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# Children, language and access to schools in the global South

# Children, Language and Access to Schools in the Global South: The case of migrants in Ghana

**Abstract**

Research on migrant children and young people has often focused on the global North and less on South-South migration. This article discusses language and its effect on how young migrants access Ghanaian schools. Through interviews with 68 pupils, 21 parents and 40 teachers and principals from 30 schools across Accra, we found that children and young people from francophone countries were placed in lower than age-appropriate grades due to their lower command of English. Our study highlights the complex linguistic barriers facing migrants in an anglocentric educational system. The article discusses the relevance of our results in other post-colonial multilingual nations in the global South.

Keywords: language, access, migrants, Ghana, Global South

**Introduction**

This article examines the admission and initial placement processes of West African migrants in Ghanaian schools. Access to inclusive and equitable quality education has been key on the agenda of various stakeholders in the international community. This culminated in the establishment of the Education for All policy in 1990, which was reaffirmed by the World Education Forum in 2000 and the Millennium Development Goals. This agenda in recent times is supported by the Sustainable Development Goals on Education. Ghana has been a signatory to these international treaties and conventions including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights (1966), and the Convention of the Rights of a Child (1989). These treaties and conventions view education as a fundamental human right necessary for the utilisation of other human rights (Ministry of Education, 2012). Children of migrants are however identified as part of a marginalised group in terms of educational access (UNESCO, 2018).

Intra-regional migration within West Africa is centred on three main hubs. The oil industry and commercial viability of Nigeria attracts many Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) immigrants fleeing their countries for several reasons including conflict, natural disasters and economic hardship. ECOWAS is the regional economic body in West Africa made up of 15 countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo). The Centre sub-area includes Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and the cocoa enclaves with relatively better economies which continue to attract many West African migrants especially from Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. The West sub-area including Senegal also attracts larger numbers of migrants not only from Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, but from other African countries partly due to Senegal's relative economic success as well serving as a transit point for those wanting to flee to Europe (Charrière

and Frésia, 2008). Despite 84% of all international migrants in West Africa moving to other countries in the sub-region (Awumbila et al., 2014), there is little research on migrant children and young people and their access to education within the West African subregion. Using the case of regional migrants from West Africa in Ghana, our article focuses on access to education by children and young people in Ghana with emphasis on the factors that affect admission requirements and the initial assessment and placement process in schools. The central question this article seeks to answer is how migrants are admitted and initially placed in Ghanaian schools.

Downing (2014) reports that migrant communities have limited appreciation of opportunities that exist within the educational system. In cases where they are aware of the opportunities that exist for their children, accessing these remains a challenge. The nature of admission policies that schools and countries pursue impact the makeup of students that end up in schools. School admission policies, which are often restricted to children within the catchment area of the school, have a tendency of putting migrants in particular schools. This is explained by migrant's choice of living in low and disadvantaged communities. The segregation that takes place because of these policies often leads to compromises in the quality of the school (European Union, 2013). Adair (2015) points out that school admission practices can be a source of discrimination against migrant students because of long-held practices and conventions that have been made possible by the way the educational system has been set up.

Crush and Tawodzera (2011), in a study of African migrants in South Africa, identified that school requirements such as birth certificates and language admission tests often act as barriers that prevent migrants in South Africa from accessing schools. Furthermore, xenophobic attitudes, geographical inaccessibility as well as high tuition fees often serve as a barrier preventing migrants from getting into schools. In their research on low-income children of immigrants in Silicon Valley in the United States of America, Greenberg et al. (2016) argued that migrants

are forced to enrol into alternative schools due to lack of proficiency in English as well as their legal status. School authorities view the admission of migrants as problematic as teachers may not have the required skills to deal with them. They therefore discourage them from enrolling into their schools and want them to enrol in English schools or correctional and behavioural schools. This alternative arrangement might not be the preference of migrants but usually the undocumented migrant conforms for fear of their legal status being exposed.

There is evidence that shows migrant discrimination based on their lack of legal documentation. The literature on migrants and access to education is dominated by research in countries where migration is largely regular and issues of migrant legal status are enforced to a greater extent. The Ghanaian system presents an interesting case study where migration is largely dominated by irregular migration as well as a laissez-faire approach with respect to legal issues of migrants. The latest official data on the migrant population in Ghana can be found in the Population and Housing Census held in 2010. This shows the dominance of intra West African migration. Nigeria has the highest migrant population in Ghana (20.8%), the neighbouring countries of Togo (5.3%) and Burkina Faso (5.1%) follow with the next highest migrant population figures. According to Bosiakoh (2009: 98) the high number of Nigerian migrants in Ghana can be accounted for by "historical factors such as common colonial heritage and long-standing trade and other commercial ties with Ghana, language, general appearance, socio-cultural similarities etc. are a few of the reasons why Ghana has become a popular destination for Nigerian migrants". The high number of migrants from Togo and Burkina Faso is explained in terms of proximity.

Another body of literature deals with grade placement and retention (see Gillborn, 2010; Darmody et al., 2012; Adelman and Taylor, 2015). The European Union (2013) posits that the placement of migrants in schools is most important in ensuring their positioning into their right age and ability level. Thus, it is imperative on educational systems to devise thorough systems

during the initial assessment of migrant students, tailor the assessment to the individual and to interpret the results accurately. Placement in newcomer classes provides migrants with additional support during the early days of their education upon arrival from their countries of origin. These classes serve as transitions that help migrants adapt to their new environment (Bunar, 2017; Adelman and Taylor, 2015). Heckmann (2008) insists that for schools that have transitory classes, migrants are usually placed into "lower than age appropriate grades" after the initial assessment. This becomes more worrying as these lower than age appropriate grades become a permanent feature for the migrant due to lack of support. For Gillborn (2010), when the initial placement in lower than age appropriate classes becomes a permanent feature, it results in migrants being cumulatively disadvantaged. Darmody et al (2012) argue that the placement of migrant children in lower than age appropriate grades may be due to lack of objective assessment of migrant students' ability but rather based on subjective views. These stereotypical views could lead to a misjudgment in placing migrants in inadequate classes. Solano-Flores (2008) shows the ways in which the placement test may lead to discrimination of migrants. He concedes that standardised tests add to the biased outcomes for migrants learning English as a second language. Standardised tests as a basis for distinguishing between different learners are conceptualised with the middle-class population as it is targeted or adopted to serve the purposes of middle-class populations. The inherent dominance of the mainstream culture in standardised tests leads to undervaluing of the student abilities from the marginalised cultures. Due to the insensitivity of such English tests, there is often a misdiagnosis of the weakness of the student involved. Non-native speakers are slower as they navigate between more than one language before arriving at answers.

Following this Introduction, the next section discusses the 4As theoretical framework. The third section outlines the case study methodology we adopted. The last section involves an analysis of the data and conclusion.

**Theoretical Framework**

This article uses the 4As framework by Katarina Tomaševki as an instrument in evaluating the migrant child's admission and placement into schools in Ghana. The 4As framework conceptualises education of the marginalised using a rights-based approach. At the heart of the framework is the obligation by the universal declaration of human rights to provide equal access to education, quality standards and reduce educational discrimination (Tomaševki, 2004). The framework impresses upon states to create the capacity for education to be available and accessible for all school-age children. The educational system should be accessible without discrimination, acceptable in the respect for both individual students and parents' rights, and adaptable to constantly evolving realities of present times. For the purpose of this article, the emphasis is placed on availability and accessibility.

Accessibility entails making efforts that ensure that discrimination is reduced in the education system. Accessibility also requires that the most marginalised and vulnerable have access to the education system (Tomaševki, 2004). The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR, 1999: 6) states that, "education must be accessible to all, especially the most vulnerable groups, in law and fact, without discrimination on any of the prohibited grounds". Nondiscrimination is to be achieved immediately and not be subject to progressive realisation. Accessibility also involves physical accessibility and economic accessibility. ICESCR (1999) further calls for an educational system that makes primary education free and secondary and higher education progressively free.

Availability is fundamental to the right to education agenda. This includes two main components: the free nature and the other being the compulsory component. These two components

are enshrined in most international laws and frameworks guiding the education for all campaign. Beyond the free and compulsory nature, it should also be available for all regardless of creed, sex, religion or race as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948.

> Education as a civil and political right requires governments to permit the establishment of schools respecting freedom of and in education; education as a social and economic right requires governments to ensure that free and compulsory education is available to all school-age children (Tomaševki, 2004: 7).

States must ensure that there is adequate education infrastructure, trained teachers, and teaching materials for the proper functioning of the education system.

Using the 4As framework allows us to gauge Ghana's compliance level towards achieving issues of equitable access vis-à-vis migrant education. The framework offers a practical way of assessing the various duty bearers involved in the right to education in Ghana. Additionally, it allowed us to assess the admission and placement processes and identify the many stakeholders (teachers, headteachers, migrant parents, and migrant students) beyond government driving inclusion within the schools.

Robeyens (2006) criticises this human rights approach to education arguing that although countries at the international level push the agenda for education for all and will append signatures to ratify international laws, in practical terms, little effort is put in ensuring that every child gets onboard. Governments are often more fixated on wholesale statistics other than what transpires on the ground. To address Robeyens (2006) criticism, this article adopts the 4As framework, which allows the researcher to go beyond what exists in the policies in order to capture the experiences of the most marginalised in education.

**Methodology**

The study is designed as a case study of migrant children and young people in Ghanaian schools. It seeks to gain insight into the factors underpinning the admission and initial placement of children of migrants in Ghanaian schools at the basic level of education. Basic schools in Ghana consist of three sections: two years kindergarten, six years of primary education and three years of junior high school (JHS) education. Using the case study approach allowed us to gain deep description and an insight into the real life experiences of migrants with respect to admissions and placement in schools.

Within the West African subregion there is little official data on migrants. Ghana however provides some official data that are useful for the design of our study. Additionally, the subregion is dominated by many francophone countries, and the authors' limited proficiency in French and the added linguistic challenges that come with working in such settings guided our choice of Ghana. Lastly, the lead authors' familiarity with the Ghanaian setting was an important factor when choosing Ghana.

Two educational areas within the capital city of Ghana, Accra were selected: the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA) and the La-Nkwantanang Madina Municipality. They both have large migrant and non-migrant communities. ECOWAS nationals constitute 73.8% of the migrant population in the AMA and in La-Nkwantanang Madina ECOWAS nationals represent 81.2% of the migrant population (Ghana Statistical Service, 2013). This article used a mixture of purposive and snowball sampling as the target group often had some form of relation whether as friends, family or acquaintances. Aware of the possible bias that came with adopting the snowballing approach, it was key taking leads from teachers, headteachers, migrants, migrant parents, research assistants and community leaders. This ensured that there were people with different characteristics and contrasting narratives. The heads of the two educational units selected for this article granted formal access into the schools. The discussions in this article are based on 40 semi-structured interviews with headteachers and

teachers (20 females, 20 males) in 30 (21 public and 9 private) schools in Ghana, 68migrant chidden and young people (30 females, 38 males) and 21 migrant parents (5 females, 16 males). Although the focus of this article is on migrant children and young people, teachers, headteachers and parents led decisions pertaining to their admissions and placements. Thus, these stakeholders and their views on admissions and placement also remained useful for this article. All interviews were limited to the educational experiences at the basic school level. Migrant children and young people in our sample were between the ages of seven and seventeen. It was important to allow as many participants in the nine different grades that constituted basic schools in Ghana an opportunity to share their experience. This accounts for the gap in age of those interviewed.

All interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. The transcriptions were carried out immediately after the interviews. This afforded the authors the opportunity to easily remember words or nonverbal actions that were not captured adequately by the voice recorders. Coding reduced data into simple text and categories and reduced texts that had meaning. We generated codes by making marginal notes through reading the fieldnotes and transcripts. We merged text that had similar meaning and selected specific parts of the interviews that better emphasised the emerging themes. Ethical standards were maintained, as police had to clear the lead author and research assistants before interviewing the children aware of their vulnerable nature. We used pseudonyms in this article when reporting the findings. We define migrant as someone from an ECOWAS country that has moved into Ghana for at least three months. Our sample included children that moved to Ghana alone, children who moved with their parents and children born to migrant parents in Ghana.

**Findings**

*Policy Guiding Admission of Migrants in Ghanaian Schools*

We found that there is no specific policy guiding migrant education at the basic school level. Despite increasing calls for both international and local education frameworks to make provisions for migrant populations, none of the Ghanaian laws and policies explicitly mention education of migrants. The lack of policy meant that the vacuum created was now filled by the discretionary powers of headteachers who acted when they needed to. What the headteachers allowed or disallowed during the admission process became what was considered as official. The implications for the lack of policy on migrant education can be drawn from UNICEF (2012) who argue that the lack of precision in defining clearly the right of migrants in national policies and documents often led to their marginalisation and further disadvantage within the education sector. The importance of including migrants in educational policy-making has been emphasised by Author 2 (2013: 6) who suggests that "several of the countries with smaller educational gaps between migrant minorities and ethnic majorities have incorporated diversity into their public policy framework including multicultural (or intercultural) education".

*Admission Requirements and Migrant Education*

All schools in our sample administered paper forms during the admission process. The form asked for personal information, guardian or parental information, religious belief, and residential address. The extent to which students were required to provide proof of the information given on the admissions forms largely depended on (a) the type of school (public or private; private with foreigners paying the same fees as nationals or private where foreigners pay more fees than nationals), (b) the location of the school (migrant dominated settlements or non-migrant dominated settlements) and (c) the headteacher in charge.

Many headteachers also admitted that distinguishing a migrant from a non-migrant in migrant-dominated areas during the admission process was challenging. Firstly, those neighbourhoods have a common lingua franca, Hausa. This is the trader's language in West Africa. However it is not an indigenous Ghanaian language that remains a language widely used within Ghanaian settlements that have large migrant populations. The extent to which Hausa is used in Ghana has been made possible by the strong social and economic ties that exist amongst ECOWAS of which Ghana is a member (Ansah, 2014). Hence, newly arrived migrants in schools could often rely on the language to integrate easily in schools. Until such students gave information about their countries of origin, their migrant backgrounds were never noticed. Secondly, the history of such neighbourhoods meant that there were many migrants who had settled in Ghana long before independence and thus had become Ghanaians. Such migrants represented useful social networks that helped more recently arrived migrants to access institutions within the neighbourhood.

Distinguishing a migrant from a non-migrant during admissions represented a form of discrimination for some headteachers. This was particularly important in schools in migrant dominated areas. Headteachers made efforts during admissions to downplay the migrant background of students even in times when such migrants were easily identifiable by either their names, accent or language spoken. Any attempt to differentiate a Ghanaian from a non-Ghanaian was interpreted as an act of discrimination. For example, the headteacher of Kai primary and JHS added,

> I do not have any migrants in this school. In this area, how do you determine who is a Ghanaian and who is not a Ghanaian. We are all from somewhere before we settled in Ghana. Looking out for who is and who is not a Ghanaian will just bring confusion in this school. I don't like that. We have too many problems in Ghana and our education for you to be focusing on something that will bring confusion. We are all one people and I do not want to discriminate by looking out for who comes from Ghana or not.

This was corroborated by interviews with some migrant parents in migrant-dominated towns. Recruiting people for interview proved difficult as some migrants perceived questions about people and where they come from as discriminatory. One migrant angrily retorted before ending the interview. He noted:

> Why are you asking such questions about who this is and where does one come from? We are one people and there is no need to be doing that. These things are divisive as the history of this place will show you, we all came from somewhere.

Studies show that migrant-dominated settlements in Ghana were initially temporary settlements for foreign migrants. These towns are usually called Zongos, a Hausa word meaning a stranger's quarters (Pellow, 2002). The general insecurity witnessed by the researcher, especially in settlements dominated by migrants, as Adida (2011: 1390) explains, is a result of the "persistent fragility of national identities relative to ethnic ones in West Africa" caused by the "tendency for hosts and immigrants alike to equate national identity with ethnic identity". In the past, this led to the deportation of migrants as was the case in Ghana in 1969. Kobo (2010) traces the root cause of this to the 1969 Aliens Compliance Order that "declare[s] the non-autochthonous population as 'aliens'" which led to the expulsion of several migrants to their countries of migration.

*Documentation and Admissions*

There were also several cases in ours sample where headteachers paid limited attention although migrants had indicated on their admission forms that they were migrants. These migrants were also not identified as they had integrated well in the system. They bore no features that could easily identify them as migrants. Yet during the process of identifying migrants in schools, they came out to proclaim their status as migrant to the amusement of their headteachers and some cases their teachers. Later checks of the admission forms revealed that

these migrants had indicated during admissions that they were of a migrant background. This underlined the fact that there was a lack of attention paid to documentation in Ghanaian schools at the basic level. Headteachers in most cases did not think having Ghanaian documents was enough proof in determining who was or who was not a migrant within schools. They preferred to use features other than documentation. In some schools, the admission by some parents and guardians of the migrant background of their children led to the headteacher granting them some privileges. In such occurrences, headteachers even paid less attention to the documents of migrants. Robert a Nigerian student of Bubii school recounted his experience during the admissions:

> My parents are Nigerians who came to Ghana in 2000. I was born in Ghana. During the admissions, I was told to read and write. I did not have any of the documents they asked me (birth certificate and weighing card i.e. child health records books that provides information on height, weight, immunization, breast feeding, and other health care given to parents after birth). My parents told them they had no documents and they just allowed me to do the exam. That was all I did on the first day. The school authorities were made aware that my parents were Nigerians.

Unlike in schools in the global North, where issues of documentation serve as barriers for migrant accessibility to schools (se for example Bartlett, 2012; Buckland, 2011; Greenberg, Adams and Michie, 2016; PICUM, 2012), migrant children and young people in Ghana did not face such issues. Proof of legal status, civil status, residence, status of guardians were hardly mentioned during their school admission process. The implications of this on migrant education overall is positive as this traditional barrier faced by migrants in terms of physical accessibility and enrolment did not exist in the Ghanaian case.

*Initial Grade Placement of Migrants and Language Challenges*

Placing migrants during admissions was associated with two main difficulties. The first challenge had to do with finding an appropriate grade for migrants with linguistic difficulties during the admission examination. The second challenge was related to the opposition by parents and students when migrant students were placed in a lower than expected grade and teachers' opposition to the placement of migrants especially those with language barriers in their classrooms.

Headteachers sought the help of French teachers in grade placement interviews with migrants who could not communicate in English but had a good command of French. French teachers served as translators between headteachers and students during this stage of admission. All headteachers interviewed confirmed that this was the approach they used in interviewing migrants who communicated better in French. All sample schools had French teachers thus administering placement via this route was not the most difficult task. Ismail, a 17 year old migrant from Mali recounted his experience on admissions and placements:

> I struggled during my first day in school as the headteachers and teachers found it difficult communicating with me. I had to wait at some point for close to three hours since they (head teachers and teachers) informed me that the French teacher was not available. When Sir Martey (French teacher) came around it was easier communicating with him. It was only after my interactions with him that I was finally assessed and sent to class 5.

Headteachers reported of cases where migrants seeking admissions could neither communicate in English nor French. Fortunately, these students could speak at least a Ghanaian dialect. These were mostly migrants from Togo who could speak Ewe (a local dialect spoken by people

in Ghana, Togo and Benin) who had teachers or students who could also speak Ewe acting as interpreters during the admission process.

> The only way normally you will get to know that they are migrants is when they cannot speak the language. For that, they will readily let you know that they are not Ghanaians. When they come like that, especially those from the southern part of Togo, you know their Ewe is similar to the one we speak in Ghana, so it is easy for us. Even if they cannot speak English, the teachers who can speak Ewe help us finding the right class for them.

Headteachers also cited examples of migrants who could not speak French, English or any Ghanaian dialect. These students were mainly found in migrant-dominated settlements. These students spoke Hausa (a non-indigenous Ghanaian dialect which is widely spoken within the migrant-dominant areas). Teachers who spoke such dialects were important in serving as liaisons between headteachers and students. Finding teachers to help with the admissions process of this category of students was relatively easy in migrant-dominated areas compared to non-migrant areas.

All headteachers in our sample noted that the most difficult to place students during admissions were those migrants who could not communicate in any language or dialect understood by staff within the school. These were usually migrant students who were previously not attending school. One headteacher alluded to the fact that she used sign language in addressing the communication gap during the assessment for placement.

> There is no laid down rule for admitting migrants into the schools. I have encountered a few migrants who are unable to write in English. These are people from the French speaking countries. As the head of the school I have gained experienced after handling

the admissions for many years. For those who cannot write the examination in English, I use sign language to communicate with them when determining the initial placement.

Factors such as age of migrants and the linguistic ability of teachers were also important in the placement process. The age factor was considered important by many headteachers, mostly in cases where migrants had failed the placement examination as a result of linguistic barriers. "After the placement exams, the headteacher told me I failed.  She said I was too old to be placed in the lowest class (grade). She decided to therefore place me in class three (grade 3). She however promised that anytime I improve, I will be moved to the right class i.e. age appropriate grade".

A few of the schools in our sample had a specific plan for newly-arrived migrants with such linguistic barriers. In Peace School, for instance, the headteacher resorted to the placement of migrant students by paying attention to their particular needs and to the teacher with the right skills in managing such students. Teachers, especially those with similar linguistic competence to migrant students, were charged with paying attention to specific migrant students.

The lack of regulations that characterises migrant admissions and the free will it grants headteachers often helped in overcoming rather rigid school practices and institutional impediments. The lack of regulation in the Ghanaian school admissions allowed some headteachers to be innovative in dealing with challenges arising from migrant admissions, as seen in the case of Peace School. In the end, our findings show how the examination and interview stage represented a phase in the admission process that distinguished some migrants from non-migrants. Miera (2007) discusses how some headteachers in Germany ignored the competencies of migrants in favour of their linguistic proficiency in German by either taking migrants to 'introductory classes' (*Vorbereitungsklassen*) or by sending them a year back than their expected grade. The Ghanaian case is similar to the German case described by Miera

(2007) as placement is determined mostly by linguistic competencies in English. However, because there are no transitory or introductory classes in Ghana, headteachers prefer to place these migrant children and young people with limited proficiency in English in lower than age appropriate grades.

*Reaction to Initial Placements*

One of the major problems that migrants experienced during the placement process in schools was their placement into lower than their expected age grade due to their challenges with regard to English. The negative reactions came mainly from newly-arrived migrant children and young people from French-speaking countries as they were disproportionately affected by this practice. Our research revealed many cases where students opposed the initial grade placement and, on some occasions, even rejected placement:

> I had completed basic education in Côte d'Ivoire. I am not a bad student. I do not understand why the headteacher wanted me to go to the lower class. For someone who has finished basic school in Côte d'Ivoire it should tell her that I am not a bad student. The problem is with the language. Everything about the placement examination is new to me. I will pick up once I learn the language.

Migrant students were not the only ones who protested about their lower grade placement. Parents and guardians were also unhappy about the placement of their children. Headteachers reported of several cases where placements led to confrontations with migrant parents. Some parents also reacted to the repetitions by refusing to comply with the directives of sending their children to lower than expected age grades. These parents often withdrew their children from the schools. A migrant parent from Togo confirmed this during the interview. He made the point that,

My daughter was attending school in Togo before we migrated to Ghana. She was a few years away from completing. I have been to some schools but they want to place her in a lower age grade. They claim she cannot speak the English language. I think she can learn. The last school wanted to put her in a grade below her level. I do not like that. I am trying to bring her into this new school in my neighbourhood. I pray she is not repeated.

These conflicts between students, parents and headteachers highlight the perceived bias of placement tests within the Ghanaian context. Not being familiar with the test process and format is one reason why migrant students may fail. Underperformance by migrant students in tests should therefore be considered recognising the linguistic and cultural bias such tests may present in the form of inability to have appropriate diction in English to give correct answers or lack of time to answer (Solano-Flores, 2008; Suarez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco, 2016; American Psychological Association, 2012). Assessing migrants in English is fraught with anomalies as students and parents felt unfairly treated. This usually had to do with the idea of students or parents of migrant students perceiving themselves or their children as being better than the results of the placement tests done largely as a result of their deficiency in English.

The negative reactions that met placement of migrants did not only come from parents and migrants. Headteachers spoke of some teacher's unwillingness to accept some migrants in their classes based on previous experiences. Reasons given ranged from their difficulty to teach due to the language barrier, the relatively older migrants and how that turned some into bullies in their classes amongst others. Although generally teachers interviewed were not ready to admit this charge from the headteachers, one teacher opened up on the issue. She stated that,

I have been a teacher for more than twenty years in the public school. Throughout, I have had students from all sorts of countries and backgrounds in my class. The

challenge with teaching these students (migrants), especially those who do not speak the English language is they take the class back. There are many students in one class and we have limited time. You cannot have time for everyone. I am therefore not in favour of bringing such people to my class.

It was not all migrants who reacted negatively to being placed in lower than age appropriate classes for lack of communication in English. There were two groups of migrants who readily accepted being placed in lower than expected age appropriate grades due to their inability to communicate effectively in English. The first group represented the older migrants (late teens) from Togo who had already finished the basic school in Togo and were in Ghana just to learn English. According to the headteachers, these students usually preferred to start from the lower classes. Senanu, a migrant student, said that:

I have been living in Ghana since the beginning of 2016. I have been in school for less than a year. My parents want me to learn English. That explains my decision to come to Ghana. I have relatives here in Accra. Although I am far older than my classmates I do not mind. It is good for me. My purpose is to learn the language. I initially wanted to start from the lowest class. I will go back to Togo after a year to continue my education there.

The second group of migrants who accepted being placed in lower than age-appropriate grades were migrants who had been brought into the country to serve as shop assistants and housekeepers. These students according to the headteachers were mostly brought to school in order to enhance their communication within society. This group of migrants hardly completed the basic school cycle. Once they picked up the language, they left school. These were students who were hardly consistent in school as they combined school with other economic activities. Nadja, a migrant student from Benin, pointed out that:

I am 11 years old. I came to Ghana from Benin. I live with the Ghanaian family I work with. They have become my family in Ghana. This is my first time of being in school. At the start of school, I was asked to write an exam. I was unable to pass as that was my first time in school. I was never in school back home in Benin.

**Conclusions**

Migrants in Ghana do not constitute a homogeneous group. There are many migrants who bring particular characteristics (name, language and complexion) into Ghanaian schools. There were no specific policies guiding migrant admissions into Ghanaian schools at the basic level. Both private and public schools were not guided by any fixed set of rules during admissions. This policy gap was filled by the discretionary powers of headteachers who developed their own criteria during admissions. The lack of attention to issued documentation in most schools led to many migrants not being identified during the admission process. It was only in cases where migrants were more open about their background or exposed by their visible migrant characteristics. The most disadvantaged migrant during the admission stage were those from French-speaking countries. The disadvantage usually took the form of language challenges as placement into grades was linked to students' ability to pass English language biased initial assessment examinations. Migrants in Ghana were placed directly into regular classrooms with or without recourse to their linguistic competence in the absence of formalised introductory or newcomer classes. This led to the placement of migrants in lower than age appropriate grades.

Migrants had access to fee-free public schools. In terms of accessibility of Ghana's educational system, there were hardly any legal or administrative barriers. Additionally, to a large extent, migrants enjoyed fee-free public education. Physical accessibility is guaranteed for migrants as gaining enrolment in the schools comes with no legal or administrative hurdles. Beyond physical accessibility, the placement process is fraught with problems that affect the quality of

the education migrants receive. The challenges associated with placement of migrants and the lack of adaptations made by headteachers in adapting school rules to suit migrants has implications on the integration approach in Ghanaian schools. Migrants are assimilated into the Ghanaian school system as the Ghanaian way of admitting students remains the only way of doing things. The structure of the Ghanaian school system of admissions does not allow for full inclusion of migrants. The school setup, especially the placement, is not dynamic enough to respond to the challenges that migrants come with. Inclusion is not given a deeper meaning in the Ghanaian school beyond enrolment. The differences that migrants bring into schools are perceived as problems, thus opportunities to adapt the admission and placement processes in order to enrich learning in the classroom is missed.

Our article is of particular importance in the way it highlights the complex nature of linguistic barriers in developing post-colonial world contexts. The findings add to wider debates on language-in-education policy in multilingual postcolonial settings. It further brings to the fore the local versus global language argument among diverse groups in sub-Saharan Africa and the ways in which language policy or the lack of it does affect the school outcome of disadvantaged learner groups.

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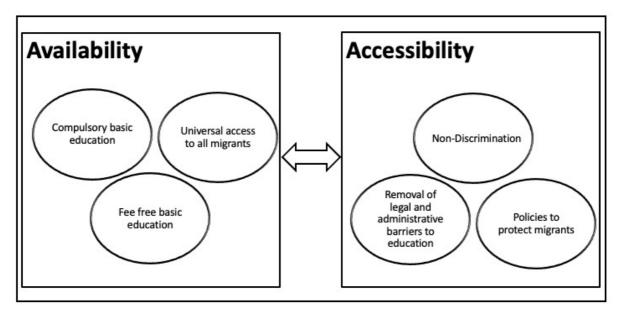
**Figure 1: Availability and accessibility in the 4A Framework by Tomaševki (2001)**