

‘A Beginner Foreigner’: Early Experiences of Migrant Learners in Schools in South Africa

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Doi: 10.23918/ijsses.v10i3p95

Abstract: In recent years, South Africa has been a primary destination for African migrants. Many of the migrants are with their families. This implies that there are many migrant children in South African schools. Studies on migration and migrants’ experiences in their host countries have not paid adequate attention on the schooling experiences of migrant children in their destination countries. This paper examined the early experiences of migrant learners in South Africa. It focuses on migrant learners from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe in Durban, South Africa. The study employed qualitative research approach and narrative inquiry methodology. Data was collected using story account, open ended interview and photo voice. The findings reveal that among the challenges and limitations migrant learners encounter on their arrival in South Africa are issues such as difficulty in accessing education as a result of immigration documentation, language barrier and cultural alienation in school.

Keywords: Learners, Migrants, Inclusive Education, Identity

1. Introduction

Migration is understood to mean the movement of people from one geographical point to another, driven by socio-economic, environmental, political and cultural reasons (Pries, 2006). In the recent years, there has been a significant increase in the number of people who embark on international migration. International migration happens when people move from one country to another to reside in the countries where they have migrated permanently or temporarily with the aim of seeking for employment, education or to stay away from harsh socio-political conditions in their home countries (Goldin & Reinert, 2006). Migrants undergo many challenging experiences (Byron & Condon, 2008). For one to leave his or her socio-cultural environment for a new setting brings many emotional and psychological challenges. Fukuyama (2007) maintains that migrants naturally find it difficult to get integrated into the new socio-cultural environment which sometimes is not welcoming, and the issue of identity poses itself as a barrier for migrants who do not have the same ethnic, social and religious background as those from the host countries.

Received: April 10, 2023

Accepted: May 25, 2023

Nnadozie, J.I., & Morojele, P.J. (2023). ‘A Beginner Foreigner’: Early Experiences of Migrant Learners in Schools in South Africa. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Educational Studies*, 10(3), 95-108.

Participants in this study may well be facing the challenges of dropping their cultures and life style to embrace the cultures and life style the South African environment may present to them as migrants in South Africa. The contextual differences that Fukuyama (2007) notes undoubtedly form a great part of the experiences of the participants in this study, both as social beings and as learners in schools. Migrants normally suffer exclusion from important aspects of the societal life. Host countries exclude migrants by constantly limiting the rights of migrants through harsh immigration policies and practices (Fukuyama, 2007). These imply deliberate exclusion of non-citizens (migrants) from certain benefits and opportunities in the host countries.

South Africa has become the target country for many African migrants especially from poor and troubled African countries such as the DRC and Zimbabwe. Many Congolese and Zimbabwean children, some with and some without their family members migrated to South Africa when trouble started in their countries. Some of these Congolese and Zimbabwean migrant children fall under the category of forced migrants while some willingly migrated to South Africa because of a desire for better conditions. This means that these migrant children do not voluntarily leave their home country but were forced to leave their country as a result of social, political and economic problems in these two countries. As a result, these migrant children do not have control over any experiences they must have passed through, and they are still passing through especially with regards to their schooling in South Africa. It is important therefore to understand what experiences and challenges these migrant children encounter on their arrival in South Africa.

1.2 Women and Children in Cross-Border Migration

Certain factors explain why global/international migration is on the increase especially in the recent times. Dobrowolsky and Tastsoglou (2006) note that one of the most recent and major factors influencing international migration is the active involvement of women in international movement as principal migrants. Where the main aim for migrating is survival, like in a situation such as the war in the DRC and the socio-political and economic crisis in Zimbabwe, women without husbands or whose husbands have been killed may have no other options than to seek refuge in other countries with their children. Also, given that many women today are single parents, which means that they are as well economically active like the men as they need to provide for their children, it then means that if international migration is what they have to do to enable them to carry out their responsibilities of taking care of the financial needs of their children, they will have no other option than to embark on international migration like the men. In this study, children may have migrated to South Africa in the company of their mothers and this may affect the way they experience life in South Africa. Martin (2001) comments that more women continue to take part in active economic activities, which may encourage international migration as principal migrants and wage earners.

Furthermore, the focus of this study is the child migrant, a phenomenon which equally requires attention. This has recently been a common phenomenon in the African continent where migrants from countries with political, social and economic instabilities had to leave their countries for countries where there are more economic, political and social stability. A good number of these migrants are children, some with and some without their parents or anyone to take care of them in the countries of destination. It may be the case that some of the migrant children from the DRC and Zimbabwe in South Africa have come without their parents. In line with this, Palmary (2009) notes that there are a good number of migrant children

without their parents in South Africa from different African countries and many of these migrant children migrated for employment. This report by Palmary (2009) suggests that many of unaccompanied migrant children are voluntary migrants who migrated to South Africa for employment.

1.3 The Cost-Benefit of Migration

Like every other human endeavour, migration has its own cost and benefits. According to Goldin and Reinert (2006), one of the main benefits of migration on the national/societal level is the cross-cultural experiences shared by countries involved. Also, migration offers migrants job opportunities and good wages which their home countries failed to offer them (Cohen, 2006). Hence, people get the motivation to migrate in order to get better jobs and better wages in countries where their skills are needed and valued most (Dobrowolsky & Tastsoglou, 2006). In this sense, Muniz (Undated) maintains that migrants save their families from economic hardship as they constantly send money home to support their families and dependants.

Countries benefit immensely economically from migrants in many different ways. For instance, migrants contribute in bringing down inflation and wages and also help in facilitating economic efficiency and growth (Muniz, Undated). Because migrants are hired at a very cheap rate, this helps to bring down the cost of production which on the other hand controls and brings down inflation. However, the cost of this may be linked to the issue of xenophobia, where locals compete with migrants for available jobs and migrants being desperate for a means of survival in their host countries, are forced to accept any wage offered by the employers. This explains the reasons for many xenophobic attacks that have happened in South Africa in the recent times and other similar experiences like stereotypes targeted against African migrants in South Africa. Also, the negative side of migration comes in a situation where migrants experience xenophobia, stereotype, and exclusion and sometimes harsh treatment in the hands of locals of their host countries, which they would not have experienced in their home countries.

1.4 Being an African Migrant in South Africa and Experiences of Exclusion

Migrants normally suffer exclusion from important aspects of societal life. Fukuyama (2007) notes that host communities and countries exclude migrants by constantly limiting the rights of migrants. In line with this, Bangura (2001) and Harris (2002) maintain that African migrants in South Africa suffer all degrees of exclusion, discrimination, xenophobic attacks and stereotypes. The participants in this study, being African migrants in South Africa, may well be facing these same challenges. Crush et al. (2005), maintains that immigration laws and policies are used to further perpetuate migrants' exclusion and denial of vital opportunities. Similarly, in some countries, immigration laws and policies put migrants in difficult situations by denying them basic rights and opportunities. In South Africa, the situation is not different. CoRMSA (2008) notes that apart from xenophobic attacks and stereotypes, migrants are still confronted with discrimination and limitations as a result of immigration documentations. Many migrants in South Africa are unemployed as result of immigration policies and documentations (CoRMSA, 2008).

CoRMSA (2008) further maintains that many migrant children in South Africa face discrimination and limitations in getting enrolled in school and in accessing other social facilities, and where enrolled in school, they still face other forms of discrimination such as denial of school fees exemption, and sometimes

may not be allowed to write Matric examinations as a result of not possessing the South African Identity Document. One would argue at this point that such discrimination and limitations experienced by migrants in South Africa limit their socio-psychological freedom. Harris (2001) also is of the view that African migrants in South Africa are sometimes negatively labelled and are connected with crime, poverty, unemployment and illegality. What this suggests is that these migrants are seen and treated as outcasts by the locals. Because of hostility, fear and hatred shown by the locals, African migrants constantly live their lives under tension, fear and psycho-emotional depression (Crush, 2005).

Furthermore, Adams (2008) notes that many African migrant families in South Africa encounter varying degrees of bias, racism, rejection, and stereotypes from the locals. This treatment affects the emotional and psychological well-being of these migrants. CoRMSA (2008) also notes that such treatment makes it difficult for migrant children to develop a positive personal identity. Thus, whether the participants in this study undergo similar experiences in their schools as part of their schooling experience in South Africa is a question that arises in this study as it may affect the way they relate with others as well as their performances at school.

2. Children's Geography as The Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study employed Children's Geographies as the theoretical framework. Children's Geographies is a branch of human geographies. It has developed in academic human geography since the beginning of the 1990s (Holloway, 2014). The earliest work in Children's Geographies can be traced to Willian Bung's work on spatial oppression of children in Detroit, United States of America and Toronto, Canada, where he deemed that children are the ones who suffer the most under an oppressing adult framework of social, cultural and political forces controlling the urban built environment (Holloway, 2014). Children's Geographies is a lens through which places and spaces of children's lives, characterised experientially, politically and ethically can be viewed (Moodley, 2015). It is used to understand childhood as an active period of meanings making where children as active agents play active roles in the negotiation and constructions of social relationships (Morrow, 2011). Children's Geographies as a body of theory is therefore anchored on the idea that children as a social group share certain experiences with ethical, political and experiential significance (Holloway, 2014). Children's Geographies is built on the assumption that children's lives will be markedly different in differing times and places and under differing circumstances (Holloway, 2014). Furthermore, Children's Geographies enables an entry into understanding the world in which children live and how their world makes particular meanings and significance for them as reality (O'Brein, 1996).

The theoretical framework of this study enabled a deep understanding of early experiences of migrant learners in schools in South Africa, and the impact of these experiences in the way they are positioned, and understand their positioning within the school and in the larger society. Through the lens of the theoretical framework of this study, I aimed to clearly elucidate the role played by social factors in defining the migrant learners' early experiences on arrival in South Africa and the impact such has on their schooling experiences in South Africa.

3. Methodological Approach

The study adopts a qualitative research approach in which a narrative inquiry methodology was used. Data was collected through story account, open-ended interview and photo voice. The story account provides an expository account of the schooling experiences of the participants. Open-ended interview questions were developed around the themes revealed in the story account. Photo voice helped in identifying the dimensions of the early experiences and the situations of the study participants that were captured through the story account and open-ended interview processes. It deepened the data collected through the story account and open-ended interview processes and possible information gap were filled.

3.1 Study Sites

All three stages of this study were conducted in three secondary schools in Durban, South Africa with Congolese and Zimbabwean migrant learners. Given that three schools were used, and for the purpose of anonymity and clarity, the first school was tagged as 'school A' and the second and third schools as 'schools B and C respectively.

School A is a government school, which implies that teachers in the school are employed and paid by the Department of Education. The school is open to learners from different racial, religious and cultural backgrounds; this explains why there are many migrant learners in the school. Learner enrolment as at the time this study was conducted stood about 1054, out of which 3% are African migrant learners, with Congolese and Zimbabwean migrant learners greater in number than other migrants. The school offers a wide range of science and commerce subjects. The school does not provide facilities to enable migrant learners to learn in their languages. Also, there is no support system provided by the school or the Department of Education to cater for the learning needs of increasing number of migrant learners in the school in regards to language barrier experienced by these learners.

School B, is also a government owned secondary school. Unlike school A, it is not a multiracial school, but it has migrant learners from other Southern African countries. Learner enrolment at the time this study was conducted was 980, out of which about 0.98% are migrant learners, from the DRC, Zimbabwe and other African countries. As it is a government secondary school, the Department of Education employs and pays the teachers in the school. Learner enrolment is quite high and the school has a full strength of staff. School B offers a wide range of commerce and science subjects. Like school A, school B does not offer subjects in the migrants' languages and does not provide any form of support system to cater for the learning needs of migrant learners in the school.

School C is an independent school, meaning that teachers and other staff in the school are not employed by the Department of Education. When this study was conducted, learner population was 574. About 1.2% of the learner population are learners from other African countries. School C, though a private school, is not very well resourced. The Department of Education does not provide any funding for the school, and as a result, learners pay school fees and provide their own learning materials such as exercise and text books. School C has a good number of migrant learners who are mostly from Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, and the DRC. Teachers and other staff in the school are blacks and locals. School C has only black/African learners in it. This means that school C is not racially diverse. Learners in the

school come from diverse cultural, religious and language backgrounds, making the school socially and religiously diverse. The diversity in the learner population is as a result of the presence of migrant learners in the school who come from different cultural, religious and language backgrounds.

The three schools are decided on for this study because of the availability and population of migrant learners from the DRC, Zimbabwe and other African countries in the schools. The schools also represent typical South African school contexts with considerable diversity as a result of the presence of migrant children in these three schools

3.2 Sampling

In this study, both convenient and purposive sampling techniques were used to select three schools in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Firstly, convenient sampling was used to select three schools with Congolese and Zimbabwean migrant learners. The three schools were selected based on their accessibility and the willingness of their school managements to allow their schools and learners participate in the study. Purposive sampling technique was later used to select 12 learners from three schools across Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, for the study. The study engaged 12 learners who were in grades 8 to 12 when the study was conducted, from the three selected schools across Durban, five from school A, four from school B and three from school C. Seven male and five female learners were selected from the three schools.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The study employed an inductive data analysis to draw patterns and themes in the data (Creswell 2014). This entailed listening severally to the recorded data and thorough reading of the transcription while listening to the recorded data to ensure accuracy in the data interpretation process (Mcmillan & Schumacher 2010). This was followed by organizing and re-organizing the data collected, linking pseudonyms with respondents. A thorough reading of the data and listening to the recorded data again helped to identify sub-emerging themes related to the study participants' early experiences on their arrival in South Africa. To better understand the participants' emotions, special attention was paid to the tone of their voices. The emergent themes from the data collected through individual, focused group interviews and photo voice were then coded, analysed and discussed.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

As a way of respecting the rights of the participants, ethical issues were observed (Creswell 2014). A written permission was obtained from the school principals through a written letter stating the purpose of the study. Letters of consent were given to the parents/caregivers of the study participants, explaining issues of confidentiality, privacy and voluntary participation. Consent of the participants were sought as the study considers the participants as individuals knowledgeable enough to decide on issues that concern their lives. Trust and respect was maintained throughout the research process and with all the research participants. The participants were also advised that they have the right to withdraw from the study when they so desired without any undesirable consequences. For confidentiality, pseudonyms are used in this paper to depict both the schools and participants.

4. Results and Discussion

This study employed Children's Geographies to explore and understand the early experiences of migrant learners on arrival in South Africa and the impact these experiences have on their schooling experiences in South Africa. Themes discussed were developed by reflecting on the findings through the story account, interview and photo voice methods. All the ideas discussed emerged from findings from this study. Findings reveal the challenges and limitations participants in this study encountered on arrival in South Africa, and are still encountering. Prominent among the challenges as the findings indicate are issues of immigration documentation, language barrier and cultural alienation at school. The themes that emerged from the study are discussed separately for the purpose of clarity. The following are the themes that emerged from the study:

4.1 Immigration Documentation

The study found that immigration documentation is among the major challenges that limits migrants from easy access to schooling and participation in school in South Africa. All the 12 participants in this study claimed that immigration documentation was among major limitations in their easy access to schooling on their arrival in South Africa.

Dingani (boy aged 16) "The first problem I had when I came to South Africa was that my mother found it difficult to get a school for me because schools wanted a permit not only a passport, and I didn't have a permit."

Different democratic governments in South Africa since after apartheid regime in 1994 have been committed to the practices of international refugee protection (Crush & McDonald, 2001). This required South Africa to put in place an immigration system and policies that would accommodate the needs of increasing number of refugees coming into the country (Crush & McDonald, 2001). This suggest more liberal immigration policies and practices different from those of apartheid era South Africa. Furthermore, the idea of building an inclusive society suggests that everyone should be given more opportunities to function and take part in the economic, social, as well as cultural development of the country and self-actualization of individuals living in it. This goes to suggest that refugee and migrants should be offered immigration assistance on their arrival in South Africa to enable them to function and participate in the inclusive South African society. It therefore implies that issues of immigration documentation should cease to be an impediment for migrants/refugees in accessing education and other opportunities in South Africa CoRMSA (2008).

Contrary to the above, findings from this study indicate that immigration challenges still remain one of the major difficulties/challenges that make the South African environment unwelcoming for migrant children. Participants in this study expressed their experiences of discriminations, exclusion and limitations on arrival in South Africa as a result of immigration documentation which denied them easy access to education and other social welfare.

Munia (girl aged 18) “The time I came it was really hard for me to find school because I had no documents first of all. So my father had to search for documents for our status. I had to wait until I got a document. I went to look for a school but most of the schools I went to didn’t take me because I am a foreigner; I didn’t have ID document, a green ID or passport.”

Also, the study found that even after enrolment in school, migrant learners in South Africa experience exclusion in extramural activities such as participating in sports competition as they are not allowed to represent their schools because of not possessing a South African Identity Document.

Wemba (boy aged 18) “I have been refused to play for my school in some competitions outside my school because I am a foreigner; I do not have South African ID book.”

Luboya (boy aged 17) “There places you cannot participate because you do not have South African Identity Document (ID). I play soccer only in my school, and I am not allowed to play in competitions outside my school because I do not have South African ID.”

In line with the above data excerpts, CoRMSA (2008) maintains that immigration laws and policies put migrants in South Africa in difficult situations by denying them basic rights and opportunities. Crush et al. (2005) maintain that immigration laws and policies are used to further perpetuate migrants’ exclusion and denial of vital opportunities. It is important that migrant children have access to education irrespective of their status. Without such access, they will likely spend time on the street and are at risk of child labour Glind (2010). Furthermore, the international and domestic laws of most nations today, of which South Africa is one, endorse the right of children to basic education. The rights of the child as stipulated by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child clearly state that all children have the right to education (Adams, 2008).

It is important to offer children, local and migrants alike, opportunities to good education and training. This will enable them fit into the scope of things in the future as adults and contribute meaningfully to global economy (Adams, 2008; CoRMSA, 2008; Glind, 2010). On the contrary to the above, the study found that migrant children in South Africa experience discrimination and limitation in the way they access education on arrival in the country. On the other hand, Adams (2008) highlights the need for host countries to come up with policies which would ensure the enrolment of migrant children into schools, but should as well include explicit provision for practical issues such as assistance with learning the language of the host countries, appropriate assessment of the migrant children’s needs and protection from any form of discrimination. By this, migrant children’s needs will be accommodated to enable their active social participation in South Africa, as well access opportunities such as education in the country.

4.2 Language Barrier

Furthermore, the findings reveal that language limitation is also among the major challenges and limitations migrant learners encounter on their arrival in South Africa, especially participants from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Harris (2002) maintains that the inability of migrants to speak or communicate in the local language limits migrants’ social participation in their new environment. The findings indicate that the language barrier is a major limitation and challenge for migrants, especially

newly arrived migrants in their countries/communities of destination. From the findings we learn that language barrier does hinder active participation of children in social space. In line with this, participants in this study claimed they still face limitations to proper participation in school and in South African communities due to their inability to communicate in local languages in school and in the communities where they live.

Disanka (girl aged 17) “My problem when I first arrived in South Africa was that I couldn’t communicate with people around me especially at school because I didn’t learn English in primary school in my country. I started grade 3 here in South Africa, so it was difficult for me to communicate with people at school because I didn’t know English and Zulu.”

Furthermore, the findings reveal that language posed another major challenge/limitation in enrolment of migrant learners in school in South Africa as participants in their narratives described how difficult it was to get enrolled in school as a result of their inability to communicate in IsiZulu, and in English (for participants from the DRC).

Tshamala (girl aged 15) “It wasn’t easy for me to find and get into school when I first arrived in South Africa for studies. They didn’t accept me because I couldn’t speak English. I first went for interviews and they didn’t accept me. I was told to go and learn English before I can start school. It wasn’t really easy for me; it was very difficult. So I had to wait till the next year because I had to learn to speak English.”

Findings from the study also reveal that the participants encounter language barriers in school which hinders them from active social and academic participation in school.

Bakome (boy aged 16) “Exam period used to be one of the most frightening times for me in school. I didn’t know how to write a word in English.... I used to know the answers but couldn’t write correctly in English.... I used to fail exams because of language.”

The participants’ inability to communicate in the local languages/languages of teaching and learning in school and their inability to properly participate in school as a result of language limitations all point to negative positioning of migrant learners within the school geographies (space and place) in South Africa. The participants in this sense see themselves as not inclusively positioned within the school. This goes further to highlight that for the participants, their construction and conceptualization (meaning making) of the school space and place is influenced by the extent to which they experience inclusion or exclusion within the school’s social, cultural and physical space. Thus, the absence of experiences of inclusion in the way migrant learners participate and relate with individuals in the school forms part of their negative positioning in school in South Africa.

The study also reveals that the participants’ inability to speak Zulu language is among the reasons the participants experience discrimination and ill-treatment from their local counterparts and their vulnerability to social exclusion within the school space and place. In this sense, they are not adequately captured within the school geography as their presence, social and academic participation in school become limited and sometimes hindered as a result of language limitations. The participants’ social participation within the school space is partly determined by their ability or inability to communicate in

the local languages. In other words, ability or inability to communicate in the local languages determines the level of acceptance they get from their local counterparts, as language in this sense is a vital tool for social participation and inclusion in the school social and physical space.

We also learn from the findings in this study that lack of proficiency in local languages still continues to be a major limitation to learning and participation of migrant learners who are still not proficient in the use of the languages of teaching and learning in schools in South Africa.

Tshamala (girl aged 15) “I’m still experiencing language problems in school somehow because there are words in English which I still do not know their meanings, and we use them in learning in class.”

Bakome (boy aged 16) “Some of the difficulties I encounter at school are like in the subjects we do, and also the language; Zulu and Afrikaans... also because of language, I couldn’t understand EMS because sometimes you write and sometimes you deal with numbers, so...it was just like confusing me. It is very difficult for me because of the language. Sometimes I know the correct answers if someone explains the questions for me but to write the answers down in English is another difficult thing to do because I do not know English.”

The above data excerpts indicate that the Department of Education and schools in South Africa are not yet prepared enough to accommodate and to take care of the growing number of migrants in schools and classrooms in South Africa. This is more evident in the difficulties and challenges migrant learners encounter in school as a result of limited access, or even non-access, to languages of communication/teaching and learning in school. According to CoRMSA (2008) language difficulty is one of the major challenges most migrant children face in their education in South Africa. In line with this, the study found that there are no adequate resources in place to help migrant learners deal with limitations caused by the language barrier which limits or even hinders migrant learners’ inclusive positioning in the school. This hinders migrant learners in school in South Africa from benefiting from the ideas and ideals of inclusion in the South African education system.

It is important to note that migrant learners in schools and classrooms in South Africa form part of the social diversity in schools and classrooms in South Africa. Therefore, their learning needs should as well be accommodated in line with the idea and ideals of the policy of inclusive system of education in South Africa. This can only be achieved where, as children and as social active participants, migrant learners’ positioning within the school geography is positively and inclusively captured irrespective of their social backgrounds and identity. For this to happen, schools should provide support systems to assist migrant learners, especially those from non-English speaking countries such as the DRC, to overcome barriers to learning and participation caused by lack of proficiency in the use of languages of communication/teaching and learning in school and in other challenges they face in school with the aim of ensuring proper participation in a socially just education system and school environment.

4.3 Cultural Alienation in School

The findings reveal that participants experience cultural alienation in school. All 12 participants in the study expressed experiencing cultural shock and alienation in school environment in South Africa.

Wemba (boy aged 18) “One of the things that really made me to know that I am now in a different place and in a different school was... in the assembly the learners did not sing the national anthem. In Congo we sing the national anthem every morning after prayers. This made me feel so strange because those are the things I was used to at home which I didn’t find...in school here.

Culture forms a fundamental part of a person’s life. Migrants face a major challenge of existing outside their cultural background as Fukuyama (2007) notes. Jegede and Aikenhead (1999) maintain that a people’s culture is tied with their common and individual identities. Migrants, especially migrant children, feel disturbed by dealing with cultural alienation in their new social and cultural environment. This is evident in the findings. Adjusting to life in a new social and cultural environment is among the challenges migrant children face in their new environment among other limitations. In line with this, Byron and Condon (2008) and Fukuyama (2007) observe that migrants undergo many challenging experiences particularly upon arrival in their destination. One of such challenges as identified by Fukuyama (2007) is adjusting to the culture in their new environment. Participants in this study face similar challenges as findings indicate that the participants experience cultural alienation in school. The participants in this sense understand the school space and place as strange and culturally complex and difficult to navigate.

All the 12 participants in the study claimed that they were overwhelmed by the huge cultural divide between how things are done in schools in their home countries and how things are done in schools in South Africa in terms of dressing, curriculum and programmes followed in schools, how people relate to one another in school etc.

Bakome (boy aged 16) “My first day in school here was kind of difficult; I felt strange and I was afraid. It was so difficult... like back home we don’t have two breaks; we only got one break but here we have two breaks, so it was difficult for me to manage time. The time table also confused me because.... back home when the bell rings, teachers have to follow us to our classes but here is the opposite.”

According to Fukuyama (2007) migrants feel distanced from their roots as a result of a sense of cultural alienation which brings a feeling of isolation. Reconciling what is morally obtainable or not obtainable in their culture with their new culture becomes a big challenge. This is evident in the participants’ narratives. All 12 participants in the study claimed that they experienced cultural shock and battled to adjust to the schools’ cultural and social environment in South Africa. Among the things they find strange include unfamiliar subjects and teaching methods as the findings indicate that among other things, the participants embrace the challenges of coping with new subjects and teaching methods which they see as strange and difficult to them.

Tshamala (girl aged 15) "...there are some subjects we do here which I didn't do when I was in school at home; subjects like EMS, Life Orientation. But what I like was the movement around the activities."

Kazadi (boy aged 16) "...there are differences between schooling in my country and schooling here. The teaching method is one of the differences..."

The participants being children and active social participants, cultural alienation in school space and place may suggest non-active social participation in school cultural and social space. In line with this, Jenks (2005) argues that childhood is a social rather than a biological phenomenon which varies between social groups, societies and historical periods. This assumption by Jenks is evident in the participants' experiences of cultural alienation in school in South Africa. As children and migrants, their ability and or inability to negotiate and navigate an unfamiliar social setting determines how active or inactive they become in the schools' social and cultural space and place. It also influences how the participants construct their positioning within the school in South Africa as inclusive or exclusive – how they feel in or out of the school social and cultural landscape. Therefore, the participants' experiences of cultural alienation in school gives rise to their sense of exclusion and of being positioned outside the school geography both in curriculum and in practices in school.

Furthermore, Jegede and Aikenhead (1999) maintain that migrants are faced with many different challenges and limitations in the host countries, especially when they newly arrive in their destinations. The challenges, as already discussed above form part of limitations migrant learners face in their schooling in South Africa which places them at the margin of the school geography.

Therefore, to ensure that the principle of diversity and social integration are in place in schools, and for schools to be spaces and places for promoting social diversity, migrant children should be allowed to access school without any hindrance based on immigration status, language proficiency or their social identity as migrants. Equal opportunities should be given to all learners in school regardless of identity backgrounds. This can only be achieved where learners are inclusively and positively positioned within the school space and place and where they construct their positioning in the same light.

4. Conclusion

We learn from the findings that migrants face challenging social positioning in the social and cultural spaces and places in their host countries as a result of differences in social and cultural identities with citizens of their host countries. As a result, they undergo challenging experiences and limitations in their host countries as a result of their positioning as migrants. The participants in this study as migrants share similar challenging social positioning within the social spaces with other migrants in South Africa and in other countries. The findings reveal the challenges and limitations migrant children face on arrival in South Africa. These challenges/limitations include difficulties in getting access to schooling as a result of immigration documentation, language barrier and cultural alienation in school. Coming from the DRC and Zimbabwe means that the participants have different social, cultural and language backgrounds, especially with regard to isiZulu. The participants experience cultural alienation at school as they find the school cultural landscape in South Africa different from what they were used to in their home countries. The

participants also find some of the subjects offered in school in South Africa strange as they were not used to the subjects in their home countries. This also poses some difficulties in the way the participants adapt academically in school. The experiences as highlighted above go to suggest that the participants' positioning within the school social, cultural and academic landscape is not properly captured within the school geographies (space and place) in South Africa.

It is important that the authorities in the Department of Education understand the challenges and limitations faced by migrant learners in schools and classrooms in South Africa. The authorities in the Department of Education should therefore develop programmes that would accommodate the migrant learner learning needs to assist especially non-English speaking migrant learners in their early stages in school in South Africa. This will facilitate their participation in school and in the learning process. Furthermore, there is the need for authorities in the Department of Home Affairs to be aware of the difficulties and limitations migrant children in South Africa face in accessing and participating in school as a result of not possessing immigration documentation. Therefore, special assistance should be provided to minimize and eliminate difficulties and limitations migrant children in South Africa encounter in obtaining the relevant immigration documentations. This will enable their proper integration and participation in the South African social space, easy access to education and other social facilities.

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