



Students' perceptions of the influence of media on perpetuating xenophobia in South African universities

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Immigration and emigration are inevitable however, some South Africans have shown a strong dislike of those coming from other countries, in the form of xenophobia. Several studies have attributed the prevalence of xenophobia in South African communities to socio-economic, sociopolitical and scapegoating issues, with some researchers highlighting the role of the media in perpetuating xenophobia-related violence. On the other hand, xenophobia in institutions of higher learning in South Africa, which are a microcosm of society, has been under-prioritised in exploring the prevalence of xenophobia. This article aims to explore students' perceptions on the influence of media stereotypes of foreign nationals on xenophobia-related behaviours in selected higher education institutions. In part, it aims to explore students' perceptions on the influence of media-perpetuated stereotypes that may be attributed to possible symbolic xenophobia among university students. Therefore, this article looked at three South African universities, namely the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus in the Eastern Cape province; the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus in KwaZulu-Natal province; and the University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus in Gauteng province. To achieve the aims of this study, a qualitative case study approach, based on the interpretivist design, was adopted. A nonprobability sampling method, based on purposive sampling and the snowball sampling technique, was used to select participants in this study. Data were generated through focus group discussions and analysed through thematic analysis. The findings of this article revealed that xenophobic attitudes, behaviour and perceptions were prevalent among university students. The South African print media's perpetuated negative stereotypes and its adoption of derogatory names – *amakwerekwere*, *amagrigamba*, aliens, illegal immigrants, 'my friend' – to represent immigrants (especially from other African countries) were highlighted as some of the contributing factors toward ongoing xenophobic violence. As part of the recommendations of this study, the Student Representative Council (SRC) and other student communities, together with students in general, have a role to play in promoting xenophobia-free university campuses through antixenophobia campaigns.

Transdisciplinarity Contribution: Most xenophobic-related studies show that media reportage has an influence on xenophobic violence in South Africa. This study therefore shifts its focus toward South African universities to investigate the prevalence of xenophobia among students and explores students' perceptions of the influence of media in perpetuating xenophobic-related violence

Keywords: frustration aggression theory; xenophobia; South African universities; media; negative stereotypes.

Introduction

Due to globalisation, the emigration and immigration of people are inevitable. As noted by Umukoro et al.,¹ people immigrate for several reasons, including socio-economic, health, education and so on. This has been the case in the context of South Africa. Since the country was declared a democratic nation, it has been a host to an inflow of immigrants 'as refugees and economic migrants'² escaping their economically disadvantaged and conflicted countries of origin, especially from other African countries and Asian countries like India and Pakistan. Moreover, the immigrants, in the context of South Africa, borrowing from Ngcamu and Mantzaris,³ have been categorised as illegal or legal immigrants and documented or undocumented immigrants. However, since 2008, some South Africans have displayed an extreme hatred of immigrants, particularly those from other African countries. For instance, Solomon and Kosaka⁴ note that, based on the South African Migration Project (SAMP) survey conducted in 2001, 21% of South African residents wanted a complete ban on the entry of foreigners, while more than 64% of the South African residents were advocating for a strict limit on the entry of immigrants. Statistics have also shown that people from KwaZulu-Natal were less welcoming towards

immigrants, compared to people from other provinces.² Perhaps, this can be attributed to the 2015 xenophobic attacks that occurred after King Zwelithini's speech in KwaZulu-Natal, Durban and then spread to parts of Johannesburg and the rest of the country. A total of eight people were killed and over 2000 were displaced.^{3,4}

Therefore, this has been a problem which led to South Africans witnessing multiple waves of brutal xenophobia-related violence in some parts of the country. Amid xenophobic violence, many people have lost their lives; some were displaced as refugees and some lost their homes. In the process, basic human rights (e.g. the right to life) are hampered, 'social cohesion and good governance'⁴ and the African value of *ubuntu* are undermined.

In light of the above view, many scholars have attributed xenophobia to socio-economic, sociopolitical and scapegoating issues^{2,3,5} and the biocultural hypothesis.⁶ While all these studies have done a great deal of research in pondering and providing solutions to the growing pandemic of xenophobia, their emphasis is on South African society in general and not on some of the significant social institutions like universities. While social institutions are under-prioritised by researchers, it is the authors' view that xenophobia-related violence, especially nonphysical forms (e.g. symbolic), might be prevalent in social institutions like universities, because they are a microcosm of the society where actual xenophobic violence is evident. Thus, this article aims to explore students' perceptions on the experiences of symbolic xenophobic violence in selected higher education institutions in South Africa. On the other hand, many media critics and scholars have emphasised that how foreign nationals are represented in the South African media landscape contributes to the spread of both nonphysical and actual xenophobic violence outbreaks in the country.^{7,8,9} This might be as the result of media representation which perpetuates power differences between South Africans and foreign nationals through normalisation of derogatory reportage. Therefore, symbolic xenophobic violence is perpetuated and could contribute to actual xenophobic violence in South African institutions of higher learning. Accordingly, this article also aims to explore students' perceptions on the influence of media-perpetuated stereotypes which may be attributed to symbolic xenophobic violence among university students.

Historical traces of xenophobia in South Africa

Prior to 1994, immigrants faced discrimination as well as violence in South Africa, which stemmed from the institutionalised racism and apartheid of that time. After democracy in 1994, contrary to what was expected, the incidence of xenophobia increased. Between 2000 and 2008:

[A]bout 67 people died in what were identified as xenophobic attacks. In May 2008 particularly, a series of riots left 62 people dead, although 21 of those killed were South African citizens. The attacks were apparently motivated by xenophobia.¹⁰

According to Qukula¹¹ (p. 1):

'In May of 2008, violence began in Alexandra Township, when locals attacked immigrants from other African countries. In weeks following this, the violence spread across the country to other settlements in Gauteng, Durban and Cape Town. Amid mass looting and destruction of foreign-owned homes, property, and businesses, at least 62 people were killed and 100 000 displaced.'

Former President Thabo Mbeki intervened in these tragic incidents and events to apologise to the victims:

'We have gathered here today to convey to all Africans everywhere, to all African nations, severally and collectively, to our own people, and to the families of people who were murdered, our sincere condolences, and our heartfelt apologies that Africans in our country committed unpardonable crimes against other Africans.'¹¹ (p. 1)

In April 2015, another wave of xenophobic attacks took place in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. Evans¹² reviewed an online article on *Radio 702* website and documented that:

In April 2015, foreign nationals were targeted in Durban. Two Ethiopians were petrol bombed in Umlazi, which ignited violence in KwaMashu, Pinetown, and a Dalton hostel. The violence spread to parts of Johannesburg and a total of eight people were killed and over 2000 have been displaced. Four refugee camps were set up by the provincial government in KZN to house the displaced foreigners, including at a local Chatsworth soccer stadium set up by the eThekweni Municipality. Some non-nationals still remain in the camps, whilst hundreds have been voluntarily repatriated.¹² (p. 1)

Regarding the above reports, the (then) President Jacob Zuma called for peace and calm amid the xenophobic attacks, and he mentioned that, 'We cannot accept that when there are challenges, we use violence, particularly to our brothers and sisters from the continent'.¹² However, these incidents occurred at a time when South Africa was still combatting the issue of racism and discrimination among the different races in the country. Given this view, this article defines the term xenophobia by distinguishing it from racism, as some people tend to confuse the two.

Xenophobia: A new form of racism

Xenophobia and racism are two words that are intricately interwoven. Xenophobia is often misinterpreted as racism. Muchiri¹³ cautions not to confuse xenophobia with racism. He described racism as 'the belief that one race is superior to another, while xenophobia is the hatred of foreigners based on fear'. He further notes that xenophobia is broader than racism. Yakushko¹⁴ states that communities across the globe may define racism and xenophobia differently because of specific historical factors. In the South African context, one might differentiate the two words by associating the term xenophobia with prejudice between the 'in' group (local) and the 'out' group (foreigners), while on the other hand, racism is usually referred to as prejudice between black and white people in South Africa.

Yakushko¹⁴ notes the differences between these words and suggests that 'racism has been typically associated with prejudices against individuals founded on a socially constructed notion of groups' differentiating visible phenotypical markers, such as skin colour'. For Yakushko,¹⁴ xenophobia, in most cases, specifically targets individuals who are foreign nationals in a certain community, irrespective of their physical appearance. This is similar in the context of South Africa in explaining and applying these terms. For instance, the term racism is strongly influenced by colonialism and apartheid, whereas xenophobia is influenced by the immigration of foreigners. The two words are similar in that discrimination lies at the heart of both the racist and xenophobe. For instance, with racism, the idea is to discriminate against or prejudge a particular individual based on their race and colour, which can also extend to physical fighting because some individuals may not be able to tolerate it. Similarly, xenophobia involves discrimination based on the fear of some foreign nationalities.

Black people in South Africa display high rates of xenophobia and racial prejudice against foreign nationals residing in South Africa. However, that is not the case when it comes to white foreign nationals residing in South Africa. It is this article's observation that black South Africans display little xenophobia toward white foreign nationals compared to their black counterparts. This was also evident in a 2006 SAMP national xenophobia survey conducted in South Africa, which established that 'foreign nationals from Europe and North America, the majority of whom are white by race, are generally regarded more favourable in South Africa, than the black African migrants'.¹³

In the authors' view, although xenophobia, as defined earlier, refers to the fear of strangers by the in-group, in the South African context, because white settlement dates back to the 16th century, South Africans no longer regarded white people as foreigners. Interestingly, South African black people share more similarities with black foreign nationals than with white South Africans and white foreign nationals. In light of this view, black foreign nationals are not strangers to South Africa because of their many similarities: skin colour, cultural practices and rituals, languages and so on. Therefore, black South Africans do not fear their fellow black sisters and brothers from other African countries because they do not look dissimilar. Thus, this article argues that the term xenophobia has been wrongly adopted in South Africa as it is borrowed from Greek. Consequently, below is a discussion on the impact of xenophobia in South Africa.

Xenophobic language in the South African print media

Due to increasing competition among media houses, print media has been accused of using provocative language when reporting on xenophobia-related violence. In some

cases, extreme headlines with manipulative language are used by some newspapers to achieve more readership.¹⁵ Even though not many studies have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that print media's language has led to xenophobic violence, some researchers and media critics hold that print media's adoption of generalised stereotypes of people from other African countries and the labelling and use of derogative names foster xenophobic discourse.^{15,16,17,18} Furthermore, it has been argued that in South Africa, newspapers are passively consumed and help shape reality for readers.¹⁷ Thus, many people in South Africa have relied heavily on print media as a source of news. With the growing concern about print media's biased coverage of xenophobic violence and its misrepresentation of foreign nationals, some researchers have dubbed South African print media as xenophobic.¹⁷

In many cases, the media, print media in particular, has relied on generalised stereotypes to classify foreign nationals when reporting on crime and violence. For instance, in many cases, Nigerian migrants have been classified as drug dealers and smugglers, Zimbabweans as predominantly illegal immigrants and Somalis and Ethiopians as sellers of expired food and products.^{15,18} Other derogatory names have been used by print media to frame foreign nationals, besides 'aliens' and 'illegal immigrants' including *amakuwerekwere*, *amagrigamba*, 'my friend' and so on. To supplement this view, the article borrows from Mgogo and Osunkunle,¹⁵ where some of the newspaper headlines with these derogative names are evident:

*Pretoria Mayor singles out Nigerians as drug dealers and pimps*¹⁹ (p. 1)

*Alex aliens want to go home*²⁰ (p. 1)

*War declared against 'my friend' spaza shops selling expired products*²¹ (p. 59)

Based on the authors' previous research on the challenges of intercultural communication among university students, some respondents have pointed out that such derogatory names and stereotypes have been used by some local students to refer to them. For instance, some students who are of Nigerian origin have been told that they are the sons or daughters of drug dealers or smugglers and that their education fees are funded with that money. This points to negative reportage of xenophobia-related violence by the South African print media while compromising the print media's potential for impartial reportage of xenophobia through constructive news coverage.¹⁸ Furthermore, the authors note that it is this representation in media that perpetuates power differences between South African residents and foreign nationals through normalising derogatory reporting. Thus, symbolic xenophobic violence is perpetuated, which could potentially lead to actual violence. Therefore, these views sparked the authors' interest in exploring the perceptions of university students on the experience of symbolic xenophobic violence and the influence of media-perpetuated stereotypes.

Symbolic xenophobic violence in South African universities

South Africa, as a country, is in the southern region of the African continent. Its historical connections with the other African countries can be traced back before and after the colonial borders. For instance, the hegemony of the Nguni tribe from the Southern African region which spread across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries like Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Zambia is phenomenal. Some researchers argue that this phenomenon was influenced by the rise of Zulu Kingdom under King Shaka Zulu.²² Furthermore, these historical connections can also be seen within the sociopolitical frame. For instance, when South Africa was under the apartheid government, most African countries displayed strong rhetorical condemnation of the apartheid system. Countries like Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya and Zambia, just to mention a few, were contentious in providing safe camps for African National Congress (ANC) military (e.g. Umkhonto we Sizwe [MK]) to fight the atrocities of apartheid system.²³ Thus, in the postapartheid era these countries were also looking to benefit from South Africa's democracy, rainbowism, diversity and particularly its education system. In light of this view, most institutions of higher learning in South Africa are now host to international students, mostly from other African countries. Rumbaut²⁴ notes that more than 70 000 international students, mostly from within the African continent, are studying at South African universities. This is without the number of university staff members, academics in particular, who work in South African universities. Where there are two or more different cultures, there is a probability of cultural shock and cultural conflict, which eventually lead to xenophobic-related behaviours.¹⁵ This was evident in the authors' (Mgogo and Osunkunle²⁵) previous study titled 'Intercultural communication challenges and its effect on students' interpersonal relationships at a South African university'. For instance, some of the students from other African countries were constantly being told to 'go back' to their home countries by some of the local students at university residences. In the same study, findings revealed that the competition for university resources (e.g. bursaries, residence, residence TV room and cooking turns) between national and non-national students has led to symbolic violence.

In a study by Mafukata²⁶ on ethnicity, tribalism and xenophobia in a South African rural-based university, findings revealed that there was evidence of not only acts of ethnocentrism and tribalism but also of xenophobic incitement that cut across the university deanery and departments. In Maseko's²⁷ study on exploring the nature and prevalence of xenophobia in South African institutions of learning at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, findings revealed that there was evidence of staff members and students perpetuating verbal xenophobic attacks on immigrants. It was also found that reporting these incidents to management seems to be a cumbersome task. Although these incidents are hardly ever reported by the

victims, the media has reported some similar incidents. For instance, in August 2018, the *Daily Dispatch*²⁸ reported an outburst of xenophobia being incited among local and Zimbabwean students – cascading from social media posts. It is alleged that there were WhatsApp conversations among the group of Zimbabwean students citing that the South African students are lazy and not so bright, and as a result, they (Zimbabwean students) will remain in South Africa and occupy their spaces in academia.

Theoretical underpinnings

Different researchers have used similar theories to explain xenophobia within the South African context. For instance, in Tella's⁶ study on understanding xenophobia in South Africa, xenophobia is attributed to biocultural issues, isolation and scapegoating hypotheses. In their study on dynamics informing xenophobia and South African leadership response, Masikane et al.² attribute xenophobia to socio-economic, sociopolitical and scapegoating issues. The scapegoating hypothesis on xenophobic violence and criminality in a KwaZulu-Natal township³ has also been used to inform the general scope of the study. Therefore, the frustration-aggression theory is used as a theoretical foundation for this study. This theory attempts to explain how xenophobic behaviour manifests in individuals. In this case, xenophobic behaviour is attributed to frustrations experienced in attaining a goal by a local group, for which another vulnerable group of people is held responsible.^{29,30} Thus, it is the authors' view that this has been the case with university students. For instance, there have been complaints from local students that international students, especially those from other African countries, are being prioritised in securing accommodation in student residences while local students struggle to do so. Local students have raised their frustrations on the issues of limited bursaries or funding and have compared themselves to the international students who mostly come from their countries, funded by their governments. Furthermore, in the authors' previous research (e.g. 22), some local students complained that international students from other African countries, in particular, overstay their welcome in South Africa to secure academic jobs, which locally based students feel they should be attaining. These have been the ideal circumstances for xenophobic behaviours and attitudes among students to have prevailed. Thus, some students have mentioned that they have been called derogatory and stereotypical names (i.e. *amakwerekwere*, *amagweja*, sons or daughters of drug dealers or smugglers) and have been told by some local students to go back to their countries.

In speaking about stereotypic and derogative names for referring to immigrants, the media has been criticised and labelled as promoters of hatred and symbolic and actual xenophobic violence. According to Gomo,³¹ the media's ability to aggravate hatred and promote violence is well documented from early studies such as those on the role of radio in Nazi propaganda campaigns and the cases of Rwanda, the former Yugoslavia and the recent xenophobic

violence in South Africa. In South Africa, the press has not only been accused of publishing unbalanced, biased or inconsistent xenophobia stories,¹⁵ but has also been accused of misrepresentation and adopting and perpetuating stereotypes of immigrants, and it has been dubbed 'xenophobic'.¹⁶ It is on these bases that framing theory is also included in this study to explain print media language and its representation of African immigrants. This print media framing can also be attributed to the use of learnt xenophobic language by local students, where media shapes their ideas about people coming from other African countries. Consequently, it became the authors' interest to explore students' perceptions on the symbolic experiences of xenophobic violence in South African universities and the influence of print media on perpetuating stereotypes. Below are the methods adopted to conduct this study.

Research methods and design

This article has adopted qualitative methods based on the case study approach, as these methods are usually employed when dealing with several types of inquiry to help in understanding and explaining the meaning of social phenomena like xenophobia.³² Hence, the study is rooted in an interpretivist school of thought, which is predicated on the study's need to explore multiple constructions of reality. In exploring students' perceptions on the experiences of symbolic xenophobic violence in South African universities and the influence of media-perpetuated stereotypes, this article adopted focus group interviews as the data-gathering method. Therefore, two focus group interviews were conducted in each of the three selected universities, and they comprised local students and other African students. Thus, the three universities were the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus in the Eastern Cape province; the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus in KwaZulu-Natal province; and the University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus in Gauteng province.

At the University of Fort Hare's Alice Campus, the first focus group consisted of eight participants and the second focus group had seven participants. The first focus group discussion conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Howard Campus had six multinational participants while the second focus group was composed of eight local participants. Lastly, at the University of Johannesburg's Soweto Campus, the first focus group was composed of five multinational participants while the second focus group consisted of six local participants, making a total of 40 participants when combining all participants in this study. It was noted that it would have been desirable to conduct more focus groups; however, there was a feeling that there could be a repetition of views from the participants. Thus, data saturation was reached with the number of focus group discussions conducted in this study. Regarding the sampling methods, this article employed a nonprobability sampling method. The snowballing sampling technique was used to mobilise students for focus group discussions in library discussion rooms, residence TV rooms and student centres. A snowball sampling method, as

argued by Leighton et al.³³ is a variable method for mobilising study participants who cannot be accessed easily or known to the research. Furthermore, the data were analysed qualitatively using themes that emerged during the focus group discussions.

Research questions

- What are the students' views on the prevalence of xenophobia-related violence in institutions of higher learning?
- What are the students' views on the influence of media-perpetuated stereotypes which may be attributed to possible xenophobia-related behaviour among university students?
- What is the role of students in promoting antixenophobia behaviour?

Ethical consideration

Ethical clearance for the PhD project that this study is based on was obtained from the University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee and Research Higher Degrees Committee, with registration number REC-270710-028-RA Level 1 and certificate reference number OSU421SMGO01. In addition, letters of consent for data generation from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the University of Johannesburg were granted.

Findings

Participants' demographical information

Before proceeding to present the data analysis, it is necessary to provide an overview of the demographics of the participants who participated in the focus group discussions. Obtaining the accurate ages of participants can be a challenge, especially when conducting focus groups. This is because most people are not comfortable with disclosing their ages. In this study, the ages of participants were obtained using age brackets. Participants were grouped into five age brackets (18–20, 21–25, 25–30, 31–35 and 35–40). This enabled the authors to categorise the experiences of the different age groups. Both female and male participants were represented in this study. The researcher purposefully selected more female participants than male participants, because female participants are more open in discussion than male participants.

To accommodate the different levels of study, both undergraduate and postgraduate students were represented in this study. The participants in this study comprised students who speak indigenous and colonial languages. The participants' languages include IsiXhosa (South Africa), Shona (Zimbabwe), IsiZulu (South Africa), Sesotho (Lesotho), Yoruba (Nigeria), Swahili (Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia), French (Democratic Republic of Congo), Portuguese (Mozambique), Setswana (South Africa) and Venda (South Africa). The details of the participants are further illustrated in Table 1.

Four themes emerged from the focus group discussions:

- local students' perceptions of other African students
- students' views on the prevalence of xenophobic behaviour in South African universities
- print media's influence on students' xenophobia-related behaviour
- promoting antixenophobia behaviour: the role of the students.

Below is the analysis of data and themes that emerged from the focus group discussions.

Local students' perceptions of other African students

To assess their attitudes (both positive and negative), local students were asked to describe their feelings and views about other African students. Positively, some students emphasised the diversity and the significant economic role played by the intake of other African students into South African universities. For instance, Participant 7 in focus group 2 from the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus, pointed out that, 'Economically, they really boost the country.'

Furthermore, a participant from the University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus, mentioned that:

'Surely, if the country does not receive and welcome visitors from abroad, it means there is something wrong about that country. Therefore, they bring diversity to our country, as it is called a rainbow nation.' (Participant 2, focus group 1, 18–20 age group)

Based on the above views of the participants, it was at the beginning of the post-apartheid era when Archbishop Desmond Tutu coined the concept of the 'Rainbow Nation'. In its essence, it refers to the multiracialism and multiculturalism of South Africa as a country.³⁴ However, there have been criticisms that the current generation has not been embracing the value of 'rainbowism'. On this view, Bisschoff et al.³⁴ emphasise that 'the continuing rise of violent xenophobic attacks in the country, mostly against labour migrants from other African countries is one example of the failure of rainbowism'.

Some participants also had negative views. Another issue that emerged strongly from focus group analysis, particularly from the local students, was the argument that the university management gives priority to other African students in terms

TABLE 1: Participants' details.

| Participants | Focus group | University | Nationality | Language | Age group | Faculty | Study level |
|----------------|-------------|--|------------------------------|------------|-----------|---|--------------|
| Participant 7 | 2 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | South African | IsiXhosa | 25–30 | Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences | Postgraduate |
| Participant 2 | 1 | University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus | South African | Setswana | 18–20 | Faculty of Science | Second year |
| Participant 6 | 2 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | South African | IsiZulu | 21–25 | Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences | Postgraduate |
| Participant 5 | 1 | University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus | South African | IsiZulu | 25–30 | Faculty of Health Science | Postgraduate |
| Participant 4 | 1 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | Zimbabwean | Shona | 21–25 | Faculty of Management and Commerce | Third year |
| Participant 3 | 1 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | Zimbabwean | Shona | 21–25 | Faculty of Science and Agriculture | First year |
| Participant 1 | 2 | University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus | South African | Tshivenda | 25–30 | Faculty of Science | Third year |
| Participant 10 | 2 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | Lesotho | Sesotho | 30–35 | Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences | Postgraduate |
| Participant 9 | 2 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | Tanzania | Swahili | 30–35 | Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences | Postgraduate |
| Participant 8 | 2 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | Lesotho | Sesotho | 30–35 | Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences | Postgraduate |
| Participant 5 | 2 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | South Africa | IsiXhosa | 35–40 | Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences | Postgraduate |
| Participant 2 | 2 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | Zimbabwean | Shona | 25–30 | Faculty of Management and Commerce | Third year |
| Participant 2 | 2 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | Zimbabwean | Shona | 25–30 | Faculty of Management and Commerce | Third year |
| Participant 6 | 1 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | Zimbabwean | Shona | 25–30 | Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities | Third year |
| Participant 4 | 2 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | South African | IsiZulu | 25–30 | Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities | Postgraduate |
| Participant 1 | 1 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | South Africa | IsiXhosa | 30–35 | Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities | Postgraduate |
| Participant 4 | 1 | University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus | Mozambique | Portuguese | 25–30 | Faculty of Science | Postgraduate |
| Participant 5 | 2 | University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus | Democratic Republic of Congo | French | 30–35 | Faculty of Science | Postgraduate |
| Participant 6 | 2 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | Nigeria | Yoruba | 35–40 | Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities | Postgraduate |
| Participant 1 | 2 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | Nigeria | Yoruba | 30–35 | Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities | Postgraduate |
| Participant 9 | 1 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | South African | IsiXhosa | 18–20 | Faculty of Science and Agriculture | First year |
| Participant 10 | 1 | University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus | South African | IsiXhosa | 18–20 | Faculty of Science and Agriculture | First year |
| Participant 9 | 2 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | Tanzania | Swahili | 30–35 | Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities | Postgraduate |
| Participant 7 | 1 | University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard Campus | South African | IsiZulu | 20–25 | Faculty of Management Science | Third year |
| Respondent 4 | 1 | University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus | Mozambique | Portuguese | 25–30 | Faculty of Science | Postgraduate |
| Participant 5 | 2 | University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus | Democratic Republic of Congo | French | 30–35 | Faculty of Science | Postgraduate |

of residence allocation, scholarships or bursaries and fair treatment, somewhat leading to a dislike and hatred of other African students by their local counterparts. For instance, from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus:

‘Students from other African countries usually get preference more than we get as local students, more especially when it comes to students’ primary needs like residence and scholarships. Therefore, we are not treated the same.’ (Participant 6, focus group 2, 31–25 age group)

On this point, a participant from the University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus, further mentioned:

‘International students, especially within African continent, get so much preference from our institution, which makes them more comfortable to stay even longer in South Africa and end up taking our jobs and women.’ (Participant 5, focus group 1, 25–30 age group)

Therefore, on this point, the prioritisation of residence allocation and scholarship issues were highlighted as some of the contentious issues, including the competition for women within the university community. This is mainly an issue of competition for resources, which is also contributing to the resurgence of xenophobic attitudes and behaviour among university students. This is consistent with frustration-aggression theory, which attributes xenophobia to the frustrations experienced or imagined by one group (which is the competition for resources) for which another group is held responsible (other African students). Furthermore, this is happening as local students experience problems like being under-prioritised during residence allocation; therefore, they resort to taking out their frustrations on the other African students and using them as scapegoats.^{2,3,5}

Students’ views on the experiences of xenophobic behaviour in South African universities

Despite the common view that African students share almost similar cultural values like *ubuntu*,³⁵ the majority of the participants (other African students) confirmed that they had witnessed and experienced xenophobic behaviours by other, local students on their respective university campuses. Moreover, participants from the focus groups confirmed that they had witnessed such behaviours among local students, noting that although it is very rare to witness xenophobic behaviour in lecture rooms, such behaviours prevail more often in the residences, in assembling areas like television [TV] rooms and so forth.

On this point, participants from the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus, pointed out that:

‘There was a day when we [other African students] were watching soccer [English Premiership League] in the residence TV rooms; local students got in, fiercely demanding to watch rugby. They called us names, and some comments like “you should go back to your country”... and we were so scared of them and even resorted to moving out of the TV room.’ (Participant 4, focus group 1, 21–25 age group)

‘Yes, I fear that we might be attacked anytime. For instance, in [the] residence cooking area, I was told that my food stinks and I should not cook that food again. I was cooking *sadza* [stiff pap] with *dovi* [a stew of peanut butter].’ (Participant 3, focus group 1, 25–30 age group)

In light of the above views, the issue of competition for limited resources, as suggested by Jackson³⁶ and Neocosmos,³⁷ again becomes evident as a contributory factor towards xenophobic-related behaviours among university students. It was also noted by the participants that even among local students, such behaviour is witnessed. This view was highlighted by one of the participants from the University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus, who pointed out that:

‘Some of the students coming from the Limpopo province who speak Tshivenda are still experiencing some of these behaviours and attitudes from their fellow students from Gauteng, who mostly speak Sesotho, even though both Venda and Sesotho are official languages of the same country, South Africa.’ (Participant 1, focus group 2, 19–20 age group)

This is regrettable, as also echoed by Ngcamu and Mantzaris,³ because it devalues the essence of the most respected African value of *ubuntu*, ‘social cohesion and good governance’⁴ in university communities.

Participants from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard Campus, were asked to comment on whether there were any xenophobic behaviour witnessed at their campus. Although some participants mentioned that they had never witnessed xenophobic behaviour or attitudes, some of the participants shared that symbolic xenophobic behaviours and attitudes are evident and are probably suppressed. For instance, the following are some of their views.

‘Although I have a feeling that these behaviours might exist, they are still suppressed; I haven’t witnessed them so far.’ (Participant 10, focus group 2, 30–35 age group)

‘I think they are there, just that we don’t want to mention people.’ (Participant 9, focus group 2, 30–35 age group)

‘I have not yet seen these behaviours.’ (Participant 8, focus group 2, 30–35 age group)

The researcher gathered that most respondents believed that there was no xenophobic behaviour shown. However, after the researcher probed more on this question, one of the participants hinted that this behaviour may be there even though it is suppressed by the students. This is synonymous with the findings by Akande et al.¹⁸ from their study conducted on students’ attitudes and perceptions of xenophobia at a university in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, because they found that despite the majority of students showing nonxenophobic perceptions, traces of xenophobic attitudes and perceptions were observed from some of the students. Moreover, similar findings emerged from a similar study²⁷ at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where findings showed evidence of students perpetrating verbal xenophobic attacks on other African students. Based on the above views, including the participants’ views, it can be argued that xenophobic behaviour is prevalent among students.

Print media's influence on students' xenophobia-related behaviour

It was confirmed by the majority of the participants that media reporting influences xenophobic behaviour by students. The participants believed, as also suggested by^{38,39} that because of the misrepresentation of foreigners with the adoption of derogatory words like *amakwerekwere* (and others) and misquoting people, the media have often promoted xenophobic behaviour among the youth, including students. On this point, below are some of the views that emerged from the focus group discussion at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus.

'The way South African media represent foreigners; it injects the idea that they are so much different from us South African students. For instance, every time when I read on newspapers or online about foreign national caught drug dealing, I will see a Nigerian in that headline, but we also have South African drug dealers. That stereotype has penetrated even in our institution. We give other African students so much negative attitude because of these generalised stereotypes by media. For example, in classrooms, I have noted that a local student cannot tolerate sitting next to a foreign student, and I think that happens because the media teach us to focus on the negative side of them.' (Participant 5, focus group 2, 35–40 age group)

'I think the media has an influence by reporting on stories that are not fully researched. For instance, the story of the leaked WhatsApp messages from the WhatsApp group of Zimbabwean students that were offensive to the South African students was reported on the Daily Dispatch on the 27th of November before the university management even intervened on the matter. Therefore, some students saw read the news and started hating.' (Participant 2, focus group 2, 25–30 age group)

'And I think it's the way media, mostly print, forms their headlines that evoke emotions to some people. The same newspapers in their headlines with the word "war" made other people think there is physical fight among Zimbabwean and South African students.' (Participant 2, focus group 2, 18–20 age group)

'The media has influence because they have injected negative stereotypes and information about us foreign nationals. For example, if you are from Zimbabwe like me, South Africans will assume that you are coming from a poor household with starvation; that is the information that the media has generalised on.' (Participant 3, focus group 1, 25–30 age group)

'Many scholars have argued that the media have done so much in the development of societies in developing countries like South Africa; however, I also think it has also done so much to promote differences among Africans, which also contributes to these attacks. For instance, we are all blacks but when media reports about us they use our countries to name us; I have seen headlines like "a Nigerian that ..." "A Zimbabwean that ..." And the focus is all about bad things done. As for me, I have been called by so many names on campus and in town, including a "Zim" [short for a Zimbabwean], "igrigamba", "refugee", "ikwerekwere".' (Participant 6, focus group 1, 25–30 age)

From the combined views of participants from the two focus group discussions conducted at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard College, these are some of the views that emerged:

'Note the use of the names of our countries by media to report on a crime committed by foreign nationals is adding more on the hatred of foreigners. I've seen newspapers writing "the Zimbabwean killed, the Zambian caught on drug burst". Such kind of language influence more xenophobic behaviours from the South Africans.' (Participant 4, focus group 2, 25–30 age group)

'Sometimes the media sensationalise the attacks and make them as if every foreign national is being attacked, while it is sometimes just an occurrence in one province.' (Participant 1, focus group 1, 20–25 age group)

In the University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus, here are some of the views from the participants:

'Media always reports on negative things done by foreign nationals, and they do not focus on the good things we are doing for South Africans, like the scarce skills that they source to our countries. I am very disappointed that they do not focus on such positives.' (Participant 4, focus group 1, 25–30 age group)

'I think it's the South Africans who hate us more than media does, because they just hate us and we can't fully blame the media. I mean, some of them, we have stayed with them for more than a year. They must have realised that we are not the same; it's just the media that generalises the information.' (Participant 5, focus group 2, 30–35 age group)

In light of the above views, since 2008, the media has been reporting strongly about xenophobic attacks. However, it has not changed the way it represents foreign nationals and its reliance on the generalised stereotypes in reporting^{14,27,37} and that the media shapes reality for the community.¹⁷ The issue of the learnt stereotypes is also evident in.² Examples are Nigerians' association with drug dealers, Somalis as *spaza* shop owners, Zimbabweans as poverty-stricken people and illegal immigrants. Here, the issue of media framing is also observed, where immigrants are portrayed as illegal immigrants and criminals. Therefore, the hatred of foreign African nationals can also be traced from the media representation. This has resulted into affecting the appearance of other African students in academic institutions. Thus, learnt negative stereotypes are perpetuated toward other African university students. It is also noted that stereotypical and ethnocentric sentiments, as suggested by³⁷ and Taras⁴⁰ can lead to intolerance, which could lead to xenophobic behaviour by university students. Therefore, this suggests that some of the local students build their knowledge of other African students from the generalised media stereotypes. Thus, it can be also argued that stereotyping breeds prejudice and intolerance, which often underlie xenophobic behaviour.³³

Promoting antixenophobic behaviour: The role of the students

The battle against xenophobic behaviour on university campuses involves not only management but also university students. Therefore, participants were asked to suggest what role they think students can play in promoting antixenophobic behaviour. These are some of the views that emerged from

the two focus group discussions conducted at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus:

'Amongst campaigns that SRC organise, they must also reinforce the one for xenophobia.' (Participant 6, focus group 2, 35–40 age group)

'If the SRC can make use of the debate society or open up a general debate about xenophobia each year, I think it can help to deal with xenophobic behaviours among students.' (Participant 1, focus group 2, 25–30 age group)

'I think students, more especially us South Africans, need to be active in these antixenophobia campaigns. We should not rely on the management to give us a signal.' (Participant 9, focus group 1, 18–20 age group)

'Yes, that includes the cultural day thing. If we don't actively participate in these activities, it would seem like we still want to carry on with this hate amongst ourselves.' (Participant 10, focus group 1, 18–20 age group)

From the combined views of participants from the two focus group discussions conducted at the University of KwaZulu Natal, Howard College, these are some of the views that emerged:

'Students must engage themselves in the discussion about xenophobia and address the reason for these attitudes and behaviours to prevail and be willing to bring resolutions afore.' (Participant 1, focus group 1, 20–25 age group)

'Students, especially local students, must not rely on the media to know about other cultures beyond the borders of South Africa; they must research more to eliminate generalised stereotypes and develop well-researched information, maybe on the books.' (Participant 9, focus group 2, 30–35 age group)

'As local students, we should be at the forefront, leading antixenophobic campaigns.' (Participant 7, focus group 1, 20–25 age group)

Similar opinions were expressed by participants at the University of Johannesburg, Soweto Campus. Here are some of the excerpts from the participants:

'Students have to accept that South Africa is a diverse country and so many unfamiliar cultures are yet still to come to this country.' (Participant 4, focus group 1, 25–30 age group)

'Students need to adapt to the fact that no man is an island. Therefore, we will always rely on one another as unique and different in terms of cultures as we are.' (Participant 5, focus group 2, 30–35 age group)

'Students need to develop an interest to adapt and be willing to learn more on our differences, for instance, willingness to learn other languages from other countries.' (Participant 2, focus group 1, 18–20 age group)

As can be deduced from the above views, participants believed that students should take the lead by actively participating in antixenophobic campaigns and intercultural events like university cultural day campaigns. It was also pointed out that the Student Representative Council (SRC) can play a big role in this regard by also facilitating students' campaigns around issues of xenophobia. Moreover, it was also pointed out that

students' interest in learning about the cultures of their fellow African students could assist in accumulating much-needed knowledge and interest in other cultures and perhaps discard the generalised, learnt media negative stereotypes of immigrants. Furthermore, participants highlighted that learning about other African students' cultures could help build mutual respect, love and harmony. Based on this view, it can be noted that these could also promote social cohesion, ubuntu and human rights, as noted by Solomon and Kosaka,⁴ within the university community.

Discussion of findings

The findings from this study show that although xenophobic attacks have not been witnessed within the South African universities investigated, there is evidence of the prevalence of xenophobic perceptions, attitudes and behaviour among university students, with some of these attitudes being suppressed. For instance, participants in this study highlighted evidence of xenophobic behaviour in university students' residences and TV rooms where other students, especially those from other African countries, are discriminated against based on their countries of origin. Furthermore, some of these students are told to 'go back to their home countries'. The study found that some of these attitudes and behaviours are motivated by frustration emanating from the competition for university resources like students' residences, funding and so forth. As a result, the hatred for students from other African countries is due to a lack of these resources. Then, frustrations from the local students are directed towards students from other African countries because they (local students) argue that foreign students are being prioritised in the allocation of these resources. Thus, the study has attributed this phenomenon to Dollard's frustration aggression theory. Interestingly, some similar behaviours are prevalent among local students in a form of 'ethnic-tribalism',²⁶ which can be viewed as a form of xenophobia.

Other researchers like^{15,18} and McDonald and Jacobs¹⁶ have researched the print media's contribution to xenophobic violence in South Africa. Therefore, it was of interest in this article to also examine students' views on the influence of the media on xenophobic behaviour. Thus, some of the participants in this study (students) confirmed that the media plays a role in xenophobia in South Africa. Its contribution was noted in line with the adoption and perpetuation of negative stereotypes in representing immigrants. Therefore, some of those stereotypes and derogative names adopted by the media (e.g. *amakwerekwere*, aliens, 'my friend', illegal immigrants, etc.) were used by some of the local students when referring to international students. The authors were also interested in finding out from the participants what the role of students was in promoting antixenophobic behaviour in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. The majority of participants highlighted the role that could be played by the Student Governing Body, also known as the SRC, in leading antixenophobic campaigns on university campuses. Participants also emphasised the role to be played by students themselves in developing an interest in learning about other

African students' cultures to discard the reality shaped by the media in its representation of African immigrants. In addition, the participation of students in university intercultural events like cultural days sparks interest in learning more about other cultures, especially from other African countries.

Conclusion

Based on the results presented in this article, the reviewed literature and newspaper articles, it can be concluded that symbolic xenophobia, including the related perceptions, attitudes and behaviours are experienced among university students in institutions of higher learning in South Africa. For instance, the competition for resources like bursaries and student residences, where international students are prioritised in attaining these resources, frustrates local students and leads to the incitement of xenophobia. The study also concludes that symbolic xenophobic traits among students at South African institutions of higher learning include negative stereotypes and the use of derogatory names for international students, especially those from other African countries. Moreover, it has emerged in this article that the media's representation, especially print media, perpetuates power differences among South Africans and immigrants and foreign nationals through its adoption of derogatory names in its reportage. The study also notes that this derogatory reportage fosters xenophobic discourse towards media content consumers in South Africa. Thus, this points to negative reportage of xenophobia-related violence by the South African print media, which may have resulted in symbolic xenophobic violence experienced by university students. In the process, print media compromises its potential for impartial reportage of xenophobia through constructive news coverage. Therefore, this marks the contribution of the media to xenophobia, not only in South African communities but also in university students from the same communities where physical xenophobic attacks have been witnessed. As part of the recommendations from this study, the SRC and other student communities have a role to play in promoting xenophobia-free university campuses through antixenophobia campaigns.

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Authors' contributions

Q.M. conceived the presentation of the idea, developed the theoretical and conceptual framework, generated data, conceptualised the method and presented the findings of this work. O.O. provided guidance and supervision of this work.

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