants and resulted in the mistreatment, exclusion, and rejection of the African migrant learners. The study recommends further research on issues on African migrant learners schooling experiences in South Africa and for schools to embrace acceptance of African migrant learners for enhancing an inclusive schooling agenda.

Introduction

The proverbial Basotho¹ saying, *Sepa le holo ke la molata – la monga motse the kotsokoane* [literally: a foreigner’s feces is the bigger one – that of the house owner is a small bit], evokes the perennality and inter-generationality of human migration. The proverb equally denotes unequal power relations infusing how foreigners were (and still are) viewed as compared to locals. Perhaps now, starkly different are the sheer numbers of people involved in migration owing to increased wars, political instabilities, poverty, and capitalist demands for more cheap labor across Africa. Consequently, people are forced to leave their home African countries for safety reasons or in search of, not greener pastures per se, but basic survival livelihoods.

Indeed, global/trans-national migration has been in existence since time immemorial ([Castles, 2010](#)). People are pushed as a result of social, political, environmental, and economic factors to migrate from their countries of birth to settle in other countries ([Rothberg, 2006](#)). International migration has ever been on the increase as a result of globalization, which makes it easier for people to have full access to other countries of the world through more efficient communication networks, easy and cheap transportation, and most importantly, common and new economic, social, and cultural ideologies ([Kok et al., 2006](#)). Since South Africa introduced democratic governance in 1994, the country has become a favourite destination for many African migrants. This is attributable to its growing and promising economy ([Shimeles, 2010](#)). Migrants as a social group do however undergo many challenging experiences notwithstanding whether their migration

¹ Plural of people who speak Sesotho – one of the mostly spoken language in South Africa and the single language spoken in the neighboring Lesotho. The singular is Mosotho – meaning, a Sesotho speaking person.

is informed by economic decisions or results from contingency ([Byron & Condon, 2008](#); [Giuffre, 2013](#)).

The challenges migrants face define their self-perception and identity, more especially where and when they are not yet welcome in the new environment ([Fukuyama, 2007](#)). In South Africa, xenophobia seen in school cultural geographies ([Harris, 2002](#)) does certainly impact and shape the schooling experiences of migrant learners. Anecdotal evidence indicates that migrant children, especially African migrant children in South African schools, experience conditions that result in exclusion, alienation, and generally unhealthy social and academic functioning of these learners. On the other hand, the founding notions of social cohesion, inclusivity, and diversity in South Africa provide a basis for the South African schools to be accommodative and socially responsive in nature. Affordance of equal opportunities and respect to all learners irrespective of background (Parker et al. 2001) is generally viewed to serve a broader purpose of achieving the nation's social cohesion and democratisation by inculcating values of respect for social diversity and integration ([Lazarus et al., 1999](#)).

Furthermore, diversity, inclusivity, equity and social justice are among the key principles enshrined in the South African Constitution. These principles require the removal of all hindrances for all learners who reside in South Africa to ensure they can access equitable and quality education, irrespective of their countries of origin. However, there is a gap in the literature on the extended and immediate effects of migration on African migrant learners in schools in South Africa. Perhaps overlooked in research is inquiry into migrant learners' experiences. In particular, focal attention is given in this study to the migrant learners of African origin from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe, who are visibly representative of the migrant schooling population in South African schools ([Vandeyar, 2011](#)). Their experiences appear not to be adequately captured within the remit of immigrant schooling discourse. Therefore, this article addresses the African migrant learners' experiences of xenophobia within three South Africa schools, the factors that contribute to these learners' experiences of xenophobia, and the effects of these

experiences on their social and academic wellbeing. Migrant learners from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe make up for large number of African migrant learners, particularly in Durban and surrounding communities where this study was conducted. This is partly due to the massive influx of migrant families from Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe to these areas ([Guild & Mantu, 2011](#)).

Understanding Child Migration in Africa

There is always the assumption that migration is synonymous with adult movement/mobility, particularly labour migration, with children regarded to be less mobile. Yet we have come to know that adult migration oftentimes necessitates child migration especially when mothers are involved ([Cortes, 2007](#); [Edmonds & Salinger, 2007](#)). In fact, many of the same factors and processes that propel adult migration also propel child migration. Children commonly migrate as part of independent or household livelihood strategies ([Crush et al., 2005](#)), particularly when households are no longer considered to be economically viable or are unable to take care of children's basic needs ([Kanics et al., 2010](#)). Factors such as family dysfunction, marital dissolution, poverty, and cultural practices also fuel child migration ([Whitehead et al., 2007](#)). Furthermore, child migration in Africa is closely associated with imbalances in development levels between origin and destination areas.

There are generally wider differences in the levels of household income and poverty between the place of origin and destination ([Alonso, 2011](#); [Kwankye et al., 2009](#)). In this sense, child migration could be seen as a strategy families employ to cope with economic hardships. Equally important are natural disasters and harsh conditions caused by wars and different forms of social and political instabilities. Indeed, child emigration from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe is partly a result of the hardships caused by wars, as well as social and economic instabilities in both countries. Family members in these countries migrate with their children to South Africa for better economic stability, better job opportunities, better wages, and

greater safety. This happens despite the risks of xenophobia, which many African migrants experience while in South Africa.

African Migrants' Experiences of Xenophobia in South Africa

Xenophobia entails attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors that reject, exclude, and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society, or national identity ([Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013](#)). In a sense, xenophobia is an internalised perception about foreigners with the notion that “they” do not belong to the “us” (the “out group” and the “in group” notion; the “them” and the “us”), which results in social exclusion and insecurity. Xenophobia and related social intolerances have continued to increase in South Africa despite government policies working to create an inclusive and socially cohesive society. It culminates in the African migrant children’s exclusion from educational opportunities and access to basic health services, including lack of employment opportunities to their African migrant parents. These tendencies continue to relegate African migrants to dire economic conditions and thus work to defeat their purposes of having left their countries for South Africa ([Osman, 2009](#)).

[Harris \(2002\)](#) notes that in South Africa, most African migrants are victims of xenophobia and xenophobic violence and stereotyping. On the other hand, [Marcos \(2010\)](#) is of the view that xenophobia in South Africa is not just an attitude but an activity, a violent practice that results in bodily harm and damage. There is strong evidence that African migrants living, working, and schooling in South Africa face physical violence at the hands of the locals. According to Patel (2013), various forms of discrimination and violence against African migrants in South Africa have also legitimised extortion, corruption, and the arbitrary arrest and detention of suspected non-nationals from other African countries. Similarly, [Adjai and Lazaridis \(2013\)](#) maintain that over the past decade, incidents of violence and discrimination against foreigners, especially foreigners from other African countries, have increased dramatically. An instance here is a number of recent

violent attacks targeted mostly at African migrants in Gauteng and Durban in KwaZulu-Natal provinces in April 2015. The reasons for this vary and include fear of economic competition and a belief that foreigners are inherently criminals and a drain on public resources ([Landau et al., 2005](#)). Similarly, Harris (2001) highlights that African migrants in South Africa are often negatively connected with crime, poverty, unemployment, and illegality. As illustrated in this paper, constructing and treating African migrants as outcasts has important implications on how African migrant children experience schooling in South Africa. Indeed, xenophobic hostilities, fear, and hatred of African migrants by some South Africa locals places a huge psychological and emotional burden on the African migrant learners within South Africa schools (Crush et al, 2005). The xenophobic tendencies targeted exclusively towards African migrants denote the racial dynamic of this phenomenon, where African blackness is generally associated with negativity and fear, and is generally constructed in a denigrating and menial fashion. In South Africa, such tendencies serve squarely to advance the colonial and apartheid agenda of “divide and rule Africans” as a strategy of advancing Western, European, and white supremacy.

Theoretical Framework: Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social identity theory (SIT) is used to understand the African migrant learners’ experiences of xenophobia in South African schools. SIT was first developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979 to understand the psychological foundation to how different groups relate in a society. Social identity is that part of the individual self-concept, which derives from individuals’ knowledge of their membership in a social group, together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Tajfel, 1982). SIT provides insights into the socio-psychological foundations of how different people relate and organise themselves into different social formations/groups and the social dynamics that regulate power relationships within these groups. Turner (1982) refers to a social group as “two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves” (p. 15). SIT

also tries to find out what reasons and conditions would necessitate members of one group not to tolerate members of another group and act in favour of the group they belong to: the “in-group” (Alexander, 2001). SIT therefore maintains that the formation of in-group and out-group categorisations, and the development of behaviours that favour the in-group at the expense of the out-group, result from social group membership. Essentially, SIT is concerned with inter-group relationships amongst the local and African foreign learners, as well as group formation processes, in relation to the socially conscious self (Hogg et al., 1995). This theory has enabled the current study to understand the social process, group formation, membership dynamics, and power relationships between the local learners and migrant learners, as well as how these play out in real live situations to cause the African migrant learners’ experiences of xenophobia, social exclusion, and cultural alienation. SIT explains how people interact within social settings (Motsa, 2017). It has enabled this paper to explicate how the social identities of African migrant learners result in their classification as a menial social group within the school, thus relegated to unequal power relationships with the local learners, in ways that allow for xenophobic attitudes and mistreatments.

Research Design

Study Sites and Sample

The study was conducted in three secondary schools with Congolese and Zimbabwean migrant learners in Durban, South Africa. Given that three schools were used, and for the purpose of anonymity and clarity, the different schools were tagged as School A, B, and C respectively.

- (a) School A was a multiracial government school, in which the majority of teachers were employed and paid by the South African Department of Education. Learner enrolment stood at about 1054, out of which 3% were African migrant learners from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe.

- (b) School B was also a government owned secondary school. Unlike school A, it was not a multiracial school. It had a learner enrolment of 980, out of which about 0.98% were migrant learners from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe.
- (c) School C was an independent school, meaning that teachers and other staff in the school were not employed by the South African Department of Education. The learner population was 574. About 1.2% of the learner population were learners from other African countries, including learners from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe.

The three schools were selected for this study because of the availability and population of migrant learners from the Democratic Republic Congo, Zimbabwe, and other African countries, accessibility, and the schools' willingness participate in the study. The schools also represent typical South African school contexts with considerable diversity because of the presence of migrant children.

Purposive sampling technique was also used to select twelve (12) Grade 8 – 12 learners comprising of male and female learners, aged 15 to 18 years. The choice of the participants for the study was based on individuals who happen to be available and accessible, and who indicated willingness to take part in the study. Also, the choice of this study to focus on migrant learners from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe is made because both categories of learners come from similar situations of displacement as a result of socioeconomic and political problems in their respective countries. Given that these learners are coming from the same situation of displacement in their home countries, their migrant background experiences and sensibilities were considered likely to be similar. Furthermore, there is visible dominance of students from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe in the school-age migrant population of schools across Durban and surrounding communities.

Study Methodology and Data Collection Methods

The study used a qualitative narrative approach as its methodological design. Qualitative research was aligned with this study for its credence to comprehend human phenomena in context (Creswell, 2014). Through this approach, the study was able to examine the African migrant learners' experiences (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Narrative inquiry was chosen based on the perspective that people are storytellers and lead lives that are full of stories (Connelly & Clandenin, 1990). Through the African migrant learners' stories, the study could better comprehend their daily-lived experiences and the meaning they made of their experiences in the schools. Individual and focus group semi-structured interviews and participatory photo voice techniques were utilized as methods of data collection. The focus groups were composed of four participants per focus group comprising of males and females, and they were held over a period of two weeks. The purpose of focus group interviews in this study was to collect shared understanding from the participants and to get views from individual participants. Focus group interview was advantageous in the process of data collection as interactions among the participants yielded information that could not be captured during the normal individual interview process. Focus group interview deepened data collected through individual interviews. Individual interviews with the participants took different lengths of time over a period of six weeks. For photovoice, each participant was given a camera with 27 frames. The participants were trained on how to use the cameras. The participants were provided guidelines on how to use the cameras responsibly and what to cover in the process of capturing images. They were then urged to capture their chosen salient spaces and places such as classrooms, libraries, playgrounds, tuck shop, etc. that held meaning to their real-life schooling experiences, guided by the theme of the study (Joubert, 2012), for a period of three days. Afterwards, the frames were developed, and the photo imagery was then used during the interviews to act as ingress into the views, perspectives, and lived experiences of the study participants (Mitchell et al., 2005). With permission from the participants, the use of a tape recorder helped in the accurate capturing of what each participant said and to make up for data not recorded in notes. Field notes were used to record the interviews, especially the

participants' emotions and body language. All interviews were conducted in English as the participants were conversant with this, and this did not seem to have created any linguistic restrictions whatsoever.

Data Analysis Procedures

An inductive process of analysis was followed to derive patterns and themes in the data (Creswell, 2014). This necessitated listening and re-listening to the recorded data while reading the transcriptions for accuracy in interpretation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Data was then organized and re-organized, linking pseudonyms with informants. This was followed by reading line by line and listening to the recordings again for familiarity with the data and to identify sub-emerging themes related to the African migrant learners' experiences in the schools. The tone of voice of the participants was also noted, especially in trying to comprehend their emotions. Also, the tone of voice of the participants is incorporated in the discussion of the findings through attention to the choice of words the participants used in expressing their emotions. The theoretically informed emergent themes from all the data (individual, focus group interviews, and photovoice) were then coded, analysed, and discussed based on debates in the field and creative interpretive abilities of the researchers.

Ethical Considerations

As a way of respecting the rights of the participants, ethical issues were observed (Creswell, 2014). Written permission was obtained from the school principals, through a written letter stating the purpose of the study. Ethical clearance was then obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal research office, after which letters of consent were written to the parents/caregivers of the African migrant learners, elucidating issues of confidentiality, privacy, and voluntary participation. As the study considers learners to be competent human beings who can decide on issues that concern their lives, their consent was also sought. Trust and respect was maintained throughout the research process and with all the research participants. The participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study if and when they so desired without any undesirable consequences. For

confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in this paper to depict both the schools and participants.

Results and Discussions

The findings unveiled aspects of the participants' experiences of xenophobia, and the resulting mistreatment and social exclusion in the schools mainly due to their social identities as African migrant learners. The findings reveal that all 12 participants from all three schools have similar experiences of xenophobia and feelings of isolation and exclusion from their local counterparts in school who see them as different. The findings are organised to address stereotypical constructions of African migrant learners, the African migrant learners' experiences of xenophobia, and the adverse effects of xenophobia on the African migrant learners' social and academic wellbeing.

Stereotypical Constructions of African Migrants in the School

The findings reveal the effect of stereotypes on the African migrant learners' schooling experiences in the schools under study. The impact of stereotyping on African migrant learners' schooling experiences did contribute to their experiences of xenophobia, mistreatment, and social exclusion. This made schools to be psychologically and physically unsafe for the migrant learners due to damages caused by negative and denigrating imaginations about African migrants in these schools. All 12 participants in this study said they have suffered negative experiences from the stereotyping and negative ideas propagated in the schools about African migrants in South Africa.

Sande (girl aged 17) They think foreigners are the ones doing the stealing in their country. They tell us that we steal their things.

Kabedi (boy aged 17) What I dislike most is what South African learners think and say about us because we are foreigners. They think we are different from them, and say that we are not clever because we do not speak their language,

and we cannot do well in school. The teachers also have failed to understand us. They think we like to always fight and do not do well in studies. Therefore, any time there is any problem in school they will say it is caused by foreigners.

The way local learners are socialized around their own identities as compared to the African foreign learners might have played a significant role in how the local learners view the African migrant learners. South Africans are socialized to believe that African foreigners should speak South African native languages. African foreigners who cannot speak South African native languages are perceived to be different and deficient (Harris, 2002). This informs how South African learners perceive their own identities and consider African migrants who cannot speak South African native languages as different. Furthermore, biological and physical signifiers reveal the foreignness of the African foreigners and their difference from the locals, and this also plays significant role in the way the locals are socialized to perceive their own identities as different from the African foreigners (Harris, 2002). This also may contribute to the ways the local learners view the African migrant learners as different and inadequate.

It appears that the local learners' views of the African migrant learners was centered on their perceptions of lack and inadequacy of the African migrants. In other words, the local learners construed the African migrant learners, somewhat fearfully in menial terms to be here to take the local South Africans jobs, with the power to also take the locals' wives. Therefore, migrants were generally construed as a functional source of the many social problems that the schools and communities faced.

Dingani (boy aged 16) People of South Africa say that foreigners in their country are here to steal and to take their jobs and wives. They think that foreigners are the cause of crime here; they are here to increase crime which is not a good thing.

FIGURE 1

A school's netball playground.



Ndiya (girl aged 17) This is our school netball ground.....Our netball coach doesn't believe I can play netball...even learners do not want me to play in their teams...they say a person from Congo can't play netball.

Disanka (girl aged 17) At first being a foreigner in this country didn't bother me much but it did bother when they started to judge me and started to say bad things about us, and that affected and really lowered my confidence; my self-esteem being here in South Africa. There is still stereotype around being a foreigner in my school ... I think what causes these experiences is the [negative] stories that people hear [about foreigners] on TV.

The issue of fear based on lack of knowledge about the African migrant learners informed how migrants experienced schooling. The negative stereotypical constructions about the African migrant seem to have been supported and affirmed at various levels of society, both at school in how some African migrant learners were denied participation in certain sports. They also faced stereotyping by the mainstream media, which propagated negative stories about African migrants, including the African migrant learners. According to Harris (2002), stereotyping can cause and has actually caused migrants great affliction in host communities and countries. This is evident in the findings, as many of the participants said they were hated, intimidated, and physically and verbally abused by their local

counterparts in the schools based on fear caused by the local learners' ignorance about the African migrants' learners and the communities they came from.

Indeed, such negative stereotypes made the schools' climates to be unsafe and thus not conducive for learning and healthy social interactions for the migrant learners. CoRMSA (2008) notes that negative treatment such as stereotyping and prejudice towards migrants by South Africans makes it difficult for African migrant children to develop positive personal and social identities. The study found that the impact of negative stereotyping about migrant learners in these schools did not only affect the ways African migrant learners related with others and their school performance, but it also limited or even eroded their social space within the schools' geography.

African Migrant Learners' Schooling Experiences of Xenophobia

[Adjai and Lazaridis \(2013\)](#) see xenophobia as attitudes, prejudices, and behaviors that reject, exclude, and often vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society, or national identity. The findings reveal that the African migrant learners experienced xenophobia through a sense of isolation and exclusion from their local counterparts in the schools.

Munia (girl aged 18) ...learners attacked me once in the toilet and behind our school main building because they said I am a kwere-kwere. I fear being attacked again... they always tell me that they hate seeing me in school because I am a kwere-kwere. They threaten me by always telling me that they will beat me up.

Disanka (girl aged 17) South African learners do not treat us the same way they treat themselves.... I feel rejected, and some learners and teachers are xenophobic in the way they relate to me as a foreigner; call me a kwere-kwere in the school ...what makes me even more sad is basically how they reject me.

Migrant learners' experiences of xenophobia, isolation, and discrimination were found to be mainly due to how both migrant and local learners in the schools formed themselves into distinct social groups based on shared identities and experiences. In line with social identity theory, this form of interaction shaped the social constructions of reality that defined the learners and their social categorisations ([Flick, 2009](#)). Social categorisation in this sense led to formation of social groupings where groups were formed according to differences and similarities in nationality, as well as cultural and linguistic backgrounds ([Hogg et al., 1995](#); [Turner, 1982](#)). These group formations denoted the active social participation and identity meaning making that both African migrant and local learners undertook.

FIGURE 2

A school tuckshop.



Tshamala (girl aged 15) ... I do not come to our school tuckshop to buy during break... whenever I come here learners call me names and irritate me by the way they behave to me... those who sell things here know that I am a foreigner and they do not talk to me with respect.

Akhumzi (boy aged 17) *...some learners make me sad when I come to school. They call me names and do not want me in their groups because I do not speak Zulu [local vernacular]. They tell me that they hate me because I am a foreigner, and they call me kwere-kwere, refugee, and all that. So I feel bad because of the way they treat me.*

Wemba (boy aged 18) *...at school they always like to make trouble with foreigners in school. The learners from here take our things without our permission, and if we try to resist them, they will show us knife and we become defenceless and speechless.*

Sande (girl aged 17) *Break time is...a bad time for me, some learners tease me by calling me names and looking for a way to provoke me, and I hardly sit in...open space...because they will come and make trouble with me.*

Indeed, the issue of African migrant learners' constructions of their positioning within the school as the "other" did to some extent contribute to the exclusionary dynamic as they formed their own social group based on their common and shared experiences as migrants. The data also denote the involuntary nature of this group formation, resulting from rejection by the local learners. The inescapable dynamic of the local learners' mistreatment of African migrant learners is depicted in Sande's extract above, which shows how the local learners provoked trouble to fuel the stereotypes about the African migrant learners' negative contributions to the school environment, as they get involved in fights and so forth. So trying to deconstruct the in-group and out-group formations of social group memberships based on stereotypical constructions of learners' group identities could be a feasible strategy of counteracting xenophobia and other unpleasant experiences, such as social isolation and cultural exclusion for the migrant learners in these contexts.

Negative Effects of Xenophobia on Migrant Learners' Education

The study found that migrants suffered exclusion from many important aspects of their social lives, as is evident in the participants' narratives below. Fukuyama (2007) notes that host communities and countries tend to exclude migrants by constantly limiting their rights. Indeed, this study found that African migrant learners suffered all degrees of exclusion, discrimination, physical assaults, and stereotypes. Discrimination, violence, and xenophobic tendencies targeted against the participants in the schools and in the larger South African society did limit their socio-psychological freedom and negatively affected the ways they lived and functioned both in school and in the wider South African society.

Luboya (boy aged 17) I hate it when learners call me kwere-kwere, I feel like going back home. That makes me see myself as different from other learners. So I feel so sad to hear learners call me kwere-kwere and tell me to go back to my country.

Akhumzi (boy aged 17) I do not feel happy walking to school every morning because I do not feel happy at school.

Wemba (boy aged 18) I feel intimidated here because of the way people treat us because we are foreigners. No one wants to be your friend because you are a kwere-kwere.... When I am walking on the road, I feel scared and unhappy... people look at you with hatred, and you see it in their faces... I like soccer but I cannot go to play with South Africans because whenever I go to play with them it ends up in a fight.

According to Harris (2002), xenophobia is characterised by negative attitudes towards foreigners. This is evident in the above data excerpts. Also, [Bangura \(2001\)](#) argues that prejudice against African migrants in South Africa prevents social unity and the freedom of migrants, as migrants are seen and treated as outcasts by the locals. Clearly, the African migrant learners in this context schooled and lived

under tension, fear, and psychological and emotional anxieties due to the experienced or imagined hostilities and hatred towards them by the locals ([Crush et al., 2005](#)). This further suggests that the participants did not only find school environments as unsafe; they also constructed their positioning within the school as vulnerable to physical attack and psychological abuse. This had a potential to limit their freedoms, including active social participation and integration within the schools and communities in South Africa.

The findings also revealed that migrant learners did not only experience the negative effects of xenophobia in their social lives in communities and in school in South Africa. Xenophobia also adversely affected their academic lives and constrained their academic performance. CoRMSA (2008) states that discrimination and xenophobic attacks are among the major challenges migrant children in South Africa face in their education. In line with this, Suarez-Orozco, Rhodes, and Milburn (2009) maintain that concerns about vulnerability to violent attacks have detrimental effects on the school climate, which affects students' readiness and ability to learn.

Bakoma (boy aged 16) ...I do not perform well in class because learners do not want me to be in their group for group work...they say I am a kwere-kwere ...and say we do not want a kwere-kwere in our group...

FIGURE 3

Left: learner reading alone. Right: learners reading in a group



Disanka (girl aged 17) *I do my reading alone, but other learners read together in small groups, and they will never accept me in their group. They call me kwere-kwere. Even when I force myself to be in their small reading groups, they will use their language to exclude me. This effects how I perform in subjects I find difficult because there is no one to share ideas about what we learn in class.*

Ndaya (girl aged 17) *Learning in class is stressful for me. When we are put in groups to work, I do not perform the way I should because learners in my group do not want me...they use Zulu to discriminate against me in their group.*

Luboya (boy aged 17) ...*even some teachers are very xenophobic the way they treat us.... In class they use Zulu to teach and will never explain to us in English language. They tell us that they do not care if we understand Zulu or not. I used to fail some of my exams because some of our teachers do not care if we understand what they teach or not.*

Munia (girl aged 18) *There are some teachers in school who do not respect me because I'm a foreigner. They talk to me in Zulu and say things that I do not understand to me. Learners laugh at me any time they treat me differently in class, and I feel so bad because of the way I'm treated...because of this, I do not do well in class and I fail my exams.*

African migrant learners' experiences of xenophobia and exclusion in these three South African schools is contrary to school as a place for promoting social diversity. [Maylor et al. \(2007\)](#) maintain that promotion of diversity and equality is an important aspect of the schooling social landscape. School is conceived to be a space and place that develop children and young people as individuals who show respect for others and who understand different beliefs and cultures ([Kellett, 2011](#)). However, the findings of the current study reveal that this is contrary to how African migrant learners experience schooling in South Africa. More civic education is needed to raise consciousness in the true spirit of the South African constitutionally enshrined national goals for social justice, inclusivity, and social cohesion amongst all who live in the country. The xenophobia experienced by the African migrant learners in this study is a microcosm of a bigger challenge of social inclusivity and social cohesion in South Africa, which variously works against the democratic goals of this beloved country.

Conclusion

The findings revealed synergic relationships between the socially engineered stereotypes about African migrants and African learners' experiences of xenophobia in schools. The social identity formation processes that differentiated African migrant learners from local South African learners tended to ascribe negative, derogatory, and menial stereotypes about the African migrant learners, while propagating positivity, high sense of belonging, and entitlement for the local learners (Francis, 2006). The African migrant learners and local learners were thus polarised into two contrasted and rivalry social categories of a "them" vs. "us" scenario. The negative stereotypes propagated against the African migrant learners resulted in these learners internalizing negativity and subordination about themselves and their fellow African migrant learners, while the local learners internalized domination (Harro, 2000). This created unequal power relationships between the African migrant learners, who generally were relegated to a lower power positioning, and the local learners, who were exalted to a dominant power positioning. Such was how the power inequalities equation between the African

migrant learners and the local learners were socially engineered, facilitating a system of oppression called xenophobia targeted against the African migrant learners. Xenophobia in these schools took the form of unfounded negative prejudicial attitudes that led to derogatory name-calling of the African migrants as the *amaKwere-Kwere*, as per the local isiZulu lingua franca, exclusion from meaningful participation in social and academic activities, and cultural alienation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, suggested are the following recommendations for further research and to help enhance African migrant learners' quality of learning and social experiences:

- Conduct further research on issues of African migrant learners' schooling experiences in South Africa in order to ascertain whether all African migrant learners in this context share similar schooling experiences or whether their individual schooling experiences are determined by factors such as differences in nationality, culture, and linguistic backgrounds. Further research of this nature is important given the differences in national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of migrant learners in schools in South Africa. Such research may suggest differences in the ways migrant learners from different countries could adapt to the South African social, cultural, and educational environment.
- Initiate programmes aimed at raising consciousness regarding the need to embrace social diversity and inclusivity of African migrant learners within South African schools and communities.
- Initiate programmes aimed at deconstructing the negative myths and stereotypes about African migrants and their learners in the schools.
- Develop coordinated school-based initiatives on how to respond to and address incidents of xenophobia on a daily basis in schools.
- Develop xenophobia hurts us all campaigns that arise awareness on how xenophobic attitudes relate to other forms of social injustices in schools,

and how equally compromised, at various levels of their lives, are the learners and teachers who practice xenophobia.

For the above recommendations to be successfully implemented, they need to be undertaken as part of a bigger strategy for enhancement of social cohesion, acceptance, and tolerance of social diversity and social justice within the schools.

References

- Adjai, C., & Lazaridis, G. (2013). Migration, xenophobia and new racism in post-apartheid South Africa. *International Journal of Social Science Studies*, 1(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.11114/ijsss.v1i1.102>
- Alexander, S. (2001). Social identity theory: Cognitive and motivational basis of intergroup differentiation. <http://www.tcw.utwente.nl/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20cluster/Interpersonal%20Com>
- Alonso, J.A. (2011). International migration and development: A view in light of the crisis. www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/cdp_background.../bp2011_11e.pdf
- Bangura, Y. (2001). Multilateral north south report: Racism, xenophobia and public policy. 5. [http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/newsview.nsf\(httpNews\)EA36CB8222E332..](http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/newsview.nsf(httpNews)EA36CB8222E332..)
- Byron, M., & Condon, S. (2008). Migration in comparative perspective: Caribbean communities in Britain and France. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203417072>.
- Castles, S. (2010). Understanding global migration: A social transformation perspective. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 36(10), 1565-1586. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2010.489381>.
- Connelly, F.M., & Clandenin, D.J. (1990). Stories of experiences and narrative inquiry. *Educational Researcher*, 19(5), 2-14. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X019005002>
- CoRMSA. (2008). Protecting refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants in South Africa. www.cormsa.org.za.

Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education

Vol. 19, no. 1, 2024, Regular Issue

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20355/jcie29533>

Cortes, R. (2007). Children and women left behind in labour sending countries: An appraisal of social risks. [www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Children_and_women_left_behind\(2\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/policyanalysis/files/Children_and_women_left_behind(2).pdf).

Creswell, J.W. (2014). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches (4th ed.). Sage. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v12n5p40>

Crush, J., Williams, V., & Peberdy, S. (2005). Migration in Southern Africa: A paper prepared for the Policy Analysis and Research Programme of the Global Commission on International Migration. www.sarpn.org/documents/.../P2030-Migration_September_2005.pdf.

Edmonds, E.V., & Salinger, P. (2007). Economic influences on child migration decisions: Evidence from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Institute for the Study of Labour Discussions Paper No. 3174. Institute for The Study of Labour. <https://doi.org/10.1108/17538250810868125>

Flick, U. (2009). An introduction to qualitative research. www.uk.sagepub.com/booksProdDesc.Nav?Prodid=Books232630

Francis, D. (2006). Between race, beyond race; the experience of self-identification of Indian-White biracial adults and the factors affecting their choices of identity. PINS, 34, 1-16. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23993140...>

Fukuyama, F. (2007). Identity and migration. Prospect Magazine, 131, 1. http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/article_details.php?id=8239.

Giuffre, M. (2013). Readmission agreement and refugee rights: From a critique to a proposal. Refugee Survey Quarterly, 32(3), 79-111. <https://doi.org/10.1093/rsg/hdt012>

Guild, E., & Mantu, S. (Eds) (2011). Constructing and imaginising labour migration: Perspectives of control from five continents. Ashgate. https://e-migration.roVol5_No1_2011>Articles

Harris, B. (2001). A foreign experience: Violence, crime and xenophobia during South Africa's transition. www.csvr.org.za/docs/racism/aforeignexperience.pdf.

Harris, B. (2002). Xenophobia: A new pathology for new South Africa? In D. Hook & G. Eagles (Eds.), Psychopathology and social prejudice (pp. 169-184). University of Cape Town Press. <https://doi.org/10.1919713670>

Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education

2024, 19(1), pp. 59-84. ©Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence. <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>



Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education

Vol. 19, no. 1, 2024, Regular Issue

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20355/jcie29533>

Harro, B. (2000). The cycle of socialization. *Readings for diversity and social justice*, 2, 45–51. <https://www.nea.org/site/default/files/Cyc>

Hogg, M.A., Terry, D.J., & White, K.M. (1995). A tale of two theories: A critical comparison of identity theory with social identity theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 58(4), 255–269. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2787127>

Joubert, I. (2012). Children as photographers: Life experiences and the right to be listened to. *South African Journal of Education*, 32(4), 449–464. <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v32n4a677>

Kanics, J., Hernandez, D.S., & Touzenis, K. (2010). Migrating alone: Unaccompanied and separated children's migration to Europe. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/3269277>

Kellett, M. (2011). Engaging with children and young people. www.epub.scu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=ccyp_pubs.

Kok, P., Gelderblom, D., Oucho, J.O., & Zyl, J.V. (2006). Migration in South and southern Africa: Dynamics & determinants. www.hspress.ac.za/product.php?productid=2094.

Kwankye, S.O., Anarfi, J.K., & Tagoe, C.A. (2009). Independent north-south child migration in Ghana: The decision making process. www.migrationdrc.org/publications/working-papers/WP-T29.pdf.

Landau, L.B., Ramjathan-Keogh, K., & Sing, G. (2005). Xenophobia in South Africa and problems related to it. www.cormsa.org.za/wpcontent/uploads/Research/Xeno/13/_Xenophobia.pdf

Lazarus, S., Daniels, B., & Engelbrecht, L. (1999). The inclusive school. In P. Engelbrecht, L. Green, L., Naicker, S., & Engelbrecht, L. (Eds.), *Inclusive education in action in South Africa* (pp. 12–23). J.L Van Schalk. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/32692771>

Marcos, B.G.M. (2010). Professionals and xenophobia: A sociological analysis of skilled African immigrants in Gauteng [Master's thesis, University of Pretoria]. <https://repository.up.ac.za/handle/dissertation>

Maylor, U., Read, B., Mendick, H., Ross, A., & Rollock, N. (2007). Diversity and citizenship in the curriculum; Research review. The Institute for Policy

Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education

2024, 19(1), pp. 59–84. ©Author(s), Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 (CC BY 4.0) licence.

<http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/JCIE>

McMillan, J.H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education. Evidence based inquiry* (7th ed.). Pearson. <https://eric.ed.gov/...>

Mitchell, C., Moletsane, R., Stuart, J., Buthelezi, T., & de Lange, N. (2005). Taking pictures/taking action! Visual methodologies in working with young people. *Children First*, 9(60), 27-30.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/23745801...>

Motsa, N.D. (2017). Researcher identity and childhood memories in a study of vulnerable children in Swaziland. *African Identities*, 1-16.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2017.1319756>

Osman, R. (2009). The phenomenon of xenophobia as experienced by immigrant learners in inner city schools of Johannesburg [Master's thesis, University of South Africa].

Parker, D., Sader, S., Stieleu, J., Green, W., Randal, D., D'amant, T., & Douglas, J. (2001). *Diversity and inclusive education*. School of Education, Training and Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal South Africa.

Patel, K. (2013). Analysis: The ugly truth behind SA's xenophobic violence [Electronic Version]. *Daily Maverick*. Retrieved 13th May 2016, from <http://www.dailymaverick.co.za/.../2013-05->

Rothberg, M. (2006). *Theory, migration and labour in an age of globalization*. State University of New York Press.

Shimeles, A. (2010). *Migration patterns, trends and policy issues in Africa*. www.afd.org/.../WORKING%20119%20word%20document%20AA.pd...

Suárez-Orozco, C., Rhodes, J., & Milburn, M. (2009). Unraveling the immigrant paradox: academic engagement and disengagement among recently arrived immigrant youth. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X09333647>

Tajfel, H. (1982). Introduction. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Social identity and intergroup relations* (pp. 1-11). Cambridge University Press.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204>



Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education

Vol. 19, no. 1, 2024, Regular Issue

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20355/jcie29533>

Turner, J.C. (1982). Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Social identity and intergroup relations* (pp. 15-40). Cambridge University Press.

Vandeyar, S. (2011). Immigrant students shifting identifications in South African schools. *International Journal of Education Development*, 32(2), 232-210. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2011.03.006>

Whitehead, A., Hashim, I.M., & Iversen, V. (2007). Child migration, child agency and intergenerational relations in Africa and South Asia. www.migrationdrc.org.