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# **South-South student migration: Socially integrating students from Portuguese-speaking Africa at UNILAB, Brazil**

Thais França and David Cairns

ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa (ISCTE-IUL),

Centro de Investigação e Estudos de Sociologia, Lisboa, Portugal

Corresponding author:

Thais França

[thaisfrancas@gmail.com](mailto:thaisfrancas@gmail.com)

## **ABSTRACT**

The Brazilian University for International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB) was created to host students from Portuguese-speaking Africa and Brazil. In this article, we look at the aims and objectives of UNILAB, which include the social integration of these students at the university. We present results from interviews conducted at UNILAB in 2018 with 63 international and domestic students. Analysis of this material shows that despite acknowledgement of the value of internationalization at UNILAB, the social integration level of Portuguese-speaking students from outside Brazil at the university is characteristically weak among the interviewees, a situation they attribute to a lack of suitable preparation for staff at the host institution and prejudice towards African students in the local community. We consider what these findings mean for the future of UNILAB and the development of Global South-South student migration.

## **KEYWORDS**

Students, migration, Brazil, Africa, UNILAB, social integration

## Introduction

Numerous studies have engaged with various aspects of student mobility in the Global North, ranging from statistical overviews to contemplation of the impact of the student migrant on host societies (e.g. Altbach and Teichler, 2001; Murphy-Lejuene, 2002; King and Raghuram, 2013). However, outside the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, the European Union and, increasingly, Asia, the research field of what is sometimes referred to as “International Student Mobility” (Cairns, 2014) remains less well developed (see also Choudaha, 2017). This is evident in the countries of the Global South, where studies of ISM have still to move from an orientation documenting outgoing migration towards greater recognition of incoming flows of learners. Nevertheless, Brazil is a country that has demonstrated an interest in ISM, and expressed a desire at policy level to establish a stronger South-South cooperation dynamic (Ress, 2018). As a result, the country is now becoming a popular destination for international students, emerging as a potential alternative destination to the more traditional learning hubs (Milani et al., 2016).

This article looks at the ISM experiences of students from Portuguese-speaking Africa at a newly established Brazilian university. We focus on the University for International Integration of the Afro-Brazilian Lusophony (UNILAB), a federal university founded in 2011, and located in the small town of Redenção in the north-eastern state of Ceará. The institution was part of an international expansion strategy to encourage South-South cooperation, and the demand to boost internationalization via encouraging students to migrate to Brazilian universities (Meneghel and Amaral, 2016).<sup>1</sup> Research questions centre upon the challenge of socially integrating international students, enabling us to contribute to debates on international students’ adaptation to new academic and sociocultural environments,

alongside appreciating the difficulties experienced in establishing a South-South international learning hub in Brazil.

### **South-South student migration**

Despite the popularity of ISM, research in this field remains predominantly focused on South-North and North-North dynamics. However, studies are now beginning to examine South-South student migration, with the South-South dynamic seen as generated by colonial ties, diplomatic relations and lower tuition costs (Nogueira and Ramos, 2014). However, even with an increasing level of student circulation in the Global South, moving within this sphere is still not seen as the most desirable option for many students and their families, with progress made by African countries in universal primary and secondary completion not matched in tertiary education, meaning limited capacity at this level (Kritz, 2013).

Elsewhere, Intra-Asian ISM has been growing fast in popularity, with Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore emerging as regional education hubs (Shields and Edwards, 2010; Diana and Wen, 2013). Some Global South countries, previously defined as sending countries, are now trying to compete with more traditional learning destinations. Within Latin America, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and México have also attained some visibility due to the availability of scholarships, international branch campuses of foreign universities, low tuition fees, improvement in the quality of higher education infrastructure, and economic and political integration between countries (Woldegiorgis and Doevenspeck, 2015: 110). Global South countries have also developed inter-continental cooperation agreements with each other; for example, the protocol signed between Mexico and Korea in 2005, aimed at promoting student exchanges (Didou Aupetit, 2019), and capacity building partnership institutions such as the Ghana-India Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT in 2003 (Malyan and Jindal, 2014).

In specific regard to Brazil, the country has traditionally been seen as a country of origin for student migrants, a role boosted by Brazilian governmental initiatives such as the Science without Borders (SwB) programme in 2011 (Archanjo, 2017). Outgoing mobility has mostly been to the Global North, including participation in exchange programmes (e.g. Foster, 2014). But in respect to incoming students, Brazil tends to receive students from Africa and South America thanks to different funding schemes on offer to students from these continents (Nogueira and Ramos, 2014), and as we shall see in the following discussion, students from Portuguese-speaking African countries feature prominently at UNILAB.

### **Social integration and international students**

The conceptual focus of this article, social integration, is of high importance to incoming students at UNILAB, especially in regard to their social, physical and mental well-being. By social integration, we refer to the extent to which students are able to participate in student culture and academic life, engage with host country students and university staff, and take part in local activities, embracing social, economic, political and cultural perspectives (see also Van Mol, 2019).

As with migrants in general, incoming students must pass through an acculturation process, learning the cultural codes of the new society. This can be stressful, alongside settling into a new educational context, as despite differences relating to language, religion, previous mobility experiences, gender and race, international students tend to be considered by their host institution as a homogenous group, without taking into account their specific needs (Ballo et al., 2019). Furthermore, they may have to cope with homesickness, cultural shocks and discrimination at a time when they have limited social support due to separation from family, home country friends and social networks (Rienties et al., 2012). They may also lack

'natural' opportunities to interact with the local community when much of their time is spent within international student peers in "bubble" like learning environments (Cuzzocrea et al., 2020), resulting in what has been termed a form of "unintentional segregation" (Fincher and Shaw, 2009). As a result, international students come to depend on their university, which becomes a reference point for their integration into the host society.

Scholarship on this topic has underlined that in many cases, professors and university staff fail to recognize the extent of the challenge of social integration facing international students, contributing to the perpetuation of social isolation (e.g. Lee and Rice, 2007). As Nada and Araújo (2018: 10) further state that, "inadequate institutional practices for dealing with diversity jeopardise the development of a satisfactory learning experience." Moreover, international students do not experience social integration, or isolation, evenly. Therefore, universities need to promote a broad and diverse range of initiatives for international students, to boost their social integration and ergo their learning outcomes, considering also their academic preparedness and access to resources (Wang and Moskal, 2019).

Given its importance, UNILAB has implemented a wide range of activities to improve social integration, focused on support and guidance in the academic context. This starts at enrolment, with a virtual welcome programme, and upon arrival in Brazil, students enjoy intensive help from staff members in regard to coping with bureaucracy. In addition, they join a three-month orientation programme aimed at introducing them to the local community, finding a place to live, getting to know other students and learning about Brazilian culture. Further actions are also developed on this theme; for instance, cultural festivals related to various home countries' traditional parties and celebrations. These are all issues that were covered by the research questions as part of the methodological design of the research underpinning this article.

## Methods

Due to the relatively short history of the institution, little is known about the social integration experiences of international students from the Portuguese-speaking African countries at UNILAB. To approach this issue, we conducted fieldwork during April-May 2018 at the university's campus. Permission to conduct the research the institution was enabled through prior integration into UNILAB's staff network, which facilitated the presence of Thais França throughout university installations and arranged a vacant office where most of the interviews were conducted in private. Some students, however, were interviewed in the common areas, cafeteria, courtyards and reading corners, due to their personal preference. The fieldwork itself involved in-depth interviews with students, professors, directors and staff. For the purpose of clarity in this article, analysis will focus solely on student interviewees, consisting of 35 undergraduate students from Africa (12 women, 23 men) and 28 Brazilian students (16 women, 12 men), with this division enabling us to make comparisons. The interviews lasted approximately one hour, and all were recorded and transcribed, and subsequently translated into English, by Thais França.

Due to the lack of an existing sampling frame, it was not possible to draw a representative sample from the student population of UNILAB. We did however take into account gender, age and field of study through following a purposeful approach to recruitment, also ensuring that students from a wide range of countries of origin and different years of arrival in Brazil were included. In practice, the interviewed students were selected through different means; mostly, open invitations issued during participant observation and introductions made by interviewees to other students who fell within the sought for sample parameters. For additional insights, we have also drawn upon participant observation with



students, which looked at their everyday interactions in their “natural” environment: in the classroom, at cultural events and during discussion groups and student social gatherings. Field notes were collated in a research journal, gathering reflections on various aspects of student life, which have been used to complement the analysis of the interviews.

Throughout the research, students were verbally informed about the objectives of the fieldwork, with consent agreement also sought concerning the interviewees. In regard to the content of the interviews, each student was invited to tell his or her own story about moving to and studying at UNILAB, including their own perceptions and experiences of cultural diversity, social integration and institutional support. Confidentiality was assured before the interview took place, with the appropriate ethical standards maintained throughout the research process.<sup>2</sup>

## **Analysis**

In what follows, we present an overview of findings from the interviews, with analysis focusing on social integration, using Brazilian and migrant students’ accounts. Through this means, we are able to isolate the challenges that are specific to the African students, as opposed to discussing more generic issues that affect host and international students alike, starting with exploration of local students’ perceptions of cultural diversity at UNILAB.

### *Brazilian students’ perspectives*

Cultural diversity is acknowledged by most of the Brazilian interviewees as one of the main advantages of studying at UNILAB; for instance, the chance to improve knowledge about Portuguese-speaking Africa and to learn from their foreign peers. For this reason, there are internationalization benefits for domestic students. However, none of the interviewees

stated that their decision to study at UNILAB was linked to its culturally diverse environment. Their choices were more closely aligned with its tuition-free character and close geographical proximity to their family homes. Cultural diversity is basically an incidental benefit, explained by one student as follows:

I did not know much about the African students before, but I was curious about many things. If their Portuguese (language) was like ours, for example, how their food was. During these years, I learnt many other things about them, and their countries' differences. Because we have this prejudice, a very European vision: "Oh, they come from Africa," as if this was something bad. I think this is a great experience and other universities should do the same (Luís, 21 years old, first year Agronomy student).

Another positive aspect of UNILAB mentioned by local students is its cultural diversity training, and they recognize that the university's learning environment contributes to enhancing their global competencies; something that can extend to professional choices (see also Tran and Pham, 2016).

Another thing I think is important is the possibility of having cultural training without leaving my country. As here at the university I have access to different cultures, I learn about countries I have never been to before and find out many things regarding the development and implementation of public policies in these other countries (Ana, 23 years old, third year Social Sciences student).

In the current labour market configuration, the ability to cope with cultural differences is a much sought after skill. Hence, students' demand for intercultural experiences has grown, with higher education institutions promoting strategies to help students develop intercultural competence. This is not something that advances naturally, meaning a well-developed pedagogical frameworks that integrates intercultural learning into course programmes must be constructed (Hiller and Woźniak, 2009; Trede et al., 2013). Nevertheless, despite this possible advantage for Brazilian students, other students evaluated UNILAB's cultural diversity negatively. They thought that cultural differences only led to long and pointless discussions in the classroom as perspectives on different topics did not coincide.

This cultural difference can also be negative because it can cause problems as we do things in different ways, causing a clash of ideas. So sometimes, during classes we spend a lot of time going over the same argument because in their country, things are not like here, or when we are working in groups, we don't agree on how to do the assignment. I feel like it is a waste of time, so sometimes I prefer to work only with Brazilian students. I think the communication is easier (Cláudia, 23 years old, first year Nursing student).

This Brazilian student's negative perceptions regarding her African peers might, at a stretch, be seen as a discriminatory practice, supporting the emergence of "neo-racism" relating not only to skin colour but also the culture and national origins of incoming students (Lee, 2007; Lee and Rice, 2007). This would be in direct opposition to the intercultural ethos of the institution and in spite of the fact that an introductory course on the history and culture of Portuguese-speaking Africa is compulsory for all students at UNILAB. Furthermore, there

are procedures in place designed to enhance Brazilian and African students' academic collaboration, an issue on which several interviewees remarked:

We have some classes that focus on promoting the integration of the students and to introduce us to topics related to Africa, aimed at helping us to deconstruct the prejudices we have about Africa that we were taught in school (Alex, 24 years old, third year International Relations student).

We have one course in the first year centred on introducing us to the African context. We are divided in mixed teams, Brazilians and African students, and each team is responsible for presenting one country (Julia, 22 years old, second year Nursing student).

The level of institutional support on offer to promote students' integration is nevertheless evaluated as insufficient by the Brazilian students. As a result, a clear segregation between Portuguese-speaking African students and their Brazilian peers remains at the university.

The integration of Brazilian and African students is very poor as there aren't many initiatives to promote this. We have one course in the first year centred on introducing us to the African context (...). But after that, it is always the same thing. Brazilian students on the one side and African students on the other, the interaction itself is minimal (Fernando, 24 years old, second year Mathematics student).

On the social integration of international students, Owens and Loomes (2010) have pointed out the value of assistance from staff, including professors. However, no formal training relating to didactic intercultural skills, cultural diversity awareness or knowledge on the African backgrounds of the students is offered by the institution to lecturers. This means that only a minority of staff members are able to ensure social integration among incoming students during classes, helping to explain why segregation in the classroom persists. This situation is something that is extremely obvious to the Brazilian students.

I don't think the university fosters students' social integration. What happens is that some (incoming) students are a bit more open and they are able to socialize better with the Brazilian students, and the same thing with the Brazilian students. Some are more curious about Africa and try to be friendly with the African students. So, it is something natural, not because the university or the professors are trying to promote it. But in general, there is no integration. For example, in the classroom, it is clear that in one part of the room, there are only Brazilian students and in the other, only the African students. Even when we are supposed to work in teams, it is the same thing. Brazilian students together and African students on the other side. If you look around here on the patio or in the cantina, there is a clear segregation: Brazilians on one side and Africans on the other. The university is concerned about qualifying the students, not about integrating them (Mario, 24 years old, second year Agronomy student).

Some courses give visibility to the African context. There are a few professors who try to engage the African students, asking them to explain or talk about the topics we are discussing in their reality so we can finally learn a bit more about them. But the

majority of courses do not approach these questions. Everything is too superficial. The professors ask only one question and that's it, and maybe one foreign student answers something. I think that the professors are not prepared for culturally diverse classrooms (Danielle, 22 years old, second year Humanities student).

A further issue concerns what happens within the local community. The lack of preparation and planning in the city for the arrival of these students also hinders their chances of social integration. The challenge for the local inhabitants is however substantial, as prior to the arrival of the overseas students, Redenção never played host to large numbers of foreigners, even as tourists, meaning that many were not familiar with cultural diversity at home. Moreover, as Ress (2019) acknowledges, in the social imaginary of Ceará, blackness occupies a very specific location in the societal dynamics, leading, in many cases, to racist and prejudice reactions. A more practical concern in the local community relates to finding suitable accommodation, as the university has no student houses or dormitories. UNILAB students are therefore dependent on private owners who are, in general, not willing to deal with international students.

The city was not prepared to receive these students, with a lack of information ending up creating conflicts, as they think, "Why bring international students here and not invest in the Brazilian students?" They also don't like to rent their houses or rooms to African students, or when they do it, they put the price too high (...). But I think that the African students now are a bit suspicious about approaching Brazilian students because in some cases they have already faced so much prejudice (Jessica, 25 years old, third year Business student).

Other studies have argued that students' sense of belonging to the local community is important to their sense of inclusion, and the more eager the receiving community is to welcome international students, the easier their social integration (see, e.g. Ward et al., 2009). Furthermore, international students tend to be open to social contact with the local community with a view to improving their knowledge and understanding of their new cultural environment (Trice, 2004). Hence, much remains to be done in Redenção to enable an appropriate reception to take place, inside and outside the university.

#### *African students' perspectives*

Looking now at the accounts of the Portuguese-speaking African students, they generally praise UNILAB's culturally diverse environment, especially the opportunities to interact with students from other African countries, and in contrast to the Brazilian students we cited previously, many stated that they chose UNILAB because of the internationalized learning experience. However, the interviewees also acknowledged that some of their Brazilian student peers, did not share this view.

For me, the opportunity to study at UNILAB was a very good one. I had the chance to learn so much about other African countries and of course about Brazil. If I were in Guinea, this would have never happened. However, I pay a very high price, because all the time I am reminded that I am different. It is either because of my accent, the clothes that I wear and sometimes even my opinions. The problem is that "being different" is seen as something bad, so instead of being curious to learn about my

country, Brazilian students exclude us from their activities (Jorge, 23 years old, from Guinea-Bissau, second year Social Sciences student).

Language is another potential hinderance to integration (see also Ward et al., 2009; Guo and Chase, 2011; França et al., 2018), and at UNILAB, there is linguistic complexity given that, officially, staff and all students are all expected to speak Portuguese. However, for the majority of the Portuguese-speaking African students, Portuguese is not in fact their first language (Vilela, 2002). Most speak other languages at home and only learn Portuguese at school, meaning that they do not relate to Portuguese like a “native” speaker, creating stress that undermines their confidence, compromising social integration. Furthermore, in a prior study, Ress (2018: 139) has highlighted how professors at UNILAB take into consideration a student’s mastery of the Portuguese language when evaluation their academic performance, boosting African students’ anxiety during oral presentations or writing exams, thus enhancing their disempowerment.

The language is also a problem; it seems that they do not understand that we speak a different Portuguese. So, the professors, most of them, never really ask if we understand what they have said or not. Sometimes we are there in the classroom, but we have no idea what the professors are saying. In addition, the students, they do not help either, when we say something that has a different meaning here, they start to laugh instead of telling us what the problem is (Cláudio, 24 years old, from Sao Tome e Principe, second year Business student).



This is an issue that is does not seem to be sufficiently acknowledged at institutional level. UNILAB does offer a one-semester compulsory Portuguese course for all students, international and domestic, but it is not tailored to Portuguese-speaking African students' needs, and a lack of training for staff to address language differences further compromises students' performance in their academic activities.

The Portuguese-Speaking African students also reported racism, prejudice and discrimination from Brazilian students and teaching staff. While underplayed in ISM literature, such experiences are not unusual among international learners. In the case of UNILAB particular, Subuhana (2009) has argued that international students from across the African continent are homogenized as an imaginary form of "African", irrespective of their social, ethnic and national background. Meanwhile, Ress (2018) has pointed out that because of pre-existing racialization practices in Brazilian society, the students' African backgrounds enforce a stereotyped form of "blackness" onto these students (see also Lee and Rice, 2007). This problem is particularly evident in regard to them receiving less objective academic evaluations, as well as in being confronted with negative stereotypes and inaccurate portrayals of their home cultures, not to mention remarks about their accents, academic ability, feelings of isolation during class discussions and exclusion from study groups (Hanassab, 2006; Lee, 2010). As the following student explains:

I would say that even some of lecturers are full of prejudice against us. Sometimes they do not want to hear our opinions, because they think that we have nothing important to say, or when we have doubts, they explain it again as if we were stupid. Sometimes, even our exams, they correct in a different way, giving us lower grades

just because they do not like our arguments or the way we express our ideas (Clara, 22 years old, from Guinea-Bissau, first year Pedagogy student).

Furthermore, as Ress (2019) argues, in spite of the rhetoric of UNILAB being an attempt to mend Brazilian's historical debt to African countries affected by the transatlantic slave trade, and to reposition Brazil as a progressive nation, this discourse also serves to reinforce students' subjugation, as well as re-iterating the link between Africa and underdevelopment. A form of "coloniality" (Quijano, 2000) thus exacerbates Portuguese-speaking African students' vulnerability to racism and discrimination, and ultimately, their subordinate position in society (see also Brown and Jones, 2013). They are marked as different from, and inferior to, their host country peers due to their African origins (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 2005; Grosfoguel et al., 2015), making them essentialized, stigmatized and othered subjects; "strangers" who belong to neither the host city or the university (Ahmed, 2000; see also Said, 1979).

This is an uncomfortable position, of which the students we interviewed are acutely aware; take, for example, the following two cases:

It seems that our presence here is not wanted, and it bothers many people. They say that money the Brazilian government should be investing in Brazilian students, they give to us. Therefore, they see us as taking something from them. However, this is not true; the whole idea of UNILAB is to improve both countries' situations. Additionally, before the Brazilian students even knew us, they already disliked us because of all the wrong ideas they have about African countries and African people. Actually, they don't know anything about us, none of the students here had even met an African person

before or visited an African country. Their ideas about us are full of prejudice about black people being poor and ignorant (José, 23 years old, from Angola, second year History student).

I feel that the Brazilian students have prejudice against us, because we are black and from Africa. So, for them, we do not know anything, everything in our country is of bad quality and they have nothing to learn from us. When we are talking about our countries in the class, almost no Brazilian student pays attention (Alice, 24 years old, from Guinea-Bissau, third year Humanities student).

In this hostile context, any negative incident can be seized upon and used to accentuate an already existing adverse image of the incoming students within the UNILAB community, hindering their social integration. An emblematic example was a sexual abuse case in 2016, where a Guinean male student molested a Guinean female student. This episode reinforced the stereotype of African countries as uncivilized, where such violations are accepted, and African men portrayed as sexual aggressors and violent (Terra, 2010):

After the rape episode, where a male student from Guinea sexually abused a female student also from Guinea, all the prejudice and racism against us increased. They look at us as if we were inferior, animals. That period had a very bad impact on our integration, because a lot of negative images about African students came out, like “African men are violent” and “African women like to be sexually abused” (Maria, 23 years old, from Mozambique, second year Biology student).

These perspectives obviously have implications for social integration. Students in fact feel responsible for promoting their own integration, with the institution preoccupied by the bureaucratic aspects of their education, thereby becoming complicit in perpetuating cultural stereotypes (see also Hanassab, 2006). Moreover, UNILAB misses the opportunity to equip students and staff with the skills necessary to be productive in intercultural environments not only within but beyond the academy. This position leads to some quite damning inditements among the students:

In my opinion, neither the university nor the professors or the students really care about us. After we arrive here and sort out our documentation and other bureaucracy, the university leaves us by ourselves. There is no preparation for the Brazilian students to learn how to interact with a different culture. At least we have the three months welcoming programme that helps us to understand better the dynamic of the university and the city, but after it is finished, that is it (George, 25 years old, from Guinea-Bissau, fourth year Humanities student).

And even when students do manage to socially integrate, they link this to their own personal efforts rather than institutional efforts, as neither the university nor the staff support this interaction to a satisfactory degree:

I learnt a lot about the other African countries, but not because we have space here at the university to discuss this reality, but because I became friends with the other African students. This part was good, but with the Brazilian students, I could never get very close to them. It seems there is no effort or curiosity from their side to learn

about us and neither the university nor the staff try to improve this situation. Not to mention the professors, because they do not care if we understand what they are saying or not, they do not show any interest in our reality. I think it is not properly explained to them what kind of university UNILAB is when they start working here. That part is very frustrating (Rita, 23 years old, from Cape Verde, second year Biology student).

Portuguese-Speaking African students nevertheless acknowledge the positive impact made by the members of staff who are concerned with enhancing their social and academic integration, despite the lack of institutional support they receive. They emphasise the positive consequences of having their countries' uniqueness recognized and the value of conviviality with the lecturers:

I think it makes a huge difference when the professors want to know about how things are in our countries and ask us to talk about it, because it gives us some status and recognition among the students. However, most of the time, that is not what happens. So, for example, it is very difficult to work with Brazilian students, because they also stick together (Denis, 26 years old, from Guinea-Bissau, fourth year Physics student).

The balance of opinion among the incoming student interviewees is therefore somewhat skewed towards negative views of staff in relation to social integration at UNILAB, notwithstanding some exceptions that demonstrate the importance of taking an interest in students' well-being.

## **Conclusions and policy implications**

In the preceding discussion, we have looked at the extent to which the interviewees, Brazilian and African, engage with each other in the classroom, and how the latter interact with people inside and outside the university in Redenção. In both respects, social integration is somewhat limited, leading us to conclude that despite an international environment at UNILAB, poor social integration of the African students at the university and into Brazilian society hinders the intercultural learning experience. Socialization among African students themselves may however be deemed satisfactory, working as a support network. Therefore, the interaction among the African students appears as the true intercultural experience at UNILAB, as these students refer to having the chance to learn about different cultures in Africa that form part of a new range of experiences. However, this experience does not seem to extend to many academic staff members.

This is a situation that interviewees attribute to a lack of adequate preparation among university staff and prejudice in the surrounding environment. The evidence we have presented show that the strategies used by UNILAB to create social integration are characteristically weak and insufficient. Additionally, in general, professors and staff do not acknowledge cultural diversity in their classroom, and thus fail to develop activities to promote international students' integration and sense of belonging to the academic community. Conversely, some Brazilian students do appear to benefit, albeit from cheap and accessible tertiary education. Although, the Brazilian students we interviewed seem to be aware of the benefits of the culturally diverse environment they experience at UNILAB, socializing with international students it is not part of their expectations in regards their educational training.

The interviews further reveal the role played by broader city context in student integration. The spatial segregation and marginalization these students experience due to the city's lack of preparation for their arrival and students' disadvantage in the housing market ensures that their integration is hampered, increase the distance between incoming students and the local community. Moreover, this position challenges the idea of international students as an economically privileged group, who are always wanted and welcomed by the host country. In fact, our results show more signs of reflecting findings from studies on discrimination and prejudice experienced by some international students face as a result of "neo-racist" practices (Lee, 2007; Lee and Rice, 2007; Brown and Jones, 2013), a situation that has obvious negative consequences for their learning. Furthermore, we also found that students experienced difficulties due to their different linguistic capabilities, something that affective life inside and outside the classroom.

In looking at other precedents, our interview evidence supports arguments from Madge et al. (2009), that stress the need for taking pedagogic responsibility for international students in a manner that recognises the complexity of student mobility, especially in postcolonial spaces, thus challenging the idea of international learning as a universal or homogenous experience. In fact, historical, cultural and perhaps political, context appears to matter a great deal. We therefore have an apparent paradox between UNILAB's attempted subverting of the hegemonic dynamics in student mobility flows (South-North and North-North), but an evident failure to create a culturally appropriate learning environment, suggesting a degree of superficiality to this shift. And even if the relationship between Brazil and the Portuguese-speaking African countries does not resemble an ex-colony and ex-colonizer arrangement, it is ultimately constituted with a view to gaining a kind of superiority

for Brazil within Lusophone colonial space, something that obviously shapes African students' experiences at UNILAB.

Putting these findings into the broader context of current debates on ISM, and student migration in particular, even though we have a relatively small body of evidence, the choice of research context is significant when we consider that Global South-South student migration has been expanding. With more opportunities, and perhaps more accessible opportunities, for learners in the Global South being created we need to know if the quality of these life chances is sufficiently high so as to be able to challenge the dominance of the Global North universities in internationalized tertiary education. Moreover, it calls attention to the need to look closer at these "emerging" spaces of student circulation in order to prevent the reproduction of old discriminatory and segregationist dynamics; problems we might associate with the more traditional circuits but may arise elsewhere. The neo-racism experienced by the African students illustrates how even in a South-South context, international students are also placed in an inferior social position. Additionally, it also shows how racial differences shapes integration opportunities, and therefore learning outcomes. If we consider UNILAB's original proposal of integration and solidarity this is perhaps disappointing, and in revealing the complexity of African students' integration at UNILAB, we hope that we can acknowledge a need to move beyond ex-colony and ex-colonizer type relationships.

Policymakers and educational stakeholders hence need to appreciate the significance of creating an intercultural environment as well as building intercultural institutions when challenging the existing ISM hegemony. Our results seem to be suggesting that promoting responsible and engaged social integration policies and strategies that foster intercultural understanding are key for a university to successfully attract and retain flows of international students. Therefore, internationalized universities should place emphasis on developing clear



goals and measures regarding social integration for their faculty staff so they can be aware of the cultural diversity potential international students have.

## Notes

1. In regard to domestic affairs, UNILAB is also a response to the Brazilian federal Programme for Support to Restructuring and Expansion Plans of the Federal Universities' (REUNI), with the objectives of fostering the opening of federal universities in precarious and under-developed areas of the country (Meneghel and Amaral, 2016).
2. UNILAB has a total of 6,419 students, spread across three different campuses (UNILAB, 2019).

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