



# Integration of Skilled Immigrants into the Hospitality Sector in South Africa: An Opportunity Blind spot?

Lyne Sarah Obindjah Bayari  
Faculty of Business and Management Sciences  
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa  
Email: lobindja@yahoo.fr

Chux Gervase Iwu\*  
Faculty of Business and Management Sciences  
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa  
Email: iwuc@cput.ac.za

Corresponding author\*

## Abstract

Given the dearth of skilled professionals in South Africa, immigrants present opportunities for South African firms which have been in dire need of skilled workforce. South Africa continues to experience massive unemployment which currently sits at 26.7%. This begs the question: how do natives perceive skilled immigrants? Researches have barely looked at this question rather they have concentrated on reasons for scarce skills and the emergent political conundrums. This study brings some value especially against the backdrop of the increasing xenophobia and wanton attacks of African immigrants in South Africa. The hospitality industry is one that enjoys massive numbers of workforce - skilled and unskilled. So, this study examines the perception of employers of skilled immigrants and tries to understand whether they are valuable or not. This will help both practitioners and government to start examining other ways of curbing xenophobia within South African townships and possibly bring about new ways of looking at diversity within the workplace. The study is conducted using qualitative means. Data were collected through personalised interviews between the researchers and hospitality practitioners. Findings firstly reveal the significance of skilled workforce which often are available from immigrants. It must also be noted that African immigrants are happy to find work and are more likely to settle for lower wages. A major implication is that labour law applications may need some urgent review owing to what we suspect are its poor application in relation to African immigrants.

**Keywords:** Diversity, South Africa, Xenophobia, Skilled workforce, Hospitality industry

## Introduction

Since Marshall McLuhan introduced the concept global village in the 1960s to refer to a contracting world (Ya'u, 2005), its popularity has suggested that markets and trade are now commonly linked. Thus, globalisation encompasses the flow of labour from one nation to another, particularly in countries with a high demand for labour (Ilori, 2017). Over the past decades, people in developing countries have had to leave their home countries for a variety of reasons. In fact, both skilled and unskilled persons sojourn to developed economies for socio-economic and political reasons. Interestingly, these include the improvement of living conditions, the improvement of employment conditions and possibilities of high salary packages, the availability of functional infrastructures and basic facilities, as well as political security. Consequently, it is important for host countries, business leaders and natives to consider whether they can really benefit greatly from the skilled workforce, or whether they present unsolvable challenges. Thus, migration of both skilled and unskilled labour remains an essential, unavoidable and



often beneficial component for the socio-economic development of many countries (Ilori, 2017).

Increased globalisation is displayed in the cumulative diversity of the workforce in the labour market (Enoksen, 2016). For instance, the United States of America owes its competitive edge to a workforce that is endowed with a diversity of skills, relevant to meet to the various needs of the economy and to fully participate in civic life. In fact, many US companies continue to search for more skilled workers, especially in literacy and numeracy, together with those with more technical, interpersonal, and problem-solving skills (Modestino, 2016). With its lure of greener pastures, the US seems more attractive to those from developing countries. Thus, it is unsurprising that other developed countries are unsuccessful in attracting highly skilled persons from outside their nations (Mattes et al. 2000).

### **Problem Statement**

In Africa, South Africa's global posture as a country with the most progressive constitution continues to attract both skilled and unskilled persons from other parts of Africa including Europe and Asia. Owing to the gross absence of a skilled workforce, this influx seems welcome. This is because a major structural challenge to the growth of the South African economy is severe skills shortage (The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) 2010; Botha and Rasool, 2011). As far back as 2008, a Grant Thurston survey revealed shockingly that business growth in South Africa was threatened by the unavailability of a skilled workforce (Heyns and Luke, 2012). Also, in 2012, Mateus, Iwu and Allen-Ile reported that Lewis' (2002) view was that South Africa's deepening economic challenges was as a result of an insufficient pool of skilled people.

As buoyant as the South African economy seems in comparison to other African countries, and its continued attraction to other nationals, South Africa continues to experience high unemployment levels. The recent StatsSA's 2018 report suggests that the unemployment rate has remained almost unchanged at 26.7% (IOL Business Report, 2018). Therefore, we ask the following questions:

- What contributions do skilled immigrants bring to the socioeconomic development of the host nation?
- How do South African citizens and local organisations perceive skilled immigrants in the society?

The findings of this study will hopefully not only add value to cultural diversity practitioners by adding to their understanding of cultural diversity, but also deepen their theoretical research, assess the positive effects of migration and support businesses in revising their ways of dealing with diversity so as to eliminate any kind of cultural contentions in the workplace. The outcome of this research will thus possibly enable human resource managers of South African organisations to better know how and why to approach immigrants as potential employees.



## **Literature Review**

The current migration of the twenty-first century, experienced by many developed and developing countries, raises a major challenge for humanity and a key opportunity for global economic growth (Keith, 2014).

This section looks at various contributions that skilled immigrants make; the costs incurred through the integration of immigrants into local enterprises, and South African perspective on skilled immigrants.

### **Skilled immigrants' contributions to host societies**

The growth of labour mobility from one country to another is a remarkable instrument to faster economic adjustment of a nation. This mobility of labour is beneficial, especially when employed in a considerable manner (Zimmermann, 2014). According to the 2000 census data on the impact of immigrants on the American economy, nearly 70% of the growth of the scientific and technical workforce in the United States was created by immigrants (Mukherjee, 2014). Contemporary evidence can be seen in multinational firms such as Yahoo, ebay which were either established by immigrants or their offspring. Little wonder therefore that the United States of America arguably relies on foreign labour especially in the areas of science, finance, engineering and information technology.

### ***Innovation***

A skilled workforce generally indirectly stimulates innovation through positive spin-offs for other researchers, achieve a critical mass in specified research fields, and provide additional skills such as management and entrepreneurship (Zimmermann, 2014). Specifically, skilled immigrants are perceived to be extremely innovative in thinking outside the box and accelerating the pace of innovation (Collier, 2013). According to Prof Vivek Wadhwa of Duke University, skilled immigrants have boosted the US economy through innovation, with the creation of enterprises that realised \$ 52 billion in sales and were able to employ nearly 500,000 workers in 2005 (Mukherjee, 2014).

### ***Augmenting skills***

Skilled immigrants supplement unskilled natives' capacities, as they increase the productivity of unskilled workers (Collier, 2013). From time to time, a country may lack specific skills, probably because of brain drain, or simply because of the unavailability of indigenes to fill the various important disciplines that the nation is in dire need of. Consequently, many countries are now turning to selective immigration, which only applies to highly qualified and skilled immigrants with the skills needed to stimulate the economies of host countries. On the basis of this, Al Ariss et al. (2012) avow that brain drain will no longer be considered as an economic handicap for many countries, but as a radical factor of transformation in the labour markets for other highly developed economies.

### ***Demographic adjustment***

Ageing staff weaken the economy of a country because of not only their low fertility rates, but also their reduced work efficiency and productivity (Basso,



2015). Therefore, some countries with an aging population prefer to rely on the external recruitment of skilled youth to sustain their economies (Bloom et al. 2011). For instance, permanent immigration has enabled Russia, China and Italy to compensate for their temporary demographic imbalance that has caused a decline in birth rate and an increase in the mortality rate in the past (Collier, 2013,123).

In a world where the economy is dictated by knowledge, older staff are often sacrificed on the basis that they are old and unable to support creativity and innovation. Some surveys have found that old employees (over 60) are perceived as the most experienced, competent, reliable, and loyal people than younger workers (Bloom et al. 2011). The conundrum in economies with an aging population is that they often seek young talents from poor nations at the expense of the experience, knowledge and skills possessed by older workers. Often, this represents an institutional history that is discarded over time.

### ***Workforce diversity and organisational performance***

The diversity of the workforce makes it possible to increase the degree of organisational competitiveness. Several professional companies in the US have realised the importance of maintaining a diverse workforce that reflects the multiplicity of contemporary society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Okoro and Washington, 2012). Basically, organisations recruit workers who identify with the needs of their clients. Skilled immigrants have exceptional and incomparable strength that gives an organisation a competitive edge on the local market. However, their integration into local companies in the host country raises many resolvable challenges (Bloom *et al.*, 2011).

### ***Job creation***

Skilled immigrants make a substantial contribution to business start-ups, sales, income and employment in the United States (Fairlie and Lofstrom, 2015). The firms they set up have also provided employment to 'indigenous' Americans (Mukherjee, 2014). Essentially, small and medium-sized enterprises create new jobs in the economy and also represent a key source of innovation, an increase in domestic production and a decrease in poverty (Fairlie and Lofstrom, 2015). As a result, today, many countries around the world, like the United States, demand and consider entrepreneurship as a national priority.

### ***Anti-migration problems***

The integration of skilled immigrants into foreign societies generates anti-migration problems such as prejudice and discrimination. Skilled immigrants reduce the amount of resources for the native population, particularly in terms of job availability. Thus, they are subjected to anti-immigrant practices, whereby their qualifications are undervalued and most of them remain underemployed in the labour market (Delcampo et al. 2011).



## **South African perspective on skilled immigrants**

Immigration, during the apartheid system, was seen as a historically significant means of development throughout the Southern African region. The presence of lucrative minerals such as gold, diamond and other mineral resources has accelerated the inflow of immigrants into the nation (Ilori, 2017). The main source of immigration to South Africa was Western Europe, particularly from Great Britain, especially with the arrival of about 300,000 foreign nationals to the country between 1965 to 1975 (Mattes et al. 2000). Years later, foreign nationals from Asia and Africa (peripheral countries such as Lesotho, Mozambique, Swaziland, Botswana and Malawi) during the post-apartheid period (Ilori, 2017) arrived. The presence of skilled immigrants within the country has brought various problems and challenges, not only according to immigration policy and its implementation, but also according to the attitudes of nationals towards immigrants (Landau et al. 2005).

### ***Immigration Policy and implementation***

The most common reference to South Africa's immigrant labour policy is the Bantu Laws Amendment Act No 67 of 1964. This law regulated the movement of skilled 'foreign' nationals to South Africa. Therefore, selected immigrants were only allowed in the country to work in the mining and agricultural sectors, which made conditions of entry in the country more severe and restrictive for other forms of migration (Tati, 2008). Before the independence in 1994, immigration to South Africa was a tenuous process which helped to fill skill gaps in the areas of finance, engineering and information technology. This gave rise to various work permits to qualified professionals (Segal et al. 2010).

### ***Contributions of immigrants***

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, South Africa has received a considerable number of professional and skilled immigrants from some African countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, Malawi, Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Angola. According to Ilori (2017), the skilled labour has contributed to the country's economic transformation. Notable among these is their contribution in establishing small and medium-sized enterprises such as wholesalers, retail trade, cybercafés, imports and exports, training and consulting, fashion and sewing, nightclubs, textile shops and auto mechanics.

Skilled immigrants have also filled the gaps created by the emigration of professional workers or the shortcomings in the education system and training. In this way, they play an important role in the economic growth and development of the country (Mattes et al. 2000). Collier (2013) also notes that skilled immigrants create jobs not only for themselves, but also for nationals.

According to a former president of South Africa, Mr Thabo Mbeki, foreign nationals bring with them significant skills that the country requires. They are creative and endowed with entrepreneurial spirit (Crush, 2001). Thus, without their superior technical skills, their talent and skills required in certain



occupations, the exploitation and development of the country's economy would be severely hampered (Mattes et al. 2000).

### ***South Africans perception of skilled immigrants***

Although skilled immigrants represent an added value for the socio-economic development of South Africa, most natives disapprove of their presence in the country and perpetuate negative stereotypes to express their opinions toward them, which has led to xenophobia and racism practices (Danson and McDonald, 2000). Common stereotypes include 'job stealers' (Jacobs, 2008), 'criminals' (Böhmke and Jearey-graham, 2013), and 'illegals' (Dodson, 2010). Perhaps these characterizations flow from the International Labour Organisations' (ILO) characterization of the migrant as desperate, dangerous and dirty (ILO, 2006).

## **Methodology**

### *Data collection tool*

The study followed the qualitative method of collecting data using semi-structured interviews and a storytelling approach. The qualitative approach was considered to be the appropriate method, as it helps to understand and comprehend complex issues through in-depth narratives, explanations and reflections (Monette et al. 2014). A storytelling approach helps the researcher in gathering valid and reliable data, relevant to the research objectives and provide the researcher with profound insight into the research problem (East et al. 2010). Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow participants some freedom to freely discuss something of interest to them (Ally, 2009).

### *Population and sample*

The target population for this research consisted of immigrants and South Africans working in the hospitality sector in Cape Town. Although snowball and convenience sampling methods were initially applied in this study owing to their capacity to manage sensitive issues (Bryman, 2004; Zhang, 2014; Stead and Struwig, 2013), the idea of randomly sampling participants was tested in this study so as to (1) weaken any likelihood of bias on the part of the researcher in selecting participants (Shenton, 2004); and (2) ensure that the sample was reasonably representative (Bouman and Atkinson, 1995).

Notwithstanding this, we were equally aware of the major danger of random sampling in qualitative research which is the possibility of "a quiet, uncooperative individual" (Shenton, 2004) being selected. Fortunately, for this study, all the participants voluntarily consented to the interview and freely offered their opinions.

Data was essentially collected from a sample of 25 people (18 immigrants, 3 business owners and 4 South African citizens) owing to data saturation (Du Plooy-Cilliers et al. 2014). The interviews were tape-recorded allowing ample opportunity for proper engagement between the interviewer and interviewee (Ally, 2009).



### *Method of Data Analysis*

Data analysis was realised through data coding. This is a method that basically categorises data by developing themes that include specific words, segment of phrases from all the participants' transcript, which relates to a single idea (Fox and Saheed, 2007). Seeing the similarities of the responses from the transcripts enabled the researchers to categorise them for practical analysis (Stead and Struwig, 2013). This type of coding technique is known as content analysis, which is concerned with the assembly and analysis of textual content, or messages such as words and themes (Stead and Struwig, 2013).

### *Ethical considerations of the study*

During data collection, the researchers adhered to strict ethical standards. Firstly, consent was obtained from the organisations whose staff participated in the study. Subsequently, we requested individual consent from the participants. In negotiating this, the participants were agreeable to non-disclosure of their identities. The participants were also advised that their participation was voluntary and therefore they were at liberty to withdraw at any time and or refuse to answer any question they were not comfortable with. Basically, good ethical research practice allows for better shared experiences between a researcher and his or her subjects (Burnham, Lutz, Grant and Layton-Henry, 2008) and even goes as far as protecting both the subject and the researcher (Tomaseli, 2018).

### **Presentation and Discussion of Results**

This section provides the responses of nationals, business owners and immigrants regarding the contributions of immigrants to local organisations.

### **Abbreviations**

The following is a list of abbreviations used in our presentation.

**Table 1:** Abbreviations and meanings

| Figures                        | Meaning  |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <b>O1 to O3</b>                | Owner number 1 to 3  |
| <b>I1 to I18</b>               | Immigrant number 1 to 18   |
| <b>N1 to N4</b>                | Nationals (South African citizens) number 1 to 4                   |
| <b><u>Underlined words</u></b> | Words that matter the most   |
| <b>Ellipsis [...]</b>          | Indicates words omitted because irrelevant to the point being made |



**Table 2:** Participants' demographics

| PARTICIPANTS      | GENDER M/F | AGE | COUNTRY OF ORIGIN | MARITAL STATUS M/S | WORKPLACE                         | LEVEL OF EDUCATION/ EXPERIENCE  | OCCUPATION                           | DURATION OF WORK IN SA | DURATION IN SA |
|-------------------|------------|-----|-------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------|
| <b>IMMIGRANTS</b> |            |     |                   |                    |                                   |   |                                      |                        |                |
| I1                | F          | 31  | Germany           | M                  | Safari Online                     | Matric  | Bookkeeper                           | 8 years                | 10 years       |
| I2                | F          | 28  | Burundi           | S                  | Tsogo sun Southern Cullinan Hotel | Matric  | Room service assistant               | 5 Years                | 12 years       |
| I3                | M          | 31  | Congo DRC         | M                  | God's Army coffee shop            | Bachelor: IT & ND: HRM  | Graphic Designer & Web Administrator | 3 months               | 10 years       |
| I4                | M          | 27  | Kenya             | S                  | God's Army coffee shop            | Matric + Financial Management short courses                                   | Manager                              | 2 years                | 7 years        |
| I5                | M          | 35  | Gabon             | S                  | Domino's Pizza                    | ND: Mechatronics  | Motor driver                         | 2 years                | 8 years        |
| I6                | F          | 33  | Germany           | M                  | Lufthansa In Touch                | MBA   | Customer service Manager             | 4 years                | 9 years        |
| I7                | F          | 27  | Italy             | M                  | Yovita Café                       | ND: Graphic Design + hospitality service experience                           | Manager                              | 4 Years                | 5 years        |
| I8                | F          | 31  | Gabon             | M                  | Go Tourism                        | BTech: Tourism and Hospitality Management + 2 years' Experience in the sector | Senior Consultant                    | 5 years                | 11 years       |
| I9                | M          | 24  | Eritrea           | S                  | Maharaj Hotel                     | Matric + experience in customer service and Business management               | Waiter & Bar Tender                  | 9 months               | 9 years        |
| I10               | F          | 26  | Congo DRC         | S                  | KAUAI                             | Matric + work experience in cyber   | Casher                               | 1 year                 | 2,5 years      |



|                  |   |    |           |   |                         |   |  |          |          |
|------------------|---|----|-----------|---|-------------------------|---|--|----------|----------|
|                  |   |    |           |   |                         | café and worked as secretary  |  |          |          |
| I11              | F | 32 | Gabon     | S | Domino's Pizza          | BTech: Anatomy and physiology + health & safety management + project Management short courses                     | Assistant Manager                        | 2 years  | 9 years  |
| I12              | M | 31 | Congo DRC | S | Fraiche Ayres           | Bachelor: Culinary artistic + 6 years' experience as a Chef   | Sous Chef                                | 6 months | 7 years  |
| I13              | F | 31 | Kenya     | M | Mindpearl               | Bachelor: Foreign education and international relations + Diploma: IT+ French language qualification              | Ranked call Customer sales and service   | 5 Years  | 5 years  |
| I14              | M | 29 | Gabon     | S | Mindpearl               | ND: Management + Experience in a Book store company   | Customer sale and service representative | 4 years  | 7 years  |
| I15              | F | 27 | Gabon     | S | Go Tourism              | ND: Tourism + experience as Marketing assistant and FIT assistant consultant                                      | Group Consultant                         | 7 months | 6 years  |
| I16              | F | 32 | Gabon     | S | Mindpearl               | BTech: Quality management + tutoring experience   | Customer representative of sale          | 7 months | 10 years |
| I17              | F | 27 | Gabon     | S | Vista Marina Restaurant | BTech: Chemical Engineering + private tutor of physical science, mathematics & chemistry + coffee shop experience | Waitress                                 | 5 months | 6 years  |
| I18              | M | 25 | Zimbabwe  | S | Domino's Pizza          | Matric + experience in construction   | Insider                                  | 1 year   | 4 Years  |
| <b>NATIONALS</b> |   |    |           |   |                         |   |  |          |          |



|               |   |    |              |   |                                   |     |   |           |         |
|---------------|---|----|--------------|---|-----------------------------------|-----|---|-----------|---------|
| N1            | F | 35 | South Africa | S | Tsogo sun Southern Cullinan Hotel | N/A | Waitress                                    | 10 years  | N/A     |
| N2            | M | 25 | South Africa | S | Taj Hotel                         | N/A | waiter                                      | 5,5 years | N/A     |
| N3            | F | 31 | South Africa | M | God's Army coffee shop            | N/A | Waitress, Chef & Cashier                    | 2 years   | N/A     |
| N4            | M | 32 | South Africa | M | God's Army coffee shop            | N/A | Web developer                               | 2 years   | N/A     |
| <b>OWNERS</b> |   |    |              |   |                                   |     |   |           |         |
| O1            | M | 40 | South Africa | M | Safari Online                     | N/A | Manager & Consultant                        | 13 years  | N/A     |
| O2            | M | 31 | Gabon        | M | Global Travel Chest               | N/A | Managing Director & Chairman of the Company | 2 years   | 8 years |
| O3            | F | 39 | South Africa | M | God's Army coffee shop            | N/A | Owner & Partner Holder of the Company       | 11 years  | N/A     |

It is evident from the above table that the participants come a range of disciplines with varying roles and responsibilities in the various workplaces. This table buttresses the concerns of Johnston, Khattab, and Manley (2015) who decry the rather under-utilisation of immigrant qualifications in their host countries (Johnston, Khattab and Manley, 2015). It also validates the argument that immigrants, especially African immigrants settle for any job as long as they get paid. Thus, "low-wage employers will ... view migrants more favourably than non-migrants..." (Matthews and Ruhs, 2007; Findlay and McCollum, 2015).



## Presentation

### ***Nationals' thoughts on immigrants***

All the South African interviewees indicated that they had worked with immigrants and that they had all had good relationships and positive experiences while working with them.

- N<sub>3</sub>** - Got to Know the “different cultures, different experiences in the way we do thing in South Africa and how to handle things in different ways”; he discovered that they are good at “problem solving”.
- Their “thinking outside of the box and also being visual ... add a lot to your company”.
  - “They are passionate toward what they are doing, and they are more free to do what they have learnt ... where they're from”
  - “They've a broader platform to bring that out, and to bring productivity”.
- N<sub>4</sub>** - Found it “really useful for working with people with different ... backgrounds”.
- “You see different ways of doing things, different sort of ways”
  - “Diversity is really great in the sense of getting different viewpoints, different ways of looking at things, different ways of working”.
  - Immigrants bring “different points of view, different ways at looking of things ... creativity really helps marketing, customer service and broader service range as well”.
  - “They are more productive than local people, because they ... come here to work, they come here for a certain goal. And that's what they want to achieve”.
- N<sub>2</sub>** - Said that “foreigners have really taught me to appreciate my job... and what I have like family, friends etc.”
- “They are not players, but ambitious ... they really work, they are hard workers”.
  - “You learn a lot from them and from the way they do things”.
  - “You get to know something from them”.
- N<sub>1</sub>** - Also reported that skilled immigrants “are good people ... hard workers ... friendly”.

It appears from the responses that positive experiences were gained by both business owners and those employed by them which included South Africans. Some of these include new cultures, knowledge and experience. Working with immigrants has taught them to be more productive by providing better products and services to customers and by learning the concept of thinking outside the box. These seem to allow companies to be competitive with their activities and their competitive policy.

### ***Owners of companies' thoughts on immigrants***

All the business owners also reported receiving valuable inputs from immigrants. From their recruitment policy to the incorporation of immigrants in their service units, they were hardly disappointed by the immigrants as compared to nationals.



- O<sub>2</sub>**
- Mentioned that a good applicant to a vacant position is the one that “has the skills and knowledge that the company needs to move forward”.
  - Said “I select people to work for me based on the values they can bring to the business”.
  - Enhanced that “we recruit people based on their skills, based on what value they can bring to the business”.
  - Said further that “it’s all about the skills and knowledge that the company needs to move forward ... it’s about what you are capable to achieve... what people are able to achieve...it’s about what you bring”.
  - Claimed that immigrants “know more or less what they want to achieve in their lives”.
  - Concluded by saying diversity “is what makes a country strong...and helps to improve ourselves in the process”.
  - “Countries with a diversified culture in terms of where people come from are among the most developed and powerful countries today...such as “the United States of America ... guys from Asia (China, India) ... guys from Europe ... even guys from Africa and South America”.
- O<sub>3</sub>**
- Stated that a suitable candidate for a vacant position would be someone with “the same enthusiasm and motivation for” the business.
  - “Someone that has the same love and passion, the same vision that we have, we don’t have to motivate them to be good employees”.
  - Someone who “has the same desire for the product that we are selling”.
  - Will definitely go for someone who “obviously got skills”.
  - Stated that skilled immigrants does add a lot of cultural flavour” because they “bring another language”; for instance, “foreigners ... have added French to a language that our company is able to communicate with ... clients into the company”. Therefore, the company was able to “stock and supply some French resources within the store...and able to cater to that market”.
  - Added that the company is now “able to communicate with our customers ... translate and communicate in a very welcome language in our country”.
  - Argued that “a company would be more successful because it (diversity) would give them fine points ... forces and a true understanding of the market they try to serve and obey to”.
  - Concluded by stating that “a company needs to reflect the economy that they are serving... because if a company doesn’t truly reflect in its staff, the diversity of the economy and the current social status, ... the business will be a little bit out of tune as to the needs and effective wants of the community or the society, or nation they are serving”.



- O<sub>1</sub>
- A suitable job applicant is someone who “understands the culture and what we are selling, which products we are selling”.
  - Stated that “Knowledge would definitely be a great big criterion” for suitable applicants. “Knowledge about Southern and Eastern Africa”.
  - They may also have “German skills, writing and communication skills”, and have the “ability to sell Safari”.
  - Mentioned that skilled immigrants bring a language which “is a big advantage.... a big asset ... an extra bonus to sell Safaris to people, especially to Germans ... because we deal with international clientele”.
  - Maintained that immigrants bring to the business an attitude of perfectionism ... which helps to reach out to those type of clientele”.
  - Moreover, immigrants “deliver excellent services and just better products....simply because their standard is a lot higher than ever South Africans’ standard would be”.
  - Also added that skilled immigrants “have very high ethical or moral values ... that plays a large part in actually employing the foreigners”.
  - Therefore, according to O<sub>1</sub>, “if the company is not diversified ... it would not be healthy for the company”.
  - Concluded by saying “if we look in our rainbow nation (South Africa), I think a diversified labour force is definitely something that should ... be represented in the company so that it also exemplified ... what the country is about”.

In summary, business owners were unanimously in favour of integrating skilled immigrants into their businesses. They reported that skilled immigrants offer a competitive edge to their companies, through their contribution to cultural values different from those of South Africa, by adopting positive attitudes towards work and by providing excellent service delivery, productivity and work ethic based on commitment and responsibility. As a result, business owners all agreed that the health, the strength, the success and the socio-economic development of a company depend on the diversity of its workforce.



### ***Reflections of immigrants on the behaviour of nationals towards them***

A significant majority of the immigrants reported having difficulty finding employment in some South African organisations in Western Cape.

#### ***a. Language barriers***

- I<sub>3</sub> - “for some jobs that you applied for, it’s required that you speak maybe Afrikaans, or you speak German, or you speak the local language like Xhosa or Zulu”.
- I<sub>16</sub> - “some of the jobs that I have found, they were asking people if they can speak Afrikaans”.
- I<sub>14</sub> - “most of the time their requirements are just to be able to speak like Afrikaans for example, or English and Xhosa”.
- I<sub>9</sub> - “some jobs, they want you to speak more than two languages or more than three languages ... some of the work, they need to speak more than two, three languages at the same time, which is a bit downing”.

#### ***b. Discrimination***

- I<sub>17</sub> - “choosing a citizen who has less experiences or who is less qualified than a foreigner who is more qualified, with more experiences, it is discrimination because the foreigner is the one who should be chosen instead of the Citizen”.
- I<sub>18</sub> - “there is discrimination about the way you can have some qualifications some level, some higher levels and you go to a research for a work they will not give you that opportunity to work”.
- “Even if you have the diploma and experiences required, you could be the suitable candidate for the position but you won’t have the position coz you are not a South African citizen”.
- I<sub>9</sub> - Also thought of “discrimination too, even if you are qualified for it ... they said you unfit in doing that job”.
- I<sub>10</sub> - “I know I earn very little money. I see the South Africans.. they don’t even go to school like me but they earn big. The owner tells me to take it or leave it. You have to take this one because you’re a refugee”.
- I<sub>7</sub> - “It’s very difficult, they are making life difficult because if the South Africans citizen can’t open up their businesses and take on locals, then at least immigrants could possibly take over some local’s people and give them a job, so they are really discriminating against immigrants too much”.

#### ***c. Racism and xenophobia***

- I<sub>5</sub> - “the race has been a barrier for me” to “not being able to find a suitable job”.
- I<sub>9</sub> - “it is much worse here ... they see the skin’s colour, the backgrounds check, you come from a rich family or poor family ... for me that’s unnecessary”.



- I<sub>11</sub> - “there’s still racism, there’s still I mean xenophobia ... you can go to some place even though you’re qualified, they also look at your citizenship, and they also look at your skin colour”. “Sometimes you even go to places, due to your skin colour, you might be received in a different way that others that you could see have been assisted before you”.
- I<sub>10</sub> - For instance “I’m black and I go find a job where there are white people, they will look at me like you are black and with which qualification you have even ... they will look just to complicate me”. The same scenario also applied to black owners or managers: “even if you go to the black people as a foreigner, you will see the way they will treat you ... you are not South African, so why do you want this position?”

In summary, it turns out that the majority of immigrants surveyed face difficulties in their integration process in South Africa. They believe that the difficulty in finding a decent job, despite having essential qualifications and experiences, is because of racism, and discrimination. They also attribute the difficulty to their inability to speak any of the major local languages especially Xhosa and Afrikaans.

### Discussion

From the report of the owners, the locals and the immigrants interviewed, the study affirms that immigrants constitute a potential source of socioeconomic development of a nation. They bring their language, their skills and knowledge, their spirit of imagination, their innovative thinking, their positive work ethic and many more. As business owners replied during interviews sessions, skilled immigrants offer a competitive edge to companies, through their contribution to cultural values different from those of South Africa, by adopting positive attitudes towards work and by providing excellent service delivery, productivity and work ethic based on commitment and responsibility. In other words, the health, the strength, the success and the socio-economic development of a company, and subsequently a nation depend on the diversity of its workforce. Skilled immigrants have left their respective countries with the desire to succeed, to find a decent job, and a pleasant life in South Africa. Unfortunately, they confront negative factors. They have had to go on strike, have rejected job applications or have worked in dangerous jobs unrelated to their qualifications. For some, they have been discriminated against based on the colour of their skins, and their nationality.

With South Africa opening its doors to the world after the advent of democracy, many people from poor countries found their way to the rainbow nation which had the appetite for accepting everyone. The challenge that beset the country was the realisation that many of the people from outside the country were better skilled and educated resulting in firms rather hiring them instead of the poorly skilled and uneducated South Africans. As time passed, it became necessary to redress this. One of the ways to do this was the tightening of employment policies by the government. By so doing immigrants who needed jobs were no longer considered. Another factor beside the employment policy was that natives needed to be employed and paid a fair wage. Therefore to circumvent the payment of fair wages, firms



sought immigrants who were willing to settle for lower wages. While this development brought about xenophobic tensions in the country, the hospitality sector was not spared. Known for its high need for both skilled and unskilled labour, especially for seasonal workers in peak seasons (Rasic, 2010), it is not surprising to note the unpleasant sentiments of some of the immigrant workers who expressed dissatisfaction and job insecurity. In relation to this, some respondents noted thus: - *“Even if you have the diploma and experiences required, you could be the suitable candidate for the position but you won't have the position coz you are not a South African citizen”*.

*Also thought of “discrimination too, even if you are qualified for it ... they said you unfit in doing that job”*.

*I know I earn very little money. I see the South Africans.. they don't even go to school like me but they earn big. The owner tells me to take it or leave it. You have to take this one because you're a refugee”*.

The question that arises from this is what sort of value would the immigrants add to the growth of the firms they serve if their perceptions of employment conditions are negative? A corollary to this is the discomfort and insecurity that business owners experience as they continually hire immigrant labour.

### **Conclusion, Implications, Limitations**

From the review of the literature and the comments of the interviewees, it is important to point out that skilled foreign labour is strongly involved in the socio-economic development of a country. Developed countries such as the United States of America, New Zealand, France, and several others, owe their prosperity, at least in part, to the foreign labour force who participated massively in the formation of their economy. So for a country to become economically prosperous, it will need the expertise of skilled immigrants to grow its economy. Besides, South Africa is not spared in this process of socio-economic development.

According to Zimmermann, (2014), skilled immigrants indirectly stimulate innovation through positive spin-offs for other researchers, achieve a critical mass in specified research fields, and provide additional skills such as management and entrepreneurship. Skilled immigrants supplement skills so as to increase the productivity of unskilled workers (Mukherjee, 2014). They create small and medium-sized enterprises, which not only generate new jobs in the economy, but also represent a key source of innovation, an increase in domestic production and a decrease in poverty and unemployment (Fairlie and Lofstrom, 2015). In the event that a country lacks specific critical skills, for instance due to brain drain, it will therefore direct its policy towards the selective immigration of highly skilled and qualified migrants to fill the professional gaps left by its local workforce (Facchini and Lodigiani, 2014). Countries with an aging population, as most of the European countries, rely independently on the external recruitment of skilled and young labour to support their economy (Bloom et al. 2011). In this twenty-first century, as globalisation continues, many organisations are seeking competitive and efficient advantage to maintain an impressive and



quality production relative to their competitors. As a result, they recruit a diversified workforce that can help them achieve these goals.

Although South Africa, more specifically the organizations involved in this study have recognized the outstanding qualities and values of skilled immigrants, which could indeed be beneficial to them, such as the mastery of international languages, creativity, adaptability, higher education, ethical conduct at work, enthusiasm, as well as learning and personal growth, the employment of immigrants is always questioned and raises issues such as discrimination, unfair treatment, racism and limited right to work.

### **Implications**

Until now, many immigrants continue to face serious problems of economic integration in South Africa. Many of them, although qualified and with laudable skills, are unemployed. Despite the fact that local businesses know that skilled immigrants would give them an undeniable advantage within the labour market, they are often denied employment opportunities in order to comply with South African laws and regulations that require locals to be given priority over immigrants.

Unlike other countries such as for example Canada and Australia, South Africa does not have explicit policies or immigrant integration programmes supported by its government, with the exception of a limited number of refugee programmes. In addition, work is not facilitated by a flexible labour market that could facilitate job search for immigrants. In the opinion of the researchers, because immigrants make an undeniable contribution, not only to the company, but also to their South African colleagues, through their hard work, determination, encouragement and cultural contribution, they also need to be considered and appreciated during recruitment and selection campaigns by employers of labour.

Nonetheless, given the magnitude of unemployment in South Africa, the government should redouble its efforts in implementing the structural reforms proposed by the National Development Plan (2012). Also, as suggested by a number of immigrants interviewed, it should revisit the employment and integration policies of immigrants. The state should also establish a corporation responsible for the orientation and training of immigrants, because the diversity of the workforce provides the health, strength, development and success of a business, of a nation.

Further, the usefulness of skilled immigrants should not be based solely on filling some hypothetical gaps created by emigration, but as a political instrument in its own right (Mattes, et al. 2000).

Lastly, concerning the South African press, they should adopt a more informed and balanced reporting on migration by assigning the burden on two journalists and give them the necessary time and resources to research on this subject in an informed and critical way, so as to limit the reports that amplify hate and xenophobia in the country (Danso and McDonald, 2000).



### Suggestions for further research

This study did not focus on the difficulties immigrants may have encountered after being recruited by a company and this could well be the subject of a future study. The research did not speak about the different criteria for immigrants' selection in South Africa. The immigration of qualified labour for the developed and developing countries causes the problem of emigration. This could be the subject of a comprehensive study in South Africa. A future study may also look at working conditions in those sectors that are known to attract large numbers of immigrants. For instance, as far back as 2001, Crush named agriculture, mining, construction and services sectors as those whose immigrant workers enjoyed very little protection in the workplace. There have also been recent calls (see Munakamwe and Jinnah, 2014; Webb, 2017) for these sectors to be paid greater attention as most of their labour is sourced from immigrants.

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