Partial and Virtual Return: the Willingness of Migrant Zimbabwean Teachers in South Africa to Participate in Skills Transfer

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Abstract

With an estimated 40 000 migrant Zimbabwean teachers in neighbouring South Africa, the question of tapping into their skills for the development of their country hinges on their willingness to participate. This study sought to understand the disposition of the resident migrant Zimbabwean teachers in South Africa to participate in a skills transfer programme through partial and virtual return. The study established that all the participants would be willing to volunteer to contribute to the development of their patria through partial and virtual return, and that some of them were already engaged in some voluntary developmental work in certain communities. However, a lack of time and a stifling political environment were cited as the major challenges to their possible participation.

Keywords: development; human resources; return migration; skills transfer; South Africa; teacher migration; virtual and partial return; Zimbabwe

Introduction

The total number of international migrants globally reached and estimated 272 million in 2019, an increase of 51 million since 2010. At present, international migrants comprise 3.5 % of the global population, compared to 2.8% in the year 2000 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2019). The increase in worldwide international migration has thus resulted in an increase in worker migration. The International Labour Organisation (ILO 2015) established that about half of the world's international migrants are economically active. The past 50 years have seen a steady increase in the participation of teachers in this global migration of workers (Morgan, Sives and Appleton 2005; Reid and Collins 2013, 269). The

question of how source countries can make the best of outmigration despite the obvious skills drains remains unanswered.

This research paper seeks to make a modest contribution to the literature on migrant teacher skills exchange through partial and virtual return. Partial return refers to the short term (a few weeks up to a year) return of migrants to their homeland in order to transfer skills (Shinn 2008). Virtual return refers to a skills exchange that is achieved through internet connection or video conferencing, and through virtual information networks (Agunias and Newland 2012; IOM 2008).

The research question posed here is: How willing are the migrant Zimbabwean teachers located in South Africa to voluntarily participate in a skills exchange program to benefit education in their country through partial and virtual return?

The Outmigration of Skilled Labour

Earlier discourses on outmigration were dominated by narratives of brain drain, and framed the outmigration of skilled migrants as a totally negative phenomenon draining the source countries of human resources (Cassarino 2004; Lien and Wang 2005, 154). These narratives are gradually ceding to those of 'brain gain', 'brain bank' and 'brain circulation' (Agunias and Newland 2012, 159; Cassarino 2004; Lien and Wang 2005, 154), indicating an increasingly optimistic view of outmigration. The outmigration of skilled labour to regional and international destinations is no longer perceived as a total loss of skills, knowledge, ability and capacity in the source country. The possibilities for skilled migrants to augment their human capital in the host countries for the benefit of their homelands are now acknowledged. Admittedly, it has been accepted for some time now that migration confers some advantages on the home country like financial and material remittances, the lowering of unemployment, and the release of political pressure (Dovlo 2003; El Khawas 2004; Lien and Wang 2005, 153). However, the debate is still on-going regarding the levels of loss (or gain) that the outmigration of skilled workers incurs in the source country.

Many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have suffered from the heavy outmigration of professionals in their post-independence epochs due to deteriorating living conditions, corruption, poor governance, and political violence (Crush and Tevera 2010). Relatively, South

Africa post-apartheid enjoyed economic growth and political stability and, as a result, attracted all classes of migrants from the sub-region and beyond (*ibid.*).

Zimbabwe lost a substantial number of professionals in the past two decades. By the year 2000, the flight of skills from Zimbabwe could no longer be ignored as it was affecting the country's capacity to deliver on sustainable development (Scientific and Industrial Research and Development Centre 2007). However, this was only the beginning of a ten-year (2000-2009) crisis that eventually caused an emigration avalanche of professionals the effects of which reverberated well into the next decade. During this crisis, the country experienced 'accelerating poverty, economic collapse, de-development and mass out-migration' (Crush and Tevera 2010, 1).

By 2008, it was reported that between 70% and 90% of Zimbabwe's graduates were living outside the country (Shinn 2008). The main destination countries for Zimbabwean migrants during the crisis were South Africa, Britain, and Botswana (Shinn 2008; ZIMSTAT 2010 & IOM 2010, 36). With an estimated 1.5 million Zimbabweans, South Africa has the highest number of Zimbabwean migrants (ZIMSTAT 2010 & IOM 2010, 37), over 40 000 of which are teachers (Manik 2013, 78). It is assumed that a loss this big could only have resulted in a huge drain of key education skills that the country would struggle to replace unless the teachers returned to Zimbabwe.

The government of national unity that governed Zimbabwe between 2009 and 2013 created some economic and political stability, albeit fragile (Government of Zimbabwe 2013). This fragility of the socio-economic situation continued to discourage migrant workers from returning to Zimbabwe in numbers. Post 2013, ZANU(PF) re-entrench its-self in power; winning the 2014 and 2018 general and presidential elections albeit controversially. The ousting of the country's strongman Robert Mugabe in November of 2016 and his replacement with his deputy Emmerson Munangagwa via a de-facto coup was greeted with euphoria by many Zimbabweans. However, that euphoria soon turned into disillusionment for some when it became clear that it was a mere change on guards (Southall 2017). Emmerson Munangagwa eventually sanitised his ascendance to power by winning the 2018 presidential elections which though widely accepted as free and fair but were tainted by post-election violence that claimed the lives of more than six people, caused the injuries of several and resulted in massive destruction of property in Harare (Government of Zimbabwe 2018). The prevailing situation is

likely to be met with a wait-and-see attitude by Zimbabweans in the diaspora before they embark on return.

Shinn (2008) states that migrants can contribute to the development of their country by returning on short-term programmes, investing in businesses in the country, establishing professional links, creating virtual information networks, and sending remittances back. Some literature exists on the remittance patterns of migrants in southern Africa, including Zimbabweans (Makina 2013; Moyo and Nicolau 2016; Oucho 2010). However, a literature search revealed very little on migrant skills exchange programmes through short term return (or partial return) and through virtual information networks (virtual return) in southern Africa. This indicates that there is a dearth of information on programmes that could hold the key to the development of the source countries in southern Africa.

Zimbabwean Teachers in South Africa

Migrant Zimbabwean teachers escaping the crisis in their country have been drawn to neighbouring South Africa by the comparatively better political and economic stability, higher wages, better working conditions, as well as the existing demand for teachers (Daniels and Green 2014; Manik 2013; South African Council for Educators 2011, 5). Indications are that Zimbabweans form the largest group of foreign teachers in South Africa (Daniels and Green, 2014; South African Council for Educators 2011, 12). Furthermore, the Zimbabwean teachers in South Africa constitute the largest group of Zimbabwean teachers in any country outside Zimbabwe at the moment. Manik's (2013, 72) estimate of 40 000 Zimbabwean teachers in South Africa in 2013 gives an indication of the population of Zimbabwean migrant teachers in South Africa.

The exit of high numbers of teachers from Zimbabwe has obviously drained this country of key education skills. For example Moyo and Nicolau (2016, 2513) state that at the height of the teacher exodus in 2007-2009 the situation was so dire that some schools were left without teachers. This indicated a serious drain of education skills that the country has to deal with. The replacement of experienced teachers with newly trained teachers might immediately put a teacher in front of learners but it does not instantly replace the lost teacher skills or experience.

The majority of Zimbabwean teachers working in the South African education system are well qualified and experienced, and teach in the areas of Mathematics, Science and Technology (Daniels and Green 2014). Although disaggregated data on foreign teachers is hard to come by, some inferences can be made about Zimbabwean teachers using the data on migrant teachers in general. The majority of the migrant teachers employed in South Africa's education system are between the ages of 31 and 40 (Moyo and Nicolau 2016). The greatest numbers of migrant teachers were employed in Gauteng (28%), Eastern Cape (28%) and KwaZulu-Natal (13%) (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). They are temporarily employed to teach in secondary schools and most of them have failed to progress beyond the rank of teacher (Green 2014; Keevy, Green and Manik 2014). We note that some of the Zimbabwean teachers in South Africa face challenges in refining their skills and in acquiring more experience in the teaching field because an estimated 47% of them have been forced to seek employment in other sectors outside education (Crush, Chikanda and Tawodzera 2012, 19), where they are likely to suffer de-skilling. In addition, the Zimbabwean migrant teachers who are employed as teachers in South Africa are finding it difficult to ascend to positions of leadership within schools (Manik 2014; Ranchod 2005) and thus miss out on a chance to hone their leadership skills. The short contracts under which most of them are employed are disruptive to the process of acquiring experience, and ascending to leadership positions.

Crush and Tevera (2010, 26) note that migrant Zimbabweans resident in the diaspora maintain an avid interest in the affairs of their home country, and do everything to support their relatives still in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwean migrant teachers in South Africa remit cash and goods regularly (Maphosa 2009; Moyo and Nicolau 2016) . However, they are "… profoundly hostile to the regime in power" and would shun any activity that they deem remotely supportive of, or co-optable by, the country's political leadership (Crush and Tevera 2010, 26). The hostility is two-way, it seems, since the Zimbabwe Teachers Association (2008) and Ranga (2014, 1) conclude that the Zimbabwean teachers who are within and outside their country's borders have been vilified by Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party for the past few decades and painted as unpatriotic agents of opposition who are bent on 'regime change'. Therefore, the migrants are unlikely to participate in any programme that might make the regime look good.

Statement of the Problem

Zimbabwe suffered a massive drain of education skills in the past two decades with the out-migration of thousands of its teachers (Moyo and Nicolau 2016; Manik 2013). This had a negative impact on its education system (Moyo and Nicolau 2016). Indications are that most of the teachers who left Zimbabwe are in South Africa (Manik 2013, 72; South African Council for Educators 2011). Adepoju (2010) observes that African transnational migrants rarely sever ties with their homelands. This suggests that migrants are still available for their source countries and most likely willing to lend their skills to the development of their countries as long as such action does not disrupt their transnational lives. Partial and virtual return offers Zimbabwe a chance to tap into the skills of its migrant teachers in order to solve the problem of the skills shortages induced by migration, and also spur the development of its education system However, research into the possibilities of harnessing the skills of migrants through partial and virtual return is lacking. Hence the aim of this research was to contribute research data to this area and the specific objective that guided the research was to explore the disposition of migrant Zimbabwean teachers to participate in education skills via virtual and partial return.

Theoretical Framework

Transnationalism

Transnationalism is the recognition that migrants hardly ever break ties with their home countries and are not moored in the host country (Brettell 2008, 120, Adepoju 2010, 15). Migrants form a dense network of social relations that link the societies of the source and host countries (Schiller 2015). These social networks, also referred to as social fields, cut across geographical, cultural and political borders. Central to transnationalism is the development and maintenance of the multiple relations; familial, economic social organisational religious and political that span across borders (Schiller 2015). The outward manifestations of transnationalism are the return visits, return migration, remittances, investments and political involvement by migrants in their countries of origin (De Haas 2010, 22). Transnational migrants are therefore people with agency who are involved in social transformation in different localities as consumers or creators of ideas, values and practices (Schiller, 2015). The transnational migrants are themselves shaped by the unequal power relations that are a product of the past and current modes of global capitalist accumulation (Schiller 2010, 26). Schiller

(2010, 2015) argues for a migration perspective that exposes agency of the transnational migrant within the ever-changing conditions of global capitalism but still acknowledging the role of the nation-state in generating and enforcing national identities. It is within these transnational dynamics that partial and virtual return offer a promise and innovative option that could help skilled migrants to contribute to the development projects in their home countries (IOM 2008, 1). Globalising agents, like ICTs, and easier means of transport (Brown 2008, 285) can be used to facilitate the transfer of skills back to the source countries without the need for the skilled migrants to permanently return to their home countries.

A Model for Migrant Skills Transfer

Agunias and Newland (2012) offer a model for the engagement of the transnational community in the transfer of skills from the diaspora to the homeland. The model offers three options for engaging the diaspora in this transfer:

- Engage the diaspora as practitioners to fill resource gaps. In this option, the migrants are asked to volunteer their time and expertise, and they may be rewarded with material and non-material incentives if need be. This is in contrast with earlier attempts to attract the migrants back to permanently fill the skills and knowledge gaps.
- Engage the diaspora as partners. Here, the emphasis is on collaboration between migrants and the locals through, for example, collaborative research and the twinning of communities and institutions. It can create a sustainable two-way exchange of skills, resources and knowledge, and hence sustain interest for a long period of time.
- Engage the diaspora as members and as leaders of scientific and technical networks. In this case, support is gathered for the creation of scientific, technical and business networks composed of local and migrant experts. These networks could rely on virtual connections through the web-based media with a chance for the participants to meet in conferences and workshops.

Agunias and Newland's (2012) framework offers possible ways in which the basic education skills like: lesson presentation, management and leadership, administration and organisational skills that are available outside Zimbabwe could be transferred back without the need for the migrants to permanently return to the source country. Emphasis on the voluntary engagement

of migrants ensures that the conflict over remuneration that often arises when members of the diaspora work with locals is pre-empted.

Research Design and Methodology

The research approach employed was qualitative and a case study design was adopted in order to solicit an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Loosely structured face-to-face interviews lasting an average of 50 minutes each were employed. The interviews were conducted in English at a place and time that were convenient to the interviewees. The interviews were also digitally recorded. Follow up interviews to clarify emerging issues in the data were then conducted telephonically. The fact that one of the researchers is a Zimbabwean living in South Africa afforded the researchers access to the participants' world.

The digital recordings of the interviews were later transcribed verbatim and the transcripts were coded by the researchers. Narrative analysis was used to compare the different experiences of the participants in order to create a general opinion (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2008, 589). The study formed part of a wider research project that aimed to investigate the experiences of Zimbabwean teachers in South African schools.

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants, and the principle of maximum variation was employed: none of the participants were from the same school and we sought to balance the number of men and women and the number of participants from public and privately owned schools. The criterion for the purposive selection of participants was that the participants had to be former Zimbabwean teachers who had been continuously teaching in South Africa for at least one year. The sampling drew eight male and seven female participants from secondary public and privately-owned schools in the Gauteng province of South Africa.

Written permission was obtained from the relevant authorities, who were the Gauteng Department of Education and the relevant school principals. The principle of informed consent was adhered to and written consent was obtained from the participants as well. Ethical clearance was obtained from each of the researchers' universities and the study adhered to the ethical standards of the two universities in terms of confidentiality, informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, trust and safety in participation, among others. The participants were assured of the confidentiality of their contribution and the anonymity of the

results. The interview questions were validated through a review for cultural relevance and content by an expert in the field of inquiry study and through a pilot study. A report back of the results to the participants was done in order to check the fidelity of the transcription.

Findings and Discussion

Biographic and Professional Profile of the Participants

Fifteen Zimbabwean teachers; seven males and eight females participated in the study (n=15). Each participant was allocated a pseudonym to facilitate reporting without compromising confidentiality (see Table 1). Most of the participants were in their mid-forties. Ten were teaching in public schools, and five in privately owned schools. Only five of the teachers were permanently employed (one in a public school and four in privately owned schools), and the rest were employed in closed contracts. On average, each participant had taught in Zimbabwe for 12 years, in South Africa for eight years, and had taught in three different schools in South Africa. Only three teachers had taught in other countries, other than Zimbabwe and South Africa.

Table 1 The participants' biographic and professional details

Pseudonyms	Gender	Age/ Age range	Type of school	Years teaching in South Africa	Number of schools in South Africa
Mlamuleli	Male	53	Public	10	1
Anacleta	Female	35-40	Public	8	5
Chipo	Female	45-50	Combined	6	1
Mandlenkosi	Male	42	Public	8	1
Simba	Male	40	Public	5	4
Collins	Male	40	Combined	8	2
Themba	Male	42	Public	10	5
Maria	Female	42	Public	4	5
Langa	Female	43	Public	7	1
Gamuchirai	Female	47	Combined	10	4
Gladys	Female	40	Public	8	5
Munyaradzi	Male	44	Combined	8	1
Sithembile	Female	51	Public	5	3
Nomsa	Female	40-45	Combined	7	2
Tongai	Male	58	Public	8	3

The participants were teaching the following school subjects: 11 were teaching in the area of mathematics and science, two each in accounting, economics, isiZulu and history; and one each in geography, religious education, technology, social sciences, Economic Management Sciences (EMS), and engineering graphics and design. The numbers add up to more than 15 since some participants were teaching more than one subject. All of the participants, except two, indicated they were teaching the subjects that they trained for. The teachers teaching isiZulu in South Africa (Themba and Gladys) indicated that they were trained to teach isiNdebele in Zimbabwe, but felt that the training was relevant considering the closeness of the two languages. Mlamuleli (history) and Anacleta (EMS) indicated that they were teaching subjects that they had not trained for. The highest qualifications held by the participants were as follows: three had a Doctoral degree, two held Master's degrees, and the rest had Bachelor's degrees. The participants' teaching qualifications were mainly obtained from universities in Zimbabwe; only three were obtained elsewhere (in Cuba). The Doctoral qualifications were obtained in South Africa post-migration.

The sample of teachers roughly fits the profile of foreign teachers in South Africa alluded to earlier. They are definitely well experienced, (average teaching experience is 20 years) the majority (10 out of 15) of them are temporarily employed, none of them has ascended to positions of leadership despite their experience and long tenure in South Africa. In terms of age they are slightly above the expected 31-40 years age group.

Return Prospects of the Participants

Only three (Themba, Tongai and Mlamuleli) of the 15 Zimbabwean teachers who participated in the study indicated that they intended to return to Zimbabwe soon (within the next three years) and had begun making concrete plans to do so. However, these three participants reported that they had no intention of working in the education sector upon their return, for example, Themba wanted to go back and practise law and was already in touch with the High Court of Zimbabwe, where he hoped to secure employment. Themba was teaching isiZulu, but had recently acquired a Master's degree in law. Mlamuleli was hoping to start a small business so he could survive on the income that he generated. Tongai, a 58- year-old man, revealed that his intention was to go back to Zimbabwe and retire from teaching due to his age, but would like to remain active in Zimbabwean politics.

On the other extreme, two teachers (Mandlenkosi and Gladys) indicated that they had no intention to return permanently to Zimbabwe ever again. Mandlenkosi's reason was that as a

family, they had invested heavily in their life in South Africa. Mandlenkosi was a technology teacher who was permanently employed at a public school. Gladys feared that she and her children would be strangers in Zimbabwe should they return. Gladys had been living in South Africa for eight years at the time of the interview. Previously in the 1990s, Gladys lived for five years in Cuba studying for her degree in mathematics and science education under a bilateral programme between the governments of Zimbabwe and Cuba.

The rest of the teachers, ten in total, indicated that they might eventually return to Zimbabwe, but not in the short term. They were waiting for the socio-economic situation in Zimbabwe to improve before they could go back. However, four teachers clarified that they were also watching the socio-economic situation in South Africa and would factor it into their decision to stay or to go.

Prior Participation in Voluntary Activities

Four of the participants in the study (Chipo, Mandlenkosi, Themba, Munyaradzi) were already involved in voluntary activities of one sort or another in Zimbabwe and a further two (Langa and Gladys) were involved in voluntary activities in South Africa. The nature of the participants' involvement in Zimbabwe was as follows: Themba and Munyaradzi were offering advice on the running and building of secondary schools in their home areas. Chipo sought to uplift the standard of education in a primary school in her home area. Mandlenkosi and Munyaradzi were supporting the needy through donations, which included food and clothing. Therefore, there were 11 participants who were not involved in any voluntary activities in Zimbabwe in any way. These participants mentioned time, and that they simply had never considered being involved as their reason for not having participated in any voluntary programme.

Disposition to Participate and Possible Areas of Involvement

All of the participants expressed willingness to volunteer their time and skills to contribute to the development of communities that they identified within Zimbabwe, or to contribute to the development of the country in general. Only one participant, Collins, expressed hesitant willingness and seemed to affirm his commitment to assist South Africa more than Zimbabwe: 'Rather, I see South Africa as my country, if there is any need to assist South Africans, I will do that and I am happy to do that but I am probably Zimbabwean so if I should be requested, I will do so.'

We do acknowledge that asking any migrant whether they are willing to help their country of origin or not, is likely to be answered with a positive affirmation. However this question was still asked as a first step towards gauging the level of willingness to participate and it yielded a positive answer from all the participants.

In the following paragraphs is an exposition of areas that the interviewees expressed interest in if they were to volunteer their time and skills to Zimbabwe. Most of the participants indicated willingness to be involved in activities that would uplift the educational standards of their country but for the benefit of specific communities. Three wanted to improve the infrastructure and administration of the schools in their home area in Zimbabwe. These three were Chipo (who had already visited a primary school in her home area and made some donations), Tongai, and Themba. Tongai was keen on improving the primary school that he attended as a child, 'I want to go to the school where I started Grade 1, Sub A then, and develop that school.' Themba reported that he was already involved in trying to uplift a number of schools where he learnt and where he had taught. His focus was on sourcing educational material (like textbooks, stationery, electronic equipment and furniture) for those schools. He reported, 'I am in constant liaison with gentlemen and ladies there … mapping out ways and strategies to uplift those areas by way of providing educational resources.'

Three other teachers felt they could contribute to education by improving the examination preparation of the learners through remedial education and teaching revision lessons. Gladys was already offering free remedial lessons in South Africa and was willing to lend a hand in Zimbabwe. Sithembile reported her wish as, 'helping some (examination) candidates to revise.' Tongai reported that he had earlier been involved in the informal, in-service skills development in chemistry lesson presentation for high school teachers in schools around his home area, 'I was training teachers in Chemistry' he said.

Tongai and Themba exhibited a willingness to engage locals as partners and collaborate with them in the uplifting of education. Gladys and Sithembile apparently feel the need to bridge a skills gap that they have identified. However, Tongai would like to come in as an expert to develop the teaching capacity of chemistry teachers and, in addition teach community members agriculture. Tongai apparently likes to engage with a network of locals as a leader.

Tongai, on the other hand, was keen on passing on his agricultural skills to Zimbabwean communities. He wanted to "teach community members more about agriculture". Maria felt her mission was to inspire the members of the community to strive for better lives as a youth

life coach. In her words, she wished '…to make a difference and inspire other people, especially the young ones.' Waste recycling was another area of possible involvement as one teacher was already voluntarily involved in it, albeit in South Africa.

Envisaged Challenges to Voluntary Participation

Time and Distance

Eight of the 15 participants considered time to be a constraint to their voluntary participation in any skills exchange programme. The following excerpts illustrate this point: 'I think it is a question of distance and time' was the opinion of Collins. 'With time, yeah, I wouldn't mind because we need to put back to the communities that maybe made us what we are today' (Mlamuleli). 'I have not had much time to do that. I would volunteer to assist especially at community level' (Chipo). Tongai, who was willing to share his agricultural skills, felt that the distance between him and the beneficiaries of his skills would just be too great, 'In Zimbabwe it would not be practical.'

Two of the participants, Nomsa and Simba, expressed the same issue of time in a slightly different manner: they said that they might be too busy with their own issues to participate much in a skills exchange. 'I am busy building some houses there, so that maybe one day or the other I can put rentals there and support my family and so on,' replied Simba in expressing how occupied he was with his own objectives.

Non-conducive Political Atmosphere

The non-conducive political atmosphere was the second most mentioned constraint, which was mentioned by six participants. Two of the problems related to the political situation were aptly expressed by Chipo, who said:

> If you involve yourself in community development, you are always at risk of being seen as looking for political mileage and then you clash with the politicians. Then there are politicians always ready to take advantage of whatever other people do to claim to have done it.

The first problem expressed therefore is that of clashing with politicians who might misconstrue any programme to uplift communities as a political campaign and make the participants and beneficiaries possible targets for politically motivated violence. The other

concern is that some unscrupulous politicians might seek to gain political mileage from the programme and abuse it to advance their political agendas.

Themba found the political situation in Zimbabwe stifling in the following manner:

> One of the reasons why I may not be able to contribute as much as I would at the moment is because of the stifling political situation. Our country is like, every suggestion must be given some political line. If only the environment would be more enabling.

Themba's complaint was that everything in Zimbabwe had become politically charged and any suggestions about the development of the country were not considered on merit but on political expediency.

Estrangement and not Knowing What to Do

Two of the participants were of the view that they had stayed outside Zimbabwe for too long and would therefore not know what to do to develop the country. 'Sometimes you spend like two years without going back, when you go back to Zimbabwe you feel like a stranger, you don't know what's going on' explained Gladys.

Financial Resources

Financial resources were also seen as a constraining factor by two participants, who were wary of spending their own money in the skills exchange programme. 'Even if I want to do that, and to some extent financial resources would be limiting' expressed Collins. 'But I don't know if the government will help to set up something, because in the schools I don't think they are doing enough' explained Sithembile, who wanted to assist by providing remedial education and examination preparation for learners in Zimbabwe.

Partial and Virtual Return of Migrants

A group of mature, vastly experienced, well-educated teachers participated in the research. Their average total number of years of experience in education was 20 years. The years of experience attest to the fact that these teachers have refined their teaching skills and have gained valuable experience in Zimbabwe and South Africa. A good number of the participants (11 out of 15) were experienced in the teaching of mathematics and science, which are areas of critical skills shortage both in Zimbabwe and South Africa. The findings of previous studies

point to the fact that the majority of the migrant teachers employed in South Africa's public and private schools are teaching the crucial mathematics, science and technical subjects (Daniels and Green, 2014). Therefore, there is a clear indication that there are Zimbabwean teachers in South Africa whose culture, skills and experiences are relevant and could benefit Zimbabwe's education system and this study suggests that most of these teachers would be willing to help.

There were poor prospects for permanent return migration in the short-term among the participants, and this made it imperative for them to be engaged in some form of skills transfer that is not dependent on permanent return. Only three of the participants had resolved to permanently return to Zimbabwe in the short term. However, even these three participants were not preparing to go back to Zimbabwe to work in education, indicating that their skills and experience in education could be lost to the Zimbabwean education system. Ten indicated that they might return to Zimbabwe someday but reported that it all depended on the country's socio-economic situation taking a turn for the better. This is in line with the findings of Mortensen (2013) with regard to the Zimbabwean migrants in the United Kingdom. The author established that skilled Zimbabwean migrants are ambivalent about return. The change for the better would probably require the skills and experience that is unavailable within Zimbabwe at the moment, but which the migrants might have. In that case, the migrant participants are probably waiting for a turnaround that needs their participation to happen. Their participation in a skills transfer programme might hasten the change that they await, and consequently their return.

Two participants indicated they would not return to Zimbabwe at all. These two participants have probably integrated into the South African society to the extent that they do not feel the need to return to Zimbabwe. However, De Haas (2010, 22) notes that the integration of migrants into the host country does not preclude their transnational involvement but on the contrary it might actually encourage it.

All of the participants responded positively to the question regarding whether they would volunteer their time and skills to help uplift Zimbabwe, thus they exhibited high levels of altruism. Altruism in the participants is a crucial attribute that could make the skills transfer programme a success (Agunias and Newland 2012). A number of participants reported that they were already volunteering their skills, time and/or resources to uplift different

communities either in Zimbabwe or South Africa. Their keenness and interest in the development of their communities could be crucial in sustaining a skills transfer programme.

The participants were keen to take part in uplifting the standard of life and education of communities back home. Their focus seemed to be on certain communities in which they had lived or worked, and not so much for the country in general. Even those who were already volunteering to help were doing so for the benefit of specific communities as opposed to the country in general. The participants may have felt that in a programme driven at community level, they could maintain some level of control over the programme activities. However, it is also possible that they did not feel as much allegiance to the country as they felt for their communities of choice. This would not be surprising in the light of the findings by Ranga (2014) which point to their political victimisation by the governing ZANU-PF party.

It is obvious from the sample of this study that there are Zimbabwean teachers in South Africa who have skills to share with other teachers and educational experts in their country. Their South African teaching experience gives them a comparative perspective, which could help them to discern and distil the best practices from both nations. These are teachers who could fit into any of the three options of Agunias and Newland's (2012) framework. Firstly, they could serve in technical teams such as subject examination panels, or serve in the governing boards of schools and other educational institutions. Secondly, they could fill in human resource gaps identified within the education system, for example, they could act as subject experts, as administrators of institutions, and as heads of various committees while permanent people are being sought. Thirdly, they could also collaborate with locals in special tasks like commissions of enquiry, setting up new educational institutions, and the facilitation of student exchanges.

Challenges to Partial and Virtual Return

The challenges alluded to by the participants give an indication of critical issues to be taken into account in the drawing up of any skills transfer programme. The time it takes to participate in a voluntary skills transfer programme was mentioned as a challenge by most of the participants. The general feeling was that migrants are busy trying to make as much as they can with the chance they have, also they are living transnational lives with interests spread over at least two countries. Therefore, they might not have the time to dedicate to a skills transfer programme. However, be that as it may, an examination of the school calendar reveals that teachers in South Africa enjoy holidays every three or so months and these amount to about

ten weeks annually. Any programmes that may involve the partial or virtual return of teachers in the transfer of skills would need to dovetail its activities to these holiday times that the teachers have and be critically aware of the migrant teachers' lack of time.

Closely linked to time, the participants felt that distance could be an issue. Globalising agents like ICTs and ease of transport mentioned have the effect of "shortening" both distance and travelling time. Therefore, different models could be considered for the transfer of skills and appropriate ICTs could be acquired to facilitate the knowledge exchange from a distance. Furthermore, Zimbabwe and South Africa are neighbouring countries and the issue of distance should not be a challenge in a well-designed skills exchange programme. Commercial flights between Gauteng, where most Zimbabwean professionals are located, to the two major airports in Zimbabwe are approximately two hours.

The political atmosphere in Zimbabwe was described by a participant as 'stifling'. The participants were wary of politically motivated violence and of their efforts being hijacked by politicians. This means that any skills transfer programme that involves the migrants will have to be depoliticised and probably be driven by an a-political professional body outside the government. The programmes of activities in Zimbabwe will have to avoid politically charged times, like those leading up to elections. There is also a dire need for the programme to be needs-driven and totally transparent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Transnational migrants make decisions and act within a field of social relations linking together the home and the host countries and in some cases the transit countries. The relations are shaped by prevailing global conditions and maybe by unequal power. The migrant Zimbabwean teachers working in South Africa who were interviewed in this research were willing to voluntarily offer their time and skills for the benefit of their homeland albeit conditionally. If engaged in a skills transfer programme, they would prefer to channel their efforts into uplifting the quality of education and the standard of life of specific communities. They feared political interference and were wary of the stifling political atmosphere in Zimbabwe. Transnational teachers are clearly aware that in their relationship with Zimbabwean politicians it is the politicians who wield more power; hence they are wary of their efforts being hijacked. The Zimbabwean migrant teachers perceived distance and time as limiting issues in their

participation in the skills transfer. This pressure of time that they feel projects their anxieties over the short contracts under which they are employed in South Africa. They are trying to make the best of the time they are employed.

We recommend that any skills transfer activities should be integrated into the calendars of the teachers to minimise disruption. The programme must be totally divorced from politics; it must be needs-driven, and totally transparent to allay the fears of it being hijacked which were expressed by the participants. The beneficiaries of the skills transfer must be specific and identifiable communities. Further research is needed on the actual model to be used for the skills transfer, and the most appropriate ICTs that are accessible to teachers and can be employed in the skills transfer. However, we envisage that social media platforms which are in everyday use in Zimbabwe like WhatsApp and Facebook could provide an easy and familiar link between the migrants and their schools and communities of choice in Zimbabwe. Another level of connection boasting of more sophistication by enabling video contact could be Google and Skype.

The transfer of skills through virtual and partial return if achieved could alleviate skills shortages in certain areas of the education system in Zimbabwe but is not by any means a panacea for the myriad of problems that the country's education faces.

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