


# Chapter 4

## Migration of Zimbabwean Scholars in the SADC Region in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### Abstract

Before Zimbabwe gained its independence, the Zimbabwean higher education system was considered one of the best on the continent. The higher education system of Zimbabwe has produced large numbers of scholars with skills in the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) subjects compared to countries such as South Africa and Botswana in the SADC region. The SADC region has witnessed a significant movement of Zimbabweans mainly to South Africa and Botswana during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century which has played an enormous role in the promotion of the internationalisation of higher education in the SADC region. Although there is much data on the migration of Zimbabweans to other countries, there is only a limited amount data that specifically focuses on the movement of scholars. Therefore, this chapter seeks to address this scarcity in research by providing an understanding of the push and pull factors that contribute to the massive movement of Zimbabwean scholars to other countries within the Southern African Development Community region with a special focus on South Africa and Botswana. The chapter also look at the impact of the movement on both the sending

country and receiving countries. Literature sources were used as the main source of the data for this chapter. The movement of Zimbabwean scholars to the Southern African Development Community region can play a vital role in the attainment of Africanisation and Internationalisation in the SADC region. Therefore, such movement should be managed effectively in order for both the countries of origin and of destination to realise the benefits of migration.

## **1. Introduction**

Several scholars from the Southern African Development Community region (SADC) had left their countries over the past several years to go and study at the higher education institutions in South Africa. Chimonyo (2019) stated that not only is the country geographically close to most Southern African countries, but its universities also use mainly English as a medium of instruction while being recognized internationally. This attracts many scholars both locally and internationally. This has contributed to the innovation of the higher education sector in South Africa by prioritizing infrastructure development to accommodate migrant scholars in setting up new offices for international scholars (Chasi, 2019). The internationalisation of higher education in South Africa has become a national debate, where the bodies representing the higher education sector call on the government to come up with a policy that will support the internationalisation of higher education (International Education Association of South Africa (IEASA), 2020). In order to move the education sector to the global stage, the government must put the internationalisation of higher education on its policy agenda (DHET, 2019). The internationalisation of higher education can be defined as a process where international experience is amalgamated to the local setting with the aim of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning at the institution of higher education (De Wit, Hunter, Howard and Egron-Polak, 2015). The University of the Free State showed its commitment to the internationalisation of higher education by collaborating with scholars from other

universities in African and European universities and co-authored 2007 publications in the period of 2013–2016. The university also registered 1900 international students during 2017 (University of Free State, 2021). Due to the rise in the world population, the developed countries are more likely to depend on the migration of students (Hazelkorn, 2011; Magbondé, 2021).

The higher education sector in Zimbabwe has witnessed a decline in terms of the financial support from the government. This affected the quality of teaching and learning leaving students without study material and their lectures with small salaries. The economic and political crisis facing the country has also led to the migration of many academics and scholars in search of better economic opportunities and further academic training (Robison, 2020). While many Zimbabwean scholars migrated to the other countries in the SADC region, some also relocated to other regions of the world (Bere, 2016; Maharaj, 2016). The migration of scholars has both positive and negative impacts. The positive is that migrant scholars are more likely to return back home with new skills that help to grow their country. The negative side is that if migrant scholars do not return back home the industries would likely collapse in their home country (Docquier, 2014). Internationalisation of higher education has given more scholars the opportunity to migrate to other countries to further their education with the belief that studying in another country will bring more success to their career and also to contribute towards the advancement of the home countries (Lillyman & Bennett, 2014).

## **2. Methodology**

This chapter tried to understand the internationalisation of higher education, by looking at the push and pull factors that contributes to the massive movement of Zimbabwean scholars to other countries within the SADC region with a special focus on South Africa and Botswana. The chapter also looks at the impact of this massive movement on both the sending

country and receiving countries as well as innovative ways of enhancing the internationalisation of the African higher education sector. Some of the materials used in this particular chapter involve policy documents, articles, and published material specifically with regards to the internationalisation of higher education institutions and Zimbabwean scholars. Websites were also used to access information on the internationalisation of higher education.

### **3. Overview of the migration of Zimbabwean scholars in the Southern African Development Community region**

The South African higher education sector entered a partnership with the Zimbabwean government in the Presidential Scholarship which targeted the Zimbabwean students who were the top achievers on the advanced level. The aim of the partnership was for the higher education sector in South Africa to enroll Zimbabwean students. These students were funded by the Zimbabwean government and were expected to return home to work in Zimbabwe. Gubba (2014) stated that South Africa has a well-developed system in the higher education sector which helps South Africa to keep on attracting more Zimbabwean scholars. In 2014 South Africa ranked 4<sup>th</sup> in attracting more scholars from other countries. The majority of scholars migrating to South Africa to pursue their education are from Zimbabwe. During 2014, South Africa received 11,247 degree-seeking students from Zimbabwe (UNESCO, 2020).

#### **3.1 *Push and pull factors contributing to Zimbabwean scholars' migration to South Africa and Botswana***

The push-pull theory attributes the migration of people into another country according to the following factors such as: push factors, which repel people from a place, pull factors, which attract people to a place, intervening obstacles that are barriers to migration, and personal factors which influence a person's decision to migrate (Faist, 2012; Jansen, 2016). These

factors are different for every migrant or prospective migrant (Jansen, 2016). Migration eventually occurs when pull factors outweigh the push factors (Faist, 2012). This means that the positives in the destination country must outweigh the negatives in both countries of origin and destination. What might attract one person may repel another. A study that was conducted in Zimbabwe on the emigration of professionals highlighted major push factors such as low remuneration, low job satisfaction, collapse of funding, the political climate and declining currency exchange regimes. The pull factors include attractive salaries and research and study opportunities, among others (Shumba, & Mawere, 2012; Robinson, 2020).

The Zimbabwean higher education sector standards decreased after the year 2000, which drove many scholars to join the South African higher education sector (Gandawa, 2015). The location of the host nation is one of the factors that scholars consider before migrating to another country (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). The fact that South Africa is considered one of the countries in the SADC region that is doing well economically, could be another factor motivating Zimbabwean scholars to migrate to South Africa. Zimbabwean scholars prefer to further their studies at South African higher learning institutions since it offers programmes that are needed in the working environment (Sivize, 2017) in comparison to other countries in the SADC region. The corruption that took place in the higher education sector of Zimbabwe post 2000, has caused many Zimbabwean scholars to doubt the credibility of the Zimbabwean higher education sector (Chingarande, 2018).

According to Garwe (2014), Zimbabwean scholars have lost their faith in the Zimbabwean higher education system which motivated them to seek quality education in South Africa regardless of the international ranking that the higher education sector in Zimbabwe enjoyed before 1980. People who support the opposition parties in Zimbabwe are also forced to migrate due to political persecution (People Against Suffering Oppression and Poverty, 2012; Robinson, 2020). Teachers who were accused of supporting the opposition

parties in Zimbabwe, became the victims of political violence which forced them to migrate to South Africa for their safety (Crush, Tawodzera, Chikanda, Ramachandran and Tevera, 2017). Additionally, Rian and Weda (2017) stated that some Zimbabwean scholars migrate to South Africa to reunite with their families who left Zimbabwe for a better life.

In another study, Chimucheka (2012) highlighted that Zimbabwean scholars migrated to South Africa because they believed that the higher education sector in South Africa promoted transformation and an open space for them to grow at the personal level. Economic challenges are also a major driving force for Zimbabwean lecturers to leave their country to go and look for better opportunities in South Africa and elsewhere (Robinson, 2020). Botswana was one of the countries in the SADC region who took advantage of the brain drain from Zimbabwe after the year 2000. The government of Botswana quickly hired migrated scholars to work in the higher education sector and health sector (Campbell & Crush, 2012). The collapse of the Zimbabwean economy around 1998 – 2004 left many Zimbabwean scholars with no choice to migrate to find better living and working conditions. Many scholars also migrated to South Africa due to the underpayment from the Zimbabwean government (Crush et al, 2017). The good infrastructure in the higher education sector in South Africa also attracted millions of Zimbabweans to study in South Africa (Idemudia, Williams & Wyatt, 2013). The family background of the Zimbabwean students plays a vital role in their migration to South Africa. Zimbabwean students who come from rich families and children of top government officials migrate to further their education at the higher education institutions of South Africa without the need for scholarships unlike students who come from less privileged backgrounds (Gubba, 2014).

### **3.2 *Effects of the emigration of Zimbabwean scholars on the sender (Zimbabwe)***

The migration of people from a country provides both negative and positive effects to the sending country. Positive effects include the economic benefits stemming from the sending

back of remittances to the country of origin, poverty reduction through investments, job creation and improved well-being of families and communities that benefit from the remittances (McDuff, 2015; Crush et al., 2017; World Bank, 2017; Awumbila, Owusu, & Teye, 2014). Scholars who migrate from Zimbabwe to South Africa and who work there are able to send remittances for their children's education (Dube, 2014).

Migration is also associated with negative effects in the sending country such as brain drain and the separation of families (Nyanga, Mpala & Chifamba, 2012). The migration of scholars from Zimbabwe to South Africa, Botswana and other countries affects Zimbabwe as a country in multiple ways. One of the major effects is the brain drain. Brain drain is a major concern in Zimbabwe since the country continues to lose its human capital that took enormous resources to nurture and produce through education and specialized training for which it is not compensated by other nations in the region (Nyanga et al., 2012). Even though the migrants send remittances back home, these have been insufficient to compensate for human capital losses.

After the year 2000, Zimbabwe has experienced a shortage of teachers as a result of the teachers migrating to South Africa (Weda, 2012). The teachers migrated to South Africa to receive better salaries. Furthermore, due to the migration of Zimbabwean scholars to the other countries within the SADC region, Zimbabwe continues to lose higher skilled scholars, which has also contributed to problem management in higher education (Bere, 2016). By sending money back home to their families in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwean scholars contribute to the well-being of their families who remain at home (Sithole and Dinbabo, 2016). Regardless of the remittances that are sent back, Zimbabwe's economy continues to decline since the Zimbabwean government cannot utilize their skills.

Muyambo, and Ranga (2020) argue that the migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa had a devastating effect on the families of migrants who remained in Zimbabwe. Migration

continues to affect people's lives, especially children due to parents and children staying apart. Some children grow up without morals because the people responsible for instilling these are absent (Nyanga et al., 2012).

### **3.3 *Effects of the Zimbabwean migrant scholars to South Africa and Botswana***

Migration also has positive and negative effects for the destination country. Countries with certain skills shortages and a growing aged population tend to benefit immensely from acquiring skills and human resources from other countries (Dzinamira & Masuka, 2021). Rian and Weda (2017) argues that South Africa has been benefiting from the migration of Zimbabwean teachers since South Africa experienced a shortage of teachers especially in mathematics and science subjects. Zimbabweans forms the largest group of migrant teachers and lecturers in South Africa (Department of Higher Education & Training (DHET), 2013; Maharaj, 2016). South Africa welcomes these migrant teachers and lecturers to ease the country's own shortage. The migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa provides a solution to the skills shortage in the country especially in STEM subjects that are critical for the country's development and economic growth. During the COVID-19 lockdown, different stakeholders appealed to the government to bring back the teachers to the country since the Zimbabwean teachers could not come back to South Africa due to the closure of borders (Matlala, 2020). This signifies the valuable contribution of Zimbabwean teachers especially in the STEM subjects.

The government of South Africa acknowledged that critical skills are needed for the development of the country, and these are used to guide the migration of people from other countries to South Africa. For example, in February 2022, a new critical skills list was gazetted specifying the skills that are scarce and are necessary for the development of the country (DHA, 2022). This alone indicates that the government benefits from the migration of personnel from other countries including Zimbabwe.

Although Botswana hosts quite a significant number of immigrants including scholars from Zimbabwe, the literature does not focus on the positive effects that Zimbabweans can have on the country (Kiwauka & Monson, 2009). According to Betts (2013) Zimbabweans are negatively perceived in Botswana due to their illegal migration to the country. This in turn contributes to their invisibility and occupation in the informal sectors where they do not contribute to the growth of the country. The dislike of Zimbabweans in Botswana is attributed to crime, competition of job opportunities and increased prostitution that is linked to the spread of HIV (FMSP, 2009). Foreigners also have also been alleged to have negative effect on the development of South Africa and are blamed for many social ills including crime, competition over job opportunities, strain on resources meant for citizens and prostitution (Landau & Achiume, 2015; Gordon, 2018). This makes them less welcome which causes incidents of xenophobia. Even though there is evidence of their immense contribution to the growth of the economy, it remains unclear how their contribution can be harnessed for the development of the nation while also protecting the interests of the citizens and safeguarding the country from any criminal elements.

#### ***3.4 Innovative ways to promote internationalisation in the African higher education sector***

The participation of scholars in cultural exchange programmes help to promote internationalisation in higher education in South Africa (Enaifoghe, Ndlovu, Maduku and Obadire, 2018). The higher education sector should design a framework that will support the promotion of cultural exchange programmes in Africa. The global pandemic affected the internationalisation of higher education since exchange programmes were canceled because traveling was prohibited. This affected teaching and learning in the African higher education sector. Against this backdrop the higher education sector in Africa needs to start planning for the future (Obadire, Mashau & Misumi, 2020). Higher education depends on human-centered design thinking. According to Doscher (2020)

scholars in the higher education sector need to confront the old ways of doing things and consult different stakeholders in shaping the future of higher education in Africa. Research outputs have proven to be the key driver for the realization of the internationalisation of higher education. African higher education thus needs to rethink the way research is done and should begin to collaborate with international scholars to increase research outputs (Sehoole & Knight, 2013).

COVID-19 affected the internationalisation of the African higher education sector. COVID-19 demonstrated the need for effective leadership in the African higher education sector that will make sure that the digital mobility for internationalisation becomes a reality. African higher education also needs to prioritize joint-degree programmes in the SADC region that will be implemented through virtual conferences and seminars (Ligami, 2021). This is a positive initiative that will require the African government to invest in technology and the internationalisation of higher education. The African higher education sector should also start providing in-service management training to internal administrators who will effectively implement the internationalisation of higher education (Kasenene, 2011). Higher education should also be supported financially.

Migration is an important aspect in the incorporation of intercultural, international and global dimensions in higher education in order to enhance the quality of education and research. According to the Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa, migration Policies such as the White Paper of Migration (2012) are important in the realizing and regulation of international migration in the country (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2019). Therefore, the government and different stakeholders need to ensure that migration of skilled personal is facilitated and harnessed through the providing of permanent residence permits and work visas. Research collaboration among scholars in the SADC region can promote internationalisation of higher education. Through these collaborations, connections with other partners, governments,

agencies, and foundations can be formed which are important vehicles in the internationalisation of migration.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This chapter contributes to the debate on the internationalisation of higher education in South Africa. The higher education policy framework in internationalisation should interact with the national policies of immigration in South Africa. This is extremely essential as migration plays an important role in the internationalisation of higher education specifically in South Africa, a country which attracts many migrants. Political instability and economic challenges in Zimbabwe have contributed to the rapid migration of Zimbabwean scholars to other countries in SADC and beyond. Migration of the Zimbabwean scholars has had both positive and negative impacts on the sustainable and economic development of the country. The most prominent negative impact is brain drain, where skilled professionals leave the country that plays an important role in the development of the country. South Africa and Botswana have been benefiting from the migration of Zimbabwean scholars by receiving skilled scholars in STEM subjects that impart their knowledge to South African students. Regardless of the knowledge that Zimbabwean scholars have in the STEM subjects and regardless of their contribution to the growth of the host country, they have been discriminated against to the extent where students in Botswana have been deported back home. This form of discrimination calls for a single internationalisation policy framework in the higher education sector in Africa. This will foster collaboration between all African universities and establish a single African Students Financial Aid Scheme Support (ASFAS) that can be used to support the migration of African students from their country to other nations. All of the different stakeholders need to support the realization of the internationalisation of higher education including the harnessing of migration. This will help in fostering social cohesion in the higher education sector in Africa where other scholars are not financially excluded.

There is a need for the higher education sector in the SADC region to develop a policy framework on Collaborative Online International Learning. This will ensure that African children are not left behind in terms of accessing education especially during the time of pandemics. Furthermore, the migration of Zimbabwean scholars to South African will help to enhance the practice of soft diplomacy that can play a vital role in reversing the brain drain where South African students in the higher education sector can learn from Zimbabwean scholars especially with regards to STEM subjects.

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