Coping Mechanisms And Survival Strategies As Factors In The Reconstruction Of Professional Identities Among African Immigrant Teachers In South African Schools

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Abstract:-The purpose of this study was to explore various coping mechanisms and survival strategies employed by African immigrant teachers in South African schools which helped them to successfully reconstruct their professional identities. This study which is qualitative in nature used semi-structured interviews, observations, researcher's journal and field notes to obtain data from the participants. The data obtained from five African immigrant teachers through narratives of their stories were analysed by means of content analysis. The findings of the study revealed that African immigrant teachers developed coping mechanisms and survival strategies in order to confront the obstacles and hindrances to the successful reconstruction of their professional identities. The coping mechanisms and survival strategies discussed in this article include access to immediate employment on arrival in South Africa and access to opportunities and resources at work place. Others are cultivation and maintenance of cordial and excellent relationships with colleagues and administrators, availability of mentors and development of special traits such as commitment and perseverance by African immigrant teachers.

Keywords: *African immigrant teachers; professional identity; reconstruction; South African schools; coping mechanisms; survival strategies; resilience.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Internationally, immigrant teachers have been noted to face different obstacles and challenges in host countries in a bid to reconstruct their professional identities (Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Phillion, 2003). In South Africa, a study conducted on African immigrant teachers also revealed that there are impediments that hinder the successful reconstruction of their professional identities (Vandeyar; Vandeyar & Elufisan, 2014). Despite all the challenges, immigrant teachers in their bid to practice their profession hitch free have devised coping mechanisms and employed survival strategies that helped them to successfully weathered the storm and reconstruct positive professional identities at their work place. In the United Kingdom, the study conducted by Warner (2010:11) reveals that immigrant teachers traced their success to the support and sense of teamwork in their schools. Like their counterparts in the international context, African immigrant teachers teaching in South African schools have also devised various coping mechanisms or made use of survival strategies in order to reconstruct positive professional identities. In this article, we tend to explore those coping mechanisms and survival strategies and how it helped in the reconstruction of their professional identities. Hence this study asks the question, what are the coping mechanisms and survival strategies that helped African immigrant teachers to reconstruct positive professional identities in South African schools?

In this narrative study the argument is presented as follows. We provide a brief contextual background to the study followed by the review of relevant literature. This is followed by the theoretical framework that underpins the study and research strategy. Finally the findings of the study are presented, analyzed and discussed in order to explore the coping mechanisms and survival strategies used by African immigrant teachers in South African schools, in order to reconstruct a positive professional identity. A number of recommendations are made for future practice.

II. BACKGROUND CONTEXT

The collapse of apartheid in 1994 which led to the successful transition into new democratic era has brought a new dispensation into South Africa. According to Mokoena (1999:1) the new political dispensation brought with it radical changes in all spheres of life. One of the areas that witnessed radical change and that is of importance to this study was migration of professionals especially teachers from other African countries to South Africa. Since 1994 South Africa has been attracting immigrants whether legal or illegal from other African countries.

Apart from other factors that might influence the movement of people from their place of birth to become an alien in another country, in this study, we have identified two reasons based on push and pull factors why South Africa remains a preferred destination for black immigrants from other African countries. First, the problem of political instability which has resulted into economic woes in some neighbouring African countries especially Zimbabwe has led to massive crossing of Limpopo River by Zimbabweans into South Africa. According to Maharaj (2004:2) South Africa will not cease to attract immigrants as long as there is incidence of widespread of poverty and high levels of inequality in other parts of Africa. Second, South Africa is considered as a rich country with a stable democracy and prosperous economy. Appleton, Morgan and Sives (2006) opine that South Africa is regarded as a rich and stable country because her economy is perceived as the most advanced in sub-Saharan Africa. Among African immigrants that are entering South Africa are experienced and professional teachers who are taking up teaching jobs in South African schools. The unprecedented influx of African immigrants into South Africa has increased tensions among South Africans who perceive their new guests as competitors and threats to the South African economy and social life. Occasionally we have witnessed a bit of tension between African immigrants and their South African counterparts as evidenced by the xenophobic attacks on African immigrants in 2008 and 2015 respectively. Despite the negative attitudes of South African citizens towards African immigrants in general, it has been documented that African immigrant teachers that are employed as teachers in South African schools are considered and regarded both by learners and administrators as indispensable and valuable resources (Vandeyar; Vandeyar & Elufisan, 2014). This study now seeks to explore the coping strategies employed by African immigrant teachers or supports that are available to them that helped them to perform excellently on their jobs and reconstruct their professional identities.

Review of the literature:

The fluid nature of identities has been well documented in the literature (Vandeyar, 2008; Allard & Cooper, 2001; Allard & Santoro, 2006). According to Henkel (2005) identities are not unitary and fixed but pluralistic and fluid. Due to its fluidity and in order to remain vibrant in a person, it requires great work and considerable participation both in and outside the community of practice (Wenger, 1998). In their attempts to renegotiate positive professional identities, immigrant teachers in international context put in great efforts by attending teacher education in the form of mentoring and induction in host countries (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). They also invest great deal in their relationships with fellow indigenous colleagues and administrators and some of them even decided to work as a volunteer in local schools in order to learn new strategies of teaching and have an understanding of the new pedagogy (Pollock, 2010). The support that other immigrant teachers received from their native colleagues and administrators helped them to transit successfully to the new environment (Remennick, 2002). Access to professional organization and networks by immigrant teachers was also mentioned as a source of support which enhanced their participation to become full members of community of practice hence quick reconstruction of their professional identities (Schmidt, Young & Mandzuk, 2010)Teacher education in the form of mentoring has been prescribed for newly arrived immigrant teachers in their host countries because it helps to empower immigrant teachers to creatively construct a new professional identity (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). While the teacher education programme served as empowerment strategy to those immigrant teachers that attended it, those that failed to go through it reported the negative feelings of being like "phonies" and "fakes" when beginning to teach in their adopted countries (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004:397). It has been noted in the literature that countries that are noted as immigrant receiving countries such as Australia, Canada, UK and USA had put in place mentoring programmes to assist newly immigrant teachers to cope and adjust to different system and philosophy of learning (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Peeler & Jane, 2005; Myles, Cheng & Wang, 2006).Reconstruction of professional identities becomes easier for immigrant teachers, who rather than antagonising, but embraced the mainstream cultural and linguistic ways of life of the people of the host country (Michael, 2006). It has been shown that adjusting pre-conceived educational norms and beliefs might help cross-cultural instructors to meet the expectations of their students (Williams, 2011:10). It has also been found that teachers who try to superimpose their own culturally constructed pedagogical beliefs unto a different culture are likely to meet with resistance from their students (Carnoy & Rhoten, 2002). While it is acknowledged that learning a new culture and language especially at the adult stage of life may be difficult and challenging, a little bit of effort and zeal committed to learning may help in transiting one from an outsider to an insider. In a study conducted by Remennick (2002), the effort of an immigrant teacher in the study to joke in Hebrew language which was not her home language changed her teaching experiences and helped in reconstructing her professional identity. Volunteering in local schools was another way that helped immigrant teachers in the absorption into the mainstream culture. While waiting for the real jobs, immigrant teachers in the study of Pollock (2010) undertook to volunteer in schools as occasional teachers without monthly salary. According to them the volunteering jobs helped them to make connections, meet teachers and administrators who might recommend them or think of hiring them officially. Immigrant teachers that are supported and accepted by colleagues and administrators will quickly adjust to the new environment which will help to ease

the process of identity reconstruction (Remennick, 2002). One of the ways by which support and acceptance by colleagues and administrators was useful for immigrant teachers was that it enhanced learning which helps in becoming a member of community of practice. According to Myles, Cheng and Wang (2006) learning occurs through apprenticing with others who are already part of a particular community or culture. In the study conducted by Mawhinney and Xu (1997) in an Ontario school, Canada, immigrant teachers learned from their colleagues and mentors, a variety of survival skills and techniques that helped them to survive and cope with various concerns and problems related to human relations and classroom management. Access to professional organization and networks by immigrant teachers have also helped in the reconstruction of their professional identities (Schmidt, Young & Mandzuk, 2010). It has been reported that some of the problems that immigrant teachers normally contend with in their new territories included among others, the inability to gain appropriate advice and information on qualifications. However, the issue of upgrading was alleviated or solved by belonging to networks (Cruickshank, 2004). One of the ways immigrant teachers in the study of Pollock (2010) confronted employment challenge was to belong to professional networks. Joining networks also helped to improve the pedagogical prowess of immigrant teachers in the classroom after gaining employment. In the study conducted by Kuhn (1996:98) teachers were able to improve their communication prowess by joining a network known as "Toastmasters International", an organization dedicated to helping immigrant teachers to become better public speakers.

Theoretical framework
The theoretical framework that was adopted for this study is the resiliency framework. According to Luthar et al., (2000:543) resiliency refers to a dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant challenges. The pivotal premise of the theoretical framework considered important to this study is that individuals possess selective strengths, resources or assets to help them survive challenges (Richardson, 2002:309). Nevertheless it has been mentioned in the literature that resilience is not a personal trait but a construct (Ungar et al., 2005:2) which encompasses both internal and external factors (Cora-Bramble, 2006:253). Assets and resources are defined as positive factors that reside within or external to individuals such as competence, coping skills, self efficacy, and mentoring (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005:399). Assets and resources equipped individuals to successfully face and overcome challenges in unwelcoming situations. Resiliency framework has gained ground in the field of medical psychology and social work, but it is now being adapted and used in educational fields, especially in studies that explore how minority academics or teachers coped with challenges at their work place. In this study, we used resiliency framework as a lens to understand the survival strategies employed by African immigrant teachers in South African schools. That was meant to assess how such has helped them to cope with everyday challenges at work and how it assisted them to reconstruct their professional identities. Assets and resources are classified both as positive factors that help individuals to face, cope and overcome challenges. While assets are regarded as positive factors that reside within individuals, resources are positive factors that are external to individuals (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005:399). In this study, external resources are those resources that are outside the control of African immigrant teachers while internal assets are those assets that are within the control of African immigrant teachers. External resources that contributed to the resilience of participants in this study are access to immediate employment, availability of mentors and access to opportunities and resources while development of special traits such as commitment/perseverance and cultivation/maintenance of cordial/excellent relationships with colleagues and administrators are classified as internal assets.

Research strategy
This is a qualitative study in which employs a case study approach and a narrative research approach as its strategies of inquiry. According to Strauss and Corbin (1990:17) a qualitative study is any kind of research design whose findings are not produced by means of statistical procedures or any other means of quantification. Data collection was done through an in depth semi-structured interviews and observations. Data analysis made use of content analysis. The list of African immigrant teachers that are employed in the services of three educational districts in Tshwane was obtained by the researchers from Gauteng[1] Department of Education. It was from the list that a purposive sampling of 5 African immigrant teachers from five different schools was carried out. In all, 3 Zimbabwean teachers and 2 Nigerian teachers participated in this research. The background information of the five research participants are provided in the table below.

Table 1: Background information of the research participants

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[1] Gauteng is one of the nine provinces of South Africa.

Pseudonym	Nationality	Gender	Age	Qualification
Tawanda	Zimbabwe	Male	41	Diploma (Edu) B.Sc (Maths & Statistics
Tafadwa	Zimbabwe	Male	36	Diploma (Edu) B.Sc (Enviromental Science)
Weza	Zimbabwe	Female	38	B.Sc (Mathematics & Computer Science)
Bolanle	Nigeria	Female	Late 40's	B.Sc (Edu)
Adewale	Nigeria	Male	Early 40's	B.Sc (Accounting) PGCE

Each of the teachers was interviewed for about an hour and they were also observed both inside and outside the classroom. The interview sessions were recorded on a tape and transcribed verbatim. Before venturing out to the field to negotiate access and collect data from participants, a letter of permission to conduct the research was earlier obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education and the University of Pretoria. All participants were intimated with the research process verbally and they all signed a consent form to indicate that their participations were voluntary. In order to maintain anonymity, pseudonyms were used for all the names of participants and research sites.

Presentation of research findings

Based on the findings of the study, it was found that there are several factors that helped African immigrant teachers in South African schools to cope with challenges in their various places of work. Factors that contributed to their success in the process of reconstructing their professional identities are:

a. Access to immediate employment on arrival in South Africa

b. Access to opportunities, resources and materials at work place

c. Cultivation and maintenance of cordial and excellent relationships with colleagues and administrators

d. Development of special and personal qualities such as commitment and perseverance

e. Availability of mentors

Access to immediate employment on arrival in South Africa

"I didn't even spend a week before I secured a job in a private school" (Tafadwa, Male, Zimbabwean Teacher)

African immigrant teachers in this study revealed that securing employment as a teacher was easier and stress free in South Africa, especially if one specialises in Mathematics and Sciences and also ready to work in a rural or remote schools. The ease of securing jobs immediately after entering South Africa helped African immigrant teachers to quickly reconstruct their professional identities and also one of the factors that helped them to cope with the shock of relocation and transition. It has been well documented in the literature that successful employment contributes to immigrants' sense of accomplishments and connects them to society at large (Vinokur et al., 2000). We inquired from all of the five participants whether they had previously worked in an informal sector in South Africa before securing a job as a professional teacher. It has been reported in the literature that when a professional teacher was employed in low paying and informal jobs, it created a dent in their professional identity (Ryan, Pollock & Antonelli, 2009). Only one out of the five participants answered that he worked as a fork lifter for just few months to raise money to perfect his work permit papers in order to secure employment as a teacher. We also asked one of the immigrant teachers (Tafadwa) how long it took him to secure a job as a professional teacher after he arrived from his home country Zimbabwe. He replied that it

was like the teaching job was already waiting for him before he came to South Africa because he started working as a teacher almost immediately he came into the country. One of the factors that may be responsible for easy access to employment by African immigrant teachers in South Africa may be partly due to shortage of teachers especially Mathematics and Science teachers in rural or remote schools. It has been documented in the literature that South Africa is losing trained teachers to countries such as United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada and Australia (Appleton et al., 2006b; Manik et al., 2006). Due to movement of South African teachers to developed countries, a vacuum had been created in the educational system, which also led to South Africa becoming a receiving country from other less developed countries (SACE, 2011:9). The vacuum that was left by South African teachers that moved to other developed nations is now being filled by African immigrant teachers from which majority are from Zimbabwe (GDE, 2011). It is clear from the accounts of all the participants in this study that access to quick employment on their arrival in South Africa helped them to cope in the new environment and helped in the reconstruction of their professional identities.

Access to opportunities and resources at work place

"Yes we are given the same opportunities" (Weza, Female, Zimbabwean Teacher)

In a sharp departure from the experiences of immigrant teachers in the literature who are marginalised due to lack of access to opportunities and resources (Pollock, 2010), African immigrant teachers in South African schools reported that they enjoyed the same treatment and condition of service like their indigenous colleagues. This level play ground without preferential treatment in respect of nationality helped African immigrant teachers in South African schools to escape the problem of marginalisation and thereby helped them to reconstruct their professional identities. It has been reported that marginalised people live under high stress levels and have difficulty in coping with the situations they encounter (Sabar, 2004).

In this study one of the participants named Weza who is a female participant, an immigrant teacher from Zimbabwe, confirmed in her interview that despite the fact that she was a non-permanent staff member, the same opportunity was given to her by her employer. She explained further that she was given the opportunity to attend workshops and she had represented her school in different fora outside the school. Inside the school, she mentioned that she has served in different committees and she was the head of a group in school referred to as a life coach. The aim of the committee on which she served was to impart the word of God to learners during break time every day. In terms of remuneration, she confirmed that all teachers on the same grade or salary level are paid the same salary irrespective of nationalities. However, the salary scale or grade is determined by one's qualifications and levels of experience. Without mincing words, she opined that the absence of marginalisation adequately positioned her to cope with the situations in her working place thereby helping her to reconstruct her professional identity in South African classroom.

Availability and access to teaching and learning materials such as computers, transparencies, overhead projectors and books in South African schools was also mentioned by African immigrant teachers as one of their coping mechanisms. According to Greene et al., (2004:80) people can become more resilient as they develop and have access to resources. One of the participants, a female teacher named Bolanle from Nigeria, explained in her statement about how challenging it was to be a teacher due to lack of educational materials in her country of origin. In contrast, she explained how easy she had access to those materials and resources which helped her to dismantle barriers on the way to the reconstruction of her professional identity.

"Okay in Nigeria we did not have so much opportunity as in South Africa. We learnt in very difficult circumstances because we don't have materials, we don't have equipment. We... Teachers teach by only what they see in textbooks. Practically we don't have those things. Comparing with my teaching in South Africa, these days there is technology happening. We have slides, projector, computers. Then when I was teaching, there was nothing like computers and so on" (Bolanle).

The availability of learning aids such as computers and projectors as mentioned by the above named immigrant teacher helped her to be able cope with her job as a professional teacher thereby helping her to reconstruct her professional identity.

Cultivation and maintenance of cordial and excellent relationships with colleagues and administrators

"The teachers are very friendly, they are very co-operative" (Tawanda, Male, Zimbabwean Teacher)

It has been documented in the literature that when immigrant teachers enjoy either professional or emotional support from their colleagues, it helps immigrant teachers to reconstruct their professional identities

(Mawhinney & Xu, 1997; Deters, 2008). One of the survival strategies employed by African immigrant teachers in this study in order to reconstruct positive professional identities was to cultivate cordial and excellent relationships with native colleagues and administrators. One of the strategies that Tawanda relied on to cultivate and maintain excellent relationships with colleagues and administrators was his ability to speak isiZulu which is one of the official languages in South Africa largely spoken by indigenous Black South Africans. It has been documented in the literature that when immigrants have the capacity to communicate in the language of the majority or the dominant culture, it fosters good relationship between immigrants and the people of the host country and also enhances their success in the host country (Remennick, 2002; Phinney et al., 2001). Therefore his ability to communicate with colleagues and administrators in their mother tongue enhanced the development of good relationships between the teacher and indigenous colleagues thereby helping the African immigrant teacher to reconstruct a positive professional identity. Going by this trend Tawanda mentioned that the positive attitudes of native colleagues towards him especially in times of personal challenges increased his confidence and facilitated his quick entrance into the community of practice hence helped him to reconstruct a positive professional identity as a teacher. Tawanda explained that there was a time his monthly salary was not paid in time due to administrative lapses, his native colleagues rallied around him and contributed a significant amount towards his welfare. Also he went down the memory lane and vividly described his experiences during the xenophobic attacks in May 2008 in which African immigrants were attacked and some brutally murdered. He said he was afraid when he heard the news over the radio and television but his landlord who was a South African national did everything in his power to protect him. He maintained that this kind of attitude from indigenous Black colleagues had reassured him of his safety and had also helped him to reconstruct his professional identity as a teacher in a South African school.

Development of special traits such as perseverance and hardwork
"I went for a workshop on the Revised National Curriculum Statement" (Bolanle, Female, Nigerian Teacher)

In the study conducted by Warner (2010:13), all the immigrant teachers who participated in the study mentioned that possession of personal qualities helped them to negotiate the difficult terrains in their new place of work and helped them to teach well overseas. African immigrant teachers in South Africa also believed that their personal qualities in terms of competence in their subject field, positive attitudes to work and engagement in professional development was also helpful to them in cutting down the barriers that may have prevented them from reconstructing their professional identities. A female immigrant teacher from Nigeria named Bolanle who participated in this research explained that she initially found it extremely difficult to understand the curriculum of South Africa which was totally different to the one she was familiar with in her home country. She specifically mentioned the assessment method that is practiced in South Africa which she criticised heavily as challenging, cumbersome and time wasting. But she said she was able to overcome the challenge because she attended a workshop organised by the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) on Revised National Curriculum Statement (RNCS). She confirmed that the attendance of the workshop helped her to obtain a better understanding of the curriculum which enhanced her professional status and ability to perform better in the classroom and to reconstruct a positive professional identity.

Availability of mentors
"It has been a challenge, but I think I have been able to surmount it." (Adewale, Male, Nigerian Teacher)

The case of Adewale was a little bit different from the four cases earlier presented. The reason for the difference was because Adewale did not possess a background in education as he completed honours in accounting in Nigeria and he was working in a bank before he migrated to South Africa. Therefore he encountered some challenges when he had a career change but he was able to surmount those challenges because he went for postgraduate certificate course in education and he also had access to mentoring at his workplace. Adewale explained that he needed to readjust to the new educational landscape totally different from his home country by enrolling for Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) at the University of Pretoria. According to him the training helped him in two ways; firstly it allowed him to secure quick employment and secondly it offered him an understanding of the curriculum and assessment practice in South Africa which was totally different from that of Nigeria.

"Obviously I have to, i.e. the PGCE. I found out that when I applied for a job with my first degree in Nigeria, it wasn't easy to get employment. And I think I understand the reason why. I thought well this is different terrain in terms of education, so I have to do their own and I found out that it was worth it. I have to do a one-year diploma in Education at the University of Pretoria which I did in Maths and Life Orientation at the senior level. I think that also gave me an edge" (Adewale).

Based on the above it was clear the participant did not rely only on the academic and professional knowledge he had before migrating to South Africa but also decided to become a learner by attending a certificate course in education. Hutchison and Jazzar (2007:372) argued that the only way immigrant teachers can get away from several special challenges, such as cultural and logistical issues, unfamiliar structural and organisational arrangements, differing understandings of assessment, communication gaps, and problems/student relations, is to become active learners themselves. Apart from becoming an active learner, Adewale also depended on mentors to help him in the process of reconstructing his professional identity. It has been stated in the literature that the goal of mentoring is to ensure that new colleagues are not left 'out and neglected', or worse steered in the wrong direction (Manrique & Manrique, 1999:73). Adewale was lucky to have been offered an appointment in a well resourced school that had an organized system of mentoring in place. He explained that new teachers both novice and immigrant teachers were properly mentored in his school. He said teachers were assigned dedicated mentors who monitored the progress of new teachers to ensure acculturation. But he was quick to point out that the school was able to put mentoring process in place because it was a well resourced school with enough resources. It has been stated in the literature that in a more advantaged schools with more educated and secure teaching staff, the reception of the newcomers was usually friendly or at least neutral, and they were soon on an equal footing with others (Remennick, 2002).

Discussion and analysis of research findings

In the analysis of our research findings, we have found that some of our research findings confirmed the evidences while others disconfirmed the evidences that have been presented earlier in the literature on immigrant teachers. The findings of this study also presented us with new insights on what coping mechanisms and survival strategies will enhance the survival of immigrant teachers in the host country. Internationally, immigrant teachers who had access to opportunities, resources and materials in the literature were able to reconstruct their professional identities while those that lacked access to opportunities, resources and materials in their schools experienced a shift in their professional identities. For example in the study conducted by Deters (2006:12) it was discovered that immigrant teacher candidate in the study that migrated from Venezuela to Canada confirmed that her adjustment was easier because many aspects of the Canadian education were better than the system in Venezuela. African immigrant teachers in South African schools also spoke glowingly about availability and easy access to learning and teaching resources in South African schools which helped in their smooth transition. A male immigrant teacher from Zimbabwe named Tawanda mentioned the difference between resources that are available in his country of birth and South Africa.

"The materials now are different. Here in South Africa they have a lot of materials, a lot of resources as compared to Zimbabwe. They have a lot of resources, they have computers, overhead projectors, the books are just plenty, they have a lot of resources" (Tawanda).

The above named participant confirmed that access to resources helped him to transit successfully and it afforded him the opportunity to reconstruct his professional identity.

"It was very easy because that side I was doing it in a hard way. In some cases I had to improvise but this time they are readily available so it makes it easy for me"(Tawanda).

Importance of support from colleagues and administrators in helping immigrant teachers to reconstruct their professional identities is well presented in the literature (Deters, 2008). One immigrant teacher in the study claimed that although her accent was a little embarrassing to her, she was supported by her colleagues as they encouraged her not to worry. They told her that everybody, irrespective of their language background, also had an accent (Deters, 2008:19). In this study, the greatest support received by the African immigrant teachers was from their principals. All the immigrant teachers mentioned that they had to visit the Department of Home Affairs on regular basis to regularise their papers. Due to the bureaucracy at the Department of Home Affairs, it normally takes longer than necessary before applications were processed. During this time of absence from school or late coming, it was mentioned by the immigrant teachers that their principals were tolerant, understanding and cooperating with them. The level of acceptance and cooperation they received from their principals was adequate to help them reconstruct their professional identities.

Development of special traits such as commitment and hardwork was helpful to immigrant teachers in the literature to reconstruct their professional identities in the host country. Some of them have to learn a new language, become a volunteer and enrolled for teacher education (Peeler & Jane, 2005; Sabar, 2004; Pollock, 2010). In this study, some of the African immigrant teachers who were participants also went back to school despite all their former qualifications and experiences in order to be well grounded in the educational culture of

the host country. One of the immigrant teachers confirmed that his ability to speak one of the local languages while he pretended to be one of them really helped him to gain the confidence and trust of local colleagues and administrators. According to Wang and Phillion (2007:95) language is not just a cultural issue but a political one. Access to immediate employment in South Africa was a dependable coping mechanism for African immigrant teachers in South African schools. It helped them to practice their profession without waiting for a long time and it also allowed for access to finance which is needed for stability. This experience is different from the experiences of other immigrant teachers in the literature. For example immigrant teachers who migrated to countries such as Canada and Australia have been reported to face challenges of employment in their new territory (Remennick, 2002; Ryan et al., 2009). In Australia, it was reported that some of the immigrant teachers had given up looking for a teaching profession and ended up being employed in an informal sector (Cruickshank, 2004:129). In difference to the experiences of immigrant teachers internationally, all the five African immigrant teachers who participated in this study confirmed that they secured teaching jobs within a short space of time on their arrival in South Africa which helped them in the reconstruction of their professional identities. A new insight that was generated in this study indicated that similarities in culture and ways of life of people across Africa could also be considered as a coping mechanism for African immigrant teachers in South African schools. For example, all the Zimbabweans immigrant teachers pointed out similarities between Zimbabweans food and mode of dressing with that of South African people. One of the immigrant teachers named Tawanda pointed this out in our conversations.

> ... We eat sasa that is our favourite food. Here in South Africa they call it pap.

In the literature, immigrant teachers have been noted to experience culture shock when they arrived in the new country due to difference in mode of dressing, food and general ways of life, thereby resulting into cultural isolation (Kamler, Santoro & Reid, 1998). In studies conducted on immigrant teachers in countries such as Australia, Canada, Israel and United States, it was found that immigrant teachers in aforementioned countries had different background in terms of culture, race, colour, religion and general ways of life from the citizens of host countries. For example, in Australia, immigrant teachers who participated in the study of Cruickshank (2004) were Vietnamese, Chinese and Arabs. In the study conducted by Pollock (2010) in Canada, the three immigrant teachers that participated in the study came from Pakistan, South Africa and Iran. In the study conducted by Michael (2006) in Israel, all the 117 immigrant teachers who participated in the research had come from the former Soviet Union. Finally immigrant teachers that participated in the study conducted by Rhone (2007) in America came from the Caribbean. Therefore, we would argue that African immigrant teachers in South African schools also used resemblance in their culture, language, skin colour and food to that of the citizens of host country as a coping mechanism and survival strategies to reconstruct their professional identities.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The survival strategies and the coping mechanisms employed by African immigrant teachers in South African schools in order to reconstruct their professional identities in a new country and to avoid being a perpetual outsider have been presented in this study. The major assets the participants drawn on in order to cope with everyday challenges had their roots in resiliency. The narratives of the African immigrant teachers who are participants in this study inferred that they are willing and ready to contribute their own quota to the development of the educational system in South Africa, therefore they should be viewed as important educational resource. This inference is drawn based on sincere and calculated efforts made by African immigrant teachers in order to cope and survive in the new environment. In this era when South African schools are bleeding from lack of qualified teachers in Maths and Science especially in rural and remote schools, it is pertinent on the part of all stakeholders to strategise on the ways to integrate these African immigrant teachers into the system as they are performing a crucial role in the continuous education of less privileged South African students. The reasons for the call for integration is borne out of the fact that majority of them are teaching Mathematics and Science subjects. These subjects have been noted to be essential for the development and building of the nation but which the expertise is lacking among the locals. Also majority of the immigrant teachers are providing services to school children in remote and rural areas which are not preferred place of choice to the indigenous teachers.

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