

## **The integration of African Migrant Learners in Vocational Education**

### **How Can Understanding Migrant Learners' Stories Assist a Vocational College of Further and Higher Education Effectively Support Migrants from Asylum Seeking Backgrounds: Migrant Learners' Perspectives in a Vocational College in Malta.**

Maltese schools and colleges experienced significant social changes reflecting the island's multicultural and cosmopolitan society.

An Education Doctorate (EdD) research study was conducted as part of the doctorate award from the University of Sheffield.

The original study examines the contemporary issue of migration and addresses this valuable topic by considering the perceptions and experiences of migrant students from Africa with asylum backgrounds studying at the Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST). It explores the needs of asylum migrant students and investigates the role that vocational education can have in supporting them with their integration into society. The research study delves into the systems, structures and policies vocational colleges could institute to more effectively support the holistic learning of asylum migrant students.

The research seeks to understand how the experiences of individual participants in their home countries, during their journeys to Malta (their Past) and since arriving in Malta (their Present) shapes their learning aspirations and needs (their Future). Based on the principal of social justice, the study also re-examines the civic role vocational colleges like MCAST can have in developing more effective strategies to enable these individuals to achieve their educational aspirations.

A sample of six participants, four males and two females, was included in the study with the life stories of individuals hailing from Zimbabwe, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia and Sudan. The research endeavour has aimed at creating safe spaces for the migrants to voice and to have acknowledged their often traumatic life experiences and the challenges encountered.

An analytical framework was applied to help identify themes from the participants' personal narrations, exploring and illuminating the migrants' experiences and their specific needs. Seven main themes were elicited: childhood, the journey, detention experiences, insecurity, responses, aspirations and challenges. The study theoretically expands on these main themes together with secondary ones with a specific focus on the main challenges of discrimination and integration as described by the participants. Determined not

to experience discrimination any longer, one of the participants stated that “*If there is equity there is everything.*”

In view of the findings, the study makes recommendations to policy makers, educational stakeholders and other vocational education professionals to facilitate the integration of asylum migrant students both at vocational colleges and society at large. “*Educators need to be prepared to a radical social change to understand diversity in student intakes and to provide the best possible opportunities for students including asylum migrants.*” Recommendations are also made for further research to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject.

The EdD research was conducted as part of the Doctorate award in Further and Higher Education from the University of Sheffield. The study provides a basis for critical reflection and discussion among educational stakeholders and policy makers amongst others.

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