International Students Seeking Political Stability and Safety in South Africa

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Given the increasing rate of South to South migration and South Africa's leading role as a host for internally displaced migrants as well as Africa's international students, this study examined this intersection of international students who selected the country for political stability and safety. The findings revealed that while these students were generally more highly prepared academically, more satisfied with university facilities and staff, and experienced fewer academic hurdles than their international student counterparts, they encountered greater challenges in regard to finances, living support and discrimination. The study calls for clearer acknowledgement in policy and specialized support for refugee and asylum seekers' unique situations and needs.

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The numbers of persons living and working outside their country of origin are higher than ever before. Based on the latest estimates by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM, 2015), more people are migrating than at any other point in human history, with an estimated 244 million international migrants globally in 2015 (3.3% of the world's population) — an increase from an estimated 155 million people in 2000 (2.8% of the world's population). This upward trend can be attributed in part to globalization, which has reduced historical barriers to mobility, as well as advances in information and communication technology and decreasing differentials between countries in terms of salaries, employment prospects and living conditions. In addition to voluntary migration in search of better opportunities, migration takes other forms, which include forced migration as a result of civil wars and unfavourable living conditions in the home country.

With the rise of refugees globally, access to higher education becomes increasingly important. In 2017, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) recorded 25 million refugees worldwide, the highest number since the end of World War II. For example, 4.8 million Syrians have registered as refugees in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Turkey and North Africa, and approximately 1.7 million have applied for asylum in Europe since the start of the Syrian conflict in 2011 (Luo and Cradock, 2016). While securing shelter and safety is the primary concern of refugees following displacement, beginning or resuming education is often the immediate step after settlement for successful integration (Ager and Strang, 2008). Maintaining an educational routine is part of a larger process of providing pathways for adaptation into the host community and serves as a powerful counterweight to the trauma of forced migration (Crea, 2016; Dryden-Peterson, 2016). Continuing through higher education becomes especially important for those who return to rebuild their country with specialized knowledge and skills once the conflict or war has ended (Watenpaugh 2013; Barakat and Milton, 2015; Kamyab, 2017).

Within the continent of Africa, South Africa is a leading host of both forced and voluntary migrants. The country is the largest recipient of refugees, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons due to conflict and violence in other African countries such as Zimbabwe, Democratic Republic of Congo and Malawi, to name just as few. South Africa continues to receive the highest number of asylum applications in the sub-region, while also grappling with a large backlog and complex protection challenges faced by migrants already in the country. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2017) observed that South Africa had 1,096,100 pending asylum claims, the highest in the world, followed by Germany with 420,600 applications and next the United States (US) with 286,200. Meanwhile, there is also an all-time high of international students studying outside their home countries, including in South Africa (OECD, 2018), paralleling the rising demand for overall migration from other African countries. South Africa serves as the leading host for African international students, although less is known about those who are in the country to also seek security and safety. Thus, this study focuses on the experiences of international students who sought study in South Africa for these particular reasons.

Supporting Refugees and Asylum Seeking in Higher Education

While past studies have mainly focused on refugee children and youth in school contexts, less is known about the experiences of students from refugee backgrounds in higher education (Ramsay and Baker, 2019). As Ramsay and Baker (2019) rightly argue, the lack of access to education is shown to be highly detrimental to people seeking refuge. Without continuing education, refugees are at risk of exploitation, abuse and further disadvantage. Access to higher education can also further prevent and lower the likelihood of joining radical organisations (Al-Hawamdeh and El-Ghali, 2017).

The benefits of higher education are just as compelling. Supporting refugees to access higher education yields benefits to individuals, their peers, their families and the broader society. These rationales include the fact that highly educated refugees can become leaders in their communities and support the future rebuilding of their homelands. In countries of settlement, refugees with higher education qualifications are more likely to find work and contribute to the local economy. Despite such benefits that higher education presents for refugees, only 1 percent of refugees enter higher education, compared with 34 percent globally (UNCHR 2017). There is also a lack of coordinated support for the limited number of refugees that reach higher education (Streitwieser et al., 2018).

Social and Academic Challenges

The challenges for refugee students in pursuing higher education are many. Among the key barriers include language mastery in the host country. For example, in Turkey, Syrian refugees must be proficient in Turkish to pass the university entrance exam or attend the country's universities. Second, financial constraints combined with a lack of financial aid, such as scholarships and bursaries at the institutional level and loans on the national level, contribute to the low enrolment of refugee students (Kamyab, 2017). Third, those that live in resettlement or camp situations may not have access to available options to seek university study; they may lack the resources including the internet and course materials. Additional factors in temporary living situations include interrupted education, social detachments and difficulties connecting with other students (Ramsay and Baker, 2019). In their study of African young adults who entered Australia under a humanitarian entry program, for example, Harris and Marlowe (2011) identified a range of pressures, such as challenges in adapting to new educational contexts, high community expectations, and difficult home environments to study in. Students recounted mixed educational experiences with staff as they interfaced with practical issues of seeking academic support, accessing study materials,

and studying in another language. In sum, this complex web of challenges, such the language of instruction, social integration issues, lack of resources to support refugee education, and personal bias and prejudices, makes refugee education especially difficult (Dryden-Peterson, 2016, 2017).

Xenophobia in the Global South

The studies cited above mainly highlight the experiences of refugee students in the global North. While the literature points to the fact that there has been more research conducted on the experiences of refugees in primary and secondary education than in higher education, and those that do focus on higher education tend to center on the global North (e.g., Morrice, 2013; Stermac et al., 2006; Stevenson and Willott, 2007; Streitweiser, et al, 2018). Nevertheless, South-South migration is occurring at a higher rate than South-North flows (IOM, 2015), suggesting a need to better understand the prominence of regional mobility, particularly in lower income countries. The search of literature for this paper also points to a dearth of literature on the higher education experiences of refugees in the global South.

Public attitudes about immigration can shed some light on the extent of xenophobia in different parts of the world. Based on the World's Gallup Poll, whereas most regions of the world hold a neutral or sometimes favorable attitude towards immigration, the majority in Southern Africa tend to favor decreasing immigration in their countries (Esipova et al, 2015). In South Africa, 56 percent of its residents reported a desire for less immigration (Esipova et al, 2015). Studies have identified the xenophobia as among the country's greatest problems (Iwara et al, 2017; Lee, 2017) and reports of South Africa's mistreatment towards internationals have been well documented (Al Jazeera, 2015; 2019. Meanwhile, Madue

(2015) suggests that South Africa is not committed to rooting out xenophobia as scenes of xenophobia against undocumented immigrants dominates the news (Andrucki, 2017).

Although there is limited research on the plight of refugees in South Africa's higher education system, past studies have investigated the challenges in South Africa's higher education sector for internationals, more broadly. Lee (2017) uncovered a range of discriminatory challenges experienced by South Africa's international students, including confronting negative stereotypes and threats to their physical safety. The author suggests a global patterning of neo-nationalism in which students from particular neighboring countries are especially targeted by local nationals, sometimes based on rationales that they are threats in competing for scarce resources, while the experiences of white international students are generally more positive. The study observed that international students from Africa in particular perceived greater discrimination than students from Europe and North America.

Refugees, Asylum-Seekers and International Students

This study makes a distinction between a refugee student, asylum seeker and an international student. According to the UNHCR (1951) a "refugee" is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of fear of persecution, based, for example, on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership of a particular social or ethnic group. An asylum seeker is an individual who is seeking refugee status and without the rights and protections of refugees. People take flight in quest of asylum, safety and freedom in another country due to events out of their control occurring in their home country, including civil war, conflict, political instability, external aggression or occupation (Kavuro, 2013). According to Maringe et al. (2017), the needs of refugee (as well as asylum-seeking) students differ from other international students, depending on whether they are running away from war or persecution on political, social, ethnic, or religious grounds (Felix, 2016; Kavuro,

2013). The 1951 UN Refugee Convention specifies conditions that qualify the 'fear of being persecuted.' On the other hand, Maringe and de Wit (2016) define an "international student" as one who leaves their own country of citizenship to study in another country. The majority of this latter group of students are what could be termed "voluntary migrants"—they cross borders of their own volition and generally bring in financial resources of their own to study and support themselves in the host nation (Felix, 2016).

Numerous scholars have indicated that the challenges of refugee students are distinctive (Kavuro, 2013; Morrice, 2013; Stermac et al., 2006; Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Kavuro (2013) best summarizes the differences between the situation of international students from that of refugees and asylum seekers because as follows: (a) The livelihoods and education dream of international students are stable as it has not been interrupted by events out of their control such as political, religious, and ethnic/tribal conflict or civil war. Their well-being has not been shaken by forced displacement and human rights abuses; (b) Immigration policies requires international students to be financially stable so as to satisfy their basic necessities of life, including accommodation, food, healthcare, education during their stay; (c) International students who come from low-income families leave their home countries when they have been awarded bursaries, scholarships, or student financial loans by their governments; (d) Some international students are sent by their own states to undertake studies in disciplines that may not be available in their home countries' universities; and (e) Some international students are studying in particular universities on the basis of bilateral or multilateral agreements between their home country and other states. None of the above conditions holds for refugees and asylum seekers given the flight mode in which they left their families and countries, resulting in them not having a relationship with their home governments. The bond of nationality between them and their home states disappear, including the right to be protected by their governments, as international students normally

are. While refugees neither enjoy the full rights, entitlements, privileges and benefits of host citizenship nor their home countries' citizenship, international students retain their political rights; including the right to vote and choose freely their representatives in their home countries. They still have access to their countries' public funds or services (Kavau, 2013).

Taking the above into account, many scholars have rightly argued that recognized refugees and asylum-seekers should not be treated as international students (Kavau, 2013; Morrice, 2013; Stevenson and Willott, 2007). Rather, their unique plight requires social, economic, emotional, and psychological support to be provided by universities, host governments and UNHCR.

South African Policy and Limitations

In order to understand and address the challenges for immigrants in the South African context, understanding immigration policy is key. Refugee conventions as well as human rights agreements became domesticated in South Africa when they were enacted into law by the Refugee Act of 1998. In order to ensure that human rights are safeguarded, the Act affords refugees basic rights contained in the Bill of Rights, which include the right to an education. In the context of South Africa as described in the Immigration Act (Republic of South Africa, 2002), an "asylum seeker" is a person who has fled their country of origin, seeking recognition and protection as a refugee in South Africa, and whose application is still under consideration. Crush and Peberdy (2018) acknowledge that many migrants remain undocumented for reasons having to do with the backlog from Home Affairs. If the application is rejected, they must leave the country voluntarily or will be deported (Republic of South Africa, 2002). In terms of the 1997 South African Constitution and Bill of Rights, an asylum seeker should be accorded the same privileges as local people or citizens with regard to access to social services, education, health facilities, and housing (Republic of South Africa, 1997). Effectively, this means that asylum seekers should enjoy privileges (where

these are available to the local citizens) such as free education, transport subsidies, and others (Kavuro, 2013). An asylum seeker is thus a person seeking the right to be accorded full refugee status in the new host country.

Despite the passing of the 1998 Refugee Act, there has been little furtherance in supporting refugees in higher education. In 2017, South Africa's Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) adopted the Policy Framework for the Internationalization of Higher Education in South Africa. Until the development of this policy framework, international engagement practices in higher education institutions were carried out in the absence of an official South African national policy on the internationalization of higher education. While the policy framework should be welcomed in terms of providing guidelines for institutions, it does not sufficiently acknowledge the challenges international students face on the ground, as will be illustrated later in this paper. It also fails to mention nor address any issues faced by refugee students in higher education.

Besides having limited funds, refugees and asylum seekers suffer further when treated the same as international students by the South African government and the universities, ignoring the unique rights due to them. When these populations are regarded as 'international students,' they are ultimately presumed to be economically independent (Kavau, 2013). International students are permitted to study in South Africa if a university has received a guarantee that the tuition fees will be paid and the student has sufficient means of support, which is less likely among forced migrants. In reality, most refugees are economically disadvantaged because they have lost all their belongings and there is no legal connection between them and their state (Kavau, 2013). If South Africa extends its hospitality to asylum-seekers, it consents to providing full and effective protection irrespective of their socioeconomic status (Landau, 2006). Landau (2002) elaborates that in principle, refugees

are, in terms of the Refugees Act, entitled to social and economic assistance which is aimed at alleviating the conditions of those who are destitute or financially disadvantaged. Kavau (2013) argues that in practice, the Refugee Act is neither interpreted nor implemented to include such assistances. Consequently, refugees and asylum seekers are effectively excluded from benefiting from the allocated national resources granted to eligible students for the purpose of 'ensuring representivity and equal access' to tertiary education which is administered by universities or by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

With the preceding in mind, this study further examines this important junction between forced migration and higher education in a leading global south country destination, South Africa. Despite the major challenges outlined above, South African remains a prominent destination among many migrants, including international students and those seeking safety. This study will provide an analysis of the country's role in international higher education, and the results from a survey of international students who selected the country for political stability and safety.

Methods

This study was part of a larger project about international student mobility and their experiences in South Africa (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). The larger dataset from which this study was drawn was based on a survey instrument that was previously utilized in the US (Lee, 2008, 2010), Mexico (Author, 2009), and South Korea (Jon et al., 2014) and was then adapted to the South African context (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). The questions included demographic background characteristics (i.e., country of origin, field of study, and degree program); reasons for choosing South Africa and the enrolled institution; educational and career aspirations; perceptions and experiences in the country and institution; and aspirations to stay in the country, return home, or work elsewhere following graduation. The larger

dataset consisted of 1,682 international students in seven South African universities, ranging in type (traditional research, comprehensive, and technology universities), situated in urban and rural settings, and located in the Eastern Cape, Gauteng, Northwest, and Western Cape provinces. This sample reflected the diversity of the country's international students (Lee & Sehoole, 2015).

This study views international student mobility as a subset of migration and further makes a distinction between voluntary student mobility in search of a better study destination as well as involuntary mobility as a result of persecution and unideal study conditions at home which forces students to flee. The focus on this involuntary mobility emanates out of a larger study that focused on inward-bound international students in South Africa which has been widely reported (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). The study also found that there were students who came to South Africa as a result of fleeing from persecution and unideal conditions back home. These students did not receive sufficient coverage in the analysis of this study, hence the in-depth focus on this subset of international students in South Africa.

Our research questions were as follows: What drew international safety-seeking students to South Africa? How do their levels of satisfaction and experiences compare to other international students? This study focused on a survey question asking about students' motivations for choosing South Africa based on stability and safety. While the survey did not specifically inquire about their refugee or asylum-seeking status, the importance of stability and safety served as the common underlying rationale for almost all refugee and asylum-seeking students. The primary survey question for this study was as follows, "When choosing to study in South Africa, how important was each of the reasons about South Africa listed below?" 1,671 survey respondents indicated the importance of choosing to study in South Africa for "political stability and safety compared to my home country," based on a Likert scale. 1062 (62.4%) indicated "not important or not true," 286 (16.8%) as "somewhat

important," 180 (10.6%) as "very important," and 143 (8.3%) "most important." The study specifically focused on the 323 (18.9%) of the sample who reported choosing the country for political stability and safety as "very important" or "most important," henceforth referred to as safety-seeking students (SSS). Those who indicated "somewhat important" or "important or not true" were grouped as less safety-seeking students (LSSS).

Almost all (93%) SSS, originated from the African continent. Among this group, the top five largest populations were from African countries and included Zimbabwe (49%), Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (9.4%), Nigeria (9%), Republic of the Congo, (4%), and Rwanda (3%). The largest group in this sample, Zimbabweans, also constitute the largest group of refugee and asylum seekers in South Africa (UNHCR, 2017) as well as the largest group of international students in South Africa (Lee & Sehoole, 2015). The next largest group of refugee and asylum seekers to South Africa, Cote D'Ivorie, is not reflected in this study sample as the country is not a major sender of international college students (Lee & Sehoole, 2015).

The data analyses were both quantitative and qualitative. T-tests were conducted to compare SSS ("most important" and "very important") to LSSS, students who were less motivated by political stability and safety ("somewhat important" and "not important or not true") based on the major areas covered in the survey: satisfaction, finances and living, academic experiences and social experiences. To better understand the experiences of SSS, open-ended comments for this group were coded for common themes in order to provide further explanation for the quantitative findings.

Findings

The findings revealed many unique characteristics of international students seeking to study in South Africa for political stability and safety, or safety-seeking students (SSS). SSS commonly expressed their rationales as being forced to leave their home country. The

following student from the DRC, for example, emphasized the political challenges: "Because I have no choice as my life as well as for my children was in danger for political reasons." For Zimbabweans, the largest international student and asylum-seeking/refugee population in South Africa, the political and economic drivers were often interlinked. One student stated,

"I chose to come to South Africa primarily to look for better living conditions. Zimbabwe was having galloping inflation which was out of this world. As a result, my earnings were eroded. Zimbabweans who had come to South Africa were leading better lives and driving nice cars and looking after their families well. The company I worked for was also operating under troubled economic and political environment. Any sensible person then had to leave."

Another Zimbabwean explained, "We migrated as a family because of economic and political reasons way back before I started studying here. Because the universities in my home country had lost their international acclaim and recognition and South African universities still held that respect and produced well-rounded graduates."

There are many other countries within and outside of Africa where international students can study. In choosing South Africa in particular, the additional reasons were quite similar to those who were less motivated by safety. The top five leading reasons for both groups included expecting better jobs in South Africa, opportunity for academic research, having family and friends in South Africa, South Africa being close to the home country, and to experience the South African culture. Among SSS, the additional appeal of future opportunities compared to their former countries was an important draw. As expressed by a Zimbabwean student, "I needed to change environment and there are better chances of getting better jobs with [a] South African education than my country." According to this student, "safety" included financial security. Additionally, South Africa is highly regarded for its top global universities and advanced higher education system. As expressed by a Malawian

student, "I chose to study in South Africa and at [University] in particular because it is one of the world's renowned universities and it is a premier university in the world." A Nigerian student also commented, "Improvements in education and research, and in addition, the government is concerned with the education in South Africa, as compared to negligence of some countries in Africa." As demonstrated, South Africa's universities were an important draw for both voluntary and involuntary migrants seeking higher education.

Satisfaction

As shown in Table 1, SSS reported statically significant higher rates of satisfaction compared to LSSS, students who were less motivated by political stability and safety in all measured areas. There were no items in which SSS reported significantly lower rates of satisfaction than LSSS.

SSS' positive comments were related to the helpfulness of staff and the quality of instruction and facilities. A student from Mozambique wrote, "So far I can say that I have been experiencing a very good time at [University] with excellent facilities, not only library and computer facilities but educational as well such as tutors that give us support with anything we are struggling with." Another international student commented on how the environment is more favourable than Zimbabwe, "It is very good, and one gets to grow a lot while away from home and this is a healthy safe space to do that." While SSS tended to report higher satisfaction levels than LSSS, there were many areas in which SSS faced greater challenges than LSSS, as will be explained further.

Table 1. Safety Seeking Students (SSS) and Less Safety Seeking Students (LSSS) on Areas of

Satisfaction

Areas of Satisfaction		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Academic resources (library, services, etc.)	LSSS	1333	3.38	0.684	0.019
	SSS	319	3.58	0.603	0.034
Helpfulness of administrators and staff	LSSS	1333	2.90	0.925	0.025
	SSS	318	3.08	0.866	0.049
Job preparedness for work after studying at University	LSSS	1306	2.82	0.884	0.024
	SSS	319	2.97	0.877	0.049
Campus safety	LSSS	1324	3.15	0.812	0.022
	SSS	317	3.29	0.745	0.042
Local community safety	LSSS	1309	2.60	0.892	0.025
	SSS	312	2.81	0.885	0.050
Technology and computer labs	LSSS	1322	3.18	0.838	0.023
	SSS	317	3.38	0.772	0.043
Social atmosphere (friends, activities)	LSSS	1320	3.12	0.791	0.022
	SSS	314	3.26	0.721	0.041
Quality of professors and lecturers	LSSS	1322	3.29	0.734	0.020
	SSS	319	3.41	0.676	0.038
Course availability	LSSS	1297	3.18	0.819	0.023
	SSS	309	3.31	0.726	0.041
Overall university experience	LSSS	1323	3.20	0.676	0.019
	SSS	317	3.30	0.601	0.034

Note: 5-point Likert scale (5 = "Extremely Satisfied to 1 = "Extremely Dissatisfied")

Financial and Living Support

The remaining sections focused on comparing themselves to local South Africans:

"Please rate the following experiences at this university on a scale from 1 to 5 compared to

local South African (not international) students." This section highlights areas regarding finances and living support.

Compared to locals, SSS rated themselves as having more challenges in the affordability of living, the affordability of their education, availability of financial assistance, availability of support services, and continuity of funding compared to LSSS (See Table 2). In no areas did they indicate significantly fewer challenges compared to locals and in no areas did SSS report more difficulties compared to LSSS.

Table 2. SSS and LSSS on Resources and Support Compared to Local South Africans

Compared to Locals		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Affordability of living (rent, food, transportation, etc.)	LSSS	1310	3.42	1.211	0.033
	SSS	319	3.77	1.179	0.066
Affordability of education (tuition, supplies, etc.)	LSSS	1307	3.58	1.241	0.034
	SSS	319	3.86	1.202	0.067
Availability of financial assistance	LSSS	1299	4.17	1.016	0.028
	SSS	318	4.37	1.021	0.057
Availability of support services	LSSS	1301	3.48	0.929	0.026
	SSS	315	3.67	1.056	0.059
Continuity of funding	LSSS	1270	3.73	1.023	0.029
	SSS	316	3.92	1.095	0.062
Finding housing accommodation	LSSS	1305	3.87	1.076	0.030
	SSS	317	4.11	1.074	0.060

Note: 5-point Likert scale (1: Much Easier than South African Students; 3: No difference; 5: Much More Difficult than South African students)

Most comments pertaining to these areas were expressed wants for greater support and infrastructural improvement. The particular needs of refugees were discussed, such as

"There isn't enough staff allocated and trained to deal with internal/refugee students especially during registration" (Rwanda) and "Refugee students have more difficulties affording living academic and financial support than other international students" (Democratic Republic of the Congo) and "[University] is doing little for refugee students" (DR Congo). While the open-ended survey questions did not specifically inquire about refugee status, many such students pointed out the difference.

In regard to accommodation, SSS reported greater difficulties in securing housing than LSSS, which they generally viewed as more challenging than for local students. According to one SSS:

"Life is very difficult in South Africa, good quality of education but very expensive. As refugees staying in South Africa more than 6 years, we experience challenges to study, getting a job, getting a loan even scholarship. We have to pay full amount of tuition fees before registration while in our country foreigner live in good conditions without those stresses" (DR Congo).

Accommodation challenges can spill over to other difficulties such as transportation and academics as the following student explained:

"My university experience has been satisfactory from the university's perspective. However, I have not found a place close to the campus, therefore I have to travel every day to and from the university, leaving me with less time to study and obtain good grades" (Zimbabwe).

Past research highlighted that securing accommodation was a leading problem for South African international students (Lee & Sehoole, 2015) and these findings make evident that SSS are even more challenged in this area.

Finances were especially burdensome for SSS students. One student, who did not identify the country of origin, expressed, "There is no financial support for international

students whereas other world top universities do have financial support or scholarships. I am one of many international students (refugee) who does not have any financial support." The challenge is especially difficult when international students are required to pay in full upfront. Otherwise, their university registration becomes jeopardized. A student from Rwanda explained:

"Refugee students in particular are expected to pay all fees upfront even though they technically aren't international students. I overheard a conversation once during which a South African student hadn't contributed once to their fees for 4 years whereas if a refugee student doesn't pay before the second semester, there is a high chance they won't be allowed back the following year" (Rwanda).

While payment schedules vary by university, this student felt they were particular disadvantaged by being grouped as an international student. Another student elaborated on the hardships for refugee students compared to international students:

"Additionally, limited opportunities for funding international students have less or no opportunities for scholarships and bursaries at [University]. They all require to have a South African ID or a permanence residence. For refugees it is even worse. Why do refugees have to pay the international registration fees? They have no support from their countries of origin and no support from the South African government" (Rwanda)

Given the fact that these students fled from their countries with little chance of moving with their assets, they are likely to be in a less favourable financial position which can serve as a barrier of access to higher education. The following student elaborates:

"Yes, I think that foreigners should not be considered at the same level. Refugees should have another status of life than other foreigners. Why? Refugees have no money, no jobs, no medical aid, no loan, we struggle to survive in South Africa than the other category of

foreigners who have ministers, managers as parents. More attention and compassion

should be given to refugees" (DR Congo)

Academic and Social Experiences

Conversely, SSS reported higher academic preparedness and participation than LSSS

when comparing themselves with locals; they rated themselves significantly higher in class

participation, communicating in English, understanding expectations and policies, and

adjusting to academic life.

Table 3. SSS and LSSS on Academic Experiences Compared to Local South Africans

Compared to Locals		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Participating in class discussions	LSSS	1303	3.07	0.956	0.026
	SSS	316	2.93	0.993	0.056
Communicating in the English language	LSSS	1317	2.80	1.048	0.029
	SSS	320	2.66	1.134	0.063
Understanding classroom expectations and policies	LSSS	1306	3.02	0.973	0.027
	SSS	317	2.78	0.986	0.055
Initial adjustment to academic life upon arrival	LSSS	1294	3.56	0.994	0.028
	SSS	312	3.23	1.096	0.062

Note: 5-point Likert scale (1: Much Easier than South African Students; 3: No difference; 5: Much More Difficult than South African students)

For example, a Zimbabwean student expressed, "The experience at the university is rather

tough in terms of academics but mostly important, very challenging, and the challenge rather

thrills me a lot." In other cases, SSS students were critical about the standards employed,

such as, "The orientation was time wasting and never spoke about important things like

modules, regulations, emails, technological issues such as share point, rule of assignments

and etc" (Iran).

In contrast to the previous set of findings, when asked directly whether international

students are treated better, the same, or worse than locals, SSS students reported generally

lower ratings. The significant differences were in two areas: treatment by administrative staff on campus and outside the university. Differences in other areas (i.e., by classmates, by professors, and inside the university) were not statistically significant.

Table 4. SSS and LSSS on Treatment Compared to Locals

Treatment Compared to Locals		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
By administrative staff on campus	LSSS	1307	2.15	0.483	0.013
	SSS	318	2.21	0.475	0.027
Outside the university	LSSS	1295	2.35	0.632	0.018
	SSS	316	2.50	0.583	0.033

Note: 3-point Likert scale (1: Internationals are treated better than locals; 2: About the same; 3: Internationals are treated worse than locals)

Students' commented on some ways they felt discriminated based on negative stereotypes. For example, "Some people ignore us, or some people cheat on us about their products and price because they assume, we don't know anything otherwise they are friendly" (DRC). Another student shared, "…as a Nigerian, there is that initial distrust and suspicion that I am regarded with when I make known the country of my birth." These findings demonstrate ways that SSS might experience relatively fewer academic hurdles compared to LSSS, they also encountered possibly more discrimination compared to LSSS.

Discussion

South Africa is a key host for Africa's refugees, asylum seekers, and international students. In bringing together these populations, this study observed the overlap between groups as well as the distinctiveness of international students who were driven to study in the country for reasons having to do with political stability and safety. Contrary to what might be expected, the findings demonstrate that safety-seeking students are generally more highly satisfied than their counterparts and fare well academically. Their higher rates of satisfaction likely have to do with their comparing their conditions to those back in their home countries.

Given their more dominant reasons to seek study in South Africa for reasons of safety, and presumably less having to do with better schooling, safety-seeking students felt better prepared than other internationals in regard to their academics. This finding resembles previous research in other countries that identified relatively high aspirations among refugee students, such as in the UK (Stevenson and Willott, 2007) and Canada (Stermac et al, 2006). Nevertheless, similar to past studies (Stevenson and Willott, 2007; Stermac et al, 2006) the same population reported infrastructural needs, as in housing and support services, than most other international students. The need for more resources, particularly financially, is a key policy and practical implication of this study given such concerns are absent. The study findings also suggest considerable challenges related to fair treatment. Future research should consider delving more deeply into their experiences, particularly in ways they may feel targeted or discriminated against.

Ultimately, this study points to a disconnect between policies and actual support for refugees and asylum seekers in higher education. While the South African Policy Framework for Internationalization is a welcome step that provides guidelines for institutions in dealing with internationalization matters, the policy was a missed opportunity to address the matter of support and financing of refugees and asylum seekers who want to pursue their studies, the same way it paid attention to students from SADC and the rest of the continent. The lack of acknowledgement in the South African DHET framework on internationalization regarding the plight of refugees, especially in relation to fees, was another missed opportunity by the Department to support vulnerable students in higher education. There is a need to level the playing field by making provisions for refugee students who are in more disadvantaged and in vulnerable positions than most other international students in terms of resources. While South Africa's broader infrastructural challenges (i.e., unemployment, public safety, public services, etc.) might explain why the country has been slow to address the needs of refugees

and asylum seekers, such a call for change is not unique to South Africa. Lenette (2016), for example, similarly noted that universities in Australia have also not offer tailored support for their refugee students. As Morrice (2013) argued:

> [T]he subjective experiences of refugees in higher education are inextricably linked to the wider political and economic framework and the objective social reality of global inequality. The political responses to migration and globalization are framed through policy and public discourses about citizenship and asylum which are driven by an imperative *to restrict the movement of certain migrants and curtail entitlement to citizenship* (p. 667) [Italics added].

As such, this study based in South Africa echoes the global call for greater refugee rights and support.

Future policy must especially incorporate the unique challenges and needs of asylum seekers and refugees that are not similarly experienced by all international students. Despite their vulnerable position as a result of the backgrounds from which they come from, asylum seekers and refugees possess skills and qualifications that can help address the skills shortage in the South African economy. Findings from this study indicated relatively less difficulties in their academics when compared with other international students. It is thus commendable that SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) is working on a policy to recognize the qualifications of asylum seekers and refugees. This effort will enable them to be able to work at a level and sectors that is commensurate to their qualifications and skills level. Similarly, the South African economy and the public sector will benefit from the expertise and skills these have to offer.

There are some limitations to this study that would be best addressed through future studies. The data from which this study was based on a broader study on the mobility and experiences of international students in South Africa. The survey did not directly inquire

about students' official refugee or asylum-seeking status or how they compare themselves to those who are not in these particular categories. Thus, the generalisability of the findings is limited to those who indicated the importance of "political stability and safety." This underlying rationale served as a proxy for the intentions of refugee and asylum-seeking students as well as students who might not ever formally register under these state categories. Thus, the findings capture a broader population of students seeking safety. Former refugees who might already have permanent residency or citizenship, such as entering the country at a younger age, might not have received the survey. Thus, this study solely captured individuals who were registered as international students at the time of the study. Nevertheless, the study examines a unique subset of international students who were motivated by stability and safety as a major driver to study in South Africa. A suggestion for future research is to further differentiate the experiences of refugee versus asylum seeking students, given that those whose applications are pending would experience greater stress and lack of rights. Finally, while the limited survey captured varying levels of dissatisfaction, how these areas were enacted upon remain unknown. As Zeus (2011) argued, higher education could serve as a means of empowering rather than incapacitating these refugees. Thus, another suggestion for follow-up studies is to interview and understand more deeply refugee students' agency and institutional responses. As Morrice (2011) asserts, higher education has failed to recognize refugees' existing capital and should be better understood within contextual realities of global inequality.

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