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### STEREOTYPICAL CONSTRUCTION OF AFRICAN MIGRANT CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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#### Abstract

This article draws on Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Children's Geographies to explore the dynamics of African migrant children's (from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe) experiences of stereotyping in the school in South Africa. Located within the stricture of qualitative research, a narrative inquiry methodology was employed and data was collected using story account, semi-structured interview and photo voice. The findings reveal that African migrant children in South African schools experience varying degrees of stereotyping and the resultant negative impacts on their schooling experiences. This took the forms of social exclusion, isolation and xenophobic tendencies towards them by the locals in school. The study recommends strategies for schools to embrace social diversity, acceptance and tolerance of migrant children as a basis for building an inclusive South African society through an inclusive schooling programme.

#### Keywords

Migration, Children, Inclusion, Stereotyping, Xenophobia, Exclusion, Education, Identity



#### 1. Introduction

South Africa has, in more recent times, been a fertile location for huge trans-African migration due to its relative vibrant economy and high opportunities especially for skilled migrants. However, migrants undergo many challenging experiences (Bempong *et al*, 2019; Byron & Condon 2008). Prominent among

these challenges are the issues of identity definition, stereotyping and resulting exclusion in the new environment. Migrants normally suffer exclusion from important aspects of societal life as a result of negative stereotyping targeted against them (Ruzungunde, & Zhou, 2021; Fukuyama, 2007). Host

communities/countries exclude migrants by constantly limiting the rights of migrants. This situation implies deliberate exclusion of non-citizens (migrants) from certain benefits and opportunities in the host countries. Furthermore, (CoRMSA, 2008) notes that immigration laws and policies are used to further perpetuate migrants' exclusion and denial of vital opportunities in their host countries. In some countries, immigration laws and policies put migrants in difficult situations by denying them basic rights and opportunities. With the school-age migrant population, experiences of stereotyping and resulting exclusion and xenophobic tendencies against them impact on their schooling experiences. Many African migrant families in South Africa encounter varying degrees of bias, racism, rejection, and stereotyping from the locals as a result of internalized perception about foreigners with the notion that they do not belong to the 'us' - the 'in group' and the 'out group' notion; the 'them' and the 'us' (Vangoro, 2019; Adam 2008). This results in social insecurity and mistreatment of non-nationals. This form of notion and treatment affect the emotional and psychological well-being of migrants. Stereotyping and resulting exclusion and mistreatment of migrants make it difficult for migrant children to develop a positive personal identity and social identity (Blessed-Saya *et al*, 2022; Weber & Kronberge, 2015).

### *1.1 Aims and significance of the study*

Anecdotal evidence indicates that migrant children, especially African migrant children in schools in South Africa, experience conditions that result in exclusion and in limitations to participation and healthy functioning in school. However, perhaps overlooked in research is inquiry into the migrant children's experience, in terms of what are their schooling

experiences and how does it matter. In particular, focal attention is given in this paper to the migrant children of African origin. How and what their experiences of schooling is, appear not to be adequately captured within the remit of immigrant schooling discourse. As a result, little is known about how the African migrant child experiences schooling in South Africa. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature on the extended and immediate effects of migration on schooling experiences of African migrant children in South Africa, and more especially on the challenging experiences they face in schools as a result of their identity as African migrants. The need to explore and understand how migrant children, especially African migrant children experience schooling in South Africa is particularly important for at least the following three reasons; to contextualise and map understanding of schooling experiences common to migrant children, especially African migrant children in schools in South Africa, to identify the factors and processes that maintain and condition African migrant children's schooling experiences, and to explain how understanding of these experiences can improve knowledge of children's geographies and inclusive schooling in South Africa. Thus, there is the need to also explore how inclusion is practised in South African schools with regards to African migrant children. This paper highlights the experiential aspects of African migrant children's experiences of stereotyping, exclusion and xenophobia within the school and communities in South Africa. It seeks to grapple with the processes that maintain and condition these experiences and the impact such experiences have on their participation and performance in school, and on overall schooling experiences. The choice of

this study to focus on the perceptions of the study participants (African migrant children from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Zimbabwe in three schools in Durban, South Africa) is to enable an understanding of how the participants as children, make meaning of their experiences, and how these experiences condition and inform their positioning within the school social and cultural landscape. It does so by drawing on the participants' narratives and by tracing how patterns of such narratives compare between migrant children from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Zimbabwe who are schooling in Durban, South Africa. The study reveals the nature of similarities and differences in the participants' schooling experiences. These similarities and differences underlie the African migrant children's experiences of school as space and place; contested, culturally condensed and tensed with power and identity. Also, in order to gain deeper insight into the challenging experiences of African migrant children in schools in South Africa, there is a need to hear both the good and the difficult stories specifically in their own perceptions. It is hoped that the outcome of this study will contribute valuably to ongoing inquiries on how best to achieve an inclusive schooling within diversity. It is also hoped that this study will be particularly important in helping to understanding the learning needs of migrant children in schools and classrooms in South Africa.

## **2. Literature Review**

### *2.1 The Undervalue of Benefits of Migration in South Africa*

Migration is an extremely sensitive subject in South Africa. The abolition of the Apartheid regime in 1994 brought about a new and democratic South Africa.

There were a lot of changes in the political, social and economic landscapes of South African life. These changes ushered in social and economic opportunities for both South Africans and non-South Africans alike as South African borders with other Southern African countries were weakened (Kali, 2023; Tshabalala, 2017). The resultant effect of these changes is the influx of people into South Africa especially from African countries facing political, social and economic problems (Mthiyane *et al*, 2022; Tshabalala, 2017). Yet large numbers of South Africans live in extreme poverty. The sudden influx of migrants especially from neighbouring countries after apartheid was perceived by many South Africans as another threat to their social and economic space as such would mean competition with migrants for jobs and other socio-economic opportunities such as housing (Machinya, 2022; Pillay, 2008). Furthermore, until the abolition of apartheid in 1994, South Africa was a closed society, and this was as a result of strict immigration laws/policies and strict border controls (Machinya, 2022; Verwey & Quayle, 2012). Majority of South African citizens were excluded from the rest of the world as they were not given the opportunity to interact with people from outside South Africa (Tati, 2008). As a result, many South Africans wrongly believe that migration is a new phenomenon, that there are many migrants in South Africa, and that the presence of migrants tends to increase crime rates, poverty and competition for opportunities, despite the prevalence of evidence to the contrary (Susuman & Sithole, 2024; Tati, 2008). This perception makes it difficult for many South Africans to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions and values migration and migrants

bring/add to social, cultural and economic development of the country.

## 2.2 Xenophobia and African Migrants in South Africa

Xenophobia and related intolerance have continued to increase in South Africa. However, xenophobia is not only a South African phenomenon. There have been manifestations of xenophobic tendencies in many countries around the world. Over the years, xenophobia has gained the status of a global phenomenon (Mhlanga, 2021; Oni & Okunade, 2018). In Africa, some of the evident manifestations of xenophobia have been the threat of expulsion of foreign nationals, unjust deportation, and in many cases, violent attacks against non-nationals (Sempijja & Mongale, 2022; Oni & Okunade, 2018). There have been different reasons for xenophobic tendencies and attacks targeted against non-nationals in different countries in Africa. For example, (Oni & Okunade, 2018) note that in Ghana, Nigeria and Angola, xenophobic tendencies towards non-nationals were majorly as a result of socioeconomic considerations; in Chad and Kenya, xenophobic prejudices were informed by the war on terror; in Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, xenophobic tendencies were triggered by political as well as economic considerations; in Tanzania, Burundi and Congo Brazzaville, xenophobic actions were mainly as a result of belief that foreigners were committing crime. In these countries and cases mentioned above, xenophobic tendencies were never physical violence; bodily harm and damage to property but merely an attitude towards non-nationals resulting to social exclusion and indifference. However, it is important to note that some of the reasons/factors that drive

xenophobic tendencies in the African countries mentioned above are similar to the reasons/factors that drive xenophobic tendencies/attacks in South Africa. Again, like in South Africa, xenophobic tendencies in the African countries mentioned above were targeted at African migrants. But the difference in the case of South Africa is in the violent nature in which xenophobia is displayed in the South African context. Attitudes towards African migrants vary across South Africa's socio-economic and ethnic spectrum (Gordon, 2020; Nyamnjoh, 2010). Xenophobia in South African context is not just an attitude like in other countries, but it is an activity, a violent practice that results in bodily harm, death and damage to property (Mlambo *et al*, 2023; Marcos, 2010). The extent of harm, damage to property, and the frequency make xenophobia in the South African context different from the way it manifests in other countries. Xenophobia entails attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity (Kaziboni, 2022; Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013). Furthermore, xenophobia on a political level is about the denial of social rights and entitlements to various resources to strangers or perceived strangers (Olofinbiyi, 2022; Hirshleifer, 2007). According to (Opara, 2022) there is strong evidence that African migrants living, working and schooling in South Africa face physical violence at the hands of the locals. 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 (Paalo *et al*, 2022; Landau, Ramja-than-Keogh, & Sing, 2005).

### *2.3 Migrant Children and Inclusion in South African Education System*

With the completion of policy and development by the National Commission on Special Education (NCSNET) and National Committee for Education Support Services (NCESS) in 1997, the idea of inclusion and diversity in South African schools and classrooms reached an advanced stage (Walton & Engelbrecht, 2022; Naicker, 1999). Inclusion in this sense implies ensuring that the learning needs of diverse learners in schools and classrooms in South Africa are well accommodated in order to enable every learner reach her/his potential. In line with this, one would argue that the purpose of building an inclusive school is for the development of an inclusive society where everyone in the society can function properly and actualise their potentials and participate optimally. Also, where respect and value for diversity and social integration are encouraged and valued. This therefore implies that issues of race, culture, gender and nationality (country of origin) should cease to be hindering factors to accessibility of sound and quality education in South Africa. If this should be the case, migrant children in South Africa should have access to sound education no matter their national and social identities as migrants. It then becomes critical that all children within the borders of South Africa be provided education irrespective of gender, religion, language, country of origin and so on. One would also argue that an inclusive schooling environment creates an inclusive society where everyone participates and functions will be socially, culturally and psychologically accommodated, participate and function optimally irrespective of his/her identity. This is in line with the principle of diversity which in turn

can be regarded as the foundation for furthering the development of an inclusive society. This also goes to suggest that migrant children in South Africa should not experience schooling differently from their South African counterparts. It is therefore important to link the principle of diversity to that of social integration in order to promote the spirit of unity in diversity.

### **3. The Study Context**

The study was carried out in three schools in Durban South Africa. Durban is located on the far-east side of South Africa. It is a major city, the largest in KwaZulu-Natal Province, and one of the country's main seaside cities. Durban Metropolitan Area ranks among the most populous urban areas in South Africa. It is the home of the Zulu tribe. It is ethnically diverse, with a cultural richness of mixed beliefs and traditions. Zulus form the largest single ethnic group. Economically speaking, Durban has a stratified local economy being a strong base for manufacturing, tourism, transportation, logistics and shipping, and serving as a key import/export gateway. Durban also has a large share of the country's financial institutions and public sector services. As a result, Durban has a culturally diverse population, including new migrants attracted by job opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labour. This perhaps partly explains why there is a large number of migrants in the city. Many Zimbabwean and Congolese migrants move to Durban as most may already have their relatives and some sense of community network and support system in the city. In as much Durban is an important economic hub in South Africa, poverty remains high among mostly black population. This is mostly as a result of very high unemployment rate experienced everywhere else in the country. As a result, migrants are perceived by the

locals as coming to take or share with them the few available job opportunities and other resources such as education, health and housing. This often leads to hostilities toward migrants from the locals in the form of negative stereotyping and xenophobia which as well infiltrate into the school space and place.

#### **4. Diversity and Theories of Identity**

The discussion on the impact of stereotyping on African migrant children's schooling experiences in South Africa can be located within Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Children's Geographies. Social Identity Theory (SIT) tries to understand the psychological foundation of ways in which different groups relate in a society (Vinney, 2024; Alexander, 2001). It also tries to find out what reasons and conditions that 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). Social identity theory is used in this study to understand the inter-group relationships amongst the local and African migrant children and the group formation processes, within the context of the socially conscious self (Harwood, 2020; Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Children's Geographies on the other hand, tries 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 (Blazek, 2024; Morrow, 2011). Children in this sense can be understood as active agents in their role in construction of and interpretations they give to their own world (Prout & James 1979). Children's Geographies is anchored on the idea that children as a social group share certain experiences with ethical, cultural, political and experiential significance (Smith & Mills, 2018;

Holloway, 2014). It is built on the assumption that children's lives will be markedly different in differing times and places and under differing circumstances such as of gender, family, class etc. (Holloway, 2014) According to Warren (2020), Children's Geographies draws attention to the spatial, cultural, and historically situated ideas, laws, and policies that shape childhood and children's experiences. Children's Geographies in this study enables an entry into understanding how African migrant children's schooling experiences make particular meanings and significance for them as reality (Morrow, 2011). Furthermore, since Social Identity Theory and Children's Geographies explain among other things interaction within a social setting, both theories therefore enable the study to explore and understand the social process, group formation and membership dynamics and power relationships between the local children and migrant children in school, and how these bring about African migrant children's experiences of stereotyping and the resultant social exclusion, isolation and xenophobia within the school.

#### **5. Study Methodology and Data Collection Methods**

The study employed a qualitative research approach in which a narrative inquiry methodology was used. Qualitative research was used in this study because of its credence to comprehend human phenomena in context (Miller *et al*, 2023; Creswell, 2014). By employing qualitative narrative approach, the study was able to examine the African migrant's children's experiences. Narrative inquiry was employed in this study as storytelling is an effective way of communicating one's experiences and resultant feelings. Therefore, through the African migrant

children's stories, the study could better comprehend their daily-lived experiences and the meaning they made of their experiences of stereotyping within the school (Hanna, 2022; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

### 5.1 Study Site

The study was conducted in three secondary schools with Congolese and Zimbabwean migrant children 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. School A is a 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 51% were African children, 26% were White children, 13% were Indian children and 10% were Coloured children. Out of the total number of African children, 3% were African migrant children, with Congolese and Zimbabwean migrant children greater in number than other migrants. Most learners in the school have Zulu as their home language. The presence of children from diverse racial backgrounds, with their cultural experiences and beliefs, add more flavour to the school's socio-cultural environment. The diversity should in this case be a socio-cultural advantage because it is a pool of cultural experiences which can be good for teaching and learning. School B, is also a government owned secondary school. Unlike school A, school B only consisted of black learners with a learner enrolment of 980, out of which about 0.98% were African migrant children, from the DRC, Zimbabwe and other African countries. As it is a government secondary school, teachers and other staff in the school are hired and paid by the South African Department of Education. The learner population is

high. School B offers a variety of commerce and science subjects. School B does not offer subjects in the migrants' languages and does not make provision for support and cater for the learning needs of migrant children in the school. School C is an independent school, meaning that teachers and other staff in the school were not employed by the South Africa Department of Education. The learner population was 574. About 1.2% of the learner population were migrant children from other African countries. The Department of Education did 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 children who are mostly from Southern African countries such as Zimbabwe, and the DRC. Teachers and other staff in the school were only black South Africans. However, learners in this school come from diverse cultural, religious and language backgrounds, making the school socially and religiously diverse. The three schools were selected for this study because of the availability and population of migrant children from the DRC, Zimbabwe and other African countries in the schools, accessibility and the schools' willingness to participate in the study. Given that the study focuses specifically on the perspectives of African migrant children from the DRC and Zimbabwe, the participants in this study were made up of migrant children from these two countries in three high schools in Durban, South Africa.

### 5.2 Sampling

This study employed both convenient and purposive sampling methods to select three schools in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal Province. Convenient sampling was first used to select three schools with Congolese and

Zimbabwean migrant children. The selection of the three schools was based on their accessibility and the willingness of the authorities in the three schools to allow their schools and permit their learners to participate in the study. Purposive sampling technique was later employed 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. 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.

### *5.3 Data Collection Methods*

Data in this study was collected through individual and focused group semi-structured interviews, and participatory photo voice techniques in which participants take photographs of their everyday realities. Individual interview was used to collect

detailed and comprehensive data through one-on-one interaction with the participants. Focus group interview was employed to collect shared understanding from the participants, and it was advantageous as interactions among the participants deepened the data collected. Given that this study focuses on African migrant children from the DRC and Zimbabwe in three schools in Durban, the focus group was composed of the 12 selected participants for this study from the three selected schools. With permission from the participants, tape recorder was used for accurate capturing of participants' narratives and to make up for data not recorded by taking notes. Interviews were recorded using field notes especially participants' body language and emotions. All interviews were conducted in English as all the participants could communicate well, and there seemed to be no language limitation whatsoever.

### *5.4 Data Analysis Procedure*

An inductive process of data analysis was employed in this study to obtain patterns and themes in the data. Inductive process of data analysis requires listening and re-listening to recordings of participants' interviews/narratives while reading the transcriptions for accuracy in interpretation (Nasheeda *et al*, 20219; Mcmillan & Schumacher, 2010). This was followed by organising and re-organising data, and linking pseudonyms with informants. Emerging themes related to the study participants' experiences in the school were identified by reading line by line and listening to the recordings again and for familiarity with data. In order to comprehend the participants' emotion, adequate attention was paid to note the participants' tone and voice. Finally, theoretically informed emergent themes from the overall data



collected through individual, focused group interviews and photo voice were coded, analysed and discussed based on insight from literature/debate in the field and researchers' creative interpretive aptitudes.

### 5.5 Ethical Considerations

In this study, research ethics were observed. Participant's rights were duly acknowledged and respected. In line with the research ethics, permission was obtained from school principals, through a written letter stating the purpose of the study. Letters of consent were written to the parents/caregivers of the study participants, explaining issues of confidentiality, privacy and voluntary participation of the participants in the study. Consent of the participants and assent in the case of minors were also sought as they can make decisions on issues that concern their lives. Trust and respect were 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 consequences. In order to ensure confidentiality of the schools and the participants, pseudonyms are used in this paper to portray both the schools and participants.

## 6. Results and Discussion

### 6.1 Definition of Operational Terms

#### 6.1.1 Exclusion and Isolation:

Exclusion refers to a state or a condition that limits a person or a group of people from full participation and functioning in a mainstream society. On the other hand, isolation is a refers to experiences of limited social network which results to unfulfilling social participation of an individual or group (Brink & Nel, 2015).

#### 6.1.2 Xenophobia:

As already highlighted above, Xenophobia entails attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude and often vilify persons, based on the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity (Kaziboni, 2022; Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013).

#### 6.1.3 Stereotyping:

Stereotyping is simplistic perception and images that negatively influence the way people see, interact and deal with others. Stereotypes creates limitations on the target groups by assigning them roles that limit them and makes it difficult for them to be their true selves (O'Dnnel *et al*, 2018).

### 6.2 Discussion of findings

The findings unveiled aspects of the participants' experiences of stereotyping, the resulting social exclusion and isolation, and xenophobic tendencies towards participants in the schools mainly due to their social identity as African migrant children. The findings are organised within the categories migrant learners' experiences of stereotyping within the school and the conditions that maintain/perpetuate such experiences, and the perceived impact of on the migrant learners' participation and performance in school.

#### 6.2.1 Migrant learners' Experiences of Stereotyping, Xenophobia, Name Calling

The findings revealed the impact of stereotypes on the African migrant children's experiences in school and in communities in South Africa. The impact of stereotyping on African migrant children's experiences in school and in communities did contribute to their experiences of xenophobia, name

calling and social exclusion. This made living and schooling in South Africa psychologically and physically unsafe for the migrant children due to damages caused by negative and denigrating imaginations about African migrants in these schools in the South African communities. All 12 participants in this study claimed to have suffered negative experiences from the stereotyping and negative ideas propagated in the schools and within the communities they live about African migrants in South Africa. Sande (girl aged 17) “Some people will see me on the road and start calling me names. They tell me...you kwere-kwere you are here to steal our stuff...you must go back to your country. I feel too bad because of what people in the community say about us and the way they treat us because we are foreigners.” Migrants undergo many challenging experiences, and prominent among these challenges are the issues stereotyping and resulting xenophobia, labelling and social exclusion. These are often as a result of difference in the social and cultural identities of migrants with locals in their destination communities/countries. In South Africa, migrants, especially African migrants experience xenophobia and negative labelling in the form of name calling because they are perceived by the locals to be different. Luboya (boy aged 17) “Even children in Findings indicate the all the participants in the study share similar experiences of stereotyping, xenophobia and name calling within the school. The participants in their narratives express how they experience stereotyping, xenophobia and name calling both at school and in the larger communities. The community see us as bad people...I think this is what their parents tell them. They will see you in the street and they will start calling you names. People don't have trust in us

because they say we are kwere-kwere...kwere-kwere are bad people.”

Bakome (boy aged 16) “I don't play with other boys in the compound. Any time I play with them it ends up in a fight because they tell me that I'm a kwere-kwere kwere-kweres steal and sell drugs...” The above data excerpts indicate how different the locals perceived migrants to be from them. The term ‘kwere-kwere’ is used by black South Africans to refer to migrants of African origin in a derogatory manner. It categorizes African migrants as inferior and as the ‘other’ – the ‘them’, not the ‘us’. ‘Kwere-kwere’ refers to everything negative in the person and identity of an African migrant in South Africa. The term not only denotes difference, it also denotes inferiority and criminality. It shows absolute negative categorization of African migrants and how they are negatively positioned within the social landscape in South Africa. Among the prominent negative perceptions associated with the term ‘kwere-kwere’ are that African migrants steal, they sell drugs, and that they are bad people as contained in the participants’ narratives above. Such negative perceptions about African migrants within the schools and communities in South Africa inform how African migrant children understand their positioning both within the school and communities as negative. This directly impacts on their social and psychological wellbeing, and on their participation and performance in school.

### 6.2.2 Social Categorization and Exclusion

Similarly, the findings also indicate that all the participants in the study feel excluded in the group of their local counterparts who treat them differently because of their social identity and positioning as migrants. In line with this, Bobek *et al* (2024) and

Cross & Omoluabi (2006) are of the view that the negative side of migration comes in a situation where migrants experience social exclusion and sometimes harsh treatment in the hands of locals of their host countries which they would not have experienced in their home countries. The findings reveal that the participants experience exclusion and isolation in school as a result of differences in social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds with that of the locals. Experiences of exclusion suggests the negative social positioning of migrant learners in the school space and place in South Africa. In line with social identity theory, this form of interaction shaped the social constructions of reality through which knowledge of the learners were and which social groups they belonged to were constructed and social categorisations lines made clear (Flick, 2009). Social categorisation in this sense led to formation of social groupings where groups were formed according to differences and similarities in nationality, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Rhodes & Baron, 2019; Hogg, Terry & White 1995; Turner, 1982). These group formations denoted the active social participation and identity meaning making that the learners, both African migrant learners and local learners, in the schools undertook.

### 6.2.3 Social Isolation and Exclusion

One of the greatest challenges migrants encounter in their host communities/countries is stereotyping; what locals of their host communities/countries think and the ideas they have about migrants in their communities or countries, their ideas about migrants. This often leads to social isolation and exclusion. The participants in their narratives claimed that they feel isolated and excluded because of what their local

counterparts think about them and what they take them to be. As a result, they prefer to always isolate themselves from their local peers. Dingani (boy aged 16) “Break time is a bad time for me...when I go to sit with other learners, they will tell me that they don’t want their stuffs to get lost. I stay alone or look for other learners who are foreigners to stay with during break time...” Individuals in a given community define themselves according to marked similarities or uniqueness in comparison to others in the same society; this could be in the form of shared cultural values, language, and religion/belief system (Turner, 1982), leading to a sense of social identity and group formation. Those who share the same cultural values, language, religion and historical background, regard themselves as belonging to one and the same group in the society/community and they become or see themselves as the ‘Us’, and other individuals outside this group of ‘Us’ become the ‘Them’. Members of social groups try to define and identify themselves as a group, relate and interact with each other in a variety of ways, and also develop social structures from this interaction (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995). Members of the out-group (the ‘Them’) may suffer isolation especially where the members of the in-group (the ‘Us’) are dominant. This works both ways. Migrants set themselves up as the ‘Us’ and consider the locals as the ‘Them’ since they do not share the same culture, religion, most times language/s with locals of their host countries/communities, also given that the locals do not share the same social position with them as migrants. In the same way, the locals see and consider themselves as the in-group (the ‘Us’) in comparison to the migrants whom they consider as the out-group (the ‘Them’) in the sense they do not share the same

cultural, social, religious and most times language background with the migrants. The difference is in the ability to exclude or isolate the other. The participants feel isolated and excluded because of negative ideas their local counterparts have about them both at school and in the communities where they live. For them such negatives ideas suggest that they are positioned as the other both within the school and in the communities where they live. Thus, the idea of ‘the Them’ and ‘the Us’ which leads to identity definition come into play.

#### 6.2.4 School-based Experiences of Stereotyping

The findings reveal the impact of stereotypes on the participants’ schooling experiences in South Africa. The impact of stereotyping on the participants’ schooling experiences may influence the way the participants’ understanding of the school as space and place laden with experiences of exclusion and hostility. In this sense, school may be unsafe for them as migrants as a result of negative ideas about migrants in school in South Africa. All 12 participants in this study claimed that they suffer negative experiences from stereotyping and negative ideas about African migrants in school.

Ndaya (girl aged 17) “when something happens and they make you guilty when you are not guilty, and you will say to yourself that they don’t believe in me, I was not guilty but they made me guilty. You will be thinking like this teacher doesn’t like me, doesn’t like foreigners. So, every time the teacher comes to teach, I won’t understand properly what the teacher will be teaching because I don’t like the teacher. So, it has been affecting my schooling.” Akhumzi (boy aged 17) “...because I’m from a different country they think I do not know anything. Some teachers think that because foreigners in school cannot speak Zulu we are

not clever like the South African learners...they make me feel that there is something wrong with where I come from...” The above data excerpts show that South African teachers and learners have certain rigid ideas about African migrants in school. These ideas are mostly negative. Stereotyping can cause and have actually caused migrants great affliction in the host communities and countries (Kirkegaard *et al*, 2020; Harris, 2002). This is evident in the findings as many of the participants claimed they are hated, intimidated and abused by some of their teachers and local counterparts in school as a result of what they think about African migrants in their schools. This leads to the participants’ mistreatment at school which have negative psychological impact on their wellbeing. Negative ideas about African migrants in school make the school’s social and physical space and place psychologically and physically hostile and unsafe for African migrant children. As a result, the participants construct their positioning within the school space and place as negative.

#### 6.2.5 Community-based Stereotyping

The findings indicate that the participants may as well suffer the negative impact of stereotyping in the larger South African society as African migrants. Furthermore, from the findings we learn that negative stereotypes about migrants in their host communities/countries certainly make them feel physically unsafe and psychologically depressed. Migrants in many host countries experience limitations, mistreatment and social exclusion as a result of stereotyping and resulting xenophobic tendencies targeted against them by the locals (Ullah *et al*, 2020; Fukuyama 2007; Adjai and Lazaridis 2013). All 12 participants claimed that they experience

abuse, xenophobic tendencies and mistreatment from local South Africans in the communities where they live as a result of negative ideas people of South Africa have about African migrants in their communities. 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.” Munia (girl aged 18) “If you cannot speak Zulu everyone will hate you. They will know that you are a foreigner and people start treating you badly. Where we live in town, my younger sister was calling our neighbour’s little girl ‘sister’ and the little girl was also calling my younger sister ‘sister’...but the father of the little girl told her that she must stop calling my younger sister ‘sister’ because she is not her sister...he told her that we are kwere-kwere...and kwere-kweres are bad people...they steal.” The above data excerpts indicate negative experience in the way participants are positioned within the communities where they live by the locals. Negative and false ideas about migrant migrants by members of the community arises sense of insecurity and isolation within the social space. Many African migrant families in South Africa encounter varying degrees of bias, racism, rejection, and stereotypes from the locals which often result to prejudice towards African migrants by South Africans (Kaziboni, 2022; Adams, 2008). These treatments negatively affect emotional, psychological and physical well-being of African migrants living in South Africa.

#### 6.2.6 Impacts of Stereotyping on African Migrant Children’s Schooling Experiences

Findings also indicate that the participants consistently experience impact of negative stereotyping in school

as African migrants. The participants in their narratives expressed the type of stereotyping they experience in school as a result of their identity as African migrants and the negative effects such stereotypes have on their self-confidence/esteem and performance in class. 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 stories that people hear on TV.” Munia (girl aged 18) “I do not feel happy coming to school because I know some learners and some teachers do not want me in school because I am a foreigner. When I see our school gate and our school buildings, I feel scared and unhappy because I know I’m not safe... learners call me names and treat me badly in school.” In line with the above data excerpts, negative treatment such as stereotype and resulting prejudice towards African migrants by South Africans makes it difficult for migrant children to develop a positive personal identity (Umeh *et al*, 2024; CoRMSA, 2008). The study found that the impact of negative stereotyping about African migrant children in school in South Africa not only affects the way they relate with others as well as their performance in school but also limits or even erodes African migrant children’s social space within the school geography. It also makes them vulnerable to psychological abuse and physical attack, creating physically unsafe and psychologically unhealthy schooling space and place for these migrant children. As a result, the participants in their narratives claimed that they are hardly or even

wrongly understood by teachers and fellow learners who already have rigid ideas about them and hate them as a result of false ideas they have about African migrants. Wemba (boy aged 18) “There are teachers, who think that foreigners have come to disturb them in their school, and there are so many things I remember and I think of going back to my country, things like hatred South Africans have for us because we come from African countries, and what they think about us...” Sande (girl aged 17) “I don’t feel free moving around because everyone got this idea that you are bad and you are coming to steal or do some bad thing. Nobody trusts you because you are a foreigner...they say foreigners are bad...” Tshamala (girl aged 15) “What I don’t like is how some of our teachers and learners see us. They think we are thieves, we don’t know anything, and we make trouble in school. They make us feel that everything about us is bad...No one wants to relate with you because we are foreigners.” The above data excerpts show the extent of exclusion the participants experience in school because of false perception some of their teachers and local counterparts have about them. Thus, this impacts on how African migrant children come to understand their social positioning within the school in South Africa as inclusive or exclusive; positive or negative. In line with this, children’s geographers view children as active social participants who through their active participation and engagement with the social space and place are able to make meanings of their new environment. Thus, the meanings children make from their environment is determined by how inclusive or exclusive they see themselves participate in the environment. This accounts for their daily experiences as active social participants and meanings making

agents in the environment. In the case of the participants in this study, being children who make meanings of their environment (school space and place), negative experiences of school social and physical spaces as a result of negative ideas about them indicates lack of proper participation or even nonparticipation in school space and place. Furthermore, experiences of mistreatment from the locals make African migrant children to perceive themselves as being positioned as the ‘other’ and vulnerable within the school social and physical space and place. Thus, the participants’ construct their positioning in school as the ‘other’, both physically and psychologically within the school space and place.

## **7. Conclusion**

The findings from this study reveal relationship between stereotyping and African migrant children’s experiences of social exclusion, isolation and xenophobic tendencies by the locals in school. This informs the way African migrant children in schools in South Africa make meaning of their positioning in school as the ‘other’ and the vulnerable group, and in their understanding of the school space and place as unsafe and hostile (Blessed-Sayah *et al*, 2022; Holloway, 2014). These result to negative schooling experiences for the participants being African migrants themselves. Findings also reveal that exclusion which leads to social categorization is part of the participants’ social positioning as the ‘other’. This also influences how the participants construct their positioning within the school space and place as such. In this sense, the participants are seen and stereotypically positioned as the ‘out-group’; the kwere-kweres by the local children who see and consider themselves as the ‘in-group’ (Alexander, 2001). This form of power relation

and social categorisation influences the participants' positioning within the school in the way they feel excluded in the midst of the local children who consider them as different as a result of their identity as African migrants. Being excluded suggests that the participants feel isolated in the midst of the locals who are the dominant group in school. The participants in this sense 'feel out' instead of 'feeling in' in the way they are perceived and poisoned by their local counterparts and in the way they see themselves as the 'other' within the school space and place. This denies the participants positive schooling experiences; meaningful social and academic participation and performance in school.

## 8. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested to help enhance the African migrant children's schooling experiences; academic and social experiences in school and in communities where they live.

- Initiate programmes aimed at educating South African children and public on the need to accept and respect migrants in schools and their communities.
- Initiate programmes aimed at deconstructing the negative myths and stereotypes about African migrants and their children in the schools.
- Initiate regular mass mobilization programmes aimed at creating awareness on the contributions of migrants to the social and economic development of South Africa and the need to recognize and appreciate such contributions.

- Initiate programme that would ensure and encourage social integration and coexistence of diverse cultures and identities in schools and communities in South Africa to encourage social inclusion and discourage all forms of identity-based stereotyping, exclusion and isolation.

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