An Investigation into Factors that Contribute to Learner Migration in South African Schools

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to investigate the various factors which contribute to learner migration in South African schools and to suggest ways in which learner migration can be addressed. A qualitative research approach was used for the study and data was collected by means of individual – and group interviews. The sample of the study consists of one Expert Management Information System (EMIS) member and one principal from a secondary school in each of the nine provinces as well as four parents and four learners from four of the nine provinces. The final sample were 50 participants (n=50). Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 9 EMIS-members and 9 principals, while focus group interviews were conducted with the 16 parents and 16 learners. The findings of the study correspond with the reasons for learner migration in terms of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory model. This model is firmly grounded in reality, thereby allowing the researchers to determine how stakeholders are influenced in terms of learner migration. The findings of the study indicate that learners are migrating to other schools due to, inter alia, the new legislative framework, school management and leadership practices of principals, school effectiveness issues, infra structure of schools as well as socio-economic factors. The study underscores the need for structuring the South African learner migration system that is guided by a coherent system of policies that enables principals to manage learner migration effectively.

Keywords: Basic education; Learner migration; Pulling factors; Pushing factors; Racism; Secondary schools; School choice.

1. Introduction
It is clear from the research literature that there is no single definition for learner migration. According to Hornby *et al.* (2009), learner migration can be viewed as the movement of large numbers of school learners from one school to another. Internationally, the main reason for this process is in most cases to get access to `better' schools to enable learners to gain knowledge and skills through effective education. In the South African context, authors such as Neluvhola (2007), Lancaster (2011) and Machard (2014) maintain that learner migration refers to the voluntary movement of learners who migrate from predominantly black township schools to urban schools, that is, former Model C and independent schools which primarily served white learners during the Apartheid period prior to 1994.

Pampallis (2003), expands on this definition by stating that learner migration refers to the movement of learners from black townships on the periphery of cities to former White, Coloured and Indian schools situated in relatively more affluent areas. This takes place as a result of the belief of specifically black parents and their children that these schools offer a better quality of education. Sekete *et al.* (2001), agree that the concept of learner migration refers to learners migrating from their home areas to schools outside their township or neighborhood. According to these authors, learners who move to other schools do this without much information of what learner migration entails. As a result, poorer schools in townships are often abandoned as migration leads, inter alia, to poor resources, poor discipline and poor academic performances.

Learner migration is a problematic phenomenon that emanates from dissatisfaction experienced by parents and learners and require an investigation into the root cause of migration. This seems to entail many contributory factors. These factors need to be interrogated to enable the various stakeholders in the education system to address the complex phenomenon of learner migration.

2. Objectives with the Study
The purpose with this study was to investigate the various factors which contribute to learner migration in South African schools and to suggest ways in which learner migration can be addressed. The objective is to extend the focus of existing research on the contributory factors to learner migration which has been hitherto limited to certain provinces in the country.

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3. Literature Review

The current trend in learner migration in South Africa relates to the outcome of educational reforms embodied in the *South African School's Act no 84 of 1996* (SASA) with reference to school admission policies (Republic of South Africa RSA, 1996c) and *The National Education Policy Act no 27 of 1996* (NEPA) (Republic of South Africa RSA, 1944b). These changes enabled learners to migrate from one school to another in a legitimate manner. According to Engelbrecht (2006) and Makoelle (2014), the transformation in South African education coincided with the movement towards inclusion in documents such as the Salamanca Statements of 1994 and those of the Dakar World Education Forum of 2000. These documents illustrate clearly that the transformation that took place in South Africa has, to a large degree, also been experienced worldwide.

Learner migration is therefore a worldwide phenomenon which also manifest in countries other than South Africa. In this regard Halsey (2009) confirms that rural communities globally experience an 'exodus' of youth in search for 'greener pastures'. In the United States of America (USA), learner migration is linked to school choice since immigrant populations depend heavily on public schools; thus, public schools have to develop different strategies for teaching learners with languages other than English and who have different cultures and customs (Spring, 2002).

With this in mind, Doyle and Feldman (2006) define school choice as the practice of allowing parents and learners to choose among the variety of schools available, a practice that has become widespread in many states and districts of the USA. According to these authors, in the early 1950s parents were given vouchers to purchase a formal education for their children at any school in the USA. The reason for this move was to improve public school education since public schools showed poor quality performance and lacked a competitive edge when compared to private schools. Salisbury and Tooley (2005), concur that a number of states have enacted school choice as a way to improve educational options for parents. Colvin (2004), maintains that the `No Child Left behind Act' (NCLB) of 2000 has been acting as a lever for school choice, school improvement and better educational opportunities for individual students. In Michigan, Plank and Dunbar (2004) found that NCLB was the `sharpest' instrument available for promoting school choice. Many urban school in Michigan school districts have adopted enrollment policies under which parents may enroll their children in any school.

In New Zealand, Ladd (2003) states that national policies give parents the opportunities to choose a school for their children. This is aimed at expanding opportunities for poor children, promoting innovation and increasing learner achievement. It enables more families to make a better match between the needs of their children and what the school has to offer. Choice programs have been introduced to cater for learners who cannot afford the cost of well-performing, so-called `middle class' schools, with high fees.

Ladd (2003), argues that the significance of school choice emerges from the understanding that one size does not fit all students. According to this viewpoint, learning is enhanced if parents have control over their children's schooling, either through a collective choice process which involves the administration of various schools or school choice and on choosing from diverse sets of schooling options or a combination of both. In several European countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland, school choice is a constitutional right at the community expense (Ladd, 2003).

Currently, South Africa is experiencing learner migration similar to the rest of the world. However, its' context differs due to the 'rainbow nation's' diversity of cultures. New educational policies have been designed to address the past inequalities and assure access to opportunity and participation by all in the education system (Neluvhola, 2017). Ndimande (2016), concurs that the post-apartheid government adopted the constitution (Republic of South Africa RSA, 1994a) to transform the long-standing inequalities of the nation. Learner migration in South Africa is the result of the implementation of an open school admission policy and the abolition of school zones (RSA, 1996a) which states that "*all South African learners are able to attend schools of their parent's choice without any restrictions*" (Litshani, 1998).

Mbokazi (2015), concurs that after the changing demographics of post-1994, South African parents from middle class communities moved their children to schools they perceived to be better resourced than the schools they were attending. Lancaster (2011), adds that black youth from township schools navigate spaces of the city in search for better schooling opportunities. Ntombela (2013), in turn, regard school choice as a measure used by parents and their children to attain equality and to exercise their rights.

Msila (2009), asserts that the ANC-led Government of National Unity created nine new province in South Africa in the 1990s for the smooth administration of the education system at national level. In all this nine provinces, schools experience learner migration. Sekete *et al.* (2001), are of the opinion that learner migration traditionally focused on labour migration and urbanization trends in response to socio-economic pressure, whilst little attention was given to learner migration in terms of education offered at school. Moreover, recent developments in education have shown that educational migration patterns are driven either by a lack of local access to educational opportunities, or by the motivation to gain access to educational opportunities that are perceived to be better than those offered by schools attended. According to Sekete *et al.* (2001) and Msila (2009), learner migration can take on various forms, namely:

- From township schools to other township schools.
- From informal settlement schools that have grown near towns or cities to township schools to which learners migrate to fill the space in township schools left by those that have moved to suburban schools.
- From rural schools to urban schools. Rural schools include farm schools in villages and small towns. Many parents seeking employment in cities feel that urban areas are better resourced, offering better opportunities for employment and schooling.

In this regard, Neluvhola (2007) adds that the migration of learners from township schools, which are predominantly black, to urban former Model C schools, that were predominantly white in the previous political dispensation, constitutes a major form of learner migration. Kruger (2002) emphasizes that migration is also rooted in poor matric results, the lack of discipline, low teacher morale, as well as other educational problems in some schools in South Africa which have led to a general drive or exodus of learners from schools across the country. This was confirmed by a study conducted by Neluvhola (2007) that revealed that better matric results, extra-curricular activities, discipline, respect and infrastructure in former Model C and independent schools constituted `pulling factors' from township schools to former Model C and independent schools in selected schools in Limpopo province.

Botha (2018), acknowledges that the ineffectiveness of a school culminates in poor outcomes of examination results. Hence, it leads to learner migration to schools that are perceived to develop learners' learning skills and knowledge more effectively. Maile (2004), as well as Bischoff and Koebe (2005) argue that learners migrate to the schools outside their neighborhoods in order to acquire knowledge and skills that will allow them to earn a living. It has also been known that ineffective leadership and poor management lead to total collapse of educative teaching which translate into learner migration (Botha, 2018; Neluvhola, 2007).

Another contributory factor to learner migration is urbanization. Neluvhola (2007) argues that increased urbanization of black families experienced in Limpopo province after the ANC government came into power and all apartheid laws were scrapped, including the Group Areas Act (Republic of South Africa RSA, 1944b), resulted in many black families moving to white suburbs. As a result, learners migrated to schools that had to open their doors to learners of all races. Sekete *et al.* (2001) and Lombard (2009) believe that learner migration is experienced in all the nine provinces of South Africa and relates to all ethnic sectors of South African population. This view is based on findings undertaken in Gauteng province.

In summary: The literature review revealed that learner migration is influenced by the following:
- Scholastic success (Sekete *et al.*, 2001).
- Examination results (Botha, 2018; Kruger, 2002).
- Market theories and choice theories (Maile, 2004).
- Legislation and quality education (Neluvhola, 2007;2017).
- Transformation in education (Lombard, 2007).
- Township youth cultivating their 'aspirational dispositions' (Lancaster, 2011).
- Commuting to quality schooling (Machard, 2014).
- Low achievement due to poor management (Mbokazi, 2015).

Against the background of the above information, there is a need to conduct in-depth research to minimize or curb learner migration as far as possible since it could have a disruptive influence on principals of schools, parents and learners. This study is significant because it highlights reasons for as well as challenges and benefits of learner migration in the South African education context.
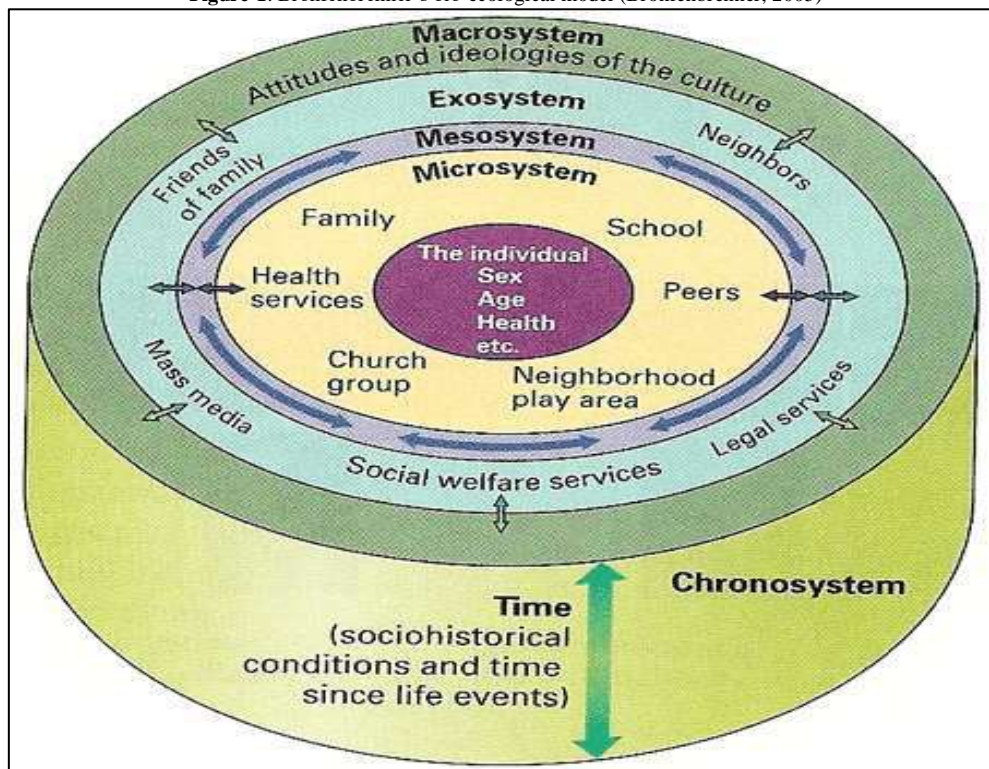
4. Theoretical Framework for the Study

A theoretical framework of a study is a theory that is used as a structural basis which underpins research (Ben-David, 2011). Dreyer (2018), defines a theoretical framework as a basis for making connections between new research and existing theory. In this study, the researchers explore Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model from 1979 as theoretical framework that can be used to understand the phenomenon. This theory is based on his ecological model which provides an academic base for this study and explains how the individual child is influenced by and interrelates with the systems of his/her environments. The child is therefore studied in the context of development, which lies within the context of the family which, in turn, lies within the context of the community (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;2005; Mischo, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory is relevant to learner migration since it shows the importance of acknowledging that the various intertwined environments influence learners to migrate from one school to the other. In this study, various influences of the ecological-model and the relevance of different aspects at each environment surrounding the child are related to learner migration to eventually arrive at recommendations in terms of the phenomenon of learner migration in South Africa.

This framework enables us to gain an understanding of how various levels of environments, namely the microsystem, the exosystem and macrosystem influence learner migration. Although this model was intended to focus on factors that affect the development of children according to certain spheres which surround the child, it is applicable to contextualize learner migration.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model is not only used to explain the reasons for learner migration at various levels (or spheres) that surround the developing child during the child's development, but also to assist in planning intervention strategies that can be used to minimize learner migration.

Figure-1. Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005)

The innermost layer represented in Bronfenbrenner's bio- ecological model, called the microsystem, is the closest environment which surrounds the developing child and influences him/her directly. For the purpose of this study it would refer to factors that directly relate to affecting learner migration. It comprises, inter-alia, the home and the school where the child spends most of his/her time. The so-called mesosystem portrays interaction between components of the microsystem. The second level of the model is the exosystem environment, which surrounds the microsystem. It influences the child in a more indirect manner. The system consists of, inter alia, the School Governing Body, the Circuit offices and District offices of the Department and the Provincial Department of Basic Education. The outermost level of the model is known as the macrosystem which comprises of cultural general values, customs and laws. In this study acts and laws in the macrosystem that influence learner migration are also particularly relevant.

Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory is beneficial in providing insight into various factors that play a role in the growth and development of a learner. The latter would include phenomena such as learner migration, which constitutes a major change in the life of a learner. Viewing learner migration from the perspective of the bio-ecological model acknowledges that different environments and their interrelationships would influence learner migration.

The bio-ecological model shows that an individual's interrelated surroundings at the micro-, exo- and macrosystem level offers a meaningful framework for interrogating learner migration in terms of interlinked social strata. The components of especially the microsystem, which have significant and direct influence on the learner as a result of its powerful mesosystemic action between its components, including the family at home, the school, peers, the neighborhood and the church, could play a significant role in effecting learner migration. The microsystem is, however, also linked with the exo- and macrosystems. It could therefore be said that all the spherical systems of Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model would bear relevance to the phenomenon of learner migration, enabling the researchers to obtain a more holistic view on this issue. The chronosystem which denotes prominent internal and exchanges in the life of the learner also has the possibility of playing a key role in terms of learner migration.

5. Research Methodology
5.1. Research Design
In this study the researchers employ the qualitative approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the root causes of the problematic issues of learner migration. Qualitative research involves the study, use and collection of a variety of empirical methods such as observation, personal experiences, case studies, life history and interviews (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Flyvbjerg (2006), describe the case study as a method that "*can close in*" on real life situations. A multiple case study was used since views from relevant participants associated with one school in each province (which constitute a case study) are obtained. Furthermore, a case study tests theory against lived reality and enable the voices of the participants to be heard (Mendaglio, 2003).

The researchers wishes to convey the analyzed messages from people who have either experienced learner migration directly or who have dealt with affected parties in each province who have experienced learner migration before.

Data was collected from participants using semi-structured individual interviews with principals from public secondary schools and from EMIS-officers in each of the nine provinces. In addition, focus group interviews were conducted with parents and learners. Due to some logistical constraints a focus group interview for parents and learners were conducted in only four provinces. The use of these methods allowed for triangulation which contributed to reliability and validity of the study. Some of the questions raised during the interviews were (Cohen and Morris, 2011):

- What are your reasons for migrating from your previous school?
- What do you think are the main reasons for learners migrating from your school?
- Do you know which schools in your province experience the highest learner migration rate?
- Can you explain why you decided to let your child leave the township or neighborhood secondary school to enroll him/her at the present school?

5.2. Population and Sampling

The methods of sampling which the researchers employed was purposive sampling. This method is most often the most appropriate method for selecting participants from the population if in-depth knowledge of participants is required (Dreyer, 2018). In the current study a sample was drawn from secondary schools that have experienced migration of learners: the principals, the learners who migrated to such schools and the parents of these learners. The researchers also approached the Department of Education (DoE) to gain assistance from EMIS-officers who enabled the researchers to identify information-rich schools in each province. In some provinces a list was sent to the researchers while in others, names of the schools were suggested. The researchers contacted the EMIS-officers from which list were obtained and requested them to suggest specific schools. The researchers then purposefully selected a school from each province based on logistical reasons. The total sample of 50 (n=50) were made up as follows:

- One secondary school principal per province to which large numbers of learners have migrated from each of the nine provinces of South Africa (n=9).
- One EMIS-officer from each of the nine provinces (n=9).
- Four parents and four learners from schools in four provinces. These participants were selected with the help of the secretaries who provided the names of the parents and their respective children who, according to them, would be most suitable in terms of providing information (n=4x8=32).

Codes were allocated to each participant to ensure anonymity of the participants. Table 1 below gives a summary of the sample and the respective codes.

Table-1. Participants and their respective codes

Province	Principals	EMIS-officers	Parents	Learners
Gauteng	G-Pr1	G-E1	G-P1 to G-P4	G-L1 to G-L4
North-West	NW-Pr1	NW-E1	NW-P1 to NW-P4	NW-L1 to NW-L4
Limpopo	L-Pr1	L-E1	L-P1 to L-P4	L-L1 to L-L4
Mpumalanga	M-Pr1	M-E1	M-P1 to M-P4	M-L1 to M-L4
Free State	FS-Pr1	FS-E1	-	-
KwaZulu-Natal	KN-Pr1	KN-E1	-	-
Eastern Cape	EC-Pr1	EC-E1	-	-
Northern Cape	NC-Pr1	NC-E1	-	-
Western Cape	WC-Pr1	WC-E1	-	-
Total (n=50)	9	9	16	16

5.3. Data Collection Methods

The methods deployed in this study were a literature study, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations. Each method is discussed below. The researchers have chosen one secondary school for the pilot study in one selected province. The purpose of the pilot study was to conduct a feasibility study that would help the researchers to execute the process of research. It enabled them to refine the research problem, test the viability of research and familiarize themselves with the field of the study. After permission was granted, the individual interviews were conducted in one secondary school in each province in which learner migration takes place. Permission was gained to interview the principal and the EMIS-officer in each of the nine provinces as well as parents and learners in four selected provinces.

5.3.1. Literature Study

According to Mouton (2003) a literature study is aimed at reviewing a body of knowledge concerning a phenomenon. The literature study revealed an appropriate theoretical framework for this study and informed the questions asked by interviewers. It also provided a valuable frame of reference with which information obtained during interviews could be related.

5.3.2. Interviews

The most common method of data collection in qualitative research is interviewing. The research interview helps researchers understand the closed life-world of the interviewee (Strauss and Myburg, 2000). The main purpose

of interviewing is to find out things that cannot be observed with the naked eye (Maharaj, 2005). The researchers believe that the interview was a suitable tool to collect information for this current study. The principals, parents and the learner's voices could be heard explaining their reasons for migrating and articulating their views of their experiences of learner migration. In the same vein the researchers are aware that interviews are time consuming and that sometimes the interviewee may not be willing to open up. Semi-structured interviews were used. Three different kinds of questions are relevant in terms of semi-structured interviews, namely:

- Main questions: The researcher prepares a handful of main questions which guide the conversation.
- Probes: When responses lack sufficient detail or depth of clarity, the interviewer asks a probing questions to complete or clarify to an answer, or to obtain explanatory examples and evidence.
- Follow-up questions: These questions pursue the implications of answers to the main questions.

The researchers selected this method for this study because predetermined questions were deemed necessary to ascertain that relevant information is obtained and that probing questions and follow–up questions are asked to engage participants in giving reasons for migration from their former schools to their present school. Two types of semi-structured interviews were employed for this study, namely semi-structured focus group interviews and in-depth semi-structured individual interviews. Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with parents and learners in selected provinces, while individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected principals of schools because they were be able to clarify issues of learner migrations in detail as they deal with admissions of these learners on yearly basis. Telephonic interviews were conducted in some of the provinces due to logistical reasons.

5.3.3. Observations

Observation was used to complement the face to face interviews in in Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and North West Province. Observation used during this study would not qualify as observation in the true sense during which the observer either "*focused on situations in which the observer has no control over the behaviour in question, and plays an unobserved, passive and non- intrusive role in the research situation*" (Lee, 2000) or participant observation where the observer becomes one of the group (De Vos *et al.*, 2005).

In this study, the researchers were able personally to visit and observe participants during interviews in four provinces, namely; Gauteng, Limpopo, Mpumalanga and Northwest. In the process of collecting data using observation, the researchers fully adhered to the recommendation made by De Vos *et al.* (2005) as well as Leedy and Ormord (2005) in terms of traditional observations in research, namely that observations should be documented carefully.

5.4. Data Presentation and Analysis

Puttergill (2013) describes qualitative analysis as the meaning attributed to a social phenomenon, while Johnson and Christensen (2004) point out that in qualitative research, the researcher use data analysis to develop a deeper understanding of their research topic. In this study the raw data which consisted of transcripts of interview and field notes were arranged to reveal manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships (Mouton, 2003) which were transcribed to provide a complete record of discussions. The researchers analyzed the content of the discussion using Tech's method as outlined by Babbie and Mouton (2004), Cohen and Morris (2011) as well as (Cresswell, 2014), namely:

- The researchers reads through all transcripts and jots down ideas as they come to mind.
- The best interviews are selected and the meaning of each piece of information noted in the margin. This step was not applied since all the interviews were required so that each province could find representation.
- A list of all topics are made and similar topics are clustered together.
- Topics are abbreviated by means of codes and these codes written next to each segment of data in the transcribed interview.
- Categories were formed by grouping topics together and determining the relationships between categories.

The qualitative research approach encourages inductive reasoning when it comes to data contact analysis procedure (McMillan and Schumacher, 2014). In this study, inductive reason was applied to isolate themes that have direct bearing on the migration of learners as regard to EMIS-officers, principals, parents and learners. Inductive reasoning create an environment that individuals can be interviewed and studied so that generalization can be formed. A total sample of 50 participants were interviewed who freely expressed themselves in connection with learner migration. The content analysis allows the findings to surface from data. Data interpretation affords the researcher an opportunity to step back and reflect on the topic being researched. These formed the findings in terms of learner migration in South Africa.

6. Ethical Considerations

Since research ethics is one of the important aspects in the research process because it provides guidelines that guard against harmful effects of research (Dreyer, 2018). The researchers undertook measures to obtain permission from the relevant Departments of Education and from participants. This ensured that the participants' confidentiality and anonymity were protected during their participation in the study, while in all cases written and verbal consent was obtained. The researchers respected the lives of the participants by honoring their privacy, protecting their identity, treating them with respect and by not violating their human rights are protected at all costs as enshrined in the constitution of South Africa (Republic of South Africa RSA, 1994a).

For the purpose of this study, the following ethical issues related to human rights were relevant and were explained to interviewees from whom consent was requested (Babbie and Mouton, 2004; De Vos et al., 2005; Du Plooy, 2000):

- Informed consent: The participants were in advance given adequate information on the goal of the investigation and the procedures which would be followed during the study. Informed consent ensures accurate and complete information. In this study, consent was obtained from the principals, parents, learners and EMIS-officials after the provincial Departments authorized the empirical research.
- No harm to participants: Since participants should never be harmed or stressed during any research, irrespective of whether they agree to partake in the research or not, the researchers guarded against questions that could have psychological implications, such as, personal circumstances that are related to the affordability of paying high fees in independent schools.
- Confidentiality and anonymity: The researcher assured the participants that their right to anonymity would be respected. No names were used. Different letters of the alphabet were used to identify the views held by EMIS-officers, principals, parents and learners.

7. Interpretation of the Research Findings

A key purpose of this study was to establish the reasons which led to learner migration in South Africa and to relate these to the findings to Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model. This allows for a holistic view and an in-depth understanding of the etiology of learner migration in order to provide recommendations to address potential problems that should be prevented from the phenomenon of migrations. Attention is also paid to the outcomes resulting from learner migration and the challenges associated with it. Discussions of findings from interviews of EMIS- officers, principals, parents and learners is provided and supported by statements from interviews. Pseudonyms were used for all respondents.

The data is presented by discussing overall themes which emerged from an analysis of interviews with EMIS-officers, principals of schools, parents and learners. The overall themes are followed by the reasons for learner migration and challenges relating to learner migration. As mentioned, the data collected mainly centered around reasons for learner migration as it is closely related to the main research question, namely: How can the problem of learner migration be addressed and managed?

The analysis of data has been integrated into Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory so that a holistic perspective on the reasons for learner migration can be presented in terms of the micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystem to address the issue of migration in a comprehensive manner. This holistic base can serve as a frame of reference for further studies, either qualitatively or quantitatively.

Practices and experiences related to learner migration were shared by interviewees from the nine provinces of South Africa. Two major themes emerged from the interviews and are contextualized in more detail in the next section. The two major themes are the complexity of learner migration and the highly emotive nature of the issue of learner migration.

7.1. The Complexity of the Phenomenon of Learner Migration

The complexity of the phenomenon of learner migration becomes apparent if one considers the extensive scope that it entails. Not only does learner migration relate to various reasons that initiate it, it also includes various challenges experienced by principals and EMIS-officers, parents and learners.

The complexity of the phenomenon of learner migration covers different spheres. It ranges from principals' managerial tasks, parental interaction with schools, positive and negative experiences of EMIS-officers and learners, as well as the problematic administrative role of principals when planning for the forthcoming year. In terms of the latter, learner migration becomes extremely complex since schools receive large numbers of application forms from parents whose children migrate from feeder schools ranging from schools situated in close proximity to schools far away beyond the borders of feeder areas. Principals are challenged to come up with strategies to handle the mammoth task of learner migration

7.2. The Highly Emotive Nature of Learner of the Phenomenon of Learner Migration

Interviews evoked strong emotions of fear, anger, anxiety, insecurity and joy. Principals seemed particularly appreciative of the opportunity that the interviews gave them to demonstrate positive emotions concerning the effective management systems of their schools, which made their schools known as 'better' performing schools which drew learner migrators from various provinces of South Africa . The principals' pleasure and satisfaction was expressed by facial expressions and by tone of voice when they talked about their schools' reputation for good performance. Learners also displayed positive emotions of satisfaction when referring to their choice of school and subjects selected from the curricular menu in terms of envisaged careers.

Mixed emotions were displayed during interviews. Some parents, for example, showed satisfaction pertaining to issues such as regular meetings held at schools to which their children had migrated, which afforded them the opportunity to meet teachers and share ideas concerning their children's formal education. Others expressed their frustration due to their inability to assist their children with homework since they have migrated to their new schools.

8. Discussion and Analysis of the Findings

The migration of learners from one school to the other is the result of so-called 'pushing' - and 'pulling' factors. Migration theorists such as Dovlo (2003) and El-Khawas (2004) advance the 'push-and-pull-factor' theory to explain the migrations. Pushing factors refer to hostile conditions that compel learners to leave their schools and seek admission in other schools, while pulling factors are the attractive conditions in receiving schools that draw learners. The following reasons emerged from the study as main reasons why learner migration, involving both pushing and pulling factors, are taking place on such a large scale in South African schools:

8.1. Changes in Legislative Frameworks and Policies

The South African Education system reform policies should be viewed in the context of international emerging trends with regard to education policies. Section 5 of the South African Schools Act (SASA) of 1996 (Republic of South Africa RSA, 1996c) states clearly that all public schools are required by law to admit learners and serve their educational requirements without unfairly discrimination. Although there exists such a policy, the schools use a variety of criteria to avoid admission in their schools. Problems associated with admission are, inter alia, that Christian private schools only allows learners who are from Christian families, while some public schools in turn only admit learners who are in the same suburb or area as the school. This problem is even worse when taking into account the reality that most parents from rural areas violate rules by looking for a guardian for their children who stays in the vicinity. In the same breath one can view these criteria as a silent restriction by the schools.

One of the principals (KN-Pr1) interviewed stated: *The policy for admissions is the problem. Parents take their children and send them to stay with families where they think are better schools, so the number of our learners decrease all the time*, while the EMIS-officer of another province (NW-E1) complained: *Although policies exits to prevent this, some schools do not want to admit learners from their feeding area, using excuses such as religion and language to not admit learners.*

8.2. Effective School Management and Leadership

The importance of effective school management in this process cannot be emphasized enough. It is assumed that the School Governing Body (SGB) and School Management Team (SMT) are recognized structures which should assist the principal in running the school. It is through these joint efforts that principals guide the teachers and learners in establishing a culture of teaching and learning (Engelbrecht, 2006). Poor school management is manifested in lack of discipline and poor learner performance. In the same breath good school management is the result of implementation of good disciplinary practice and effective leadership of the principal. This can be regard as a pulling factor as learners migrate to schools with effective school management systems with good discipline and improved results. One of the parents (L-P2) summarized this when stated: *I took my child from this one school because the principal cannot run the school; there are no teaching, the teachers sit around and the principal fails to manage them.*

Effective leadership from principals can be related to their approachability and availability that benefit both staff and learners. Effective leadership from principals is manifested in effective schools. An effective leader also provide opportunities for staff development that enables teachers to perform beyond their call of duty. This can be regard as a pulling factor as learners migrate to schools with effective school leaders, again resulting in good discipline and improved results. Another parent (G-P3) said in this regard: *The majority of Grade 12 learners failed last year, so there is no culture of learning in the school due to poor leadership, this is why I took my child from this school.* A learner form the same province (G-L1) added: *I want to be in a school with good results, my future depends on this; this is why I decided to leave this school. The principals cannot lead and we feel and see it every day.*

8.3. The Implementation of Good Disciplinary Practices

Good disciplinary practices contribute to learner migration. In this study it was indicated that a school with a well-developed disciplinary policy, endorsed and implemented by the principal and staff who discipline learners, is regarded as a good and effective school. This factor is considered as the moral compass of the school and can therefore be regarded as a pulling factor as it prompts learner migration. The results of the findings show that in all the provinces, learner migration is indeed influenced by the lack of proper discipline and a deterioration of moral values. This aspect is one of the major pushing factors with regard to learner migration.

One of the principals (WC-Pr1) of an effective school in a province with the best matriculation results in the country stated clearly: *Discipline is the beginning and the end at my school. Without discipline, you cannot achieve good results, and that is what we aim for.* The EMIS-officer (L-E1) from another province with one of the poorest matriculation results in the country confirmed this when he agreed with the principal: *The biggest problem in schools in my province is a lack of discipline; not only from learners but also from teachers, it all start with the principal. If we do not improve this, our results will not improve; we lose learners to other provinces due to this.* One learner (L-L2) from the same province said unconditionally: *I have left my old school because there was no rules and regulations; everyone do what they want to and the principal does not even care.*

8.4. Improved Formal Education

This aspect goes hand in hand with effective school leadership and management and they are indeed two sides of the same coin. The study revealed that former Model C schools as well as independent and private schools offers a good curricula that allows learners many career opportunities. Furthermore, the use of English as medium of

instructions is considered as another contributing – or pulling factor for learner migration as learners will be conversant with the Queen's language. Over and above this pulling factor, good Grade 12 results constitute the bedrock on which the road to tertiary institution is constructed.

From the empirical investigation it became evident that good matric results play a prominent role in learner migration and act as an important pulling factor with regard to learner migration. One principal (L-Pr1) said: *If you have good teachers, like we do, learners will not leave the school as they know good teaching and good education are they keys to their future,* while one of the parents (LP-3) from the same province reiterate: *Our children prefer to be teach in English; I will therefore send my child to a school where he is taught in English.* The EMIS-officer (L-E1) from the same province responded on this issue as follows: *We lose learners to other provinces; they prefer to attend a school where they know there are excellent teaching and learning, and who can blame them for that?* One of the learners (L-P3) from the same province concluded: *I will go to as school where I know I will get good education, even if I have to travel very far to get there and if it cost my parents more; they know just as good as I do how important a good school is for me.*

8.5. Structural Educational Changes

From this study it is evident that learner migration is a serious challenge to some schools. Learner migration and the consequent decrease in learner numbers result in the merging of schools which is a common practice in some provinces. One of the principals interviewed (NW-P2) stated unambiguously: *Our learner numbers had decreased over the years a lot; this resulted that we had to merge with the school next door. Now we lose even more because of this issue.* One of the learners (M-L3) stated: *When our school merged with another school, everything got worse. I was not prepared for this and decided to leave the school. Luckily my parents support me all the way.* It became clear from the study that the factor of structural educational changes acts as a pushing factor with regard to learner migration as the merging of schools result in learners leaving the school to attend another school.

8.6. School Infrastructure

The infrastructure of most schools in rural areas and in townships range from poor to non-existent. Schools, specifically in rural communities, are dilapidated and lack basic services such as sanitation. It is therefore no surprise that a shortage of infrastructure serves as a pushing factor by encouraging learners to migrate to schools that have better infrastructure and sanitation.

One of the principals interviewed (G-Pr1) emphasized: *learners come to my school just because we have toilets, labs and a nice looking garden. They are not prepared anymore to stay at a school without a proper infrastructure such as well-maintained buildings,* while the EMIS-officer (G-E1) of the same province concluded: *We are lucky in our province, the infra-structure of our schools are still generally OK and we need to keep it as such. Learners migrate from other nearby provinces to our schools because they know we have better schools, and we appreciate that.* One of the learners (NW-L2) shared this sentiment: *My former school did not even has decent toilets and bathrooms. There are no trees, so we sit in the sun the whole day as some classrooms do not have enough space for all of us. In some classes we are more than 60 kids, we can't even hear what the teacher try to say.* Another learner (L-L3) complained about them lack of labs: *I like sciences and biology, but we don't have any labs. There are no equipment and the teacher is not able to demonstrate anything to us. I wish I can leave this school, but I can't.*

8.7. Socio-Economic Factors

It would be very difficult to discuss learner migration in South Africa without contextualizing it in the previous political dispensation. Due to racial segregation mainly blacks were confined to rural areas. This scenario has, however, changed rapidly in recent year. This can be seen in changes to urbanization, status, prestige and improved public transport. Urbanization is experienced where parents and their children are moving to urban areas. Learners from empowered families are able to utilize public transport and get admission in urban schools while these from poor families remain in rural schools. The distance from home to work is also decreased. Prestige and status also plays an important role in learner migration. These are all pushing factors with regard to learner migration.

One of the parents (M-P4) addressed the concern of the majority of parents in his province as follows: *I am not prepared that my child attends a `black-only' school; this reminds me of the Apartheid days. I am lucky, because I can afford to put my child in a hostel in a former Model C school. I know not all parents can afford this, but this is non-negotiable to us.* The son of this parent (M-L3) agrees with his father: *I am in a hostel, but a lot of my friend moved to the city; this means they can also now attend this school, and it is so different from my old school. We are taught in English and I feel part of the new generation of learners.*

8.8. A Safe School Environment

This pulling factor goes hand in hand with socio-economic factors. The interviews established the view that a safe school environment that is conducive for teaching and learning and good accommodation for learners translate into a pulling factor for learner migration. Principals are taking precautionary measures to ensure the safety of learners at all times when crime, including rape on school premises, has escalated to unacceptable high levels.

One of the parents (M-P2) said: *Safety is no the number one priority for me; even more important than good education. But these two go together anyway. If I know my daughter is safe, I sleep well at nights. She did not feel safe at her former schools. I am so glad we moved her here.* One EMIS-officer (EC-E1) said in this regard: *One of our biggest challenges in this province is to make our schools safe again. Problems range from drugs, weapons at*

school, alcohol and gangs operating in schools. We are losing learners daily as they prefer to go to schools in areas with less crime. A learner (NW-L1) concluded: *For the first time in my life I feel safe at school now I can focus on what I am here for: to get the education that will enable me to attend university.*

8.9. Poor Learner Performance

The interviews with parents and learners from all the participating provinces revealed that learners' poor performance constitutes a driving force of learner migration. Learners migrate from schools without a culture of teaching and learning.

One of the principals (FS-Pr1) stated in this regard: *It happens more and more that parents take their children out of my school because their results are not good enough, even when it is sometimes their own fault. In this process, we lose a lot of learners that negatively influence the school.* It is, however, not always the fault of the school when a learner do not progress well. One learner (L-L1) who migrated to another school after he failed one grade said: *The problem was not with me. The teacher did not do anything in class. Since I moved to the new school, my marks increased a lot. I wish all my friends could join me in my new school.* A parent agreed: *I wish I had change school for my child a few years ago. From the time that he entered the new school, everything changed. She is now happy and her marks show it; it had even doubled in some subjects. I am so glad for her sake.*

9. Recommendations from the Study

From the findings above, it seems that are very relevant and legitimate pushing and pulling factors in the South African that play a role in learner migration. With these in mind, the following recommendations can be made that derived from this study:

- The SMTs of schools where learner migration is experienced in large numbers should be reskilled to enable them to address this problem.
- It is challenging to operate an institution on a tight budget. The Department of Basic Education (DoBE) should be hands on in the improvement of teaching and learning practices as well as infrastructure and resources of schools in this situation.
- The Apartheid resources backlog of poor infrastructure in many schools in various provinces should be improved.
- Discipline is a serious challenge in schools where migration is experienced. It is recommended that a policy be developed in line with the departmental policy that will promote discipline in all schools. The policy should be communicated to different stakeholders, while the SMT and SGB should implement, manage and monitor the policy.

10. Avenues for Future Research

The study focuses on learner migration, which has become quite common in South Africa, in terms of migration from secondary schools in rural areas to former model C and independent secondary schools. The research is limited since it focused on selected secondary schools only. The information contained in this study could, however, assist research that focuses on learner migration to primary schools of South Africa's provinces.

Detailed nationwide research on learner migration which includes longitudinal studies conducted by a reputable research institution is recommended. Research which focuses specifically on the leadership and management skills of principals who draw learners to their schools would be especially beneficial in improving training programmes for principals.

11. Conclusion

This study has shown that the phenomenon of learner migration can only be understood if it is considered holistically. The overall solution in addressing the problem of learner migration is collaboration between government, provincial Departments of Education, business companies, non-governmental organizations, educational institutions, principals and teachers, influential people in communities, parents, and learners, and possibly other stakeholders who as yet remain unidentified.

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