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Mpata, Sarah

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University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
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ABSTRACT

South Africa is still perceived as a critical higher education destination in Africa, as evidenced by the influx of student migration from neighbouring countries and sub-regions post-apartheid. However, despite possessing diverse knowledge and skills that have the potential to add value to the knowledge production of the country, region and around the globe, many immigrant students still face an array of psychosocial challenges when they come to South Africa to study. This study was crafted through Narrative Inquiry and Critical Race theoretical lenses to explore and understand the experiences of 6 postgraduate immigrant students from DRC, Malawi and Zimbabwe currently studying at the University of the Witwatersrand to identify how these experiences have facilitated or hindered a sense of belonging. The study intends to further contribute to the existing body of knowledge to help improve the lives and well-being of students in culturally diverse communities. A convenient purposive sample drew from a pool of immigrant students fitting the diversity and context of the study.

The findings revealed a general impression of diverse experiences from immigrant students. However, many similarities identified in the elements of institutional discrimination, xenophobia and Afrophobia remain significant barriers to the success of immigrant students belonging, primarily manifesting through cultural and language barriers, individual differences in adaptation, social support and diversity inclusion initiatives, access to psychological support and counselling, Racism, Xenophobia and Afrophobia, prejudice and discrimination. Some participants also experienced language barriers and challenges related to institutional support based on how the immigrant student came into the country or was admitted into the institution vis a vis self-sponsorship, government-sponsored, or university scholarship and immigration status also revealed how individuals felt a sense of belonging or excluded. The study concludes that addressing these issues will help improve immigrant students' psychological well-being in their learning environment.

Keywords: alienation, belonging, exclusion, immigrant students, narrative inquiry, xenophobia