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# **Integrating marginalised students in Ghanaian schools: Insights from teachers and principals**

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## **Abstract**

This article focuses on deepening the understanding of the factors affecting migrant students' integration in Ghana's educational system. Research on migrant education has primarily centred on northern destination countries. Using the case of West African migrant children in a multiethnic and multilingual Ghanaian setting, the article examines the complex and interplaying factors affecting migrant students' integration into Ghanaian schools. Analysis from 40 semi-structured interviews with teachers and principals drawn from 30 schools offers insights into the challenges faced by schools in trying to help migrant students succeed. The study offers practical insights into the advantages of having teachers with a migrant background, especially the extent to which they use their intercultural competencies in helping migrant students overcome school-related challenges. While the fieldwork was carried out in Ghana, the implications are also of interest to other jurisdictions where schools are faced with migration-related diversity.

**Keywords:** integration, migration, mother tongue, teachers and principals' perspectives, Ghana

## **1. Introduction**

Research on migration and education has often focused on countries in the global North. However, a significant number of migrants are involved in South-South migration and this study sheds light on the different dynamics involved in South-South migration. The aim of this article is to deepen understanding on the complex and interplaying factors affecting the integration of migrant students in Ghanaian schools using the views of teachers and principals. The importance of this study goes beyond the under-researched question of educating migrant children in West Africa. Instead, it will provide scholars with an informed opinion on whether earlier studies in the North belong to a special case or apply globally. Additionally, previous studies (see for example Arnot, Schneider, and Welply 2013; Nunes, Reis, and Seabra 2018) have often overlooked that in many multilingual countries in the global South, migration poses serious challenges for schooling as a result of the nature and extent of language diversity, a situation that is hardly seen in countries in the global North.

The migrant community in Ghana is very heterogeneous, with nearly 70 per cent coming from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) speaking over 80 languages. ECOWAS is the regional economic and political union in West Africa consisting of 15 countries: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cabo Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The prospect of better living conditions that translate into better job

opportunities and access to improved infrastructure and social security seems to push migration within the West African region. The relatively better economic fortunes of countries like Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana have drawn large numbers of migrants especially from neighbouring countries in the post-independence period since the 1960s. Many governments in West Africa are facing economic, social, and cultural challenges in providing equal opportunities for their nationals. The challenge is more cumbersome for migrants, as local populations struggle to live a comfortable life due to relatively low socioeconomic conditions. This is made worse by the inadequacy or absence of proper welfare schemes in most countries in West Africa. Thus, issues related to the integration of migrants are given relatively low priority. These migrants often live on the periphery in the countries they migrate to, with poor paying jobs among others (Gagnon and Khoudour-Castéras 2012; Awumbila, Owusu, and Teye 2014).

Nonnenmacher and Yonemura (2018, 37) highlight the gap in literature on the nexus between migration and education in West Africa. This is a result of the fragmentation 'between few topics, namely trafficking in persons, work and exploitation, fostering family reunification'. They argue that child migration has generally been analysed from the perspective of their independence and their right to work or not as children. Research on child fostering has often been anchored on the prism of child trafficking, labour and exploitation. The analytical approaches used in previous studies (see Tamanja 2014; Awumbila, Owusu, and Teye 2014) leave gaping holes that do not allow for the extensive appreciation of the nexus between migration and education. According to the Ghana Statistical Service (2013, 214), 'nearly four out of ten immigrants in Ghana had never attended school. This is much higher than the national population of 28.5 percent. The proportion of the immigrant population with no education increases with age: 18.6 percent of those aged 15-19 years and 25.8 percent of those aged 20-24 years have had no education'. Beyond the information provided by the Ghanaian statistical service, there is little information on the academic achievement level of various groups of migrant children in relation to school qualifications, success in individual subjects, or entry

into post-school courses. In addition, there is no policy document guiding migrant education or the management of diversity in Ghana.

The range of Ghanaian languages coming into Ghanaian schools include but are not limited to the eleven languages used in the National Accelerated Literacy Project: Asante (Ashanti) Twi, Akuapim (Akwapim) Twi, and Fante, Ewe, Ga, Dangme, Dagbane, Nzema, Dagaare, Gonja, and Kasem. Ghana's language policy in schools is guided by the National Accelerated Literacy Project (NALAP). NALAP is a bilingual transitional programme that encourages basic schools to use mother tongue (L1) and English language (L2) from kindergarten to third year of primary school. The situation in Ghanaian schools is further complicated by migrant youth coming from a sub-region with over 500 languages. However, there are some cross-border languages spoken in Ghana and other West African countries. These include Ewe (Ghana, Togo and Benin), Hausa (Niger, Nigeria, Togo and Mali), Akan (Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire) and Yoruba (Nigeria and Benin) (Amuzu and Singler 2014; Afrifa, Anderson, and Ansah 2019, Bronteng, Berson, and Berson 2019).

This article addresses several interlinked important questions: What are the factors affecting migrant students' integration into Ghanaian schools? What are the insights of teachers and principals on the problems faced by migrant students in school? How do educators adapt their teaching methods in culturally diverse classrooms? The next section discusses the literature on migrant education and teachers in Ghana, followed by the theoretical framework consisting of the 4-A's framework by Tomaševki (2001) as well as concepts of inclusion, integration and marginalisation. After this, there is a brief description of the methodology. Key findings are then presented, and the final section assesses these findings.

## **2. Researching migrant education and teacher views**

The following three subsections introduce the literature on migrant education and teacher views. We draw primarily on literature from other jurisdictions because there is only very scarce literature available on the Ghanaian context. However, where it is available, for example with regard to grade retention, we will highlight information about Ghana in this section.

### **2.1. Teachers and migrant education**

Dusi and Steinbach (2016, 822), in emphasising the importance of teachers in the school setting argue that the 'presence of an adult who is able to welcome a migrant child is a bulwark against their lack of references, considering the difficulty their parents have in supporting them in this encounter with the new world'. Wu and Tarc (2019) also argue that many migrant children often rely on the teacher to be able to expand academic knowledge in a meaningful way within the school setting. Irvine (1989, 51) describes this as 'cultural translators and intercessors' in her work on cultural influences on the pedagogical perspectives of black teachers. She further argues that teachers with a migration background adapt their teaching styles in response to the different cultures in the classroom. This notion of culturally responsive pedagogy is not only important for teachers with a migration background but teachers in general (Author et al. 2018).

It is not in all cases that there has been advocacy for the usefulness of teachers with a migrant background in classrooms (Alberts 2008; Lee 2015). Competency in the host nation's language of instruction has been one of the dominant negative reasons given in deploying teachers with a migrant background. Another reason for the negative impact of teachers with a migrant background in the classroom has been put forward by Alberts (2008) who argues that the differences in culture are a factor that works against migrant teachers from dispensing their duties in the class effectively. This often makes it difficult for students to adapt to the difference in teaching style due to cultural variations. The lack of cultural capital of the host countries might lead to difficulty in presenting concepts and ideas. Lee (2015) identified that the difference in cultures manifested itself in conflict

with parents because of their lack of understanding of the mainstream culture in the United States of America. Parents often perceived teachers with a migrant background as lacking the necessary skillset needed to teach their children. They also argued that many teachers with a migrant background struggled to find appropriate communicative channels when engaging with them.

## ***2.2. Expectations, stereotyping and prejudice of migrant students in schools***

Spiteri and Sang (2019), in drawing the link between the expectations of teachers and student achievement, argue that teacher expectations act as self-fulfilling prophecies that act as a guide in their interactions with students. Their actions will be consistent with their expectations. Dabach et al. (2018, 39) show the ways in which teacher expectations of students may play out in general. These include 'teacher affect (warmth versus coolness), types of teacher feedback (praise versus punishment), and differential opportunities for student responses'. According to Bergh et al. (2010) migrant students are in danger of failing in school because of lower teacher expectations. These expectations often lead to differential treatment of migrant students in class. Lower expectations of migrant students by teachers meant that they are just being kept busy as they are not expected to excel in school. OECD (2010) describes as deficit-oriented approach teachers' lowering of their expectations of migrant students. It explains that this attitude from teachers is as a result of their negative attitude towards multilingualism and language development. In this case, other than a focus on the benefits of having a linguistically diverse class, teachers focus on the deficits in language development. This leads to a lowering of expectations of students with migrant background.

Janta and Harte (2016) outline several ways in which lower teacher expectations may manifest itself in schools. These include the level of work they assign to students, student-teacher interactions and grading. They cite the example of grading bias amongst German teachers against Turkish migrants. Teacher expectations remain a complex and delicate issue that does not only affect migrant students



and their academic achievement but has other implications on their integration into the wider society. Teacher expectations serve as an indicator for mirroring society (Dabach et al. 2018).

### **2.3. Grade retention**

Jones and Waguespack (2011, 708) define grade retention as ‘the practice in which children are required to repeat a grade level in school because they failed to meet required benchmarks or grade level standards’. The idea of using grade retention as a tool of overcoming underperforming migrant children in school has been contested in the literature. According to Danhier (2018), this explains its limited use especially in countries like Denmark, Finland, Ireland, UK, USA, Italy, Norway and Sweden. Nunes, Reis, and Seabra (2018) posit that there is little positive effect attached to the grade retention of migrant students from lower-income families. Their study on low-achieving students in Portuguese schools concluded that grade retention of underperforming migrant children was ineffective considering the cost involved in keeping a student at a particular grade for a year. They suggested the use of mentoring schemes, extra hours of classes, and preferential assignments as a more effective tool to raise attainment levels among low-performing students. The language deficit many migrant youth bring into the educational system often make them candidates for grade retention.

Contrary to the arguments made against grade retention by some scholars (Nunes, Reis, and Seabra 2018; European Union 2013), Pong (2009) argued for the positive impact of grade retention amongst migrant students in Hong Kong. Pong defines academic redshirting as a deliberate choice by parents of foreign-born migrant children to be retained in lower than expected age grades as a way of improving achievement in school. The extra year spent through academic redshirting allows migrant students to gain the needed cultural capital important for navigating through schooling.

Within the Ghanaian context although there is little information on the effect of grade retention on cross-border students, research points to the prevalence of grade retention among disadvantaged students. For example, Ananga (2011) found that grade retention is a major factor pushing children out of school in southern Ghana. He further asserts that grade retention often leads to children being older than age-appropriate grades. This often comes a reason that subsequently pushes them out of school. Ananga (2011) also argues that in-country seasonal migration is another factor causing grade retention at primary school level in Ghana. Seasonal migration takes students away from school that in the end prevents them from taking part in class assignments and end-of-term assessments that are key in determining student progression.

### **3. Tomaševki's Theoretical Framework: acceptability and adaptability**

This article draws on the 4-A's framework developed by Tomaševki (2001) as a tool in assessing what factors affect migrant students' integration into Ghana's education system. The framework has been adopted by the United Nation's Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) in interpreting the content of the provisions of rights to education in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). Our study, in adopting the 4-A's framework, uses the concept of the toolbox approach that allows for the selection of the most relevant indicators that apply to the state under examination. In the context of our study, the sub-indicators that are most relevant (acceptability and adaptability) are selected for analysis (Tomaševki 2001) and summarised in Figure 1 below. The indicators of availability and accessibility are beyond the scope of this article.

---- Figure 1 about here please ----

*Acceptability* according to the ICESCR General Comment 13, note 1, paragraph 6 (c) requires 'the form and substance of education, including curricula and teaching methods, have to be acceptable, for example, relevant, culturally appropriate and of good quality, to students and, in appropriate cases,

parents, which is subject to the educational objectives and the minimum educational standards'. Using acceptability as a measure, the content of education should be relevant to the prevailing conditions of those the education system seeks to affect. Educational systems should be non-discriminatory and culturally sensitive bearing in mind the different creeds of people involved. Students in schools should not be made to approve any religious or ideological views. Bullying, labelling and other forms of discrimination should be addressed (Tomaševki 2001). Teaching methods are expected to be learner-centred reflecting the different cultures within classroom. In multicultural classrooms, the views of teachers should not only reflect those of the dominant culture but should also reflect the different people in class. The views of teachers are not expected to be shaped by negative stereotypes and prejudices that do not inure to the benefit of learners. An important aspect of acceptability is the quality of participation of learners. How teachers perceive students – and in this case migrant students, their views and expectations of them – will give an indication on the extent to which they may allow migrant students to participate in the learning process. Using acceptability as a benchmark allows for the examination of the extent to which the views and expectations of teachers and principals show how they welcome migrant students within their schools. Acceptability advocates for an educational system that respects the rights of other racial, ethnic or religious groups. It is therefore important to examine the views and expectations of teachers and principals to determine whether they do promote respect for migrant students and other ethnic minorities.

*Adaptability* states that 'education can evolve with the changing needs of society and contribute to challenging inequalities, such as gender discrimination, and that it can be adapted locally to suit specific contexts' (Right to Education Project 2008, 1). Flexibility of the education system is key in making education adaptable to the needs of all those involved. Although adaptability allows room for some educational standards, there should also be room for educators to explore to empower disadvantaged groups who may be constrained by the social structure.

Teaching methods, language of instruction, enrolment and placement should all be adapted to suit the needs of learners. Responding to the diversities in class whether age, gender, migrant status, ethnicity, culture, language and others represent key aspects of adaptability. Additional provision of support system and not a one-size-fits-all solution is important for adaptable school systems. The extent to which teachers adapt teaching methods to suit the multi-age and multicultural classes serves as an indicator in determining the level of support systems available for migrant students. Adaptability requires educators to be proactive in providing solutions not only to learners with visible challenges within the schools but equally pay attention to the ones that are invisible. The research we reviewed earlier (Ananga, 2011) shows how some migrant students are affected negatively by grade retention, language issues, invisibility or being on the periphery in classes. How proactive schools are in reacting to the problems identified gives an indication on how adaptable the system is.

This conceptual framework allows for an introspection into the viability of mechanisms laid out in the right to education for the marginalised. Studies on marginalised people should transcend traditionally marginalised groups in order to capture less visible groups. This disaggregation is critical as it is important for all marginalised groups to be counted regardless of their numbers. Being counted remains the first step to being helped from the marginalization. The framework enabled us to assess the processes and identify the many stakeholders (including teachers and principals) beyond government driving integration within the schools.

#### **4. Methodology**

Stake (1994, 237) suggests that 'case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of [the] object to be studied'. The objects studied were teachers and principals with experiences of managing migrant students from West African countries in Ghana using a multiple case design. The research gained insights from teachers and principals within the educational sector with the aim of building the case under study. It was important to follow a multiple case study design as this study needed to recruit

participants with contrasting cases and different perspectives. This confirmed Ritchie and Lewis' (2003, 52) argument that a key feature of case studies remains the 'multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context'.

This study forms part of a larger project that interviewed 68 in school migrant children (38 male and 30 female students), 40 out of school migrant children (30 male and 10 female students), 40 principals and teachers (20 male and 20 female principals/teachers) and 42 migrant parents (28 male and 14 female parents). In this paper, we focus only on the data collected through interviews with principals and teachers: 30 semi-structured interviews with principals and 10 semi-structured interviews with teachers in 30 (21 public and 9 private) schools in Ghana. We focus on the perspectives of teachers and principals with experience of teaching and managing international migrant students from ECOWAS. All principals interviewed also acted as teachers for individual subjects. This explains why there were more interviews with principals as the administrative and practical teaching experiences were equally important.

Many interviewees were teachers who also taught what was described as core subjects: English, Mathematics and Science. All those interviewed taught in either public or low fee-paying private schools rather than in religious or high-cost private schools. Public schools and low fee-paying private schools were the dominant schools in the research location. Those interviewed were teachers and principals who had experience of teaching and managing West African migrant children and were willing and available during the times the fieldwork took place. The interviewees were all taught and/or managed schools located in the capital of Ghana, Accra. Accra hosts the largest population of migrants in Ghana (58.4%) and more specifically ECOWAS nationals (21.1%) (Ghana Statistical Service 2013). The high number of ECOWAS nationals living in Accra is the main reason why it was chosen as the research location. Purposive sampling was key as there was a high unawareness about the plight of migrant children in Ghanaian schools generally. Thus, we searched for principals and teachers with

knowledge on the questions being asked. Snowballing was used to complement the purposive sampling technique as the research population selected were normally acquaintances, friends and family of the target population in the research.

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews. The number of interviews was determined when the point of saturation was reached with each group of participants. All interviews were conducted within a total of 10 months (May to July 2015; September- November 2016; July-October 2017). All interviews were conducted by the lead author. Interview questions were guided by research on teacher expectations, stereotyping and grade retention and the concepts of acceptability and adaptability. Answers from these interviews were analysed using the conceptual framework of acceptability and adaptability. All interviews were recorded with the permission of interviewees and transcribed. This helped ensure validity of data. The recorded interviews were always immediately transcribed as non-linguistic impressions not captured by the recorder were still vivid to the lead author. Initial codes were produced making meaning of critical texts and thoughts identified with individual questions. Codes that expressed similar meanings and ideas were put together. The next step was connecting the conceptual framework and the codes developed and linking it to current literature (grade retention, expectations, stereotyping and prejudice of migrant children in schools, teachers and migrant education) and other themes emerging from the fieldwork. At this point we focused on emerging themes and how they helped answer the research questions. We selected specific parts of the interviews that better emphasised some emerging themes. The identities of all schools and informants in this study were protected using pseudonyms. All aspects of this research including data collection instruments were approved by a university ethics committee.

## **5. Findings**

### ***5.1. Teaching migrant children in Ghanaian schools***

Most teachers who participated in the study did not adjust teaching methods to suit the learning capabilities of migrant youth in their class. Most teachers made no distinctions between migrant and non-migrant children during lessons. Teachers often dealt with all students as one without recourse to the peculiar background of migrant children in class. Many factors underpinned teachers' approaches toward teaching migrant students.

All the teachers we interviewed were experienced in teaching or managing migrant students, yet they had had no training in dealing with migrant students. Thus, they approached migrant education based on what they believed was right or wrong in line with school rules. Many teachers argued that student background made no difference in terms of their academic performance due to the multicultural and multilinguistic nature of the classroom. Most teachers appeared not to have adapted their teaching even in cases where migrant children showed low proficiency in the language of instruction. Many teachers did not think lower proficiency in English was peculiar to only migrant children considering the multilinguistic and multicultural Ghanaian context where students were taught in a language other than their mother tongue. This phenomenon is not limited to Ghana but a common feature of postcolonial countries in sub-Saharan Africa (Kyereko and Faas 2021). This finding is in stark contrast from most research (see Arnot, Schneider, and Welply 2013; Rodríguez-Izquierdo and Darmody 2019) on migrant education in countries in the global North. In many northern countries, the school system does not provide teaching in migrant students' mother tongue. Some school systems offer some extra classes to support them learning the school language, and /or some extra classes to maintain their mother tongue. For example, in the UK, all children are taught in English with English as an Additional Language (EAL) support in the classroom for those who do not have English as their mother tongue. By contrast, in Ghana, although English is used as the official language of instruction in schools, it is not the local spoken language of any of the ethnic groups. There is also no additional language support to help migrant children develop their English.

In a country like Ghana with over 80 languages where, according to the language policy (National Accelerated Literacy Project), only 11 languages are to be used in schools, many other local languages are sidelined. Therefore, making linguistic provisions for West African migrant students from similarly multilingual countries is practically impossible to achieve. This aligns with the reasons given by the DES (2011) in Ireland, for example, for the lack of mother-tongue teaching for migrant students in Irish schools due to the heterogeneity among migrant students. Siarova and Essomba (2014) also add that linguistic diversity among migrant students accounts for the lack of integration of teaching in the mother tongue for migrant children in Europe.

Most teachers in our study did not differentiate in their treatment of migrant and non-migrant students. To most teachers, the teaching approach did not matter as in the past students who proved to be more serious with their studies were able to overcome language and other challenges that came with education in Ghanaian schools. Opuni, the principal of Faith Private School, explained that:

I have taught for 20 years. I have never had any refresher courses on how to deal with migrant students. In school, we do not pay any special attention to them. The serious ones are able to pick up easily. It is only some lazy ones who are not ready to learn that fail.

Another reason for teachers' struggle to adapt their approach to teaching migrant students was the blurred line that existed between migrant and non-migrant students in Ghanaian schools. This problem was more pronounced in migrant-dominated settlements. The history of migrant settlements in Ghana blurred characteristics such as name, language, complexion that were used as indicators for differentiating migrants from non-migrants. Being a migrant youth in these schools was the norm rather than the exception. The lack of attention given to issues of documentation in schools meant that only migrant children who showed visible signs of not being Ghanaian were identified as having



a migrant background in schools. The effect of this was several invisible migrants children in Ghanaian classrooms. Elvis, the principal of Armour Public School, said:

If you cannot identify them, how do you make provisions for them? The moment they come to the school they do not declare their backgrounds from which they come from in order to avoid isolation. Once they do not declare their migrant backgrounds it is difficult to identify peculiar hardships associated with such students.

Many interviewees suggested migrant students always preferred to be dealt with in the same way as non-migrant students. This, according to teachers, also affected any possible efforts that would have aimed at helping migrant children during teaching and classroom work. According to some teachers, migrant students in the past resisted attempts at adjusting or setting them aside for special lessons. Tina, the principal of Beka Public School said that,

I have encountered a few migrant students in my teaching experience. The last one I taught was from Mali. He hated being separated from the main class to be given special attention. It was always a battle to get him to appreciate the essence of the extra time being allotted to him. I can say many of these migrant students over the years have reacted in like manner.

The approach adopted by most teachers in most of our schools where they never changed their teaching methods regardless of the background of students is what Coin (2017, 3) described as 'teacher-centered' or 'subject matter oriented'. He further explained that this approach had the teacher playing an active role with the student playing a passive role. This method of teaching set standards that must be met by all students regardless of background, capacity or ability. This further reinforces the point on the lack of adaptability of the Ghanaian school system.

Although most schools had no specific arrangements with which to address the general challenges of migrant youth, there were exceptions. A few teachers and principals resorted to altering seating arrangements in class as a way of overcoming linguistic challenges among migrant children. Unlike research which revealed that seating arrangements were used as a means of further marginalising students (Erçetin and Kubilay 2017) some teachers deployed seating arrangements as a way of helping migrant students overcome challenges in the classroom especially problems associated with language. Teachers used flexible seating arrangements at various points in class to help migrant youth overcome learning challenges. Teachers preferred asking migrant students, especially those with lower proficiency in the language of instruction, to sit closer to the teacher. Teachers who deployed this explained that it was a move aimed at making them pay closer attention to the student in question. These were seats usually in the front row. Teachers who placed migrant children in the front row were of the view that it gave them a voice and recognition in class. This was important in overcoming challenges as Toohey (1998) concluded that some learners were physically marginalised based on the seating arrangements in class. This practice led to the exclusion of students from benefiting from teaching and learning in class as well as a struggle for their voices to be heard.

In some exceptional cases, teachers made migrant children sit next to other students from similar backgrounds who were more proficient with the language of instruction. Allowing students to choose their seats in class, teachers realised that migrant students often preferred sitting within the same area. Teachers believed having migrant students with linguistic challenges crowding around the same area was a distraction to the progress in class. Thus, strategically pairing struggling migrant students with peers having superior linguistic and academic background offered the migrant student an opportunity to improve academically. It was also a way of avoiding marginalisation within the classroom, as Ntow a teacher of Anda Public School pointed out:

I pay attention to the migrant students in my class. I sometimes make the students who are good sit with the migrant students who are not good with the language. From previous experiences, it has always helped migrant students improve especially their language competency. They are able to pick up easily when they are paired with their peers, especially the good ones.

This further reinforces the point made by Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) on the importance classroom arrangements have in promoting inclusion in classrooms with multicultural populations. According to Foucault (1979), spatial arrangements in the classroom have served as basis for the institutions of ranks and norms. Thus, for Toohey (1998), students who enter schools proficient in languages other than English are labelled as deviants who ought to be normalised. Their position in the classroom is an identifier rank that places them under surveillance from the teacher. Setting the class in the right way can be a proactive way of getting the best out of students other than waiting to only react when things go wrong. The way some teachers used seating arrangements in managing migrant students with linguistic challenges confirms previous research by Wannarka and Ruhl (2008) on structural conditions in classrooms impacting the academic performance of students.

The importance of teachers with a migrant background was very evident in one of our schools where the principal utilised teachers with a migrant background in solving the challenges that arose because of teaching migrant students in this particular school. This school was in a migrant-dominated settlement with its principal having lived in the community for several years. He paid particular attention not only to the background of students but also teachers. He addressed the language of instruction challenge by matching teachers based on their linguistic abilities and migrant students with respect to their language challenge.

Ahmed, the principal of Peace School recounted that,

we had a girl who, according to her age, should have been in primary two (second year). She had never been to school and could not speak or write in English. I decided to place her in the kindergarten one class with a teacher who is also from a similar migrant background. She speaks the local languages spoken by that particular girl. I told the teacher to focus on her. At the end of the academic year, she had improved academically.

Matching teacher competences in interacting with migrant student needs can be explained by culturally responsive school leadership and pedagogy (see Author 2 et al.). They asserted that the importance of ethnicity and cultural background cannot be discounted in education. Hence there is a need for school leadership to make provisions within the school environment that caters for the needs of all.

This finding corroborates previous research (e.g. Seah 2018; Lee 2015) on how teachers with a migrant background possess specific linguistic and intercultural competencies that facilitate their interaction with migrant students. Their background and experiences equip them with the necessary skills to successfully deal with the complex and diverse issues associated with having migrant students in school. The findings further challenge the arguments by Strasser and Steber (2010) that there is lack of empirical support to back the claim that teachers with migrant backgrounds are positive additions to the classroom.

The findings on teaching migrant students in Ghanaian schools show evidence of limited adaptation, but not much acceptability. Teaching methods failed the acceptability test as they were in many cases not learner-centred. Despite the highly multicultural nature of Ghanaian classrooms, teachers often failed in to make teaching methods reflect the different cultures within the classroom. Thus, the acceptability benchmark was not met in most of the schools where fieldwork was conducted. The lack of acceptability and adaptability in schools can be explained by the lack of awareness of the presence

of migrant students in schools as well as a lack of teacher training on issues pertaining to migrant education. Training could be an important step in bridging the acceptability and adaptability gap between the experiences and desires of teachers by making them more reflexive of their actions in the classroom. Although an exceptional case, the successful deployment of teachers with a migrant background in Prince school emphasises their importance in achieving acceptability and adaptability. The provision of a linguistic support system and not a one-size-fits-all solution is important in helping the Prince school achieve acceptability and adaptability with regard to migrant students.

### ***5.2. Views and perceptions of educationalists on migrant students***

Nearly half of the principals and teachers interviewed held some negative opinions of migrant students. Nigerians were most affected by this. The principal of Charity Public School, Ampomah, recounted that:

I taught a Nigerian who didn't even bear a Nigerian name. He bore a normal Ghanaian name. No record showed that he was not a Ghanaian. I only realised he was a Nigerian when there was a theft case and I asked him to bring his parents. It was at this point that I realised he was Nigerian. But for the theft case I would have always thought I had only Ghanaians in the school. You know these Nigerians and their perception of 419 thing [connoting criminality and a swindler in the Ghanaian sense]. Since then I have been careful. I now pay more attention to him.

The prejudices and perceptions were not only limited to Nigerians in Ghanaian schools. A minority of teachers and principals also held some prejudices against migrant students from francophone West Africa. The data further revealed how simplified generalisations were made of some migrants based on some experiences. Nunoo the principal of Nkwanta Complex Public School 'They are aggressive,

But for that guy I spoke off, they are academically sound. Very quick tempered. As for that all my Nigerian kids are quick tempered’.

Some teachers and principals also felt that the diversity that migrant students brought to schools was disadvantageous. In several instances during the interviews, they touched on how diversity led to the introduction of alien customs and traditions into the Ghanaian culture. Recounting an encounter with migrant students, the principal of Dist Private School (Owusuaa) posited that:

Even this morning I had a problem with a parent who came to complain that some senior students had prevented their daughter from covering the hair. They cited that it had been allowed in Nigeria. I told them there was an Islamic school where these things were allowed. So, either they take their child to a nearby Islamic school or they comply with the rules of this school. They decided to comply by the rules and not make the child cover the hair. In Ghana, no rules states that you should have your hair covered.

Migrant students from francophone countries were viewed as key resources during French lessons. French teacher interviewees spoke highly of the role migrant youth from French West Africa played during their lessons. For example, migrant-led discussions helped explain things to their colleagues. Olivia, a teacher at Shie Public School, stated that:

They look up to the foreigners (migrant students), especially when it comes to the language class, I do not know much about the other subjects, but in my subject, that is what normally happens. They are more interactive during the French lessons. They also inspire the other students to want to learn the language.

Most teachers who had interactions with francophone migrant children over the years confirmed that they excelled in mathematics. Most of the principals and mathematics teachers in our sample spoke about the strong mathematical background migrant youth from French-speaking West African countries brought into Ghanaian schools, especially migrant youth from Togo. The reasons teachers gave for the strong mathematical background was that migrant children usually had to drop to lower classes due to language barriers, therefore they studied subjects below their level. Additionally, others like Sena a teacher of Kuman Public School also spoke of the francophone system and how it emphasised mathematics:

My experiences with children from Togo show that they have a very strong mathematical background. It is difficult assigning any specific reason for this. Perhaps, it may be because many come to schools in Ghana only to learn the language having previously completed basic school in Togo. Mathematics is a universal language and the experience of being previously in school gives them an upper hand.

The above confirms the argument by Nieto (2000) on the positive sides of having a multicultural classroom. The positive experiences migrant youth bring into the class when harnessed enrich learning outcomes in school.

This section has identified prejudices, perceptions, negative images and stereotypes as major obstacles preventing greater acceptability and adaptability. Diversity in Ghanaian schools is not inspiring but potentially dangerous, pulling down the school, challenging its practices - except in the case of students from Francophone countries who helped the curriculum with their valued knowledge. Viewing the challenges of migrant students through the lenses of prejudice and stereotypes remains a major reason preventing schools from taking proactive steps in making the school system acceptable and adaptable to the needs of migrant students.

### **5.3. Poor academic performance leading to grade repetition**

The effect of the challenges associated with language was dire. Academic output was severely reduced due to the linguistic difficulties migrant students faced in class. There were no clear guidelines on what academic achievement merited a repetition of grade. It was largely at the discretion of the grade teacher and to some extent the principal. Overall, students were expected to have grasped thoroughly the grade level material to merit a promotion to the next grade. Thus, migrant students who were retained in their grade were deemed to have failed in mastering their grade material well enough to merit a promotion. Grade retention therefore was aimed at offering the student an opportunity to relearn the grade material and develop the skills expected of someone of that grade. The main reason that accounted for the high rate of retention among migrant students in our sample schools according to the interviews was the low proficiency in English, the language of instruction. Most teachers, including Tina the principal of Beka Public School, reiterated the emphasis on language proficiency in schools: 'One thing I have realised is the language challenge. You have people being repeated not because they are not good but because of the challenge of speaking'.

The effect of grade retention of migrant students as a key predictor of school dropout and an early signal of academic challenges has been well documented in the literature. Scholars have argued against grade retention as it does not positively affect the academic fortunes of students. Grade retention often leads to the development of negative attitudes towards school (Pedraja-Chaparro, González, and Rodríguez 2016).

Schools' recognition of the value of diversity in Ghanaian schools is not strong and can be seriously disadvantageous, especially for migrant children. It can be detrimental to the school culture and its practices as well as teachers' professional practice, although there is some value seen in the case of students from Francophone countries who seemed to have contributed to the school curriculum



because, it seems, their knowledge in French and mathematics was seen as more valuable. Challenges outlined in the previous sections (e.g. negative image, stereotypes, teaching methods, teaching instruction) combine in ways that lead to disadvantages that later became permanent features in the life of migrant students. These cumulative disadvantages lead to grade retention, lower confidence and dropout. Although there is strong evidence in our data that all of these disadvantages lead to grade retention, dropout and lower confidence, there are no national statistics in Ghana to back this up. It would be useful if authorities in Ghana were to start collecting representative data on the factors highlighted here.

## **6. Conclusions**

There is evidence of limited acceptability and adaptability in schools leading to migrant students struggle to survive and excel. Our findings highlight the complex nature of barriers facing migrant youth in Ghana's educational system. The study provides evidence of the nature of barriers marginalising migrant children in schools. The identification of these obstacles (e.g. negative image, stereotypes, teaching methods and teaching instruction) affecting acceptability and adaptability in Ghanaian schools will lead to a deeper understanding of issues of inclusion.

This paper also highlights that despite the professional knowledge and desires of teachers, they often lacked training in dealing with migrant students and cultural diversity. The effect of this on migrant education in Ghana is negative. Most teachers in Ghana are inadequately equipped to meet the learning needs of migrant students. Training could encourage greater reflexivity so that, when combined with professional knowledge and teachers' goals, it would lead to greater adaptability and acceptability in the management of migrant students in schools. Regardless of how diverse and multicultural Ghanaian schools are, our study has demonstrated that migrant youth come with peculiar characteristics that require specific training to harness their potential.

The lack of acceptability and adaptability seen in teacher's inability to adapt teaching methods to suit the background of migrant students also points to the lack of support for working with migrant children. That represents a systemic issue that goes beyond teachers and principals. The work of teachers and principals in helping migrant students reach their full potential can only come to fruition when there is a system level support. This support creates enabling architecture in the form of a policy framework that drives effective pedagogy. Our study has shown that the complex nature of teaching and managing migrant students in Ghanaian schools requires policy-specific measures that prioritise the development of support for schools with migrant students. This combined with training could help them innovate, work with migrant parents and communities to learn about their ways of learning (their funds of knowledge).

Our findings further highlight the role of perceptions and stereotyping in the construction of migrant identity within schools. Most Ghanaian schools in our sample exhibit not much adaptability and acceptability in responding to the different learner needs of the migrant student. The operational environment within schools is not sensitive and structured to cater for the challenges that educating migrant children come with. There is a lack of awareness of the presence of migrant children in most classrooms. This in effect has resulted in the very minimal efforts geared at tackling problems related to the teaching of migrant children leading to limited acceptability and adaptability.

Amid many marginalising practices within schools, the findings highlight some best practices that led to greater acceptability and adaptability in schools. The findings bring together evidence of good practices that helped in harnessing the potential of migrant students in schools. Teachers with a migrant background offered some positives in the successful integration and learning of migrants children amid the many negative practices surrounding migrant education in Ghana. They had (a) positive attitudes towards migrant education, (b) were more open and innovative in dealing with

diversity as well as building trusting pedagogical relationships, and (c) they emphasised the importance of a multicultural learning environment in promoting an all-inclusive education.

The paucity of research on migrant education in Ghana (and to large extent the Global South) and the limited availability of official data about educational integration and intra African migration was a limitation for our study. Further research is needed on multiethnic and multicultural contexts in the Global South particularly on issues relating to teacher observations in classrooms, curriculum analyses (e.g. the inclusion of diversity and different migrant groups in the curriculum), teacher training, linguistic diversity and how it can be used in a more positive way by schools.

The wider implication of our research is the contribution it makes towards the debate on mother-tongue education as a solution to linguistic challenges of migrant students. Our findings show the difficulty in implementing such policies in post-colonial countries like Ghana and other countries where there are many schools teaching local children in languages other than the mother tongue. Indigenous languages are competing against global languages where there appear to be a bias for the latter. Thus, there is marginalisation of not only the mother tongues of migrant youth, but even the non-migrant children. The sheer number of indigenous languages in Ghana limits the ability of the educational system to support the use of all these languages. This also shows the extent to which findings of previous research on migrant education conducted in the global North does apply to the Ghanaian context and, to a larger extent, countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

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Figure 1: Adaptability and acceptability in the 4A Framework by Tomaševki (2001)

