



**Parenting in migration: the lived experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of  
Doctor of Human Science (Anthropology), in the College of Humanities,  
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November 2024

**Supervisors Consent for Submission**

I declare that I have given my consent for the submission of this thesis.



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**Supervisor's signature**

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**Date 29/08/2025**



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**Co-supervisor's signature**


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**Date 29/08/2025**

DECLARATION

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## **Dedication**

This PhD is dedicated to the loving memory of my grandfather Mbhono Sindane, who loved education but never had the chance to follow his own dreams. He always believed that his grandchildren would go far with education, and his words have inspired me every step of the way. This is for him because of his unwavering belief in us.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I thank God for granting me the opportunity to achieve this milestone in higher education. Through His grace, I found the strength to persevere.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Vivian Ojong. Thank you for your invaluable guidance and contributions to my work. Most importantly, I am deeply grateful for your understanding that life sometimes gets in the way of studies. Your encouragement and support during challenging times have meant so much to me.

A special thank you to my supervisor Dr. Nelly Sharpley for stepping in to supervise this work to its completion. You joined my journey when I felt stuck and burnt out, and your insights and guidance were truly appreciated. Ngiyabonga!

Thank you to all the participants who were a part of this study, your time and dedication to this work is appreciated.

To my husband, Rogerant Tshibangu, thank you for your unwavering support and encouragement to see this through to the end.

To my children, Lunga, Ayabonga, and Zisanda, thank you for your patience and for sharing your mom with her academic work. At last, I can proudly answer your question: "Mama, are you done?" Yes, I am done!

To the Sindane family, thank you boMbhense! Nyathi! I'm appreciative of all your love and support.

Aisha and Nokubonga thank you for your emotional support and encouragement. I am deeply grateful for your care and kindness throughout this journey.

## **Abbreviations**

**UNESCO** **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**

**SIT** **Social Identity Theory**

**HRW** **Human Rights Watch**

**UNICEF** **United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund**

**PAR** **Participatory Action Research**

**SA** **South Africa**

**DRC** **Democratic Republic of Congo**

**SDGs** **Sustainable Development Goals**

**SADC** **Southern African Development Community**

**PAR** **Participatory Action Research**

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to examine how Congolese immigrant parents in South Africa navigate the challenges of raising children in a new cultural and socio-political environment and how their young adult children experience identity, belonging and integration. The study aimed to explore how migration influences parenting practices, the transmission of cultural values and the adaptation strategies employed by both generations. Set within the broader context of intra-African migration, this research responds to a gap in the literature by focusing on the lived experiences of Congolese families in South Africa, where migration dynamics differ from those in Western host countries.

This phenomenological study drew on semi-structured interviews with Congolese parents and their young adult children who were either born in South Africa or arrived at a young age. Using Social Identity Theory, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Acculturation Theory as guiding frameworks, the research examined how Congolese parents blend their cultural traditions with South African practices and how both parents and children adapt to a hybrid cultural environment.

The findings reveal that parents rely heavily on community-based social networks to maintain cultural ties and transmit values to their children providing resources and a sense of belonging. Participants noted that South African societal norms often compared to American models because of the emphasis on children's rights created tensions with traditional Congolese parenting expectations. Unlike African immigrants in Western countries the families in this study reported minimal engagement with the welfare system though two institutions, the Department of Home Affairs and schools, were identified as highly influential in shaping integration experiences. Schools emerged as critical spaces where young adults confronted questions of identity and belonging and learned local languages which supported their assimilation.

Key challenges included documentation barriers, high unemployment or underemployment and persistent xenophobia, all of which negatively affected parenting. This study contributes to anthropology by offering a detailed account of intra-African migration and highlighting the unique parenting adaptations of Congolese immigrant families in South Africa expanding the literature beyond the prevailing Western and non-Western migration focus.

**Keywords:** *Congolese immigrants, parenting, migration, South Africa, identity, belonging, cultural adaptation, immigrant youth*

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## **CHAPTER 1: Introduction**

This chapter introduces the study which examines the lived experiences of Congolese immigrant parents raising children in South Africa and the perspectives of their young adult children. It situates the research within the broader context of intra-African migration highlighting how relocation shapes family roles cultural adaptation and identity formation. The section outlines the central problem of limited scholarly attention to parenting in migration within the South African context and presents the study's aims to explore adaptation strategies value transmission and the influence of host-society structures. It also summarises the significance of the research for anthropology and migration studies noting its contribution to understanding how families navigate cultural continuity and change. The chapter concludes by outlining the structure of the thesis and setting the stage for the detailed exploration that follows.

### **1.1 Introduction and Background to the Study**

Parenting is said to be a generally difficult and wonderfully gratifying undertaking however it can become a tremendously challenging task when done away from one's cultural roots and familiar surroundings. Harkness and Super (2002) state that in classic anthropology and human development, parenting is often seen as the main way to socialize children, helping them adapt to their surroundings and make the most of opportunities.

Raffaeta (2016:38) stated that from a socio-anthropological perspective the significant role of migrant parents in the developing standard culture of parenting has not been thoroughly examined. Additionally, how migrants' cultural diversity interacts with current parenting practices and ideas, as well as how broader factors such as legal settlement status influence these dynamics, have been underexplored. The author calls for an investigation to important factors pertaining to migration. One of anthropology's main aim is to understand how aspects of society are linked and how people interrelate as they encounter changes. It studies the ways in which social, cultural, economic, and other factors influence each other and people's lives. It is under this contextual change of migrating from the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Africa that I want to investigate both experiences of Congolese parents raising their children and Congolese children raised in a migratory space.

Ahead of exploring the context of Congolese immigrant parents raising their children in a migratory space we first need to understand the motivating factors and history that have led them to come and live in South Africa. Migration has been an enduring part of human history, moulded by social, economic, and environmental forces. The South African Forced Migration Studies Programme, states that there are between one and three million African immigrants currently residing in South Africa Jolly (2008) cited in Nanivadekar (2014:1). In general, some of the pull factors to South Africa for most immigrants from other African countries are because they cannot live safely or cannot make a living in their home countries. Many African nations are facing economic challenges leading their citizens to seek refuge, in countries with conditions elsewhere including South Africa, known for its stability and attracting a wide range of migrants, with varied skills and backgrounds seeking political freedom and economic prospects as noted by Lee and Sehoole, (2020). Since the abolition of apartheid, in 1994 and South Africa joining the Southern African Development Community (SADC) the nation has been working towards building ties with its neighbouring countries. This has led a rise in migration as borders became more open and accessible over time. In the past discriminatory labour arrangements based on gender and colonial practices have played a role in shaping migration patterns in Southern Africa with a focus, on labour according to Crush et al (2005:15). South Africa became a choice, for refugees seeking asylum from countries like the DRC and other SADC members over the years. In 1994 during the height of conflicts in the DRC region Congolese refugees made up most asylum seekers with 152, 414 applications filed with the South African Department of Home Affairs. By 2016, around 450 000 Congolese refugees had settled in neighbouring African countries marking a continuous rise over the past four decades as highlighted by Flahaux & Schoumaker (2016). Besides South Africa, several African nations host a significant population of Congolese refugees.

South Africa's legal framework plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences of migrant families and their children. The South African Citizenship Act of 1995 provides that citizenship by birth is granted if at least one parent is a South African citizen or permanent resident (South African Citizenship Act, 1995). For children of foreign nationals, including asylum seekers and refugees, birth registration is essential to securing identity documents and accessing rights; however, strict documentation requirements often prevent parents without valid permits from registering their children at birth (Centre for Child Law, 2022; Scalabrini Centre of Cape Town, 2019). This creates risks of statelessness despite constitutional guarantees of children's rights. Recent developments have sought to address this gap: children of asylum seekers and refugees

born in South Africa are now eligible to apply for naturalization at age 18, provided their births were registered (Department of Home Affairs, 2019). Nevertheless, practical challenges such as bureaucratic delays, xenophobic attitudes, and inconsistent application of the law mean that many Congolese families still struggle to secure documentation for their children.

From an anthropological perspective, these struggles highlight how parenting in migration extends beyond the household. Parents must navigate state bureaucracies as part of their role, becoming both caregivers and legal advocates for their children. Research in South Africa shows that precarious legal status and restrictive migration governance have direct consequences for family stability and belonging (Crush & Williams, 2005; Landau, 2017). In this sense, Congolese parents in South Africa are not only transmitting cultural values at home but are also managing the structural constraints of the host society. This shows that parenting in migration is both a cultural and political act, where family life is inseparable from the wider legal and institutional environment.

Despite the attraction of better prospects in other countries acting as pull factors for increased migration, the fundamental causes of the DRC's population leaving persist, especially in the Eastern Kivu and Goma regions Vlassenroot and Huggins (2005). Flahaux & Haas (2016) state that Congolese migrants in South Africa are part of a broader trend of African migration increasingly influenced by developmental processes and social changes rather than solely driven by poverty and violence. This shift in migration patterns suggests that individuals are now motivated by growing capabilities and aspirations to pursue better opportunities in new settings. South Africa, renowned for its economic prospects and migration history, attracts numerous African immigrants seeking socio-economic advancement. The encounters of Congolese immigrants in South Africa are shaped by various elements, including xenophobia and prejudice. Xenophobia and animosity towards immigrants including those from the Congo persist as significant challenges in South Africa. According to Madue (2015), xenophobic attitudes and behaviours are driven by negative perceptions of African migrants as job competitors and threats to social and economic resources. These attitudes create a difficult environment for Congolese immigrants and other foreign nationals, impacting their integration and overall well-being in South Africa.

Congolese families moving to South Africa encounter significant challenges that affect how they raise their children. Ochocka and Janzen (2008) highlight that migration often leads to feelings of isolation as families are separated from their support networks and must adapt to

unfamiliar cultural norms. This adjustment can be especially difficult for parents, who are tasked with balancing their cultural heritage while helping their children navigate a new society. Suárez-Orozco et al. (2011) explain that this balancing act often results in intergenerational conflicts, as children quickly adapt to the new culture, which may differ from their parents' traditional values. Similarly, Yoshikawa (2013:6) points out that additional barriers, such as language difficulties and limited access to resources, make parenting even more challenging for migrant families.

Globally, Portes and Rumbaut (2014) argue that migrants face the dual challenge of preserving their cultural identity while integrating into new environments. This tension is echoed by Crul and Schneider (2010), who observe that families in Europe often struggle to maintain their heritage while participating in broader society. For immigrant families, as Bornstein and Cote (2006) assert, this involves weaving together emotional support, cultural values, and practical parenting strategies in a way that enables their children to thrive in their new environment.

When immigrants move to other countries, they carry their cultural norms and values to the host country. Consequently, these have a significant influence on building family relationships and setting socialization goals for child development and parenting LeVine, (2004). It is now prevalent to see immigrant couples raise their children in South Africa, however research documenting their parenting experience is scant. This warrants an inquiry to understand how they experience and perceive parenting in South Africa. The adaptation experiences of their young adult children will also be an area of significant emphasis in this research to ascertain how they experience being raised by Congolese immigrant parents in a South African context. This circumstance offers fertile ground for anthropological research, providing valuable insights into how families strike a careful balance between conserving cultural identity and adapting to a new socioeconomic setting. Understanding the dynamics of parenting during migration provides insight into cultural adaptability, identity preservation, and value transmission between generations.

One of the important aspects of research is conducting studies that are relevant to the local and global space while contributing to knowledge regarding the problems we face in contemporary times. This research is not only an anthropological query to parenting and migration, but it is relevant to many elements of sustainable development, making it closely related to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gaining insight into the migration-related experiences of Congolese parents and children will help us better understand how their struggles and achievements relate to the larger objectives set forth in the SDGs.

Migration can affect several SDGs, especially when it comes to parenting experiences. For example, given that immigrant families frequently experience financial difficulties and unequal access to resources, goals 1 (No Poverty) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities) are pertinent (Janker & Thieme, 2021). Parenting styles and Congolese families' access to healthcare in South Africa may influence Goal 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). Regarding the educational experiences of migrant children and their integration into the South African educational system, Goal 4 (Quality Education) is pertinent. In terms of comprehending gender dynamics among migrant families and guaranteeing their rights and protection in the host nation, the lived experiences of Congolese parents and children in South Africa can also be linked to Goals 5 (Gender Equality) and 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) (Janker & Thieme, 2021). Concerning employment possibilities and economic integration, the problem may also touch on Goal 8 which is Decent Work and Economic Growth (Adhikari, B., Urbach, Chettri, Sharma, Breu, Geschke, Fischer & Prescott, 2023). While this research does not directly address the sustainable goals, it is crucial to emphasize its relevance. By examining the challenges and strategies faced by Congolese parents and children in South Africa, we can enhance our support for migrant families. This understanding can help create policies that address their unique needs and promote their integration and well-being, contributing to the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.

Chapter two, which is dedicated to the reviewing of literature pertaining to this study will have greater details; however, this part of the introduction gives a brief glimpse of what is currently known or even related to this research topic especially since it is one that limited studies conducted. The start of research on Congolese immigrants highlights several challenges related to parenting, including stigma, discrimination, financial hardship, and preserving cultural identity. Wagner, Glaesmer and Bartels (2020) discuss the significant stigma faced by children of United Nations peacekeepers and their mothers in the DRC. These families experience social exclusion due to mixed ethnicity, perceived illegitimacy, and fatherlessness, along with economic hardships. This study demonstrates how social stigma affects family life and suggests that these issues may persist for Congolese families in South Africa, affecting their integration into new communities. A study by Wagner et al. (2020) focused on single parenthood from the perspective of mothers and the findings showed that single mothers in the DRC face severe financial, health-related, and parenting challenges. found that these mothers deal with instability, conflict, and poor governance, but they also show great resilience and self-reliance. The study highlights the lack of support for single mothers, stressing the need for targeted

policies and research to improve their support networks. Understanding these challenges and the resilience of these mothers is important for understanding the context in which Congolese immigrant families live in South Africa. Maintaining ties to their home country and culture is also crucial for Congolese migrants. Whitehouse (2009) explains how West African migrants, including those from Congo, do this through practices like rotating wives and sending children back to be raised by relatives. These practices help preserve cultural continuity and identity. This context helps us understand how Congolese parents in South Africa might deal with the complexities of raising children while keeping cultural connections strong.

Taking care of children inside the secure confines of their familiar environment and cultural norms is a common perception of parenting. It's a role rooted in custom and a strong sense of belonging. But this journey takes on an interesting aspect when migration comes into play. Parents find themselves in unfamiliar ground when they move away from home, culture, and everything they know. The challenges of raising kids in the face of unfamiliar languages and traditions. Migration also changes family structures, child well-being, parenting practices, and gender roles. Mawire, Mtapuri, Kidane and Mchunu (2020) studied Zimbabwean and Congolese families in Durban, South Africa, finding that migration often leads to family members being separated, the rise of female-headed households, and changes in parental roles. These changes show the challenge of balancing cultural values with adapting to a new society. The experiences of these families show how adaptation and preservation both play a role in the lives of Congolese parents and their children in South Africa.

The research by Madhavan, Kim, White and Gomez-Olive (2023), on parenting among migrants in South Africa, provides useful insights that can help understand the experiences of Congolese parents here. It focused on the challenges migrant parents face in balancing their work and family responsibilities, which is important for understanding the situation of Congolese parents. The study also looks at how living with children affects the well-being of parents, especially their sleep, which can help you explore how migration and changing ways of raising children impact migrant parents' health.

The context of sending money home among Congolese migrants reveals the deep connections they keep across distances. Peter Kankonde Bukasa (2010) discusses how remittances are not just financial, but also emotional and cultural links that connect parents and children. The concept of 'social death' shows the severe consequences of not maintaining these connections.

This understanding is crucial for exploring how Congolese parents in South Africa engage with their families back home and strive to keep family bonds and cultural heritage alive.

These studies highlight the various challenges faced by Congolese immigrant parents. My research will build on this by exploring how these parents balance adapting to a new society with preserving their cultural identity. By examining the experiences of Congolese parents in South Africa, my study aims to shed light on how migration affects parenting and family life. This study aims to gain an understanding of this topic by embarking on a phenomenological study that focuses on understanding the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants. It aims to describe the essence of experiences from the perspective of those who have lived them. In this study, this involves deeply exploring the personal experiences of Congolese parents and their children as they navigate life in South Africa.

## **1.2 Significance of the study**

- The existing literature on immigrant family dynamics in South Africa is notably sparse, with a particular deficiency in studies focusing on the Congolese community. This study addresses this significant research void by exploring the varied nature of immigrant family life within the South African context. By focusing on the Congolese diaspora, this research enhances the scarce pool of knowledge, showing the distinct difficulties, cultural engagements, coping mechanisms, and the comprehensive societal structure that define the existence of these families., it provides valuable insights that are crucial for various stakeholders interested in immigration, cultural studies, and family dynamics.
- South Africa is a nation celebrated for its cultural diversity. This study highlights the ongoing cultural infusion that comes with immigration, examining its implications for the social bonds or connection of the country. The anthropological perspective is vital in understanding how different cultural groups coexist, interact, and influence each other within a shared space.
- By examining the family lives of Congolese people, we can potentially see the other side of their lives unlike the one that is portrayed in the media and perpetuates the scepticism about African immigrants in South Africa. Such an anthropological study promotes a more nuanced and informed understanding of immigrants' roles in their new communities.
- The research is valuable because it will shed light on the adaptation processes of Congolese parents and their children in South Africa. This understanding is vital in understanding the

broader anthropological context of migration and the complexities involved in establishing a new home in a foreign land. The research doesn't just help immigrants adjust to their new surroundings; it also enhances the scholarly discussion about how people move, settle into new communities, and exchange cultural ideas.

- Studying the parenting experiences and perspectives of Congolese immigrants serves as a crucial step in fostering cultural competence within social services. By exploring these insights, professionals, including anthropologists and service providers, gain a holistic understanding of the unique challenges faced by immigrant families.

### **1.3 Motivation for the study**

The reason for focusing on this area of study came from how African migrants are often shown in the media and the frequent xenophobic events in South Africa (Danso & McDonald, 2001). Various authors (Hadland, 2010; Harris, 2001; and Kalitanyi, & Visser, 2010) acknowledge that media narratives and scholarly literature tend to classify African migrants primarily as individuals seeking economic opportunities, primarily engaged in various economic activities, remitting money back to their home countries, and unfortunately, being associated with xenophobic violence and a review of past studies on media portrayal and xenophobia reveals that many newspapers commonly depicted African migrants as criminals (Harber, 2008; Mawadza, 2012; Els, 2013) cited in Chiumbu, and Moyo (2018:137). This perspective is limited and often presents a one-dimensional depiction of African migrants. This study is inspired by a desire to investigate other perspectives and uncover the lives of African immigrants beyond the economic framework. It poses the question: beyond working hours and beyond conflict-ridden headlines, what does the day-to-day existence of these individuals and families entail? There is a rich and unnoticed side to their being how they parent in an unfamiliar land and the cultural values they transmit to their children. Barbali (2009:88) states that people are more connected, even if not physically, and as a result, migrant communities evolve into diasporic networks with many interconnected points. The social networks they establish, and how they navigate issues of identity and belonging in a society that is not always receptive. This study intends to fill that gap by focusing on the lived experiences of Congolese parents and their children, thereby offering a more balanced and humanized portrayal of African migrants. It aims to surpass the stereotype of migrants as solely economic agents or victims of xenophobia, instead presenting them as active participants in their communities with rich cultural lives and personal narratives.

### **1.3.1 Professional motivation**

As a student of anthropology, my thesis on "Parenting in Migration: The Lived Experiences of Congolese Parents and Their Young Adult Children Living in South Africa" is motivated by my deep interest in the evolving dynamics of African Migrant to South Africa. Historically, African immigration to South Africa was predominantly male dominated, driven by labour opportunities. However, in recent times, there has been a significant shift towards family migration, where entire families relocate together. This shift prompts crucial questions about preserving and adapting cultural practices and ways of life as migrants integrate into a new host nation. Obiakor and Afoláyan, (2007: 266). The definition of cultural continuity and discontinuity varies depending on the individual. Anthropologists and sociologists study how human cultures are passed down from one generation to the next. Within the scope of this research, I probe in search of how Congolese parents change, retain, or alter their parenting culture when raising their children in South Africa.

Doda (2005) and Friberg (2022:13) posited that anthropologists are mainly interested in studying much further, exotic societies that are detached from modernization beyond the European continent. It is true that most anthropologists conduct fieldwork with isolated populations in distant corners. However, anthropologists are increasingly interested in home anthropology, which is the study of anthropology at home, or in one's own society. I, too, am intrigued by the changes I observe in my society as we welcome new populations whose family lives we are unfamiliar with.

We, as a receiving society, we must understand the experiences of these migrants. Having had the privilege to closely engage with African immigrant families, I have often contemplated what it entails for them to essentially "restart" their lives in a new country, particularly concerning their children's upbringing, away from extended family, and the familiarity of their home country. My research intends to explore and understand the family structures and dynamics within the context of immigration, with a specific focus on how Congolese families navigate and adapt their cultural practices, beliefs, and parenting strategies within the South African setting. This study aims to enhance our understanding of the varied effects of migration on these communities, highlighting the significance of cultural sensitivity and support for migrant families striving for improved lives in South Africa.

#### **1.4 Research Problem**

The substantial emigration from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to South Africa has brought to the forefront the profound sacrifices and uncertainties faced by migrating families. Parenting, a complex endeavour even under familiar circumstances, becomes exceedingly difficult when transplanted into the unfamiliar terrain of a new country. Researchers such as Glick, Hanish, Yabiku and Bradley (2012:1529) state that extant research on children in immigrant families and the role of immigrants' parenting practices in children's development has focused largely on children's health and cognitive functioning but, they haven't looked as much into how these parents handle their changing roles in parenting, how their own cultures affect how they raise their kids, and how living in a new country legally impacts them in this case as Congolese parents settle in South Africa. They are challenged with integrating into a new community and parenting their children in a diverse cultural environment. However, the connection between migration and parenting hasn't been studied enough, even though it's very important. Where it has been considered, it typically features as a peripheral aspect of broader studies. According to Raffaeta (2016:41), the nexus of migration and parenting encompasses a varied array of disciplines, including reproductive and child health, family studies, feminist and gender studies, research on childhood, and migration and health policy studies. This issue is not confined to the adults creating new paths but also profoundly affects their young adult children those who immigrate or those born in the host country. These young individuals encounter the acculturation process during a critical developmental phase, wrestling with identity formation and the reconciliation of traditional values with those of the host culture. As the Congolese diaspora in South Africa solidifies the experiences and challenges of parenting within the migratory landscape are becoming increasingly salient, warranting an in-depth exploration that this study seeks to provide.

There is not much research on parenting in South Africa, especially when it comes to immigrant families. According to Bidandi and Roman (2020), there is a clear shortage of studies focusing on this area. Immigrant parents in South Africa face many challenges, particularly when it comes to getting their children into schools. These difficulties point to bigger problems with how immigrants integrate and access resources in the country (Marishane, 2021:70). These families also must adjust to new cultural and social norms, which can make it hard to carry out their parenting roles effectively. This includes understanding different ways of raising children and dealing with language barriers (Yakhnich, 2016). It's important to understand how immigrant families cope with issues like identity, discrimination, and the need to stay united

despite facing xenophobia and cultural challenges (Jong, 2017). We need to look at what immigrant families expect when they come to South Africa and what the reality is like for them. It's crucial to consider how these experiences affect their children's living conditions and the overall well-being of the parents (Kanayo & Anjofui, 2021; Madhavan et al., 2023). It's surprising that there isn't more research on the experiences of Congolese families living in South Africa, given the significant impact that migration has on family life, the transmission of culture, and how these families integrate into society. We don't know enough about how migration and parenting intersect in these families. There's a lack of understanding about how Congolese parents adjust to their changing roles and how cultural factors influence their parenting styles. Additionally, there's not enough knowledge about how immigration laws affect these parents' experiences. Because of this gap in research, the specific challenges faced by migrant families are often overlooked, as are the broader impacts on the cultural and identity development of immigrant youth. Therefore, it's crucial to carry out comprehensive research to explore the complex dynamics of migration and parenting among Congolese families in South Africa.

### **Key questions that were asked**

- a) What are the experiences and views of Congolese immigrant parents about raising children in the context of the South African context?
- b) What are the adaptive mechanisms parents employ when faced with the challenges of raising their children?
- c) In what ways has migration influenced their parenting roles?
- d) How does the South African environment enhance or hinder the immigrant families' acculturation experience?
- e) How do the young adult children of Congolese immigrant parents perceive the experience of being raised in South Africa?
- f) Do Congolese immigrant families have social networks and support?

### **1.5 Research problem and objectives: Broader issues that were investigated**

This study aims to gain insight into the holistic experience of Congolese couples who are raising their children together in South Africa. It also seeks to capture the views and adaptation experiences of Congolese young adult children who grew up in this country.

- a) To investigate how migration influences parenting roles.

- b) To identify contextual factors that impact the immigrant family's acculturation process.
- c) To identify the lack or presence of support and social networks for Congolese immigrant families.
- d) To understand the experience Congolese young adults, have with growing up in South Africa.
- e) To ascertain the strategies used by Congolese immigrant parents to deal with the challenges of raising their children in South Africa.
- f) To identify challenges and opportunities of raising children in South Africa.

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

The study focuses on Congolese parents and their young adult children living in Durban, South Africa. It explores the experiences of those who have migrated from the Democratic Republic of Congo to South Africa before becoming parents as well as those who migrated to South Africa with their young children. This study aims to explore the experiences of Congolese immigrant families in South Africa, focusing on parenting challenges and adaptation strategies. It looks at how parents cope with cultural differences and language barriers, how migration influences their parenting roles, and how the South African environment impacts their ability to integrate. It examines the perspectives of young adult children on their upbringing and the role of social networks in supporting these families. The research seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the challenges of parenting, adaptation, and cultural integration for Congolese immigrant families in South Africa. This was made possible by inquiring about the experience of raising children in South Africa and what the lived experience of being a child of immigrants being raised in South Africa is?

### **1.7 Study Challenges**

Recruiting participants for this study presented a set of unique challenges, largely stemming from the delicate nature of inter-nationality trust. Given my South African nationality, the Congolese participants were initially wary, compounded by their previous encounters with xenophobia. This understandable apprehension created a barrier that made it difficult to establish the necessary rapport for conducting research. To bridge this gap, a trusted gatekeeper was used. They recommended that I conduct the first few interviews in their presence, which helped to reassure participants about the purpose and nature of my research. This strategy proved effective, as I noticed a marked change in the participants' willingness to share their

experiences in subsequent one-on-one interactions. There was a degree of doubt among some potential participants, which was not unfounded. Having been subjects of previous studies that offered no direct benefits to them, they viewed participation as potentially fruitless. It was a challenge to communicate the non-monetary value of their contribution. I emphasized that their stories would provide a voice to their community, offering valuable insights into the Congolese diaspora's unique parenting challenges and experiences. Scheduling interviews was challenging. Many participants had important commitments on Sundays, like church services and household chores, and were preparing for the upcoming week. This made it hard to stick to the planned interview times. To accommodate their schedules, I found myself needing to exercise a great deal of patience and flexibility. There were numerous instances where interview timings had to be renegotiated, demonstrating the need for adaptability, and understanding in the research process.

### **1.8 Study Assumption**

The study operates under the presumption that Congolese parents and their young adult children residing in South Africa face distinctive obstacles and shifts in their parenting interactions because of migration and the subsequent process of acculturation. The underlying belief is that the act of relocation from one cultural setting to another brings forth a set of specific challenges that influence family dynamics, roles, and relationships. This assumption is central to the research, as it seeks to explore and understand how the experience of moving to and integrating into a new society affects the way Congolese parents raise their children and how these young adults adapt to their new environment while maintaining ties to their cultural heritage. The study anticipates that these challenges and changes are significant and have a profound impact on the family unit.

### **1.9 Relevance of this study to the discipline of Anthropology**

This topic is a major area of interest to the discipline of anthropology for numerous reasons. Areas of interest namely include aspect of family, migration and parenting of children inclusive of child socialization and enculturation among many that this research touches on.

The study of family is not new in research there are several classic anthropological studies that have set a foundation for building knowledge in this area. Pioneering anthropologists have made valuable contributions to our comprehension of family structures and dynamics across various cultures. Margaret Mead is distinguished for her ethnographic literature such as "Coming of Age in Samoa" (1928) and "Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies"

(1935) cited in Newman (1996) questioned Western assumptions regarding gender and child-rearing through the examination of Samoan and New Guinean cultures. According to Weaver (2002) Bronisław Malinowski's "Argonauts of the Western Pacific" (1922) offered fundamental insights into the social organization and kinship systems of the Trobriand Islanders. Franz Boas, recognized for his cultural relativism, conducted extensive fieldwork among Inuit communities, contributing to our comprehension of how family life is shaped by environmental and historical factors. Claude Lévi-Strauss's "The Elementary Structures of Kinship" (1949) presented a structuralist viewpoint on kinship systems, uncovering underlying patterns in familial relationships across diverse societies. Ruth Benedict's "Patterns of Culture" (1934) explored how cultural patterns, including family roles, mirror broader societal values. Anthropology is a holistic discipline that is concerned with studying and understanding every aspect of mankind, therefore when people migrate to contexts different from their own this calls for an investigation of why people would choose to migrate and raise their children away from their setting. Anthropologists are curious to understand what happens when different cultural groups interact therefore in the context of this research what happens when Congolese parents raise their children in a South African context?

I believe this study is an important area of interest within anthropology, specifically in social and cultural anthropology and migration. It investigates intra-African migration and family and cultural issues while examining how parenting practices and socialisation of children are negotiated in a migratory environment away from cultural familiarity and norms. This study extends the knowledge on family and kinship by offering insight on how parenting is impacted by migration.

In the same disposition, the classical anthropological literature on family and migration primarily focused on the global North African diaspora and cultures. Comparisons were made between North European parenting standards and African parenting. Similarly, contemporary anthropologists have expanded their interest to include the diverse cultural practices, beliefs, and behaviours of human societies. This study offers an opportunity to explore how Congolese families adapt to the challenges of migration and acculturation in a new cultural setting. It provides insights into how cultural values, norms, and parenting practices from their country of origin (DRC) are negotiated and transformed in South Africa. Interestingly, the study compares two African populations, where one might assume that shared African identity would lead to homogeneous parenting practices; however, it shows that African identity, parenting, and cultural values are heterogeneous, with notable differences

This study is interesting to anthropologists because it entails scrutinizing family structures and kinship systems across different cultures. It is interested in the dynamics of Congolese families, exploring the impact of migration on family roles, intergenerational connections, and parenting styles. The study is aligned with the anthropological fascination with acculturation and cultural changes. Scholars such as Guarnaccia and Hausmann-Stabile (2016:3) posit that “from the beginning, the anthropological approach to acculturation had a global perspective, moving beyond the study of immigrants coming to a new country to focus on all situations of cultural contact”. In the context of this study, migration represents a type of cultural interaction, and the investigation clarifies how Congolese families and their young adult children manage the process of acculturation, including changes in cultural practices, language use, and identity formation. Power dynamics and social inequalities are also significant areas of inquiry for anthropologists. The experiences of Congolese families in South Africa can offer valuable insights into these issues. Anthropologists are deeply involved in analysing how globalization and transnationalism affect individuals and societies. They explore the patterns of migration and connections across borders. The Congolese families' relocation to South Africa is an example of the global movement of resources and people. By researching this phenomenon, the study documents a deeper understanding of how global influences and shapes local experiences and identities.

In contemporary anthropology, the focus has shifted toward migration, transnationalism, and the reconfiguration of family and kinship across borders. Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004) conceptualize migrants as living within “transnational social fields,” simultaneously maintaining ties to home while adapting to host societies. Bryceson and Vuorela (2020) highlight the role of “transnational families,” where caregiving, obligations, and cultural transmission continue across geographical distances. Building on this, Baldassar (2007) and Mazzucato (2008) show how remittances, long-distance caregiving, and the circulation of children shape everyday family life. More recent contributions, such as Fog Olwig (2012) and Carling and Pettersen (2014), explore how migration reshapes kinship, belonging, and intergenerational relations, often generating tensions between traditional expectations and host-country realities. By situating Congolese parenting within this body of work, this study connects classical anthropological debates on kinship and child-rearing with contemporary discussions on transnationalism and migrant family life. My research contributes to this body of work by showing how Congolese parents in South Africa both preserve and adapt their

parenting practices. It demonstrates that classical concerns with kinship and child socialization remain relevant, but they must now be understood in the context of transnationalism, acculturation, and migrant family life. In this way, the study bridges earlier anthropological theories of family with current debates on migration and cultural change.

While these classical works provide an important foundation, anthropologists continue to explore how migration, parenting, and family life are shaped in contemporary contexts. These debates are discussed further in the Literature Review (Chapter 2).

## **1.10 Definition of terms**

### **Parenting**

Alber (2023:38) defines parenting as a relational concept, which encompasses multiplicities of gendered moralities, actions, care activities, knowledge transmissions and feelings between parents and children in specific historical moments and over parents and children's life courses. This concept is broad and multifaceted, covering the child's physical health, emotional well-being, and educational needs. The process of parenting involves a range of interactive behaviours that guide and shape the child's upbringing, from the basics of caregiving to the more complex aspects of teaching and moral guidance. Effective parenting requires a balance of discipline and affection, aiming to equip the child with the skills and values necessary for their journey into adulthood and society at large. In this research, the challenges of parenting faced by Congolese immigrant parents in South Africa are investigated, including how they navigate these challenges while adapting to a new cultural environment and potentially facing socioeconomic barriers.

### **Parents**

Strathern (2011:246) states that the term parent is a relative term a kinship term that is defined only with respect to another, one is parent to one's offspring. Its orientation is prospective: to be a parent is to have a child. At the same time, parent signifies a retrospective state; to have a parent is to have had an origin in another person. When 'parent' is used as a verb, 'to parent,' it encompasses the responsibilities and actions of raising and nurturing a child. This includes not only the physical care of a child but also emotional support, education, and the imparting of values, beliefs, and cultural practices. Whether as a noun or a verb, the concept of a parent plays a crucial role in a child's development and the formation of family and societal structures.

## **Immigrant Parent**

In the context of this study an immigrant parent is defined as an individual who has migrated from one country to another and has children who may have been born in the host country or migrated with them. The focus of the research is on Congolese parents who have immigrated to South Africa, examining how their migration experiences influence their parenting practices and their children's upbringing.

## **Immigration**

Immigration is the process by which individuals from one country move to another country to live there permanently. As explained by Morozov and Rybalkina (2019), this process involves people settling in a new country, often in search of a better life, more opportunities, or to escape adverse conditions in their home country. This movement is a key part of global demographics, with significant social, economic, and cultural implications for both the immigrants' country of origin and the new country they adopt as their home. Immigration can enrich the receiving country with diverse perspectives and skills, while also presenting challenges of integration and cultural assimilation for both immigrants and the host society. The research focuses on Congolese immigrants who have chosen South Africa as their destination, exploring their parenting and the impact of migration on their families.

## **Intra-African migration**

Intra-African migration involves individuals relocating within Africa for either brief or extended periods. As discussed by Morozov and Rybalkina (2019), this migration is motivated by a variety of reasons such as the search for jobs, the desire for higher education, escaping political unrest, or responding to ecological factors. This movement is a key element in Africa's story, as people journey across national borders in pursuit of improved prospects, safety, or to be closer to family. The flow of people within the continent strengthens cultural, societal, and economic ties among African states, influencing the continent's demographic composition and cultural identity. This internal movement has long been a part of Africa's evolution and remains a defining feature of its contemporary era. This research investigates the migration of Congolese individuals to South Africa, which falls within the category of intra-African migration.

## **Immigrant**

The International Organization for Migration (2019) explain that an immigrant, is someone who moves across borders or within a country, leaving their usual home, regardless of legal status, whether it's voluntary, reasons for moving, or how long they stay.

## **Young adult**

The period of young adulthood, defined as the age range from 18 to 25, is a critical developmental stage where individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood. Higley (2019:2) points out that, within the framework of this study, 'young adults' are specifically those who descend from Congolese immigrants. This time in life is often filled with pivotal changes, such as starting higher education, beginning a career, and living independently. For young adults with immigrant parents, this phase involves the added complexity of managing the typical growth experiences of their age while also balancing the cultural expectations of their family heritage with those of the broader society they live in.

## **Acculturation**

Acculturation refers to the transformation that occurs when different cultural groups interact over an extended period. This concept, put forth by Redfield in 1936, encompasses a range of cultural changes that may occur in language, traditions, and societal structures. It is a layered process that can also affect a person's psychological state. The outcome of acculturation can be the adoption of new cultural characteristics or a combination of cultural elements, leading to the emergence of novel cultural forms. It's a critical component of human society, particularly relevant today as the flow of people and cultural exchanges have become more frequent worldwide. The research, the ways in which Congolese immigrant families in South Africa navigate acculturation, including language acquisition, cultural practices, and identity formation.

## **Congolese**

A person from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country located in Central Africa. This designation can encompass a wide range of ethnicities, languages, and cultural backgrounds, as the Democratic Republic of the Congo is known for its rich cultural diversity.

## **Remittances**

Cazachevici, Havranek and Horvath (2019:2) define remittances as funds sent home by expatriate workers, i.e., money that migrants send to their country of origin. These financial transactions generally comprise the migrant's earnings from their labour or alternative income sources in their newfound place of residence. These remittances play an important role in the economies of the native countries, often serving as an indispensable means of financial aid for the families left behind and making a significant contribution to economic progress. They can be used for a variety of purposes, encompassing basic subsistence, education, healthcare, and investment in local enterprises, thus significantly impacting the welfare of the recipients and their communities.

## **Xenophobia**

Crush and Ramachandran (2009:5) define xenophobia as attitudes, prejudices and behaviour that reject, exclude, and vilify persons based on the perception that they are outsiders, foreigners to the community, society, or national identity. As described by Moge kwu in (2005), these manifestations of xenophobia can range from subtle forms of bias and exclusion to outright aggression and exploitation. The term captures a complex social phenomenon where foreigners are unfairly treated as scapegoats for a variety of societal issues and are often met with unwarranted suspicion and contempt. Such conduct not only undermines community cohesion but can also inflict considerable emotional and bodily distress on those who are subjected to it.

## **Young adult child**

The study examines individuals aged 18 to 25 with Congolese heritage referred to as "adult children." It explores two categories within this demographic; those born in the Democratic Republic of Congo who relocated to South Africa before turning 10 with their families and individuals born in South Africa to Congolese parents, within the same age range. It is important to consider these two groups individually as their backgrounds may influence their experiences in different ways. Children who relocated from Congo might recall their country of origin and possibly deal with leaving behind what they know as home and adjusting to a new country. On the hand individuals born in South Africa may struggle with matters of being Congolese but not have been to Congo and need to seek a way of understanding their roots with the South African society they were raised in.

## **Social network**

A social network is a collection of entities (often referred to as actors or nodes) and ties that represent a specific type of relationship among them (McGee & Warms, 2013:2). Social networks are referred to as the connections and relationships that individuals have with others within their social circles. The research examines Congolese immigrant families in South Africa's use of social networks to access resources, find support, and maintain ties with their homeland. This includes exploring how connections are formed and sustained with other Congolese immigrants as well as with members of the local community.

## **Afrophobia**

Fuelled by misinformation and harmful stereotypes, Afrophobia involves prejudice and hostility toward people from other African nations. It can create fear, anxiety, and insecurity, and is directed at anyone perceived as African, including immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers from across the continent (Abioye & Idoko, 2021; Misago & Landau, 2023).

## **Subtractive bilingualism**

The term subtractive bilingualism, first introduced by Lambert in the 1970s, describes a process in which learning a second language leads to a decline in proficiency in one's native language (Fillmore, 1991, p. 323, as cited in Nguyen, 2022). In other words, it is a form of bilingualism where the acquisition of a second language interferes with the maintenance and use of the first language (Chacón Vera, 2023).

## **1.11 Structure of Dissertation**

### **Chapter One**

Chapter One introduces a detailed study of how Congolese parents and their young adult children manage life in South Africa after moving there. It focuses on the challenges they face due to migration. This chapter explains the research problem further, placing the study in the specific situation of the Congolese community living in South Africa. The research question crystallizes the focus of the dissertation: "How do Congolese parents and their young adult children experience and navigate parenting and intergenerational relationships in the context of South African society?" By posing this central inquiry, the chapter outlines the trajectory of the research and seeks to amplify and refine the understanding of how migration influences parenting practices, cultural identity maintenance, and the adaptation processes for these

families. The chapter promises a scholarly journey through the lived realities of these individuals, offering nuanced insights into their challenges, coping mechanisms, and the reshaping of their family dynamics in migration.

## **Chapter Two**

This chapter provides a detailed account of prominent themes in empirical research as they relate to immigrant parents, immigrant families, and youth. Chapter two of the literature review, a detailed exploration of existing knowledge and research on parenting in migration. This chapter acts as a comprehensive overview that summarizes, analyses, and synthesizes the findings, theories, and ideas from various sources. It delves into the background of Congolese families and the current situation of Congolese immigrants in South Africa, highlighting key concepts and theories that have shaped the understanding of the topic over time. Additionally, this chapter identifies gaps and areas where more research is needed, presenting a roadmap for the rest of the study. To provide clarity on the topic discussions that help contextualize the research problem, identify trends or patterns in the existing literature, and understand the complexities and debates within the field have been provided.

## **Chapter Three**

Chapter Three of this study delineates a qualitative research strategy aimed at delving into the parenting dynamics of Congolese immigrants in South Africa. Employing a phenomenological method, the focus is intensely on the authentic, lived experiences of Congolese immigrant families, particularly couples and their young adult children. This methodological approach is not merely about observing behaviours; it's about deeply understanding the core of their day-to-day life, the essence of parenting, and the experience of growing up in a cultural setting different from their own. The study is inherently explorative, illuminating aspects of African immigrant life that are largely uncharted in existing research. This chapter will explain the theories and ideas that shape the study, helping us understand the data clearly. It will also list the ethical rules followed during the research to make sure it's done respectfully and properly. Essentially, this section acts as the detailed blueprint, laying out precisely how the study was undertaken, from conception to execution.

## **Chapter Four**

In this chapter, the history, motivations, expectations, and aspirations behind Congolese migration to South Africa are explored. The aim is to provide a straightforward understanding

of this complex phenomenon. The chapter starts by looking at the history of Congolese people moving to South Africa. Key reasons prompting individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo to relocate are delved into, with a focus on economic, political, and environmental factors that influenced their decision.

Subsequently, the expectations that Congolese migrants held upon their arrival in South Africa are investigated. Their initial hopes and dreams are brought to light, revealing how they envisioned their new lives. Finally, the chapter looks at what Congolese migrants hope to achieve in South Africa. It talks about their plans and how they try to fit into South African life. The chapter aims to give a clear view of the complicated situation of Congolese people moving to South Africa.

### **Chapter Five**

Chapter Five is a crucial section that dives deep into understanding how Congolese parents raise their young adult children in South Africa amidst their migration experience. This chapter focuses on uncovering the parenting strategies, values, and beliefs of these families in the context of migration. You can expect an exploration of how traditional parenting methods from Congo are maintained, changed, or adjusted to fit into South Africa's environment. The chapter will discuss how their journey of migration has influenced the way they parent and pass on cultural values to their children. Through real-life stories, it will reveal what parents hope for, expect, and how they view their roles within their families. This will shed light on how they balance holding onto their culture while adapting to a new place. Moreover, the chapter will also look at outside influences like community support, social norms in South Africa, and how these affect their parenting. It will explore the relationships between parents and their young adult children, examining how they navigate identity and independence within their families. Throughout the chapter, you will explore themes like resilience, adapting to new cultures, and how the migration journey shapes how these families approach parenting. By the end, you'll gain a better understanding of how Congolese migrant parents maintain their cultural roots while helping their children adjust to a new cultural setting, adding to the broader conversation about parenting during migration.

### **Chapter Six**

This chapter looks at how moving to a new country changes family life, especially for Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa. It examines the details of their experiences, which are central to the study of parenting within the context of migration.

The discussion begins by exploring the reasons behind the relocation of many Congolese families to South Africa and how this transition has reshaped family structures and roles. Through personal narratives, the chapter reveals shifts in parenting styles and family dynamics within the new cultural environment.

The challenges encountered by both parents and young adults are examined. For parents, the struggle involves maintaining cultural traditions while adapting to a new society and raising children. Young adults face the task of balancing their Congolese heritage with their South African upbringing. The emotional journey of these families, including feelings of homesickness, the stress of cultural adjustment, and their resilience, is also explored, with personal stories providing deeper insight. Additionally, the chapter examines the importance of support networks, including extended family and community connections, in easing the transition for these families in South Africa. Through an integration of these experiences, the chapter offers perspectives on how migration alters family dynamics, parenting approaches, and the self-concepts of young adults. than just a presentation of research, this chapter highlights the strength and adaptability of Congolese families in South Africa, offering a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. The insights presented are drawn from thorough interviews and observations, ensuring a nuanced and empathetic portrayal of the families' journeys.

## **Chapter Seven**

Chapter Seven zooms in on the lived experiences of Congolese youth brought up by immigrant parents within the South African context. It reveals several themes that encapsulate their life narratives, covering the array of hurdles they face as well as the opportunities they perceive in growing up between two cultures. The chapter discusses in detail how these young individuals manage to put together their Congolese heritage with their South African socialization, highlighting their journey of cultural reconciliation and identity formation.

It further investigates the adaptive strategies these youths deploy to navigate life in South Africa, all while preserving their links to the Congolese culture and staying connected to relatives back in the Congo DRC. By offering a blend of personal accounts and analytical examination, this chapter paints picture of the Congolese youth's transnational identities, their resilience in the face of cultural shifts, and their continuous interaction with both their home country and South Africa.

## **Chapter Eight**

Chapter Eight serves as the concluding segment of the thesis, bringing together the research findings and offering a critical evaluation of each research objective. In the final chapter, the study's results are clearly explained, giving a brief overview of the main points learned from the research. This chapter provides targeted recommendations designed to enhance the lives of Congolese families residing in South Africa, tackling the various difficulties and possibilities uncovered during the study. It suggests practical approaches for policymakers, community figures, and service providers to offer more effective support to these immigrant communities. The chapter provides a plan for more research, highlighting what the study missed and offering ideas for new research to learn even more. recommendations are designed to inspire and guide further academic exploration into the lives of Congolese immigrants and the broader field of migration studies.

## **CHAPTER 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The literature review starts by setting the context for both the countries of origin and destination. It covers topics such as the history of migration to South Africa and the current state of Congolese families living there. This foundational context is crucial for understanding the unique challenges and adaptations experienced by these families. Presented in this section are the thematic empirical findings from similar research studies. These findings offer valuable perspectives on the experiences of migrant families in various global contexts highlighting common themes and differences.

The literature review discusses the theoretical frameworks underpinning parenting studies within migration contexts. These frameworks provide a structured lens through which to analyze and interpret the experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children. This literature review examines studies conducted in South Africa that are closely related to this thesis topic. The scarcity of studies specifically focusing on the parenting experiences of Congolese migrant families in South Africa necessitates the inclusion of international literature in this literature review. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject by integrating insights from a variety of sources, thereby compensating for the lack of local or specific research.

### **2.2 The concept of parenting**

Parenting is broadly defined as the process through which parents care for and guide their children ensuring their safety, growth, and development (Surono et al., 2022). The goal of parenting is to raise children who are happy, confident and successful members of society (Matuško, 2017). In the social sciences, parenting is recognized as a multifaceted concept studied from various disciplinary perspectives, each offering unique insights. Anthropology views parenting as a key method for passing cultural values and practices from one generation to the next. Anthropologists have highlighted significant cultural and contextual differences in parenting behaviors and styles shaped by developmental goals and societal expectations (Keller et al., 2004). In psychology, parenting is often understood through broad styles such as authoritative, authoritarian, permissive and neglectful with each style affecting child development differently (Matuško, 2017). Authoritative parenting, characterized by warmth and structure, is frequently considered the most effective. More recent research emphasizes the need to account for cultural and situational factors. This approach frames parenting as a

dynamic process where parents adapt their methods to align with their goals, their children's needs and specific challenges they encounter (Smetana, 2017). Thus, parenting is not only a universal process but also one deeply influenced by cultural, societal and psychological factors. It reflects the intersection of individual practices and broader societal norms.

### **2.3 History of African immigration to South Africa**

The history of African immigration to South Africa is complex and has changed over time, shaped by the country's history and economic conditions. Before European colonization, South Africa was home to many indigenous groups. The arrival of Europeans brought Africans and Asians into the country, often as slaves or labourers, creating a racially divided society Terreblanche, (2002). During apartheid, South Africa's immigration policies favoured white people and limited black Africans' entry. Still, African migrants from countries like Mozambique and Zimbabwe came, often illegally, attracted by job opportunities (Migration Policy Institute). After apartheid ended in 1994, South Africa became more welcoming to immigrants from all over Africa, drawn by economic opportunities and fleeing unrest in their own countries (Southern African Migration Programme). Today, South Africa is diverse with many African immigrants, but this has sometimes led to social tensions and xenophobic attacks, reflecting issues like unemployment (Southern African Migration Programme). Despite these challenges, African immigrants have contributed to South Africa's economy and culture, bringing new skills, flavours, and sounds (Crush & McDonald 2001). However, South Africa still faces economic and social inequality, and some people show xenophobic attitudes towards immigrants, including those who are legally employed or seeking asylum. For numerous years, Congolese people have been moving to South Africa, driven by various reasons. This migration increased in the 1990s, especially after 1998, due to a war in Congo that caused instability in the government. Many Congolese chose South Africa, particularly Durban, as their new home (Sabet-Sharghi, 2000); (Dunia, 2014); (Amisi, 2006)). Economic hardships in Congo, such as the high 80% unemployment rate and poor infrastructure, have pushed Congolese people to look for jobs in other countries, with South Africa being an appealing choice. However, life in South Africa was challenging due to crime and xenophobia, but the hope for a better economic situation kept attracting them Sharghi (2000). Political issues and long-term conflict in Congo, which resulted in many deaths, forced people to flee for safety. South Africa seemed like a hopeful place because of its democracy and economic opportunities, but migrants often faced tough realities upon arrival (Rukema, 2010); Baruti, 2006; Dunia, 2014; Sharghi, 2000).

In South Africa, Congolese migrants often find themselves in difficult situations without proper legal documents, risking detention or deportation (Rukema, 2010; Inaka, 2014)). Historically, Congolese migrants preferred European countries like France, Belgium, and Switzerland. But after South Africa ended discriminatory laws and became a democracy in 1994, it became a new favourite destination. Congo joining the Southern African Development Community (SADC) also encouraged this shift. South Africa's migration history changed, as it had mainly been a destination for migrants from English and Portuguese-speaking Southern Africa (Bouillon, 1999). People from Congo are moving to South Africa mainly because of financial difficulties, political problems, and the hope for a better life. While South Africa offered opportunities, many Congolese migrants faced various challenges. This migration is more than just moving places; it reflects changes in politics, economic goals, and the quest for stability despite challenges.

#### **2.4 State of Congolese immigrants in Durban**

According to Danso and McDonald (2000) cited in de Jong (2018:108), Congolese migration to South Africa dates to the apartheid era when individuals from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) were allowed visa-free entry due to a favourable relationship between Mobutu, the DRC dictator, and South Africa's apartheid regime. This migration unfolded in three significant waves. Kleist (2007) attributes the first wave in the mid-1980s to political and economic turmoil in Congo, prompting skilled professionals such as doctors, engineers, and teachers to seek better prospects abroad. The second wave spanned from 1991 to 1993, coinciding with civil war and the collapse of the Gécamines mining company, which resulted in widespread unemployment (Nest, Grignon & Kisangani, 2006). The third wave, which is ongoing, began in 1994 following the Rwandan genocide, leading to an influx of Congolese individuals facing various political, economic, and social challenges (Kleist, 2007; Nest, Grignon & Kisangani, 2006). Unlike the previous groups, this latest wave of migrants generally lacks formal education and professional skills. Post-apartheid, South Africa has witnessed a rise in African immigration, yet local media frequently depicts these immigrants negatively, often branding them as 'illegal' (Danso & McDonald, 2000).

In Durban, South African policymakers are being called to turn their attention to the Congolese migrant community, who are crafting innovative but challenging economic survival tactics in the informal sector, as documented by researchers such as Dunia (2014) and Rukema (2010). While there are instances of success where some Congolese individuals secure formal jobs or

establish their own businesses, the overall situation remains challenging. The informal sector, which is the main source of support for many Congolese migrants, is plagued by hurdles like institutional barriers, struggles in obtaining vending permits without local middlemen or through bribes, and frequent police harassment. The economic challenges faced are not solely about financial survival but also deeply affect family life, especially in terms of parenting. Numerous Congolese parents in Durban are wrestling with the lasting impacts of war and economic turmoil in their home country. This persistent economic uncertainty often worsens marital conflicts and strains relationships between parents and children. For example, the stress from financial instability can result in heightened parental disputes, subsequently impacting the emotional well-being of children. Mawire, et al. (2020:129) in their study found that not all migrants were thriving. Many were unhappy with their financial situation and mentioned money problems in their families. They admitted to being underpaid, and finding formal employment was hard because they didn't have the right documents. Some, particularly those from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), had refugee status in South Africa. However, this status made it challenging for them to secure well-paying jobs, as it did not come with permanent work permits. The precarious economic circumstances also mean that many Congolese parents struggle to offer a stable environment for their children, crucial for proper growth. The unpredictability and lack of steady income may lead to an insecure home life, where children might experience disruptions in schooling and limited access to necessities and opportunities for social and educational progress. Another finding of the study by Mawire, Mtapuri, Kidane, and Mchunu (2020:129) is that migrant families have trouble with their children's education. One reason migrant children can't get into schools is because they don't have the right documents. Participants from the research by Umubyeyi, Mtapuri, and Naidu (2020:414) expressed the significant stress experienced by Congolese refugee families in South Africa. They shared that stress affects everyone in the household, from the family head to the wife and children. They encounter grave economic challenges, striving to meet basic needs such as food. As the month draws to a close, their worries escalate as they face uncertainty about rent payments. Unlike those with secure jobs and regular income, refugees lack such reassurance and often struggle to determine the source of their next meal or rent money. This persistent stress triggers family discord, leading to disputes and altercations among members. The passage illustrates how the challenging economic circumstances engender a cycle of stress and strife for refugee families. According to Guruge (2007) cited in Umubyeyi, Mtapuri, and Naidu (2020) indicated that unemployment has been linked to heightened stress levels,

increased marital conflict, discord within marriages, and a greater risk of abuse in some migrant families.

#### **2.4.1 Families in Congo**

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a large and very poor country, family life is strongly impacted by economic struggles. It is estimated that almost 75% of the people in the Democratic Republic of Congo live on less than \$1.90 a day. This severe poverty affects women and girls the most because they are often not treated equally (Opportunity.org, 2021).

According to UNICEF, the Democratic Republic of Congo has one of the highest fertility rates in the world, with women having on average 6 children each (UNICEF, 2015). However, this figure is not uniform across the country. Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) data show clear variations, with fertility rates lower in urban areas (around 5.4 children per woman) and much higher in rural areas (up to 7.3 children per woman) (DHS, 2014; Kayembe et al., 2015). These variations reflect differences in access to education, healthcare, and family planning, as well as cultural norms that continue to value large families, especially in rural settings.

Children's roles extend beyond mere chores; they are integral to the household's daily survival, tasked with fetching water and caring for siblings amidst a backdrop of deprivation (UNICEF). The legal framework within the DRC further complicates family dynamics, with the Family Code enshrining men as the heads of households, thus limiting women's legal protections concerning family life (Global Hunger Index, (2021)). Yet, against these adversities, the introduction of family-centred support programs has shown promise in enhancing the quality of life for families, addressing their comprehensive needs from the emotional to the informational (UNICEF). The DRC's societal norms, which favour large families, play a critical role in shaping the demand for family planning services. Despite the high total fertility rate, which stands at 6.6 children nationally higher in rural areas, economic hardships do not deter families from having more children. Instead, having many children is associated with social status and is further influenced by legal and cultural expectations surrounding marriage and dowry practices. In this setting, a large family is not only a status symbol but also a traditional form of social security, as parents rely on their offspring for support in old age (Humanium (2021)). Children in the DRC are born into a world fraught with challenges, including an armed conflict that touches their lives directly, making them victims and sometimes even participants as child soldiers in Humanium (2021). It is a stark contrast to the experiences children might have when visiting other countries, revealing the distinct realities faced by young Congolese

in their formative years. Despite the hardships, there exists a strong sense of community and care, with even the more affluent families contributing to the common good by providing employment where they can, such as hiring nannies and housekeepers Borgen Project, (2021) In the face of these systemic challenges, the Congolese exhibit resilience and kindness. The communal upbringing of children in the DRC shapes a unique worldview that starkly contrasts with experiences elsewhere, underscoring the complex interplay of poverty, cultural norms, and legal frameworks that define family life in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The way families are set up in the Democratic Republic of Congo is shaped by old customs and the long-term impact of the time when it was a colony The roles within Congolese families are defined by longstanding customs that designate men as the primary breadwinners and heads of the household, a status that bestows upon them considerable privileges and decision-making powers over family matters (Tichenor, 2005). Women, conversely, are traditionally expected to fulfil domestic roles, which include a range of household duties and childcare (Freedman, 2015; Lwambo, 2013).

This division of labour is not just a present-day reality but is rooted in historical practices that, before the colonial era, allowed women to play key roles in agriculture, granting them a measure of economic independence and respect within the community (Muswamba, 2006; Wilson, 1982). However, colonial rule brought about a transformation in these roles. The Belgian colonial regime reshaped the economic and social fabric of the Congo to serve its own financial interests, thereby eroding the economic autonomy that women had previously experienced Freedman (2007, 2015). Education during colonial times was heavily gendered, with girls being groomed for domesticity. Schools, predominantly run by Catholic missionaries, aimed to mould girls into "Christian wives" proficient in child-rearing, cooking, and housekeeping, while discouraging them from pursuing broader educational and economic opportunities (Bouwer, 2010; Yates, 1982b). Such educational policies solidified the gender disparities in the Congolese labour market by limiting women's access to modern skills and trades (Allen, 1976; Yates, 1982). Following independence, although the 2006 Constitution of the DRC includes articles promoting gender equality, the Family Code still upholds the unequal power dynamic, with men recognized as the leaders of the family and women needing their husbands' consent to engage in legal and economic activities (Code de la Famille, 1999; Odimba et al., 2012). This legal stance perpetuates the secondary economic status of women and their dependency on men. In the DRC, children learn from a young age that men are supposed to work outside, and women should take care of the home (Fulcher & Coyle, 2011;

Tinsley et al., 2015). This socialization process shapes their expectations for the future, often leading women to anticipate roles aligned with caregiving, and men to see themselves as the family's main financial providers. The Congolese family reflects a society navigating the intersection of tradition and history. Even though there has been some improvement in gender equality, old customs and laws still shape what men and women do in the DRC. This strong influence affects everyday family life, where traditional ideas about men's and women's roles still guide what people do and aim for.

## **2.5 The importance of studying Congolese migrant families**

Studying immigrant families holds significant importance; however, it is imperative to scrutinize these studies with a discerning perspective, particularly in the context of South Africa. The research conducted by Portes and Rumbaut (2006) shows the role of cultural comprehension in facilitating immigrant integration. However, in South Africa, this matter goes beyond mere cultural dynamics. Immigrants also contend with formidable obstacles such as racism and xenophobia, which are prevalent in South Africa. Borjas (1994) expounds upon how immigrants bolster the economy through their labor and entrepreneurial endeavors. Nevertheless, in South Africa, a nation grappling with widespread unemployment and stark wealth disparities, this dynamic can engender tension between immigrants and indigenous citizens. Although immigrants contribute to the economy, their acceptance or support for policies is by no means guaranteed. The research undertaken by Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova (2008) regarding education for immigrant children assumes paramount significance. Nevertheless, South African schools encounter their distinct difficulties and might not possess the appropriate tools to address the individual requirements of these children, who hail from diverse backgrounds. Healthcare represents another critical domain. Castaneda et al. (2015) maintain the need for all-inclusive health services, although the healthcare system in South Africa presently struggles with daunting challenges. Ensuring that immigrants receive quality healthcare transcends the realm of cultural understanding; it necessitates holistic improvement of the entire system. Studies such as those conducted by Menjívar & Abrego (2012) and Zhou (1997) underscore the import of robust policies and community support. However, within the South African context, with its distinctive historical and sociopolitical issues, these measures need to be tailored with greater specificity to genuinely uplift immigrant families. Lastly, the mental well-being of immigrants, as discussed by Rothe, & Pumariega (2005), assumes profound importance. Yet, within the South African context, this facet warrants special attention due to the nation's historical legacy and ongoing struggles with

inequality and violence. Thus, while these international studies provide a foundation, it is imperative to contextualize them within the unique circumstances of South Africa. This entails a comprehensive examination of the nation's specific challenges and their impact on immigrant families.

## **2.6 The role of cultural identity in parenting**

Cultural identity significantly influences parenting practices among immigrant parents, as shown in various studies. Chao (2001) emphasizes the importance of transmitting cultural values and heritage, a common aspect of parenting in immigrant families, especially among those from Asian backgrounds, who often focus on imparting values like educational achievement and respect for elders. Bornstein and Cote (2006) discuss the challenge immigrant parents face in balancing the cultural norms of their native and host countries, a task that involves assimilating into the new culture while preserving their own. This balance is part of the broader acculturation process that Berry (1997) notes can lead to changes in parenting styles, affected by education, socioeconomic status, and contact with their native culture. Deater-Deckard (2004) points out that immigrant parents might experience heightened stress due to language barriers, economic challenges, and discrimination, with cultural identity playing a role in either exacerbating this stress or providing support through community ties. Additionally, Smetana (2000) shows that cultural influences on parenting styles have indirect impacts on children's development, affecting their social skills, academic achievement, and well-being. Understanding these aspects is critical for supporting immigrant families and fostering their integration into the host society, underscoring the role of cultural identity in shaping immigrants' parenting experiences. A study by Qin (2009) examined the parenting practices of Chinese immigrant families in the United States. This study found that parents maintained a strong emphasis on educational achievement, a value deeply rooted in their cultural identity. This emphasis often led to high academic expectations and the use of authoritative parenting styles, highlighting the influence of cultural background on parenting practices.

Another relevant case study by Costigan and Dokis (2006) focused on Filipino immigrant families in Canada. It revealed that these families often experienced a cultural clash between the traditional Filipino values they upheld, such as family interdependence and respect for elders, and the more individualistic values prevalent in Canadian society. This clash influenced how parents raised their children, often leading to a hybrid approach that blended values from both cultures. In the context of African immigrants in Europe, a study by Ogbu (1995) explored

how Nigerian parents maintained their cultural practices while raising their children in a vastly different cultural environment. This study highlighted the challenges these parents faced in preserving their cultural identity and transmitting it to their children, amidst the pressures to assimilate into the mainstream European culture.

These case studies, each focusing on different immigrant groups, show the different ways in which cultural identity influences parenting practices. They show how immigrant parents navigate the challenges of maintaining their cultural heritage and adapting to new cultural environments, impacting their parenting styles and the development of their children.

## **2.7 Cultural Adaptation and Acculturation**

The concept of parenting acculturation and cultural maintenance among immigrant parents and its significant impact on children's ethnic identity development. This process involves immigrant parents navigating and negotiating between the values and norms of their heritage culture and those of the host society, which influences their child-rearing practices and, consequently, their children's ethnic identity formation (Cheah et al., 2013; Wakil et al., 1981). Parenting acculturation is a dynamic process in which immigrant parents constantly adjust their parenting styles and practices in response to the cultural context of their host country. This adjustment is often a balance between retaining aspects of their cultural heritage and adopting new practices that are deemed beneficial or necessary in the new environment. For instance, Cheah et al. (2013) found that Chinese immigrant mothers in the United States reported modifying their traditional parenting practices by incorporating elements of American parenting styles, which they perceived as supporting their children's socio-cultural and academic adaptation. The concept of cultural maintenance refers to the efforts of immigrant parents to preserve and transmit key aspects of their native culture to their children. This includes practices related to language, food, religious beliefs, and other cultural rituals. Such efforts are critical for children's development of a clear ethnic identity. For example, immigrant parents often emphasize the importance of speaking the heritage language at home, participating in cultural festivals, and maintaining dietary customs, which can help reinforce a sense of belonging and identity within the heritage culture (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Research has shown that the degree of parental embeddedness in the heritage culture, as demonstrated through their social networks, behaviours, and practices, significantly contributes to how children understand and connect with their ethnic background (Umaña-Taylor & Fine, 2004). Children who are exposed to consistent cultural practices and values are more likely to develop a strong sense of ethnic identity, which has been linked to various positive outcomes, including

higher self-esteem, better academic performance, and greater well-being (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014).

Numerous research studies have explored the impact of original cultural influences and the process of adapting to new cultures on immigrants' parenting methods. that parenting styles among immigrants often mirror the cultural frames prevalent before migration, particularly when individuals migrate during adulthood or older adolescence Glick et al. (2012). For instance, Chinese immigrant parents commonly adhere to deeply rooted values such as filial duty, obedience, hard work, and family honour in their parenting practices Guo (2013). When immigrant families move from a culture very different from their new home's culture, it can cause disagreements between parents and children. This happens because they adapt to the new culture in different ways, as noted by Babiker et al. (1980) and Kim et al. (2013). This can lead to more conflicts within the family. conflicts primarily stem from parents' struggles in understanding and addressing their children's adaptation challenges within the new cultural context Kim et al. (2013).

Scholarly insights emphasize that parenting practices are culturally constructed and deeply embedded within the socio-ecological contexts of respective cultures, often reinforced by extended family and broader societal norms (Harkness & Super, 2002). This presents significant challenges for immigrant parents transitioning from collectivistic to individualistic cultures, leading to conflicts between their traditional parenting ideals and the prevailing values in the host culture Yaman et al (2010).

The chosen acculturation strategy significantly influences parenting behaviours among immigrant populations. Those transitioning from collectivistic to individualistic cultures often adapt their parenting styles based on their acculturation approach, with integrated strategies involving a blend of heritage practices and host culture norms Yaman et al (2010). The conflicts may emerge due to divergent policies between cultures. For instance, immigrant families facing restrictions on culturally prescribed parenting practices, such as corporal punishment due to state-imposed policies, grapple with internal cultural conflicts (Rasmussen et al., 2012). These conflicts can lead to a breakdown in parental authority and respect within immigrant households.

These critical observations derived from scholarly literature show the connection between cultural backgrounds, acculturation dynamics, and immigrant parenting practices, shedding

light on the significant challenges and conflicts faced by immigrant families in navigating differing cultural norms within the host society (Glick et al., 2012; Guo, 2013; Kim et al., 2013; Harkness & Super, 2002; Babiker et al., 1980; Yaman et al., 2010; Rasmussen et al., 2012). The isolation experienced by immigrant families due to separation from extended family and community networks poses a profound challenge in seeking support for childcare, employment, and emotional well-being. This predicament, examined by Ornelas, Perreira, Beeber and Maxwell (2009), amplifies the difficulties faced by these families. Research conducted by Kim and Park (2011) and Schofield et al. (2012) indicates that challenges in communication between immigrant parents and their children exacerbate differences in cultural adaptation. can lead to several negative effects for the children, such as difficulty adjusting, mental health issues, becoming delinquent, struggling in school, and more family fights. These outcomes are further discussed in research by Costigan and Dokis (2006), Kim et al. (2013), Updegraff et al. (2012), and Wang et al. (2012). Furthermore, the immigration process often triggers conflicts over gender roles and marital dynamics, particularly in settings with more egalitarian gender expectations, like the U.S. Falconier (2013) discusses the challenges faced by men from traditional, patriarchal cultures in adapting to the increased freedoms afforded to women in host countries. This adjustment may lead to conflict, aggression, and dissatisfaction within relationships, contributing to the complex web of challenges in immigration family structures and dynamics.

It's important to note that the process of parenting acculturation and cultural maintenance is not uniform and can vary significantly depending on factors such as the parents' own acculturation experiences, the community in which the family lives, and the degree of exposure to both the heritage and host cultures. The interplay of these factors shapes the unique experiences of each immigrant family, as well as their approach to balancing heritage and host culture influences. Parenting acculturation and cultural maintenance are key processes through which immigrant parents influence their children's ethnic identity development. The extent to which parents retain heritage cultural practices and adopt new ones from the host society plays a critical role in shaping the ethnic identity of their children.

## **2.8 Parenting styles and intergenerational conflict**

Scholarship in the field of migration research has a longstanding interest in studying the challenges faced by migrant youth and the conflicts that can arise between generations (Choi et al., 2008; Chuang et al., 2014; Telzer, 2010). Research has expanded this area by examining

how social factors influence the experiences of migrant youth, including issues related to social inclusion/exclusion, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging (Portes and Rumbaut, (2009). Intergenerational conflict is a significant aspect to consider when examining migration and the barriers and opportunities for full integration into the host society. Previous studies have shown that differences in the ability to adapt to life in a new country often led to an acculturation gap between generations. Newly arrived migrant youth tend to acquire social and cultural capital rapidly, particularly through formal education, enabling them to access opportunities that may not be available to their parents. In multicultural contexts, this "gap" can also refer to differing expectations and desires between migrant youth and their parents. Migrant youth often aspire to full societal participation, which can lead to the adoption of practices more closely aligned with the culture of the host society. This can result in these young individuals feeling caught between the expectations of their parents and those of the host society (Choi et al., 2008; Costigan & Dokis, 2006; Hynie et al., 2012; Tardif & Geva, 2006).

For newly arrived migrant communities, these dynamics, along with changes in family structure and cultural adjustments, often contribute to conflicts between generations as families strive to maintain intergenerational unity (Attias-Donfut & Waite, 2012). Furthermore, culture plays a significant role in shaping how parenting styles are perceived and practiced, both by parents and their children. Parents often seek to preserve the values and norms of their cultural background, while children are influenced by and tend to adopt the values and norms of the host society (Lim et al., 2008). Research highlights the importance of culture in understanding the relationship between parents and adolescents in newly arrived migrant families. Cultural heritage transmission is a critical aspect of the acculturation process for migrant parents, but it can also lead to tensions and disagreements as they seek to pass down certain cultural elements to their young generation (Peltola, 2009). Renzaho, Green, Mellor and Swinburn (2011) identified significant differences in parenting styles and perceptions across three generations of African immigrant families. Older generations reported a preference for high restrictions, close monitoring, and minimal collaboration, a style that became progressively relaxed with each generation. This evolution reflects a broader pattern observed in immigrant families, where second-generation adolescents tend to acculturate more rapidly than their first-generation counterparts, creating a “gap” in intergenerational relationships characterized by reduced family cohesion and parental control, and increased parent-child conflict (Add Health Study).

The Acculturation Gap-Distress Model is a concept developed from studies on how differences in cultural adaptation between parents and children in immigrant families can lead to problems. Szapocznik and Kurtines, 1993 early research on Cuban families in the U.S. found that when parents and children adjust to a new culture at different speeds, it can lead to problems like bad behaviour in teenagers and arguments in the family. Conflicts are different from the usual disagreements that happen as children grow up and seek independence. Later, Portes and Rumbaut expanded on this by identifying three patterns of how families adapt: consonant (where parents and children adapt at similar rates), dissonant (where children adapt faster than parents, leading to a loss of parental authority and understanding), and selective (where children are bilingual and help their parents adapt). Dissonant acculturation is particularly challenging and can lead to issues like poor mental health and behaviour problems in children.

Over time, various researchers have used these ideas to form the Acculturation Gap-Distress Model. However, while this model aims to explain a common experience among immigrant families, not all research findings support it consistently. This inconsistency has led to calls for more thorough testing and examination of the model's ideas. The Acculturation Gap-Distress Model is widely discussed in the literature review, highlighting the mixed effects of cultural differences between parents and children in immigrant families. Originally, researchers like Szapocznik thought these gaps might lead to problems like bad behaviour and family arguments. However, later studies by people like Fuligni and Pasch show mixed results, with some finding no clear link between these gaps and children's problems. Telzer's (2010) review suggests that the impact of these gaps varies greatly, and Kim and Park (2011) believe the mixed findings might be due to different ways of defining and measuring these gaps, as well as other factors like communication styles. There's also a debate about whether acculturation means completely adopting a new culture or blending it with the original one, which affects how we understand and measure these gaps.

The literature points out that the way studies are designed and who reports the information can change the results. There's also a concern that only studies showing expected results get published, which might skew our understanding. In general, the readings show that comprehending the impacts of acculturation gaps is complicated and needs further, more detailed study.

## **2.9 Problems encountered by immigrant families**

African immigrant families in South Africa face a multitude of obstacles due to the nation's socio-economic and political landscape. The disparity in economic status between South Africa and other African countries has positioned the country as an appealing destination for migrants seeking enhanced prospects (Idemudia & Williams, 2013). Nevertheless, immigrant business owners encounter significant hurdles in obtaining formal financial assistance, with fewer than 5% successful in securing credit from recognized financial establishments (Asah & Louw, 2021). The absence of financial support has impeded the development and continuity of immigrant-run enterprises, compounding their challenges in establishing a foothold in the South African economy (Muchineripi et al., 2022). Discrimination has resulted in prolonged waiting periods and healthcare workers' reluctance to attend to undocumented immigrants, highlighting the struggles in obtaining crucial healthcare services for immigrant families. Moreover, the strained healthcare system in South Africa has acted as a barrier to accessing high-quality medical treatment, as some locals have voiced apprehensions about immigrants seeking medical help in the nation (Alfaro-Velcamp, 2017). Xenophobia has exacerbated the difficulties faced by African immigrant families in South Africa. Hostile attitudes towards immigrants, fueled by the perception of them as job threats and contributors to criminal activities, have led to violent assaults on immigrants, resulting in casualties and property destruction Desai (2015). Such xenophobic incidents are most prevalent in economically disadvantaged regions, where immigrants are frequently held accountable for societal issues, reflecting broader social tensions and animosity towards immigrants (Olorunlana, 2024). In addition to economic and healthcare challenges, African immigrant families in South Africa grapple with issues related to social integration and a sense of belonging. The challenge of securing formal employment has hindered immigrants from feeling welcomed and assimilated into the local community, further isolating them (Atabongwoung, 2022). This lack of social integration can lead to seclusion and marginalization, further complicating the already challenging circumstances faced by immigrant families. The experiences of immigrant entrepreneurs in South Africa shed light on the obstacles to economic prosperity encountered by African migrants. Restricted access to funding, competition, and xenophobia have impeded the expansion of immigrant-owned enterprises, diminishing their economic impact on the nation (Ngota et al., 2019). The informal nature of many immigrant businesses, such as street trading, has exposed them to regulatory hurdles and harassment, adding to the challenges in their entrepreneurial pursuits (Moyo et al., 2016). The broader socio-economic context of South

Africa, characterized by high unemployment, poverty, and income inequality, has fostered a demanding environment for African immigrant families striving to enhance their circumstances Urban et al. (2022). The nation's migration history and political dynamics further complicate the experiences of immigrant families navigating a terrain influenced by historical connections and contemporary socio-political tensions (Idemudia & Williams, 2013). In summary, African immigrant families in South Africa encounter a diverse range of challenges spanning economic, healthcare, social, and political spheres. From barriers to entrepreneurship and financial aid to biased healthcare and xenophobic violence, the hurdles faced by immigrant families underscore the intricacies of their experiences in a nation characterized by socioeconomic gaps and intercultural tensions. From numbers 2.7.1 to 2.7.8 the challenges of immigrant families are documented.

### **2.9.1 Language and Communication Barriers**

Language acquisition in immigrant families is a complex process characterized by the interplay of heritage language retention and the learning of the host country's language, each influenced by a range of sociocultural, educational, and economic factors. The retention of the heritage language is vital for maintaining cultural identity and familial bonds, as argued by Tse (2001), but it often faces challenges due to societal pressures to assimilate, leading to a phenomenon known as language shift (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). In contrast, some families actively work to maintain their heritage language, fostering strong ethnic identity and intergenerational communication (Schwartz, Moin, & Leikin, 2012). Concurrently, acquiring proficiency in the host country's language is crucial for the social integration and academic success of immigrant children (Cummins, 2001). While the emphasis on learning the host language is prevalent, studies like those of Bialystok (2001) highlight the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, including improved problem-solving skills and cognitive flexibility. Schools and educational policies play a critical role in language acquisition. Bilingual education programs that support both languages can lead to enhanced academic performance Baker (2011), however, the availability and quality of such programs vary, impacting language development outcomes. Some educational systems, however, favour assimilationist policies, prioritizing the host country's language at the expense of the heritage language. Parental attitudes and socioeconomic status also play a significant role in shaping children's bilingual development. Parents' perspectives on language can greatly influence their children's ability to balance both languages (Hoff, 2006). Families with higher socioeconomic status often have more resources to support

language learning. Yet, while some parents prioritize the host country's language for practical reasons, others focus on bilingualism for cultural preservation (Spolsky, 2004).

The level of community support for the heritage language can have a significant impact on its preservation. Strong ethnic communities often provide a supportive environment for heritage language use (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). However, in communities without such support, children may experience faster language assimilation towards the host country's dominant language. Language acquisition in immigrant families, particularly in a multilingual country like South Africa, presents unique challenges and opportunities that reflect both global trends and specific local dynamics. In South Africa, with its 11 official languages, immigrant families must navigate a more complex linguistic landscape than in countries with a single dominant language. This scenario demands not only learning an international language like English but also local languages such as Zulu or Afrikaans, adding layers to the linguistic adaptation process (Heugh, 2011). The importance of maintaining heritage language in these families is paramount, serving as a key cultural link and a component of identity, especially for African immigrants integrating into the familiar yet distinct South African society Deumert (2010).

Educational policies in South Africa play a critical role in shaping language acquisition for immigrant children. The approach to language instruction, particularly for non-native speakers, has significant implications for their academic integration and success (Plüddemann, 2007). Moreover, socioeconomic factors influence language acquisition, with resource-rich families able to provide better support for learning both the heritage language and South Africa's official languages, thereby facilitating smoother integration into society and the education system (Heugh, 2011). Immigrant families in South Africa face the dual challenge of integrating into the local cultural milieu while maintaining their linguistic heritage, a balancing act that impacts their children's identity formation and social integration within the country's diverse landscape (Bekker, 2010). This connection of global and local influences highlights the complexities of language acquisition in immigrant families, underscoring the need for flexible linguistic strategies and supportive educational and social policies to aid their integration. The language acquisition journey in immigrant families involves a delicate balance between heritage and host country languages, shaped by educational policies, parental attitudes, and the socio-cultural context. This balance presents both challenges and opportunities for immigrant children, influencing their cultural integration, identity formation, and cognitive development.

In a local study by Naidu (2019) she shed light on the significant challenges immigrant families face due to language barriers. Firstly, Naidu emphasized that these barriers impact the access immigrant families have to crucial services like healthcare and education, as effective communication with service providers becomes a hurdle. Naidu emphasised the isolation immigrant families experience because of language differences, leading to a lack of support system in their new environment. Her study pointed out the educational challenges children of immigrant families encounter, as parents struggle to communicate with teachers and support their children academically, potentially affecting the children's learning outcomes.

Dekoke (2016:85) state that “When multilingual migrants from the DRC enter multilingual South Africa, their language repertoires can change in various ways”. Lekogo (2008) notes that many French-speaking African immigrants struggle with language barriers in English-speaking areas. As a result, they often choose to learn English to better adapt and become multilingual (Crush, Williams & Peberdy, 2005). In a study by Vandeyar (2010) found that in a school setting within their study Language, including accent, reflects immigrant status and contributes to academic and social exclusion, as local Black students and teachers label immigrant students as "the Other". While bilingualism offers numerous benefits, some educational systems and social environments promote assimilation over bilingualism. In the context of Vandeyar’s (2010) study, learners did not learn new languages for the purposes of being bi/multilingual; however, it was a strategy to assimilate in their school. The immigrant students prioritised learning the isiPedi, which is one of South Africa’s languages, so that they could interact with other African students who spoke the language and understand their teachers when they would code switch between English and isiPedi during lessons. Assimilation involves prioritizing the host country's language and culture often at the expense of the immigrant family's heritage language.

This approach can have both advantages and disadvantages. On one hand, assimilation can facilitate faster social integration and improve educational and employment opportunities for immigrant children. Proficiency in the host country's language can help children perform better academically and socially, as it enables them to fully participate in the educational system and interact with their peers and teachers. On the other hand, assimilation can lead to the loss of the heritage language and cultural identity. This loss can create a disconnect between children and their families.

From a social constructivist perspective, children's learning and development are shaped by their social environment. When assimilation is promoted, children must learn and adapt outside their own cultural setting. This process can have a variety of effects on their cognitive and social development. For instance, while they may gain proficiency in the host country's language, they might also experience stress and confusion as they navigate different cultural expectations and norms.

### **2.9.2 African immigrant schooling experiences in South Africa**

In South African schools, there's a gap in research about how immigrant boys and girls experience life differently. These schools play a key role in how these children form their identities, with many identifying themselves by their home country, influencing their sense of belonging. According to Rees and Nicholson (1994), the reactions they get from people around them can deeply affect their self-perception. Positive interactions can boost their self-esteem, while negative ones can make them feel worthless. Immigrant children often struggle to fit into the school environment, and this can lead to conflicts if they feel targeted or stereotyped. Vandeyar (2011) highlights that they're sometimes called 'makwerekwere', a hurtful term used in South Africa. These children face ongoing challenges because of their cultural background, underscoring the need for schools to create a more inclusive atmosphere that embraces cultural diversity.

The research on education for migrant children in South Africa by Blessed-Sayah, Griffiths, and Moll (2022) adopted a qualitative methodology, using a case study format that involved teachers and parents to investigate the issues these children encounter. The study used a constant comparative method within a grounded theory framework to thoroughly understand the educational context and experiences. The research has notable limitations alongside its strengths. Although it gathered insights from parents and teachers, not directly involving migrant children as participants meant missing out on more profound perspectives of their experiences, with ethical considerations for their inclusion being recognized. The research's narrow focus on just one school also limits how much its findings can apply more broadly. While it offers valuable perspectives, the study emphasizes the necessity for future research to overcome these shortcomings and more comprehensively understand the challenges migrant children face in their education.

### **2.9.3 Obstacles to education for migrant children in South Africa: documentation, policy, and well-being**

Within the framework of the UNCRC mandate, access to education remains a significant challenge for many migrant children, primarily due to issues related to proper documentation (UNICEF, 2003; Bartlett, 2015). In South Africa, migrant children, especially those of the second generation, are often regarded as foreign nationals and are required to maintain their parents' citizenship status. To access essential social services, including education, health care, foster grants, and child support grants, they must navigate the complex immigration system outlined in the Immigration Act of 2002. One potential pathway for these children is to acquire a dependent or permanent resident visa, assuming one of the migrant caregivers obtains South African citizenship. When they reach the age of 18, these children can apply for South African citizenship, provided they have been residents of the country for 18 years. Many migrant families encounter significant difficulties in obtaining the necessary identity documents, permanent residence permits, or dependent visas, leaving a considerable number of migrant children without proper documentation ("irregular") and unable to access education (Bartlett, 2015).

The reluctance to incorporate undocumented immigrant youth into the educational framework is notably evident in South Africa's under-resourced rural sectors (Makgate, 2013). The International Organization for Migration (2019) has well documented the difficulties in executing policies intended for the educational welfare of these migrant minors. In specific South African locales, exclusion and xenophobic sentiments afflict migrant youth irrespective of their legal status, thus risking human rights abuses UNESCO (2018). A common plight for migrant youths across nations, regardless of their development status, includes facing ethnic prejudice, economic hardship, and malnutrition, especially as many settle in destitute neighbourhoods Bartlett (2015). Studies point out that, particularly in nations like South Africa, financial limitations are a significant barrier to the educational access of these migrant youths (Palmary, 2009).

The challenging immigration laws and the hesitance of South Africa's educational institutions to integrate undocumented immigrant children pose profound consequences on their educational opportunities and overall welfare. These impediments are compounded by the broader issues of ethnic prejudice and economic deprivation, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities where these children are likely to reside.

#### **2.9.4 Mental health and well-being**

Scholars have extensively explored the theme of mental health among African immigrants, approaching it from various angles. Their research highlights how social exclusion significantly impacts mental health, as detailed by Saasa et al. (2021). The study by Ogunbajo et al. (2019) shows that African immigrants who are also gay or bisexual face specific mental health challenges because of their race, sexuality, and immigrant status. Furthermore, the role of changing social status post-migration, as investigated by Ahmed and Rasmussen (2020), is shown to have profound effects on mental health. Additionally, the influence of cultural, religious, and systemic factors in healthcare, as reviewed by Omenka et al. (2020), points to the complexity of healthcare experiences for African immigrants. Lastly, the importance of cultural identity in self-care, explored by Henry Osokpo et al. (2021), underlines the critical role of cultural congruence in mental health and healthcare practices. These studies together give us a well-rounded view of the different mental health challenges that African immigrants face. Smith and Silva (2011) argue that a strong connection to cultural heritage often correlates with better psychological well-being. This experience isn't universal. For some, like Ethiopian youth, this strong cultural connection might provide a protective buffer against the psychological stresses of immigration. Conversely, for young adults from less-represented African nations, the pressure to maintain cultural traditions in a predominantly different cultural setting might exacerbate feelings of alienation and stress.

The study highlights that migrant youth often encounter stressors related to familial conflicts arising from intergenerational differences in cultural adaptation. Language barriers and differing cultural norms between parents and youth contribute significantly to these conflicts, leading to stress within the family unit. Suarez-Orozco & Qin identify several coping mechanisms employed by migrant youth to manage stress. These include selective adoption of cultural practices, code-switching between their heritage culture and the host country's culture, seeking peer support, and finding solace in cultural communities. These strategies aim to mitigate stress while maintaining a sense of identity. The study reveals that while migrant youth face considerable stress due to acculturation challenges, many exhibit resilience. Some manage to navigate these challenges by embracing both cultures, demonstrating adaptability, and creating hybrid identities that incorporate elements from both their heritage culture and the host culture. However, the research suggests potential drawbacks in some coping mechanisms. For instance, while selective adoption of cultural practices might alleviate immediate stress, it could lead to identity conflicts or a sense of disconnection from one's roots in the long term.

Berry's research found that when migrants balance keeping their own culture and joining in with the new culture (integration), it's good for their mental health. However, efforts to completely embrace the new culture (known as assimilation) or experiences of feeling excluded (referred to as marginalization) might lead to mental health challenges. These difficulties often arise from struggles with personal identity and a sense of not fitting in or belonging. However, Berry's way of looking at how migrants adjust might be too simple. It might not cover the complex ways people adjust, especially those from non-Western places, and could be too focused on Western ideas. The study also says how migrants adjust can change over time. This means we should study this over a long period to really understand how these changes affect mental health. So, Berry's research shows the good points of integration but also that we need to study migrant experiences more deeply to understand how they affect mental health.

### **2.9.5 Identity formation**

The bi-cultural adaptation and stressors that immigrant children experience as they attempt to reconcile the pressures of conforming to the mainstream culture with maintaining their ethnic identity (Alvarado & Ricard, 2013; Zhou, 1997). This dual cultural negotiation can be a significant source of stress and strain, as these children often find themselves caught between two worlds, each with its own set of expectations and norms. The stress of bicultural adaptation can manifest in several ways. For one, children may experience internal conflicts over cultural identity, which can affect their self-esteem and overall psychological well-being. They may feel the need to conform to the dominant culture's norms to fit in, such as speaking the language without an accent, dressing in a certain way, or engaging in culturally specific leisure activities. At the same time, there is often a strong desire to retain connections to their ethnic culture, which can be particularly challenging in environments where there may be prejudice or a lack of appreciation for their native traditions (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). This tension can also impact social relationships. Immigrant children may struggle with peer relationships, facing challenges in finding acceptance within both their ethnic community and the broader society. They might feel pressure to assimilate into the mainstream culture at school while maintaining their ethnic identity at home, leading to a sense of living a "double life" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Research has shown that this bicultural stress can have developmental implications. Adolescents navigating these stressors may exhibit behavioural issues, academic difficulties, or mental health concerns such as anxiety or depression (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Cotigan & Dokis (2006) noted that successful navigation of these challenges can lead to

positive outcomes, such as enhanced social skills, cognitive flexibility, and a deeper sense of empathy.

To mitigate these adaptation stressors, social support systems such as family cohesion, supportive peer networks, and culturally sensitive school environments play a crucial role (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2007). These systems can help immigrant children develop coping strategies and resilience, enabling them to integrate aspects of both cultures into a cohesive identity. The process of bicultural adaptation for immigrant children is complex and challenging, involving the negotiation of identities and the balancing of diverse cultural expectations. It is a dynamic process that requires support and understanding from both the family and the larger society to ensure healthy development and well-being.

### **2.9.6 Economic challenges and socioeconomic integration**

The impact of parental characteristics on the development of children within immigrant families is a well-documented area of research, and it has significant implications for their cognitive stimulation and academic achievements. Abrego (2011), and Yoshikawa and Kholoptseva (2013) provide evidence that the legal status of parents, along with their education and socioeconomic status before migration, are influential factors. These characteristics affect not only the resources available for the child's development but also the educational expectations and support within the home (Pong & Landale, 2012). For instance, the educational level of parents prior to migration has been found to correlate with the educational environment they can provide for their children. Higher levels of parental education often translate into a richer language environment, more extensive educational resources, and a greater emphasis on the value of education (Turney & Kao, 2009). These households are more likely to engage in activities that promote cognitive development, such as reading to children and providing educational materials. Socioeconomic status also plays a crucial role. Parents with higher socioeconomic status tend to have better access to educational resources and are more equipped to navigate the educational system of the host country. They can provide additional learning opportunities outside of school, such as tutoring or extracurricular activities, which can have a positive impact on academic achievement (Crosnoe & Turley, 2011).

The quest for employment opportunities in host countries often presents significant obstacles to immigrants. Extensive literature exists on the subject, highlighting the disparities between immigrant workers and their counterparts from the host country. One crucial aspect directly related to the immigrant experience is the nature of the jobs they secure, which is frequently

less desirable than those available to native workers (Pérez et al., 2012). This disparity in employment conditions has prompted further research into immigrants' workforce experiences.

A recurring issue emphasized in the literature is the mismatch between immigrants' qualifications and the jobs they ultimately accept. Several sources (Godin, 2008; Van Tonder & Soontiens, 2013) provide evidence that immigrants often find themselves undertaking roles that are not commensurate with their professional expertise, occasionally even accepting positions for which they are overqualified (Godin, 2008). This trend is partly attributed to their genuine desire to provide financial support for their families in their new country.

Research highlights the unique challenges encountered by immigrant women, especially those who struggle to integrate into the labour market. Frequently, such women are regarded as less educated and skilled than their counterparts (Bonjour & Kraler, 2015; Kofman et al., 2015). The demands of their jobs, which may involve non-standard working hours, significantly hinder their ability to balance work and family responsibilities (Wall & José, 2004). An additional concern revolves around migrant mothers who face an increased risk of unemployment due to their household management obligations. Those with young children may confront heightened discrimination due to their limited availability for external employment, as well as significant work-family conflicts (Ho & Cheung, 2016).

It is important to note that many immigrant families experience a disconnect between their skills and their integration into the job market (Bonjour & Kraler, 2015; Kofman et al., 2015). Often, immigrants find themselves in occupations that require lower skill levels than their qualifications would suggest, even when they possess higher educational backgrounds (Kogan, 2010). This discrepancy frequently arises from the host country's failure to recognize their qualifications and potential language barriers.

Kalitanyi and Visser (2010) state that despite African immigrants and their education and experience, they struggle to find work and often experience exploitation. As a result, many see entrepreneurship as a necessity, particularly in ethnic enclaves. This entrepreneurship sometimes creates jobs for South Africans. These immigrant entrepreneurs face significant obstacles, including xenophobia, difficulty accessing finance and credit, and challenges with bureaucracy and crime. Despite these challenges, many remain optimistic and show perseverance. Their resourcefulness in financing their ventures, often through 'bootstrapping', highlights their creativity and resilience in the face of adversity. African immigrant families in South Africa are greatly impacted by economic hardships faced by parents who pursue

entrepreneurship. These challenges, such as discrimination, financial obstacles, and xenophobia, create stress and instability within the family. This instability might affect their ability to meet basic needs like children's education and healthcare. Moreover, the continuous struggle to sustain their businesses under tough conditions can affect parents' availability and emotional well-being, influencing family dynamics.

### **2.9.7 Legal status**

The legal status of African immigrant parents in South Africa has a profound influence on their children. Research has demonstrated that the legal status of parents has a significant impact on various aspects of children's lives, including their overall well-being, mental health, academic achievements, and cognitive development (Waldman, 2022; Söhn, 2013; Salami et al., 2020). Immigrant parents, particularly those without legal documentation, encounter challenges that can result in financial difficulties, emotional strain, and restricted availability of resources. These difficulties subsequently impact their children (Bradley et al., 2014; Maseko, 2024). The legal susceptibility of parents can directly affect the familial setting, including emotional welfare, economic security, and parent-child connections, ultimately shaping the consequences for children (Söhn, 2013).

The legal status of immigrant parents serves as a mediator for the indirect impacts on their children, since the legal position of children frequently aligns with that of their parents (Cinini & Mkhize, 2022). The transmission of legal status from one generation to another can lead to inequalities in educational accomplishments and prospects for offspring of immigrants (Maseko, 2024). The legal status of parents has a significant influence on parent-child relationships, both prior to and following migration, affecting the dynamics within African immigrant households in host countries (Kelly et al., 2017). To understand the impact of the legal status of African immigrant parents on their children's schooling and access to health in South Africa it is crucial to consider the challenges and implications associated with legal status. Research has indicated that the legal status of parents, particularly undocumented status, can significantly influence children's well-being, including their access to education and healthcare (Oropesa et al., 2015; Hamilton et al., 2021). The legal statuses of both parents, with a particular emphasis on mothers, are vital in evaluating child health (Oropesa et al., 2015). The rights granted by immigrant legal status determine access to services such as health insurance and welfare benefits, directly affecting children's access to healthcare (Hamilton et al., 2021). Zhou and Matlakala (2024) attest that in South Africa, documentation is crucial for migrant children to access essential services like education, healthcare, and social protection.

Without it, they face barriers in accessing these services, leading to inadequate living standards and exclusion from social security benefits. Proper documentation allows them to apply for state grants and social assistance programs, enhancing their quality of life.

The legal status of immigrant parents can impact the family environment, encompassing financial stability and emotional well-being, which can subsequently affect children's schooling and overall development (Söhn, 2013). Ambiguity in legal status can result in disparities in essential service access, impeding children's educational opportunities and health outcomes (Alfaro-Velcamp, 2017). The encounters with xenophobia and discrimination encountered by immigrant parents can compound the challenges faced by their children in accessing quality education and healthcare (Cinini & Mkhize, 2022; Vanyoro, 2019).

It is also true for studies done internationally that the legal status of parents significantly influences children's development. Parents who are unauthorized immigrants might encounter stress and have restricted access to social services, hindering their ability to create a supportive educational environment. The fear of deportation can introduce instability at home, impacting their children's emotional and cognitive growth (Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, 2011). The interaction between parental legal status, pre-migration education, and socioeconomic status lays the groundwork for the developmental and educational path of immigrant children. Policies aimed at supporting these families in their children's educational progress need to adopt a comprehensive approach considering these factors. Many immigrant families worry about deportation. Around 5 million children in the U.S. live with a parent who doesn't have legal documents (Capps, Fix, & Zong, 2016), and many children know someone in this situation. Because America has implemented immigration laws more strictly, researchers are looking at how this affects these families (Yoshikawa, 2011).

The biggest issue with stricter immigration laws is that families are often split (Dreby, 2010, 2015). In the late '90s and early 2000s, when America made it harder to cross the border, more families ended up staying in the U.S. because it was too costly to go back and forth. This meant more women and children came to stay with family members who were already there (Hamilton & Hale, 2016). However, if parents lack legal status in the United States, there's a chance they could face deportation and be separated from their children. Parents who've been deported and have children in the U.S. are more likely to try to come back, even without proper documents (Amuedo-Dorantes, Pozo, & Puttitanun, 2015).

According to Opfermann (2020) migrant families in South Africa face numerous challenges, including the risk of deportation and separation from their children due to undocumented status. Even when parents and children are together, they often experience difficult socio-economic conditions that impact their daily lives and overall development (Mbeve, Nyambuya, Munyoro, Dube & Shumba, 2021). These challenges are not unique to South Africa, as countries worldwide are implementing stricter immigration policies and cracking down on undocumented migration (Arrocha, 2019). South Africa has also been tightening its migration policies, particularly towards undocumented migrants (Amit, 2022). Zhou and Matlakala (2024:3) shared that South Africa faces significant concern over undocumented children, with 642,000 displaced, migrant, and refugee children by 2020. Despite common deportation of adult migrants, child deportation is prohibited, even when in the company of undocumented illegal immigrants. This disrupts family life, and the worst-case scenario is when a parent is deported and must arrange alternative care for the children if it is not feasible to leave with the child/children.

### **2.9.8 Cultural and legal challenges in parenting practices of African immigrants**

African immigrant parenting practices in host countries often reflect deeply ingrained cultural values from their home countries. These practices can clash with the norms and laws of the host nations, especially in places like the United States and parts of Europe, creating a complex balancing act between preserving their culture and adapting to new environments, particularly in terms of raising children. One major area of conflict arises from disciplinary actions taken by African immigrant parents, which may involve corporal punishment that is common and accepted in many African cultures. However, these practices can conflict with child welfare laws in host countries in the West, sometimes leading to encounters with law enforcement and child protection services, causing stress and disruption in immigrant families.

Parents and guardians across cultures are responsible for managing children's behaviour and providing love and affection. They promote disciplined behaviour and respond to misbehaviour to prevent recurrence (Lenta, 2017). Physical or corporal punishment is sometimes used, but attitudes vary across time, nationalities, and cultures. There is no universally accepted parenting blueprint. According to a report from End Corporal Punishment (2019) Article 326(4) of the Family Code 1987 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo allows parental authority to inflict reprimands and punishments on children compatible with their age and conduct improvement. However, provisions against violence and abuse in the Criminal Code

1940, Family Code 1987, and Constitution 2006 do not prohibit all corporal punishment in childrearing.

Parenting and corporal punishment are significant topics in South Africa, with implications for child development and well-being. The use of corporal punishment in parenting has been a subject of research globally, with studies highlighting its prevalence, outcomes, and interventions (Gershoff, 2017). In South Africa, the ban on school corporal punishment in 1996 marked a shift towards valuing children's rights and moving away from punitive disciplinary measures (Gershoff, 2017). However, research indicates that corporal punishment remains a common practice in the country, with children experiencing it both at school and potentially at home (Breen et al., 2015).

Studies have shown that parental beliefs play a crucial role in the use of corporal punishment, with parents who view it as an effective parenting strategy being more likely to utilize it (Chen et al., 2021). This belief can lead to an increased risk of negative outcomes for children, including victimization by peers, bullying, and depression (Chen et al., 2021). Additionally, the experience of corporal punishment by parents can influence their attitudes towards using it as a disciplinary method in the future (Walker et al., 2018). The issue of corporal punishment in South Africa is complex, with challenges in changing cultural norms and attitudes towards its use (Grobbelaar & Jones, 2020). While some parents may perceive corporal punishment as an effective way to correct children's behaviour (Chong & Yeo, 2018), research suggests that a warm and involving family environment can protect youth from serious problem behaviours associated with corporal punishment (Ma et al., 2012).

A study by Fino (2019) that looked at the experiences of Zimbabwean parents raising their children in South Africa found that parents from Zimbabwe adapted their parenting styles to meet the demands of the host country, demonstrating a relaxed approach to authoritarian tendencies. Parents in this study kept values and traditions they deemed valuable to Zimbabwean culture but adapted others. For example, a father in the study allowed his daughter to continue staying in the family home regardless of her being pregnant out of wedlock, which in Zimbabwe warranted her being chased out of home. The father justified his decision by stating that there were too many vulnerabilities in South Africa that could harm his daughter since he was the only support she had in the country. Other parents in this study were of the belief that the South African environment is too permissive; this is evident in schools where children smoke. This contrasts with the norms in Zimbabwe. The abolition of corporal

punishment in South African schools leads to increased unruliness and negative impacts on discipline. Learners bring dangerous weapons, endangering everyone's lives, and educators become unhappy, demoralized, and exhausted (Naong, 2007). Research shows that student misbehaviour is increasing in South African schools, and teachers feel unable to maintain discipline without using corporal punishment. Ntuli and Machaisa (2014) stated that the South African Schools Act bans corporal punishment, making it harder for educators to enforce rules. Students often take advantage of this, knowing they won't face the physical pain of corporal punishment. This situation has led to chaos in schools, with some teachers believing that behaviour problems have grown since corporal punishment was banned. This chaos was noted by participants in study Vandeyar (2010:357), whereby they shared that "In Zimbabwe, classrooms are quieter and more orderly. Here, many students are noisy, constantly playing, gambling, swearing, and fighting. They show no respect for their teachers and lack manners and discipline". Based on this information, it is evident that there is some form of law concerning corporal punishment; however, it is still being used in both countries. According to Clark (2020) corporal punishment is well ingrained as a discipline method in South African society. There is compelling data that suggests that corporal punishment is a common occurrence, especially for many children raised in economically disadvantaged urban households in South Africa.

### **2.10 Extended family-support**

In South Africa and around the world, the support from extended family, community groups, and various social networks is crucial for the welfare of African immigrant families. Studies have demonstrated the varied forms of assistance these networks provide, aiding in both adaptation to new environments and offering emotional and practical support. A study by Dodson and Oelofse (2000) on Zimbabwean immigrants in Cape Town illustrated how extended families operate as a safety net, providing accommodation and initial financial support. The study highlighted the role of kinship ties in easing the initial transition and the settlement process. Similarly, research by Landau and Freemantle (2010) focused on the social cohesion among African migrants in Johannesburg and found that community networks often serve as a bulwark against xenophobia and social exclusion, fostering resilience among migrants. Support systems are important for immigrants everywhere, as seen in studies like the one by Zhou and Cai (2002) on Chinese communities in the United States. Their research revealed that ethnic community networks could significantly mitigate the challenges of integration by providing employment opportunities and social services tailored to the cultural

needs of immigrants. The emotional support aspect is well-captured in a study by Nesteruk and Marks (2011), which found that shared cultural and religious practices within community networks play a critical role in psychological well-being for immigrants, offering a sense of belonging and identity continuity. These support systems are not just vital for adults but also for the younger generation. A study by Chaudry and Wimer (2016) suggested that children of immigrants benefit from community support through culturally specific educational programs that help them maintain their heritage language and cultural practices, enhancing their bicultural adaptation and identity formation. These studies show the essential role that extended family, community networks, and social support systems play in the lives of African immigrants, aiding in their adaptation and providing multifaceted support. The research highlights both the challenges faced by immigrants and the powerful ways in which their communities rally to provide support, fostering resilience and well-being.

### **2.11 Contemporary anthropological engagement with migration and family**

Contemporary research confirms the importance of studying family life in migration but also shows gaps that this study addresses. Mann (2002), for example, documented how Congolese refugee children in Tanzania faced disrupted education and poverty, highlighting the need to centre children's voices in research. My study echoes these concerns in Durban, where Congolese youth also described delayed schooling and stress linked to their parents' legal status, but extends Mann's work by examining how parents themselves negotiate these pressures and adapt their parenting strategies. Similarly, Schockaert et al. (2020) demonstrated how protracted asylum processes in South Africa destabilise family life and interrupt children's socialisation. My findings confirm these patterns, with parents and young adults both reporting that repeated renewals and inconsistent Home Affairs decisions shaped their daily lives, schooling, and sense of belonging. Spates et al. (2024) showed that Congolese refugee women in the United States relied on family-based beliefs and parenting roles as survival strategies, my study demonstrates comparable dynamics in Durban where Congolese parents use respect, discipline, and fictive kinship with fellow Congolese to protect children against xenophobia and exclusion. Mann (2012) further situated Congolese migration within broader histories of displacement and kinship rebuilding. This resonates with my participants' reflections on maintaining transnational ties and raising children across two cultural contexts.

Mawire, et al. (2020) provided one of the few studies in Durban, examining socio-economic effects of migration on Zimbabwean and Congolese families together. They found that

migration reshaped household roles, strained marriages, and created financial stress. My study builds on this local foundation by focusing exclusively on Congolese families. By narrowing it to the Congolese community specifically it reveals the distinct parenting strategies and cultural practices that are often obscured in comparative accounts.

Taken together, these studies highlight the resilience and vulnerability of migrant families but show a persistent gap in understanding how Congolese parents themselves reconfigure parenting under migration. My findings demonstrate that parenting is not only preserved but actively reshaped through transnational practices, school interactions, and negotiations with bureaucracies. This connection also grounds my recommendations, support services tailored to immigrant families respond directly to the instability described by Schockaert et al. (2020). The call for more consistent Home Affairs training addresses the challenges of “liminal legality” identified in both my data and the literature and the emphasis on schools and teachers reflects Mann’s (2012) and my participants’ accounts of disrupted education and the need for culturally sensitive teaching. In this way my study affirms and extends the contemporary anthropology of migration by situating Congolese parenting at the centre of analysis, bridging international research with the under-documented context of Durban KwaZulu-Natal. This study offers insights needed to inform policy, practice, and anthropological debates on parenting in migration.

## **2.12 Studies of immigrant parenting in South Africa: Identifying research gaps**

Studies about African diaspora families from the parent's point of view provide an important starting point before considering their children’s perspective Habecker (2016). This study is important for understanding the lives of Congolese immigrant families in South Africa, especially how they handle family life and parenting. This study stands out for including the viewpoints of both mothers and fathers, along with the experiences of their children. So, this study offers a more balanced and comprehensive exploration of parenting within Congolese families in a migratory context.

The research differs from the studies by considering the experiences of fathers and recognizing their impact, on family structure and parenting dynamics in immigrant families. The broader viewpoint aligns with research that focuses on comprehending the roles of fathers in cultural settings (Lamb, 2010). The inclusion of both parents' viewpoints provides a meaningful understanding of the complexities and interplay of roles within the Congolese immigrant

family structure. This study also brings to the fore the perspectives of Congolese youth raised in South Africa; an aspect often overlooked in favour of educational experiences. This study goes beyond just looking at school challenges, exploring wider aspects of the immigrants' lives like family relationships, adjusting to a new culture, and how they develop their sense of identity. This inclusion is key to understanding how these young individuals navigate their cultural identities within the South African societal framework.

This study addresses a significant gap in the literature regarding Congolese family experiences of parenting in South Africa. Unlike earlier research that mainly looked at how immigrant children do in school, this study gives a complete picture of family life, including how parents raise their children and what the children experience at home. *Cultural Adaptation and Parenting Strategies*: The study illuminates how Congolese parents navigate cultural differences, manage immigration stressors, and balance their cultural traditions with assimilation into South African culture (Bornstein & Cote, 2006). It highlights the strategies involved in preserving Congolese cultural heritage while adapting to a new cultural environment.

The study contributes valuable insights into identity formation among Congolese youth in immigrant families, underscoring the negotiation of cultural identity in a new environment and its impact on social integration and psychological well-being. This study offers a comprehensive exploration of the Congolese immigrant experience in South Africa, highlighting the intricacies of parenting, cultural adaptation, and the experiences of youth within these families. This study provides important information about African families who have relocated from Congo, helping us better understand their family life in South Africa.

Naidu (2013) researched a sample of forty-five African migrant mothers to probe how they negotiate some of the tensions, complexities, and challenges of mothering children outside their home countries. The African mothers are from Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. Using a narrative approach, the author captures the stories of transnational parenting from the perspective of immigrant mothers. While this study was insightful, it did not offer the experiences of fathers parenting in migration or the overall experience of what it is like to be a child of immigrant parents in the South African context.

Finos (2019) conducted a research study titled “We are actually raising South Africans”. *Raising Immigrant Families: The Parenting Experiences of Zimbabweans in South Africa*

aimed to explore the experiences of immigrant Zimbabwean parents raising their children in South Africa. The study found that the participants' overarching experience of parenting was that they were ultimately raising 'South Africans'. Participants framed their children's 'South Africanness' positively, identifying the children as cosmopolitan and empowered, which they celebrated. However, they also lamented the children's loss of identity as the most problematic aspect of 'South Africanness.' To navigate the resultant tensions, participants relaxed some of their existing beliefs while simultaneously implementing measures to reinforce some non-negotiable values and beliefs in their children. Another study that was concerned with parenting in migration is that of Mpofu (2018), which focused on exploring the lived experiences of Zimbabwean migrants parenting under conditions of irregularity in South Africa and the role of social work in the lives of irregular migrant parents. The findings from this study reported that irregular Zimbabwean migrant parents had been pushed to migrate from their country because of the negative economic, social, and political conditions in Zimbabwe. They migrated and chose to live with their children under irregular conditions in the hope that the children would have a better life in South Africa. Contrary to their expectations, they faced multiple challenges in parenting. These studies are mentioned because they give valuable findings regarding the experiences of Zimbabwean parents in South Africa, who are also a growing African immigrant population; however, we cannot assume that their experiences are the same as those of Congolese immigrants. My research fills the gaps by being inclusive of documenting both the mother's and father's perspectives of parenting in a migratory space. The research is also inclusive of young adult children who are Congolese and were raised in South Africa by their immigrant parents. One of the theories that will be used to underpin the study is Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which will provide a holistic approach to capture and interpret the experiences of Congolese immigrants raising their children in this country. This academic study aims to address various significant research gaps within the realm of parenting in the context of migration, with a specific focus on the experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children. The primary objective of this research is to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the diversity of migration experiences by directing attention to a relatively underrepresented immigrant group, specifically Congolese immigrant families in South Africa. The experiences of this group may not have been extensively documented in the current body of literature, which tends to predominantly concentrate on more prominent immigrant communities. Therefore, this study seeks to shed light on the experiences of Congolese immigrants, ultimately broadening the scope of our knowledge

regarding immigrant adaptation and parenting in the context of migration, thus fostering a more inclusive perspective.

This study is situated within the distinctive cultural, social, and political context of South Africa as the host country. This contextual setting introduces a crucial dimension to the research, as it facilitates the exploration of how Congolese immigrant parents, and their children adapt to a specific host culture. It is imperative to comprehend the influence of the host country's cultural context on immigrant parenting, a critical aspect that has often been overlooked in the existing literature. Thus, this research aims to address a notable gap by emphasizing the host culture's significance in shaping Congolese immigrants' parenting experiences. A significant amount of the studies on parenting in migration come from the West. They are based on non-Western immigrants, namely Africans, Chinese, and Latinos, settling in host nations such as America, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. This study offers insight into an under-researched parenting niche in migration whereby the immigrants are African, in this case Congolese, and moving to an African country, South Africa. Due to cultural differences, there is usually a clash between good parenting and bad parenting, as well as the outcomes associated with it.

A more recent study by Mawire, Kidane, Mtapuri and Mchunu (2020) explored the socioeconomic impact of migration on families, focusing on Zimbabwean and Congolese families living in Durban, South Africa, and suggested the importance of conducting additional investigations into migration that encompass families from diverse national backgrounds. Such studies can shed light on the potential for migrants to achieve complete integration in South Africa, leading to mutual benefits for both migrants and the host country. This involves gaining insights into the determinants of individual migration choices, the characteristics and composition of migrant families, and the socio-economic impacts of migration on these family units. Findings indicate that migration substantially affects children's well-being, often leading to behavioral issues and altered family structures. The study observes that migration complicates the family's role in socialization as parents balance between two cultural value systems. Migration can also affect socio-cultural aspects, leading to weakened or lost traditional values and customs. Research highlights the significant role of social networks and capital in migration decisions. From an economic standpoint, migration presents a mixed outcome for families, with some benefiting from new opportunities while others face exploitation and social neglect. The study suggests that effective integration policies and proper documentation for migrants are essential to mitigate these effects.

This current study employs qualitative and phenomenology research approaches to gain an in-depth understanding into the lived experiences of Congolese parents and young adult children. This methodological choice is particularly advantageous as it captures the richness and complexity of their experiences, thereby providing a more profound understanding of the challenges, triumphs, and overall journey of these families. By adopting this approach, the study can offer valuable insights into the perspective of both parents and children, thereby providing a holistic view of the parenting dynamics within Congolese immigrant families.

The study by Peter (2010) explored the experiences of Congolese migrants in South Africa and found important information about their family dynamics and means of subsistence. The financial difficulties these migrants encounter, in addition to the social pressure to send money back to their families in Congo, are important discoveries. As migrants attempt to support their relatives while also making ends meet in their new country, they frequently experience financial strain. The study emphasizes how strongly families expect financial contributions from Congolese migrants, and there is a cultural stigma associated with not sending money, which negatively affects both individual well-being and familial relationships. Peter's (2010) research sheds light on the phenomenon of transnational familial control, where migrant members are influenced by their families despite physical distance, shaping their sense of belonging, social status, and relationships within the family. This control also impacts the autonomy and decision-making processes of migrant members, showing the balance between maintaining familial ties and navigating the challenges of a new environment.

Peter's (2010) study on the financial and family pressures faced by Congolese migrants in South Africa sets the stage for my own research on parenting in migration. My research takes a closer look at how these financial issues affect the way parents raise their children and the kind of relationship they have with them, revealing new details about their emotional and mental health. I also explore how young adults from these families manage their cultural identities in their new home compared to their country of origin. This helps fill a big gap in our knowledge about how different generations of migrants adjust and blend their cultural identities. By focusing on how these economic and cultural pressures specifically impact parenting and the growth of young adults, my study goes deeper than Peter's broader approach. It provides a full picture of the migrant experience that goes beyond just economic struggles, looking at both parents and children in migrant families. This study uses the idea of intersectionality, which looks at how different parts of identity, like ethnicity, gender, and migration status, come together in the lives of Congolese immigrants.

This approach significantly contributes to a more holistic understanding of how these different factors interact and shape the parenting experiences of Congolese families. By considering the complex interconnections of identity, the research moves beyond the typical portrayal of African migrants solely as job seekers, offering a more holistic view of Congolese immigrant families and their experiences in the context of migration. In summary, this study not only seeks to investigate parenting in the context of migration but also aims to bridge critical research gaps, ultimately enriching our understanding of the experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children within South Africa's unique cultural context.

### **2.12.1 Studies about Congolese youth in South Africa and other African countries**

Jaclisse, Lorene, and Mayoma (2018) conducted a study that focused on how young, 1.5-generation Congolese migrants in Cape Town, South Africa, construct and negotiate their identities. The study's subjects were 1.5-generation migrants born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo but raised and educated in Cape Town. This group is a unique example of the intersection of cultures, as they were born in one country but spent most of their socialization in another. The study made clear the challenges that these recent immigrants face as they establish their identities in a diasporic environment. The study, which used a socio-cultural methodology, concentrated on the role that language and social interactions have in the social construction of identities. In this study, it was found that young Congolese migrants in Cape Town manage to adapt to their new environment while keeping their connections to Congo. They keep speaking their native languages like French, Lingala, and kiLari, which helps them hold on to their cultural roots. They also make friends with other Congolese migrants, forming a support network that assists in their integration and helps preserve their cultural identity. By mixing elements of their Congolese heritage with South African influences, these migrants are shaping a unique identity that reflects both where they come from and where they are now. They actively engage in educational and social activities in Cape Town, which further helps them develop their new identities while staying connected to Congo. This dual approach allows them to navigate their past and present realities effectively, establishing a sense of belonging that includes both their origins in Congo and their life in South Africa.

One of the study objectives was to understand Congolese young adults' experiences with growing up in South Africa. Growing up in South Africa is inclusive of their schooling experience. Since the participants in this study arrived in South Africa when they were still of school-going age and some were born in South Africa and started their schooling experience in this country, it was important to include literature from studies that captured the youths

schooling experience. One such study that addresses this is by Nnadozie and Morojele (2018). The study examined the educational experiences of migrant students from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in South Africa, KwaZulu-Natal, in the city of Durban, emphasizing the difficulties and chances they run into in the system. It draws attention to issues such as language barriers, prejudices, and a lack of support, in addition to the benefits of being exposed to better educational opportunities and a diversity of cultural backgrounds. The study shed light on how to better the educational experience of immigrant students and facilitate their assimilation into the South African educational system.

This paper by Nnadozie and Morojele (2018) is an essential point of reference for a literature review on the parenting experiences of Congolese migrants and their young adult children in South Africa. The foundational insights into the educational opportunities and challenges faced by Congolese children in a new cultural and social environment are provided by this earlier study. Although it does a good job of drawing attention to the educational part, it does not address the parental viewpoint or the larger dynamics of the family. This gap presents an opportunity for my research to investigate how these educational experiences influence parenting styles, choices, and the overall support network of families within the Congolese migrant community. My study attempts to provide a more holistic understanding of how educational challenges affect family life and how families collectively navigate the complexities of migration and integration by looking at the lived experiences of both parents and their young adult children. A deeper understanding of the relationship between parenting styles and children's educational experiences can enhance the body of research by highlighting parts of family and sociocultural dynamics that are not sufficiently covered in studies that only look at academic results. This approach not only bridges an important gap but also enhances our understanding of the resilience and adaptive strategies employed by Congolese migrant families in South Africa. The challenges that migrant and refugee children, particularly those from Congo, face in accessing and succeeding within South African schools have been extensively studied and reported (Crush & Tawodzera, 2014; Hlatshwayo et al., 2012; Vally & Spreen, 2012; Yu & Shandu, 2017; Vandeyar, 2012, 2010; Adebajji, 2011; Nnadozie & Morojele, 2018; Nnadozie, 2010). These studies primarily address the issue of documentation, and how a lack of it has acted as a barrier in assessing education. Migrant families often struggle with financial issues, making it hard to afford school fees and other costs related to education. This lack of money can prevent their children from accessing education in South Africa (Chisholm, 2023). Additionally, the absence of proper documentation, like recognized refugee

status for parents and birth certificates for children, can make it difficult to enrol in local schools. Having the right legal documents is essential for accessing education. Language barriers and discrimination in schools can further challenge migrant children, making it tough for them to adapt to the education system in South Africa. These factors combined create significant obstacles for migrant families trying to provide education for their children.

The study "Educational and Socio-Cultural Experiences of Immigrant Students in South African Schools" by Vandeyar (2012) looks at how immigrant students deal with their identities in South African schools. Through interviews, observations, and field notes, the study shows how these students try to fit in with local classmates while also holding on to their own cultural heritage. It also stresses the need for inclusive school environments and reveals how politics affects immigrant students' identities. This study uncovered findings that challenge existing literature in this field. Immigrant students find it politically advantageous to "pass" as local black students based on their similar physical features. This practice, known as "psychosocial passing," involves blending in with the local racial group but only outwardly, as these students don't wish to adopt local behaviour or conduct. Instead, they often view the actions and behaviour of local black students as a source of contamination and shame. Vandeyar (2012) states that traditionally, "passing" in the Western world involves black individuals with lighter skin blending in as white, but in South Africa, it refers to black immigrant students blending in with local black students due to their similar racial features.

Immigrant children in South Africa are confronted by multiple sets of challenges that demand urgent attention. This analysis, drawing from various research studies, sheds light on their difficulties and deficiencies within support systems. A significant issue faced by these children is the struggle to acquire the necessary legal documents. According to Ncumisa and Mfubu (2016), many are enrolled in schools without proper identification, hindering their access to education and essential services. Language and cultural disparities exacerbate these challenges, leading to social isolation, exclusion, and even instances of bullying and discrimination in schools Isseri et al. (2018). This impedes their adaptation and integration. The emotional and psychological distress among immigrant children is another critical concern, highlighted by Mathe (2018), especially for those unaccompanied, due to discrimination and barriers to education. Ncumisa and Mfubu (2016) emphasize a critical gap between protective laws and their actual implementation, leaving many children vulnerable. Ackermann (2017) further supports this by discussing challenges related to identity documentation within the existing child protection framework. However, a methodological flaw in existing research lies in the

reliance on data primarily gathered in school settings and from the children's perspectives alone. This overlooks valuable insights from the viewpoints of parents or caregivers who possess deeper understandings of their children's challenges. There is a clear need for more comprehensive research encompassing home and community experiences, along with schooling. This research should also consider acculturative experiences through the perspectives of immigrant parents and teachers. Despite South Africa's seemingly supportive legislative framework, the lived experiences of immigrant children reveal substantial gaps in protection, support, and understanding of their unique needs. Targeted and inclusive research is crucial for developing effective strategies that ensure their well-being and successful integration into society and the educational system. These critical insights into the challenges faced by immigrant children in South Africa form the basis for advocating more effective policies and support systems that acknowledge and address their distinct needs (Ncumisa & Mfubu, 2016; Isseri et al., 2018; Mathe, 2018; Ackermann, 2017).

The existing literature mentioned above, including studies at the master's and PhD levels, generally centres on the experiences of immigrant children and youth within educational contexts. These scholarly works often examine how immigrant students navigate identity, integration, and the unique challenges they face within school systems. However, Alison Kuah's 2022 study brings a new perspective to the conversation. Instead of focusing solely on academic performance or social adaptation Alison Kuah's 2022 study, "Aspiring to Citizenship: African Immigrant Youth and Civic Engagement in Cape Town, South Africa", examines the experiences of African immigrant youth in Cape Town, focusing on their complex identities and civic engagement without formal citizenship. Through ethnographic fieldwork, the study highlights the active role these young people play in improving their communities, countering stereotypes that portray them negatively. Kuah (2022) emphasizes their aspirations and contributions, showing that civic participation is crucial for their recognition and integration into society.

The study also reveals significant challenges faced by these youth, including marginalization due to xenophobia, discrimination, and limited economic opportunities that prevent them from fully joining the workforce and participating in society. The government's lack of formal recognition deprives them of basic citizenship rights and services, increasing their vulnerability. Their fear of police identification also discourages their public activism and community engagement. Although Kuah's research shows the positive impact of civic involvement, it also exposes systemic barriers and social prejudices that prevent African

immigrant youth from being included and thriving. The study provides a youth-focused perspective on migration, showing how African immigrant youth navigate their identities and contribute to their communities through civic engagement. Kuah identifies systemic challenges like xenophobia, discrimination, and economic barriers that limit the full societal integration of these young immigrants, directly influencing family dynamics and aspirations. Her emphasis on the lack of formal recognition and the fear of police identification reveals significant obstacles that shape parental strategies and family cohesion.

Starting with Jaclisse, Lorene, Mayoma's (2018) study, which looks at how these youth see themselves within their immediate social circles. They discovered that despite being in a new place, these young people still hold onto their cultural roots while also adapting to their new surroundings. Nnadozie and Morojele's (2018) research, which examines how the school environment impacts these youth. The findings reveal that language barriers and a lack of support can make school difficult for them. This study highlights the interconnectedness between home life, friendships, and educational experiences. Vandeyar's (2012) study further explores how societal attitudes and rules affect these youth, particularly within the school context. It shows how the broader societal environment can influence their integration experiences, shaping their sense of belonging and acceptance. Lastly, Kuah's (2022) study explores how these youth engage with their communities. It sheds light on the barriers they face, such as discrimination and economic constraints, which can hinder their participation and sense of belonging.

Together these studies provide a holistic view of the experiences of Congolese youth in South Africa, showing how various factors within their microsystems (family, school, peers), mesosystems (interactions between these systems), exosystems (societal institutions), and macrosystems (broader cultural and societal contexts) influence their upbringing experiences. Understanding these dynamics allows us to gain valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by Congolese youth as they navigate their identities and integrate into South African society.

Children who are Congolese refugees in Dar es Salaam face numerous obstacles that have a big influence on their everyday life and general well-being. The study by Mann (2002) on Congolese refugee boys and girls showed the widespread harassment and discrimination from Tanzanian peers, which causes feelings of exclusion and emotional distress, is one of the main challenges they encounter. Their integration into the community is hampered, and their sense

of social isolation is exacerbated by this hostile treatment stemming from their refugee status. Furthermore, these kids frequently face obstacles in their path to obtaining an education, such as limited financial resources, apprehension about revealing their refugee status, or their temporary status in Tanzania. Children's mobility is restricted by parents in an effort to protect them, which limits their chances for social interaction and academic success. These kids also struggle with trust issues.

This study of Congolese refugee children in Dar es Salaam provides valuable insights into Congolese families' migration experiences. It showed the dynamics within refugee families, including trust issues, parental protection, and the effects of social exclusion on children's well-being. These insights are crucial for understanding the experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children in South Africa. The research fills a significant gap in the literature about the day-to-day experiences of these children, establishing a basis for further exploration of similar themes within South Africa. By examining the effects of social exclusion, discrimination, and limited access to education, the study deepens our understanding of how these factors affect parenting practices, family relationships, and the overall well-being of migrating Congolese families. The importance of understanding parental protection is highlighted as a key factor that affects the well-being and development of children in migration settings. Parental protection gives children a sense of security, emotional stability, and trust, which are essential for their mental health and resilience. It also helps children deal with challenges such as discrimination and limited access to resources in new environments. In migration contexts, where families face additional challenges and uncertainties, the role of parental protection is even more critical.

Mann's (2002) study centres on the experiences of Congolese refugee children in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, while your research focuses on the lived experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children in South Africa, specifically exploring parenting in the context of migration. This difference highlights a gap in demographic focus, with the text study concentrating on children's perspectives and challenges, whereas your study aims to delve into the dynamics of parenting, intergenerational relationships, and the broader family experiences in migration settings. By shifting the focus to parents and young adult children, your study offers a more comprehensive understanding of how migration influences family dynamics, parenting practices, and the interactions between generations within a new cultural environment.

### **2.13 Immigrant children and youth in South Africa**

Immigrant children in South Africa are confronted by multiple sets of challenges that demand urgent attention. This analysis, drawing from various research studies, sheds light on their difficulties and deficiencies within support systems. A significant issue faced by these children is the struggle to acquire the necessary legal documents. According to Ncumisa and Mfubu (2016), many are enrolled in schools without proper identification, hindering their access to education and essential services. Moreover, language and cultural disparities exacerbate these challenges, leading to social isolation, exclusion, and even instances of bullying and discrimination in schools (Isseri et al., 2018). This impedes their adaptation and integration. The emotional and psychological distress among immigrant children is another critical concern, highlighted by Mathe (2018), especially for those unaccompanied, due to discrimination and barriers to education. Ncumisa and Mfubu (2016) emphasize a critical gap between protective laws and their actual implementation, leaving many children vulnerable. Ackermann (2017) further supports this by discussing challenges related to identity documentation within the existing child protection framework. However, a methodological flaw in existing research lies in the reliance on data primarily gathered in school settings and from the children's perspectives alone. This overlooks valuable insights from the viewpoints of parents or caregivers who possess deeper understandings of their children's challenges. There is a clear need for more comprehensive research encompassing home and community experiences, along with schooling. This research should also consider acculturative experiences through the perspectives of immigrant parents and teachers. Despite South Africa's seemingly supportive legislative framework, the lived experiences of immigrant children reveal substantial gaps in protection, support, and understanding of their unique needs. Targeted and inclusive research is crucial for developing effective strategies that ensure their well-being and successful integration into society and the educational system. These critical insights into the challenges faced by immigrant children in South Africa form the basis for advocating more effective policies and support systems that acknowledge and address their distinct needs (Ncumisa & Mfubu, 2016; Isseri et al., 2018; Mathe, 2018; Ackermann, 2017).

### **2.14 Strained Relationships: Immigrant Parents and Children**

The theme of strained and disrupted relationships between immigrant parents and their children has garnered significant attention within existing research. Several studies (Berry, 2005; Hwang, 2006; Renzaho et al., 2010; Ying & Han, 2007) have extensively explored this subject, highlighting its prevalence and importance in the context of immigrant families. This body of

research underscores that the relationships between immigrant parents and their children can face various challenges and tensions during the process of acculturation. Immigrant parents often come from different cultural backgrounds, and they may hold onto traditional values and practices from their home countries. In contrast, their children, growing up in the host country, tend to adapt more quickly to the culture, customs, and values of their new environment. This differing pace of acculturation can lead to misunderstandings, conflicts, and strained communication between generations.

### **2.14.1 Variations in acculturation rates and family dynamics**

The process of acculturation holds a crucial role in shaping family dynamics within the context of immigrant families. Acculturation refers to the adaptation of individuals from one culture to another through interactions and exposure, and it varies significantly between immigrant parents and their children. As noted by Renzaho et al. (2010) and Ying and Han (2007), immigrant parents tend to uphold the values and traditions of their home countries, resulting in a slower rate of acculturation to the values of the host society. In contrast, their children tend to adapt at a quicker pace through everyday interactions with peers in the new cultural milieu.

The differing rates of acculturation have substantial implications for family cohesion within immigrant households, as highlighted by the scholars (Renzaho et al., 2010; Ying and Han, 2007). This variance in acculturation rates can lead to several challenges, particularly in terms of communication and familial closeness. Immigrant parents may find it challenging to bridge the generational and cultural gap with their children, who have embraced the values and norms of the host society while clinging to their cultural heritage.

Consequently, communication difficulties often arise within these families, exacerbated by language barriers, making it challenging for parents and children to effectively convey their thoughts and emotions. The lack of cultural understanding further compounds these issues, resulting in misunderstandings and frustration.

The variance in acculturation rates can contribute to a sense of distancing between parents and children. Immigrant parents may feel alienated from their children's rapidly changing world, while the children, seeking peer acceptance and integration, may perceive their parents as out of touch with their experiences. This emotional distance can erode family cohesion, creating tensions and emotional strains that affect the family unit's overall well-being. The differing rates of acculturation between immigrant parents and their children significantly impact family dynamics, as observed by Renzaho et al. (2010) and Ying and Han (2007). This phenomenon

engenders challenges in communication and a sense of distance within the family, ultimately affecting family cohesion in immigrant households. The complexities of acculturation and its ramifications underscore the importance of further exploring and understanding these dynamics within the context of immigrant families.

In the realm of immigrant family dynamics, Berry (2005: 710) underscores the presence of disparities arising from disparities in acculturation rates within host societies. These disparities give rise to contrasting perspectives concerning family responsibilities, parent-child interactions, and the rights of adolescents. This serves to underscore the earlier discussion on the profound impact of differing acculturation rates on the dynamics of immigrant families.

In the evolution of acculturation theory, as found in contemporary literature, there has been a notable shift from the initial assimilation model, which proposed the complete absorption of one culture by another. Instead, contemporary research, as highlighted by Organista and Marin (2003), emphasizes the layered nature of the acculturation process. Furthermore, acculturation is now seen as a dynamic exchange where cultures influence each other in diverse ways during the adaptation process. This perspective, explained by Berry and Sam (1997), provides valuable insights into how immigrants integrate into their new cultures and how cultural interactions shape the experiences of immigrant families.

The acculturation process has been widely studied but not in conjunction with parenting, which is one goal of the current study. Berry (1997) reviewed the immigrant experience of integrating into the dominant United States culture. Research in this field has shown that there are four prototypical acculturation strategies, which include: a) integration, b) assimilation, c) separation, and d) marginalization. People can acculturate to certain extents, such that they may fully integrate into the dominant culture (integration), hold some beliefs from their culture of origin (assimilation), feel removed from the mainstream culture but ambivalent about it (separation), or remain unacculturated and feel negatively targeted by the dominant culture (marginalization) (Berry, 1997).

#### **2.14.2 Cultural dimensions of parenting: Styles and influences**

Parenting is all about the ways parents raise their children and the kind of emotional environment they create. It's made up of parenting styles, the emotional environment in which children are raised, and parenting practices, the actual activities parents do with their children. Bornstein (2001) points out that these styles and practices are crucial for children's growth, and Darling and Steinberg (1993) emphasize that it's not just about managing behaviour but also

about building a strong emotional bond. Baumrind identified three main parenting styles: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarian parents, as Turkel & Tezer (2008) explain, are strict and expect obedience without much explanation. Permissive parents, Baumrind (1991) found, are more relaxed and allow for a lot of freedom. Authoritative parents, on the other hand, balance warmth and clear rules, which supports children's independence while setting clear expectations (Baumrind, 1966; Dougherty, 1993; Maccoby, 1992; Cherry, 2016). These parenting styles are significantly influenced by culture. For example, Canadian parents often use the authoritative style, which encourages independence but with some limits (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008; Liu & Guo, 2010; Cleas et al., 2011). African parents tend to be more authoritarian, emphasizing respect and obedience (Jackson-Newsom et al., 2008). Immigrant and refugee families often stick closely to their traditional parenting practices to keep their cultural identity alive. This includes strong respect for parental authority and family values (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011; Lencucha et al., 2013). Children learn about their culture from their family and through participation in community activities. This helps them understand their cultural norms and values (Maynard & Powell, 2013; Emmanuel et al., 2012). This understanding is important as it shows how different parenting styles and cultural backgrounds shape children's development in a diverse world. A significant concern among African immigrants, as noted by Amayo (2009), is the erosion of cultural traditions in successive generations, particularly among children born in the United States. The alteration of children's and grandchildren's names to more Americanized versions is seen not merely as a loss of tradition but as a dilution of the symbolic meanings inherent in these names, which often represent strength, resilience, and other valued traits. This cultural shift shows the struggles faced by African immigrants in maintaining their heritage in a new sociocultural context.

Parenting an immigrant presents unique challenges that go beyond the usual aspects of parenting. These parents must adapt to a new language, unfamiliar customs, different parenting styles, and social systems in a new country. There's often a shift in family roles, and they may be separated from their extended families. These challenges are influenced by various factors like their parenting experience, the number and characteristics of their children, and their cultural and religious backgrounds (Ochocka & Janzen, 2008: 96). The support from their new community is vital for their adjustment and success. Immigrant parents also face emotional and uncertain challenges related to immigration (Gonsalves, 1992; Lamberg, 1996 as cited in Lewig et al., 2010: 324).

In recent studies exploring the impact of immigration on family dynamics, researchers have identified a complex interplay of cultural retention and adaptation among migrant families. Nancy Foner's 1997 research highlights how the intermingling of an immigrant family's cultural heritage with the socioeconomic landscape and legal framework of the new country can lead to either integration or a bicultural existence. These families often hold onto traditional values from their home countries, even as those traditions evolve back home, maintaining practices based on their recollections of the past. This adherence to cultural memory plays a crucial role in preserving familial norms and customs. Meanwhile, a 2009 study by Lamb and Bougher shed light on the challenges faced by Mexican adolescents in the United States, noting a tendency to adopt risky behaviours such as drinking and smoking, which compounds the economic and emotional strain on their parents. A parallel study on Chinese youths in the USA pointed out increased acculturation, leading to behavioural and peer-related issues. These difficulties forced parents to reinforce conservative traditions like family obligations and respect for authority, often causing cultural clashes within immigrant households.

In the daily lives of immigrant families, cultural conflicts regularly manifest in routine activities. Mbakogu (2014) notes how children observe disparities in disciplinary practices and freedoms between their homes and their peers', highlighting a broader cultural contrast. Yenika-Agbaw (2009) accentuates the significance of food as a symbol of cultural identity, indicating that children's choices at the dinner table serve as expressions of either connection to or detachment from their African heritage. Additionally, language becomes a pivotal aspect of this cultural struggle as parents prioritize preserving their native language, whereas their children, immersed in English-speaking environments, may not value this preservation. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) observe a prevalent trend in the United States, noting that assimilation forces contribute to the gradual loss of heritage languages by the third generation of immigrant families.

### **2.15 Changes in gender roles**

Recent studies have cast light on the profound ways in which migration influences family structures, particularly concerning gender roles and marital relations. According to Fisher (2013), the migration process is instrumental in evolving and challenging traditional gender roles, a transition that often incurs tension and conflict within the family as members grapple with adapting to their new realities (Fisher, 2013: 839). This is more challenging in the case of men, traditionally the breadwinners, who find themselves unemployed or in lower-status jobs,

leading to a recalibration of power dynamics within marriages. The research by Bui and Marosh (2008), as well as Suarez-Orozco (2001), highlights that the redistribution of household duties in migrant families, necessitated by economic pressures, often escalates the burden on both partners and can result in power struggles and, at times, domestic violence. Parallel findings by Ho, Yin, and Wu (2014) show the challenges faced by Pakistani migrant women in Canada, pinpointing limited employment opportunities and a dearth of social support as significant obstacles. These factors contribute to a sense of isolation and compound the difficulties in adjusting to new social and cultural environments, which can strain marital relationships (Ho, Yin, Wu, 2014: 662-663). The situation is particularly stark in African migrant communities, where traditional gender roles are more rigidly defined. A study by Nwabunike and Tenkorang (2015) reflects on how such entrenched roles, underpinned by longstanding values and customs, are confronted by the migration experience. Echoing these sentiments, Cummings & Davies (2002) have observed that marital discord caused by migration not only affects the relationship between spouses but also has a knock-on effect on parenting and overall family functioning.

## **2.16 Understanding immigrant parenting dynamics in global societies**

Ochocka and Janzen's (2008) article explains a new way to understand how immigrant parents raise their children in today's globalized world. A qualitative study involving 317 immigrant parents in Ontario, Canada, developed their framework. This study aimed to investigate the difficulties encountered by immigrant parents and the alterations they implement in their parenting approaches while adapting to life in Canada. A study found that immigrant parents exhibit diverse parenting orientations, undergo changes in their parenting styles, confront broader challenges related to the immigration process, require various forms of parenting support, and have significant outcomes in their parenting. These results involve how children's well-being, school success, and cultural identity are affected, along with how family dynamics negotiate culture. Yet, although the study offers valuable insights into recent immigrant parents' experiences in Canada, it recognizes some methodological limitations. The sample size, which is limited to those who have lived in Canada for less than three years and includes only 12 language groups, may not fully represent all immigrant parents in Canada. The use of focus groups and community researchers might have constrained the depth of understanding and introduced potential biases. Despite these limitations, the study contributes important perspectives and presents a fresh framework for comprehending immigrant parenting dynamics in multicultural settings.

The paper "Parenting Practices of African Immigrants in Destination Countries: A Qualitative Research Synthesis" aims to gather and understand how African immigrants raise their children in new countries. The researchers examined numerous studies, totalling 1794, yet only 24 of them aligned closely with their specific criteria and objectives. They found out that African immigrant parents often change how they discipline their kids, value respect a lot, mix in their cultural and religious beliefs, and that moms and dads might parent differently. The study reveals that African immigrant parents undergo significant adjustments in their parenting methods upon relocating to a new country. They often modify disciplinary approaches, striking a balance between leniency and strictness in line with their new environment. Emphasizing respect, these parents prioritize teaching their children to honour elders and uphold traditions, maintaining this core value despite cultural adjustments. Moreover, these parents integrate their cultural and religious beliefs into parenting. They incorporate traditional practices, stories, or religious teachings into their children's daily lives, fostering a connection to their heritage and establishing a sense of identity.

The research indicates differences in parenting approaches between mothers and fathers, post-migration. Some fathers take on increased caregiving and household responsibilities, while mothers might assume more financial roles, altering their interactions and time spent with children. These shifts sometimes lead to a more balanced distribution of parenting responsibilities but can also create tension as parents navigate these evolving roles. Overall, the study underscores the adaptability of African immigrant parents in parenting, balancing the preservation of cultural values with adjustments to a new social environment.

Their methodology and execution of how they did the research have some unclear parts. They outlined the process they followed, such as selecting pertinent studies and interpreting their significance, but they lacked sufficient elaboration on the specific methods used for article selection or the criteria employed to assess their quality. They also didn't mention if they had any checks in place to avoid bias, like having more than one person look at the studies. While the paper provides helpful insights, understanding the details of how they did the research would make their findings more reliable and useful for making policies or helping families.

## **2.17 Theoretical Framework**

### **2.17.1 Acculturation Theory and its application to migrant parenting**

According to Grant and Asanloo (2016), the theoretical framework is the cornerstone of any research study because it is the basis upon which all knowledge is built. A theoretical

framework's purpose is to provide a structure that supports the study's rationale, problem statement, purpose, significance, and research questions. This framework limits the scope of the relevant data by focusing on variables and delineating the researcher's perspective for analysing and interpreting the collected data.

A crucial function of a theoretical framework is to facilitate the comprehension of concepts and variables according to their respective definitions. It permits researchers to construct new knowledge by validating or disputing theoretical assumptions. By defining the theoretical framework, researchers can determine the appropriate research methods to employ and develop a coherent research design. Grant and Asanloo (2016) state that a good theory is valuable in the social sciences because it serves one primary purpose: to explain the meaning, nature, and challenges associated with a phenomenon that is frequently observed but unexplained in the real world. Researchers and practitioners can use this knowledge from theoretical frameworks to act more effectively. Consequently, a solid theoretical framework is essential for any research study, as it provides a solid foundation for the research and ensures the validity and dependability of the findings. Three theories were used in this research study, namely the social identity theory, the acculturation theory, and Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

### **2.17.2 Social identity theory**

According to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), individuals form their identities in relation to social groups, and these identifications help safeguard and reinforce self-concept. Social identity is shaped through two processes: self-categorisation and social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 225). Through social comparison, individuals may perceive themselves as part of an "in-group" or an "out-group," with a tendency to show bias towards the in-group (Stets & Burke, 2000: 225). Tajfel's early minimal group experiments demonstrated that individuals consistently favoured their in-group even when groups were assigned arbitrarily, showing the powerful influence of group membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979:34). Turner later expanded the theory into self-categorisation theory, emphasising that the salience of a particular identity depends on context at times ethnic identity may dominate, while in other situations religious or professional identities may become more significant (Turner, 1985:80). This development highlighted the fluid and situational nature of identity.

Scholars have applied Social Identity Theory extensively in migration studies. Hu and Cheung's (2024) meta-analysis of 33 studies involving over 30,000 participants found that social identity strongly influences migrant integration outcomes, both in maintaining cultural

resilience and in enabling adaptation. Ahmadipour (2024:15) shows that refugees often rely on heritage identities as protective resources during resettlement, while Hack-Polay, Igwe and Madichie (2021) argue that forced migrants frequently adopt multiple identities strategically to navigate exclusion and improve acceptance. These findings extend SIT by showing how identities are actively negotiated in contexts of displacement, discrimination and transnational mobility. Despite its usefulness, Social Identity Theory has been critiqued for focusing heavily on cognitive and interpersonal processes while paying less attention to broader structures such as state policy, xenophobia and economic inequality (Hu & Cheung, 2024). It is therefore often combined with frameworks that foreground structural and institutional dimensions of migrant life.

For this study, Social Identity Theory is valuable in analysing how Congolese parents and their children in South Africa construct and negotiate identities within an environment marked by both cultural diversity and xenophobia. Their social categorisation may be shaped by factors such as language, nationality, immigration status, and shared experiences of discrimination (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Vandeyar, 2012). As Ahmadipour (2024:18) notes, emphasizing heritage identity can be a strategy of resilience, while adopting hybrid or multiple identities may facilitate belonging in new contexts. This theoretical perspective therefore helps to explain how Congolese families manage parenting, cultural transmission and intergenerational relationships while simultaneously navigating the challenges of migration and acculturation.

### **2.17.3 Acculturation theory**

Acculturation has long been an important concept in anthropology and psychology for explaining what happens when cultures meet. Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936:149) first defined it as the changes that occur when people from different cultures come into continuous contact, leading to changes in the cultural patterns of one or both groups. Later, Berry (1980 1997) described acculturation as a two-dimensional process that considers both heritage culture and settlement culture. He proposed four strategies: integration (connection to both cultures), assimilation (connection to the host culture), separation (connection to heritage culture), and marginalisation (weak connection to both). These strategies remain influential though they have been widely debated.

Acculturation is not only a group process but also an individual experience. Berry (1982: 9) explained that individuals and groups may respond differently to cultural contact, and

ethnographic studies are necessary to capture these differences. Building on this, researchers such as Sam and Berry (2010) argue that acculturation involves both psychological adaptation (changes in identity, stress, coping) and sociocultural adaptation (learning new roles, norms and values). Roer-Strier (2001) and Chia (2006) show that immigrant parents often take a bicultural approach, keeping some aspects of their heritage culture while also adopting parts of the host culture.

Recent studies have criticised Berry's fourfold model as too simple. Waldram (2009:173) argues that acculturation theories sometimes treat culture as if it were the same for everyone, creating a limited understanding that does not capture individual differences. Rudmin (2009) also argues that the model ignores power dynamics, discrimination and structural inequalities that shape migrant experiences. Bornstein (2017) responded to these critiques with the specificity principle. This principle shows that acculturation is different across areas of life such as family, work and religion. It is shaped by factors like gender, age, migration status and legal environment, and it can change over time. This view explains why families may use different strategies in different settings, for example separation at home but integration in schools or workplaces.

For this study acculturation theory helps explain how Congolese immigrant parents in South Africa manage parenting and cultural transmission. Coming from their country of origin, these parents must decide which practices to keep, which to change and which to adopt from South African society. Their choices are not the same. Some parents may stress Congolese traditions at home while encouraging their children to adapt in South African schools. Others may face marginalisation when xenophobia or insecure legal status makes belonging difficult. As Bornstein (2010) notes, acculturation also affects caregiving, shaping parental expectations and child development. This perspective gives a deeper understanding of how Congolese families adapt to migration, how relationships between generations are managed, and how children's identities are formed at the meeting point of two cultures.

#### **2.17.4 The Ecological Systems Theory**

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979; 1986) provides a way of understanding how children and families develop within different but connected environments. At first Bronfenbrenner described the theory as an ecological model, which explained that a child's development is shaped not only by what happens in the family but also by wider social, cultural and institutional structures. Later he refined this into what he called the bioecological model,

where he stressed that regular and repeated interactions between a child and the surrounding environment are central to development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

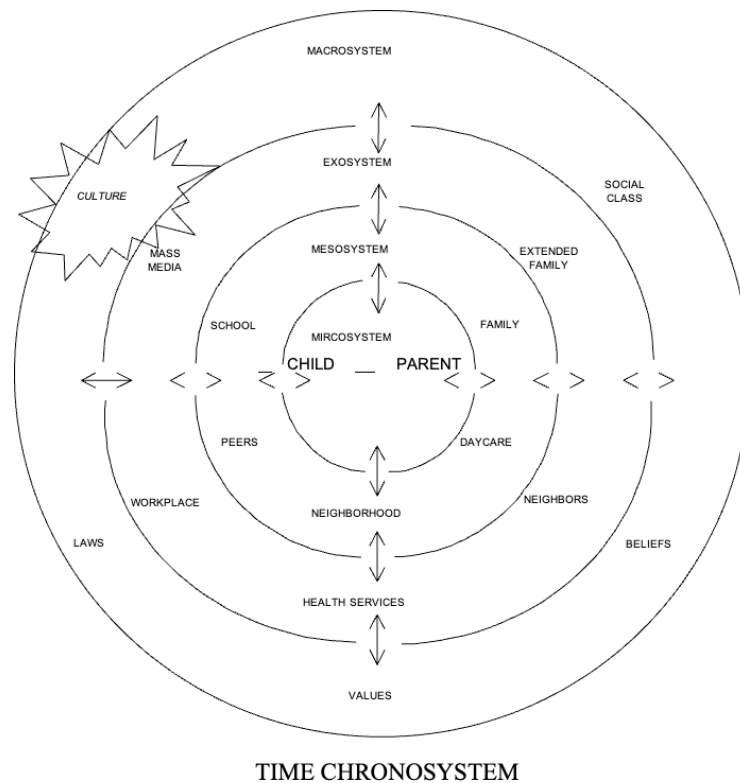
The theory identifies five linked systems. The microsystem is the immediate setting such as family, school, and peers. The mesosystem refers to the links between these settings, for example, the way home and school connect. The exosystem refers to settings that affect the child indirectly, such as a parent's workplace or the immigration office. The macrosystem includes cultural values, laws, and social attitudes. Finally, the chronosystem refers to changes that take place over time, such as historical events, migration, or shifts in family life. Each system is connected to the others, so that when one changes the others are also affected (Rosa & Tudge, 2013).

Researchers have applied this theory to the study of migration and families. Paat (2013) explains that immigrant families are not separate from the wider society but are linked to many institutions such as schools, neighbourhoods, workplaces and state services, all of which influence how they adjust. Bornstein and Cheah (2006) note that children's growth is shaped not only by their parents but also by the cultural and social structures that guide parenting. For immigrant parents this means that both their heritage culture and the host culture influence the way they raise children.

In South Africa, Congolese parents bring their own cultural ideas about parenting, but these are reshaped when they interact with schools, neighbours and government offices. At the level of the macrosystem, laws and policies on migration, as well as public attitudes toward foreign nationals, can strongly influence how families experience everyday life. At the level of the microsystem, family roles may shift, language use may change, and children may take on new cultural practices through contact with peers. These different levels interact to explain why immigrant families may experience both resilience and stress in the process of adapting to life in South Africa. Some scholars have argued that the ecological systems theory is very broad and not always easy to use in detailed research (Darling, 2007). Others suggest that the model pays little attention to inequality, poverty or discrimination, which are important in the lives of migrants (Neal & Neal, 2013). For this reason, some researchers recommend combining it with other approaches that focus on power and social justice.

Even with these limits, the theory is still useful in this study because it shows that Congolese families are influenced by many levels of context. It makes clear that their parenting and family life cannot be understood by looking only at the family itself, but also at the wider social and

cultural forces around them. This perspective helps to explain how Congolese families in South Africa face challenges such as xenophobia and uncertain legal status, while at the same time finding ways to hold on to cultural traditions and create a sense of belonging.



*Figure 7: The contextual ecological perspective on development. Bornstein and Cheah (2013)*

### 2.17.5 Justification of this theory combination

Research triangulation, according to Noble and Heale (2019) is the procedure that aids in enhancing the validity and credibility of research. To put it another way, the primary goal of research triangulation is to validate the findings of study theory triangulation, which promotes many theoretical frameworks to facilitate the interpretation of a phenomenon. In my research, I used theoretical triangulation to interpret the findings by applying three theories. This approach allowed me to analyse the collected data against multiple theoretical frameworks, leading to a better understanding of parenting and being raised in migration.

The study of Congolese immigrant families navigating acculturation gains depth and insight when multiple theoretical frameworks come into play. While acculturation theory provides valuable perspectives on cultural adaptation, it comes with limitations that might oversimplify the immigrant experience, overlook systemic factors, and carry cultural biases. Integrating the Ecological Systems Theory and the Social Identity Theory helps address these drawbacks.

The ecological systems theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner, emphasizes the layered influences impacting individuals and families. When paired with acculturation theory, this framework offers a more comprehensive view. It examines small systems (such as families), interactions between environments, external factors like policies, and cultural norms, as well as changes over time. This helps us understand acculturation in a dynamic way. Unlike the static view of acculturation, it considers structural elements such as discrimination and policies, offering a broader perspective that encompasses family dynamics, societal contexts, and historical shifts.

Integrating the Social Identity Theory sheds light on how group memberships shape individual identities within immigrant families. This theory explains intergroup dynamics, identity negotiation, and social categorization. By exploring in-group and out-group dynamics, researchers can examine how family members connect with their heritage and host cultures. The theory also uncovers the impact of social identity threats, highlighting acculturation stress and mental health outcomes. This theory offers insights into collective action and empowerment, enabling an exploration of how immigrant families leverage resources and networks to navigate challenges and advocate for their well-being.

In essence, a holistic understanding of immigrant families' experiences during acculturation emerges from the integration of Acculturation Theory, the Ecological Systems Theory, and the Social Identity Theory. This framework tackles Acculturation Theory's limitations by understanding the complex nature of adaptation, recognizing broader influences, and exploring how individual identities and group dynamics relate within larger cultural settings.

This theoretical triangulation offers a comprehensive view of the experiences of Congolese migrant families, considering environmental, social, and psychological aspects. Combining these theories provides a detailed analysis of the challenges of parenting in migration, ensuring a balanced exploration of the research topic. As Olsen (2004) states, triangulation not only validates findings but also helps the researcher gain a deeper understanding. Given the limited literature on this topic, this approach is particularly useful than using one theory in the study.

By compensating for the weaknesses of each theory with the strengths of others, this study achieves greater validity and a thorough understanding, significantly contributing to migration and parenting studies.

#### **2.17.6 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is more than just a collection of ideas; it's a carefully structured system where each idea plays an important and connected role. As Miles and Huberman explained in their 1994 work, a conceptual framework is not just a simple assembly of concepts. Instead, it is a thoughtfully planned layout that organizes the main parts, ideas, or factors in a study and predicts how they relate to each other. This framework serves as the foundation of a research study, guiding the researcher in exploring these relationships and understanding how each component influences and interacts with others within the scope of the research. Essentially, it provides a research blueprint, explaining the key theories and assumptions needed for a complete understanding of the subject.

#### **2.17.7 Relevance and evolution of theories**

The three theories used in this study, Acculturation Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory have each developed over time in ways that help explain the experiences of Congolese immigrant parents and youth in South Africa. Acculturation Theory began with early work by Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936) and was later developed by Berry (1997) to move beyond ideas of full assimilation, recognising that people can keep aspects of their original culture while also adapting to a new one. Social Identity Theory, first introduced by Tajfel and Turner in the 1970s, started with a focus on how people see themselves as part of groups and how group membership affects behaviour. It has since been applied to understand how identity can change depending on context and how belonging is shaped by social conditions. Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), first explained how different layers of the environment influence people's development, and later included the role of time and life events. In this thesis, these updated understandings are important because they show that the parenting practices, identity formation, and cultural adaptation of Congolese families are shaped by ongoing interaction between personal choices, social relationships, and wider community and societal influences.

### 2.17.8 Conceptual framework

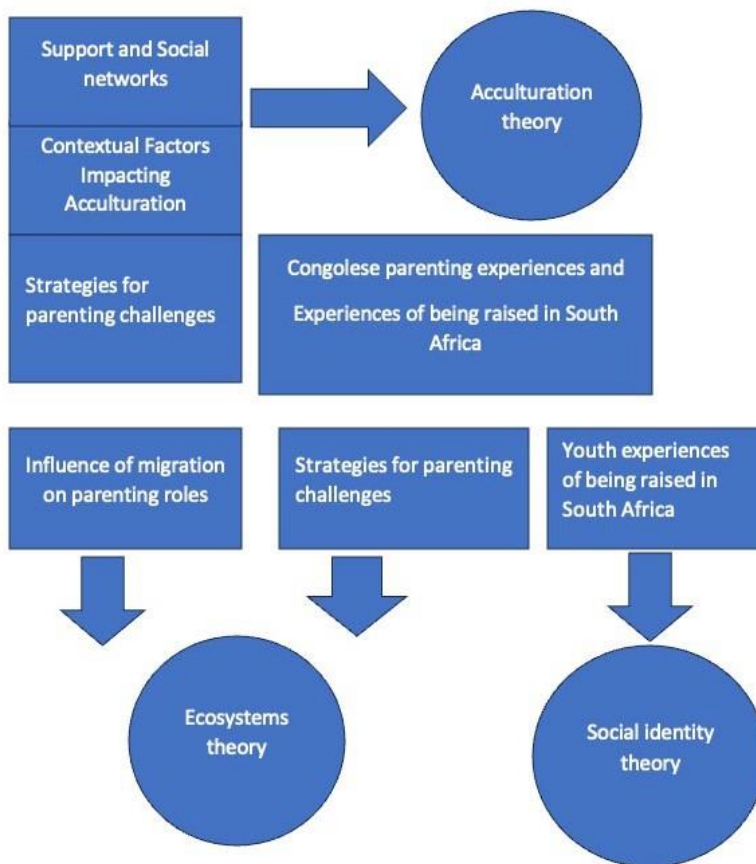


Figure 5: Conceptual framework: Experiences of Congolese families in South Africa.

#### Theoretical background

**Acculturation Theory:** Examining how Congolese parents and young adults adapt to South African culture while maintaining their own cultural identities.

**Social Identity Theory:** This theory helps to understand how Congolese parents and their children develop and maintain social identities in the context of migration. It examines the role of group membership, such as national or cultural identity, in South Africa's self-concept and social interactions.

**Ecosystems Theory:** This approach explores how Congolese immigrant families interact with and are influenced by the various systems around them, including social, economic, and cultural environments in South Africa. It emphasizes the interconnectivity between individuals and their surrounding environments.

## **Key concept**

**Migration Experience:** The process and challenges of relocating from Congo to South Africa.

**Cultural Identity:** How do Congolese parents and young adults perceive and maintain their cultural identity in South Africa?

**Parenting Styles:** Congolese parents' approaches to raising their children in a new cultural environment.

**Inter-Generational Relationship:** The dynamics between parents and young adult children within the context of migration.

**Integration and Adaptation:** How these families integrate into South African society and adapt to their new environment.

## **Assumptions**

Migration leads to significant changes in family dynamics and parenting.

Cultural identity is a critical factor in the adaptation process for both parents and young adults.

The experiences of Congolese families in South Africa may differ from those of other immigrant groups due to unique cultural and socio-economic factors.

## **Research questions**

- What are the experiences and views of Congolese migrant parents about raising children in the context of South Africa?
- What are the adaptive mechanisms parents employ when faced with the challenges of raising their children?
- In what ways has migration influenced their parenting roles?
- How does the South African environment enhance or hinder the immigrant families' acculturation experience?
- How do the young adult children of Congolese migrant parents perceive the experience of being raised in the multicultural environment of South Africa?
- Do Congolese migrant families have social networks and support?

## **Methodological approach**

- **Qualitative Methods:** In-depth interviews using semi structured interview questions to gather detailed personal narratives and experiences.
- **Sample selection:** Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa.
- **Data Analysis:** Thematic analysis is used to identify common themes and patterns in participants' experiences.

## **Expected outcomes**

- Insights into the unique challenges and experiences of Congolese immigrant families in South Africa.
- Understanding how migration influences parenting styles and family dynamics.
- Contributions to policy development to better support immigrant families.

Together, these parts offer a clear view of the real experiences of Congolese migrant families. They show how individual and collective experiences interact, influenced by broader cultural and social factors. This framework emphasizes the challenging connections between adjusting to new cultures, parenting styles, family connections, and the economic situation during migration.

### **2.18 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this research offers valuable insights into the emotional and cultural challenges immigrant parents face, particularly concerning the rapid cultural adaptation of their children in new societies. It shows the concerns of immigrant parents about their diminishing authority and their children's growing affinity with the host culture. Despite the limited specific studies, the use of international literature has enriched our understanding of these dynamics. The review effectively contextualizes the experiences of immigrant families, particularly Congolese in South Africa, and contributes to the broader discourse on parenting in migration, offering a foundation for future research in similar contexts.

## **CHAPTER 3: Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Research methodology refers to the systematic procedures and methods that researchers employ to gather and evaluate data to answer their research questions or test hypotheses. It requires a well-thought-out and organized approach, which includes choosing the best research techniques, creating the necessary tools, sampling participants or data sources, interpreting the data, taking ethical considerations into account, and validating the research's conclusions. Research methodology is a methodical approach to gathering and evaluating data to answer research questions or test hypotheses in a legitimate and reliable way.

This chapter's point of departure is a discussion of what research is and its significance. The framework and research methods that underpin this study are discussed. We consider the inclusion criteria for this study, which inform us about the selection and methods of participants. This chapter also includes a discussion of the chosen study design and its suitability for this research. A very important aspect of conducting a research study is the means or instrument of data collection. A detailed explanation of how data was collected and analysed is given. Research studies are conducted for a variety of reasons, including to expand the body of knowledge in a specific subject area and gain insight into unexplored phenomena. In the quest to do this, it is important to adhere to research ethics, which are put in place to ensure that research is conducted in a respectful manner that does not harm the participants under study. In this chapter, ethical considerations and procedures used are discussed.

#### **3.1.1 Defining research**

In the words of O'Donnell (2012), research is the process of generating new knowledge and using that knowledge in renewed and inventive ways to produce new ideas, viewpoints, and understandings. Finding solutions to issues through research is organized and systematic because you will follow a predetermined set of processes and procedures. To put it plainly, research can be likened to a systematic inquiry aimed at knowledge acquisition. It resembles the work of a methodical investigator who adheres to a predetermined plan, collects and analyses information, and gradually pieces together the elements of a complex puzzle to reveal a comprehensive view. This process is organized and deliberate, ensuring the comprehensive exploration of the subject matter without overlooking critical details. Consequently, research functions as an essential tool for solving problems and making discoveries within a disciplined and methodical framework. To obtain the most precise results, several steps in the research

process need to be taken. By conducting this research, I attempted to get closer to the reality and experiences of Congolese immigrant parents on how they raise their children in the context of South Africa and the experiences of the Congolese young adults who were raised in South Africa as children by their immigrant parents.

### **3.1.2 Qualitative research paradigm**

Green and Thorogood (2009:5, 38) maintain that the selection of the qualitative approach as the primary or exclusive research method depends on various factors, including the study's goal, aim, or purpose. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), the choice of research approach or method should align with the research question and the subject of investigation. Consequently, the research design employed should be seen as a tool for addressing the research question. This thesis sought to investigate and gain insight into the lived experiences of the participants under scrutiny.

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the experiences and views of Congolese migrant parents about raising children in the context of South Africa?
2. What are the adaptive mechanisms parents employ when faced with the challenges of raising their children?
3. In what ways has migration influenced their parenting roles?
4. How does the South African environment enhance or hinder the immigrant families' acculturation experience?
5. How do the young adult children of Congolese migrant parents perceive the experience of being raised in South Africa?
6. Do Congolese migrant families have social networks and support?

### **3.1.3 The suitability of a qualitative research paradigm for this study**

The qualitative research paradigm is highly suited for the investigation of "Parenting in Migration: The Lived Experiences of Congolese Immigrant Parents and Their Children in South Africa" because it enables a thorough examination and comprehension of the experiences and viewpoints of the participants. To understand the meanings, attitudes, and experiences of individuals or groups, qualitative research focuses on gathering and evaluating non-numerical data, such as words, images, and observations. This method is

especially helpful for investigating complex and nuanced subjects that may be difficult to quantify, including migration and parenting.

The qualitative research paradigm used in this study made it possible to gather rich, in-depth information regarding the lives of Congolese immigrant parents and their children living in South Africa. In-depth, semi-structured interview questions gave participants a chance to express their experiences and viewpoints in their own words, giving the researcher a better understanding of the difficulties and opportunities they encountered in their new environment. Qualitative research also lends itself well to examining the social and cultural contexts in which experiences take place, which is especially pertinent in the context of migration. This paradigm made it possible to examine how participants' parenting experiences were impacted by cultural norms and values, as well as how they navigated and dealt with the expectations of the host society. A qualitative research paradigm was highly appropriate for this study because it allowed for a nuanced understanding of the opportunities and challenges that Congolese immigrant parents and their children faced in the context of migration. It also allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of these individuals.

#### **3.1.4 Ontology and epistemology of the study**

Ontologically, this study aligns with social constructivism, viewing the reality of Congolese immigrant families as subjective, co-constructed through their experiences and perceptions in the South African context. This approach acknowledges that the essence of being for these families, is shaped by their unique cultural, socio-economic, and personal contexts (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The study seeks to answer the ontological question, 'what exists?', by exploring the varied realities of these immigrant families as they navigate their new environment.

Epistemologically, the study is grounded in phenomenology and narrative inquiry. It values the personal experiences and narratives of Congolese parents and children (young adults) as primary sources of knowledge, aiming to understand the essence of their lived experiences through their perspectives Husserl (2012). It also recognizes storytelling as a means of conveying complex emotional and social truths, thus providing a rich and empathetic understanding of the challenges, adaptations, and resilience of these families (Clandinin & Connelly, 2004). The essential epistemological question, 'How do we know?', is addressed through qualitative methods that emphasize depth and context, seeking to gain a holistic

understanding of the immigrant experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Thus, the study's ontology and epistemology interact to construct a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of Congolese immigrant families in South Africa, grounded in their realities and understood through their narratives and experiences.

### **3.2 Role of the researcher and suitability of phenomenology**

In the phenomenology framework, the researcher is interested in the participants' interpretations, assertions, and descriptions of their familiarities and acquaintances (Hobert, 2001). So, descriptive data comes from qualitative research. The researcher then must figure out what the data means by following strict and organized steps like transcribing, coding, and looking for trends and themes. The systematic procedure. Moustakas (1994) shows the steps as finding a phenomenon to investigate, bracketing out one's own experiences, and gathering data from several people who have encountered the phenomenon. In essence, this phenomenological study sought to question mainly two things. Firstly, what Congolese immigrants have experienced about parenting in migration and how their children experienced being raised in the context of migration, and secondly, how South Africa as a context has impacted their experience of this phenomenon. Creswell and Poth (2016) proposed a method for conducting phenomenological research, which we applied to this study. This method involves analysing the data and categorizing remarks or phrases into distinct themes. Afterward, the researcher proceeds to create a written portrayal of the participants' experiences of parenting/being raised in migration, outlining their encounters, as well as a structural depiction of their experiences, explaining the circumstances, context, or situations in which they transpired. A combination of these written and structural descriptions was used to effectively convey the overall essence of their experience.

A phenomenological approach has been applied successfully in similar African immigration contexts. For instance, Alhassan (2019) explored how African immigrant parents in the United States experienced the special education process, using phenomenology to uncover feelings of disempowerment and adaptation challenges. Ogunnowo (2016) employed phenomenology to examine how Nigerian parents navigate parent-adolescent communication on sexual health amidst cultural change. These studies demonstrate how phenomenology sheds light on lived experiences shaped by migration, identity, and institutional interaction just as this study aims to explore the parenting experiences of Congolese families in South Africa. Phenomenology focuses on how people make sense of their everyday lives and identities. In the international space research with refugee parents has shown that phenomenology can reveal how migration

puts pressure on family life while also showing resilience (Drummond Johansen, Varvin and Sagbakken, 2025). A study of Afghan families in Norway also used this approach to show how migration shapes language, identity, and family relationships (Mirvahedi, 2023). Likewise, research on immigrant children highlights how phenomenology captures their changing feelings of belonging and cultural identity (Batuchina & Straksiene, 2019). In this study, phenomenology makes it possible to hear the voices of Congolese families and to see parenting and identity as they are lived in practice, not just as abstract ideas.

### **3.3 My experience and positionality in conducting this research**

May and Perry (2017) note that in educational research it is impossible to fully separate ourselves and our values from the work we do. They emphasise the importance of considering and documenting our own position and feelings about the research. This relates to “positionality,” the understanding that researchers are part of the social world they study and that our own perspectives inevitably shape how we see and interpret that world (Rowe, 2014). Our worldview, what we believe about how things work and about human behaviour, is part of this (Scotland, 2012). Grix (2019) notes that aspects such as gender, race, ethnicity, and place of origin are shaped by culture and can influence how we see the world. I approached this research as a South African anthropology student with a strong interest in cultural dynamics and migration. I do not share the same nationality as the Congolese participants, my position as an outsider to the group I studied shaped the way I entered the field, the questions I asked, and how participants related to me. Initially I believed that keeping a certain distance and aiming for objectivity would help me avoid bias and present the participants’ stories more faithfully. As the research progressed, I came to understand that this idea of complete objectivity was unrealistic. My own background, education, and South African social context inevitably influenced the way I understood and interpreted participants’ narratives. I realised that positionality is not about removing oneself from the research but about being aware of and reflecting on how our perspectives shape the process and the findings.

In this study I remained conscious of how my outsider status, my understanding of South Africa’s migration history, and my own cultural assumptions shaped my engagement with participants and my interpretation of their experiences. Rather than trying to bracket out my own perspective I worked to acknowledge and reflect on it, recognising that knowledge production in qualitative research is a co-construction between researcher and participants.

### 3.4 Area of study

The research was conducted with participants from Durban, a major city in South Africa's KwaZulu-Natal province, which has experienced rapid population growth. According to Maharaj and Moodley (2000), Durban has seen a significant rise in migration from other areas of the province since the 1980s, making it one of the world's rapidly expanding cities. It attracts many migrants due to better work and business opportunities compared to other parts of the country, as well as its linguistic landscape, where English and isiZulu are widely spoken, making communication easier for newcomers (Maharaj & Moodley, 2009). Earlier studies of the Congolese community in Durban have mainly focused on their business ventures and experiences as refugees and asylum seekers. The prevalence of the Congolese population in Durban therefore offered a relevant and accessible participant pool for this study. Interviews were conducted in locations that maximised participant comfort and encouraged open discussion, including a local church, which served as a familiar and trusted space for many participants, and selected homes and workplaces to accommodate preferences and schedules. These varied settings maintained cultural familiarity, reduced travel costs, and supported the development of trust and rapport throughout the interviews.



Figure 3. 6: Map of Durban. Source: Map Data 2023 AfriGIS (Pty) Ltd

### 3.5 The study population, recruitment and sampling procedure

The study population was made up of Congolese immigrant couples who are raising their children in South Africa. This study aimed to capture the experiences of young adults who were raised in South Africa by their Congolese parents, so they were also included as study participants. The starting place for recruiting participants was a predominantly Congolese church. This is where most of the participants were recruited. As a researcher, I approached the

senior pastor and explained my research to him, and he agreed to share this with his church members. He then provided me with the contact information for those who were interested in participating in the study. As a researcher, I recognized the importance of community involvement and sought the pastor's support as a means of accessing potential participants.

The pastor's role proved vital in several key aspects of the study. Initially, I approached the senior pastor and explained the research goals, seeking their permission to communicate this information within the church community. Their agreement to share details about the study with participants facilitated the sharing of information and generated interest among individuals willing to participate. The pastor's assistance extended beyond communication; they provided practical aid by supplying contact information of interested individuals, streamlining the recruitment process. The pastor allowed me to use the church premises as a meeting place to explain the study's rationale and participation requirements to potential participants which enabled an environment conducive to open dialogue and engagement. The pastor's influential role as a community leader significantly contributed to the successful recruitment of participants. Their cooperation and provision of access to the church community were pivotal in establishing rapport and trust, ensuring a comprehensive representation of experiences among young adults raised by Congolese parents in South Africa.

When I was invited to the church, I recruited participants and explained the rationale for this study and what participation in it entailed. To increase the number of participants, I asked the participants to refer me to more potential participants who met the criteria for this study. Using these connections, I made phone calls to set up meetings, which were held at the church premises, to explain what the research was about. I did this process until I reached enough participants. Most adult youth interviewed in this study were not from the church, so they invited me to their homes, places of work, and places of study for our meetings.

The study utilized purposeful sampling, which is based on the idea that carefully chosen, information-rich cases can provide deep insights into the subject of study (Shaheen et al., 2016). To be eligible for this research, participants needed to be married Congolese nationals raising at least one child in South Africa or be a young Congolese adult aged between 18 and 25 who were brought up in South Africa by Congolese parents. This selection criteria ensured that individuals with direct experience of the phenomena under investigation could contribute their narratives and insights, offering perspectives previously unexplored by the researcher. Additionally, snowball sampling was employed. This approach was necessary because initial

recruitment did not yield the required number of participants. By asking initial participants to refer others they knew who met the study's criteria, a network of potential, information rich informants were tapped, allowing the study to reach its desired sample size.

### **Inclusion criteria**

#### **Participant criteria for parents**

- Must be Congolese and live in South Africa
- Parent participants must be born and raised in Congo.
- Have raised a child or children SA.

#### **Participant criteria for young adults**

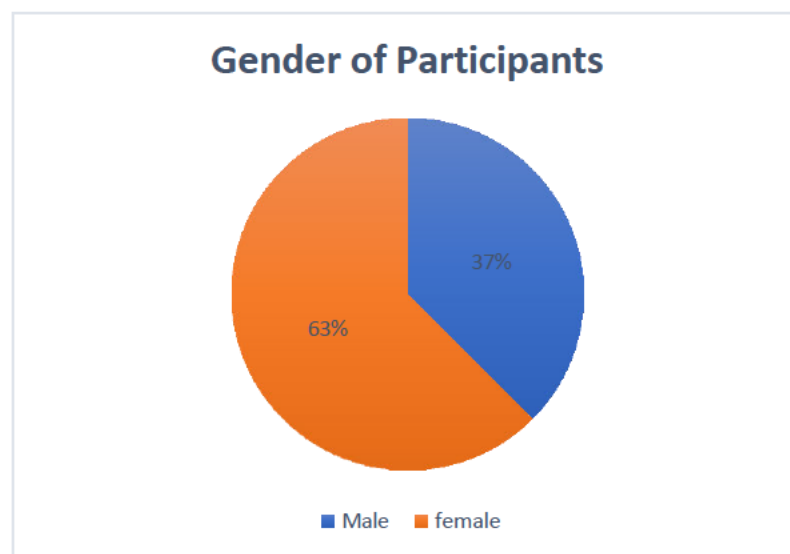
- Be a Congolese raised by Congolese parents in South Africa
- Be between the ages of 18- 25 years.
- Must be born in South Africa or come to South Africa as a child before the age of 10.

The inclusion criteria were used to select participants for this research study based on specific characteristics that are relevant to the study's objectives, namely wanting to study the Congolese community, not migrants from other countries and the children of Congolese immigrants(youth) because this age group has been in South Africa for a significant period of time and they are at an age where they can articulate themselves well and answer questions on critical concepts such as identity and belonging. The phase of young adulthood spans from 18 to 25 years and marks the shift from adolescence to adulthood. During this time, individuals engage in self-discovery, forming a unique identity and belief system while also gaining independence. Youth at this age are in a stage in life where they can think more deeply about their experiences and how these have shaped who they are. This skill, called meaning making, is about looking back on events, understanding what they mean, and using those lessons to guide current choices. It develops during late teenage years and early adulthood, making this age group well suited to reflect on their upbringing and migration experiences (Alea & Bluck, 2013; Lawford & Ramey, 2015)

Participants were required to be of Congolese origin, have at least one child and be legally or culturally recognized as married. The decision to focus exclusively on married parents was

guided by the need to maintain sample homogeneity and to examine parenting within a consistent family structure. Married couples often navigate parenting through shared decision-making, role negotiation, and culturally embedded expectations, which may differ significantly from the dynamics present in single-parent or other household forms. Limiting the sample in this way allowed for a more precise analysis of how migration and cultural adaptation shape parenting practices, without the additional variability introduced by differing family structures. This focus represents the first phase of a broader research trajectory. While this phase concentrated on married parents, future research could expand to include unmarried and single-parent households, enabling a comparative analysis and a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of marital status on parenting in migrant contexts. These criteria helped to ensure that the study sample is representative of the population of interest and that the results are meaningful by reducing confounding factors that could interfere with the interpretation of the results.

### 3.6 Demographics of participants



*Figure 7: Demographics: Gender of Participants*

The diagram above illustrates the gender of the participants in this study. A total of 24 participants who met the requirements for the study were interviewed. Six participants were fathers, and 3 were male youth (children of Congolese immigrants). Seven mothers and eight female youths (children of Congolese immigrants).

### 3.6.1 Youth participants

Name	Age	Gender	Birth Country	Occupation
Alex	19	Male	SA	College
Brian	22	Male	DRC left at the age 9	Part-time work at the phone repair shop
Charles	20	Male	DRC left at age 6	Unemployed
Sarah	18	Female	SA	High School
Rachel	21	Female	DRC left at age 7	Distance learning & hairdresser
Jessica	23	Female	Left at age 8	Building manager
Olivia	19	Female	SA	Nail technician
Emily	24	Female	DRC left at age 9	Studying it at a private college
Lily	20	Female	DRC left at age 5	Culinary school
Chloe	20	Female	SA	Nail technician
Sophia	22	Female	SA	Home baker and student

### 3.6.2 Parent participants

Name	Age	Gender	Occupation
Marie	39	female	Contract lecturer
Louise	44	female	Caregiver
Anita	41	female	Bread & breakfast housekeeper
Josephine	47	female	Baby clothes reseller
Catherine	39	female	Hairdresser
Florence	45	female	Medical officer
Helen	42	female	seamstress
Jean	45	Male	Electronic repair shop owner
David	52	Male	Mechanic
Thomas	38	Male	Customer service & carpenter
Emmanuel	48	Male	Senior Lab technician
Simon	50	Male	Salesman and Pastor
George	43	Male	DStv installer & repairs electronics

### 3.7 Method of data collection: Interview process and fieldwork notes

Data collection for this study took place over a period of three months, from March to May 2022. This timeframe allowed for multiple visits to participants' locations, follow-up conversations, and the opportunity to build trust and rapport within the community.

Interviews were semi-structured and generally lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The proposed duration was one hour; however, some sessions ran longer when participants were particularly

engaged and willing to share in-depth narratives. Shorter sessions occurred when interviews were conducted during work breaks or in busy home environments with time constraints.

Most interviews were held at the church where initial recruitment occurred. This location was chosen for its familiarity to participants, creating a safe and culturally comfortable environment that encouraged openness. It also provided a private space away from unrelated community members. Some participants preferred to be interviewed at their homes, which allowed them to speak in a relaxed, familiar setting and sometimes prompted spontaneous reflections when family members or objects in the home reminded them of their stories. A small number of interviews were conducted at workplaces during lunch or tea breaks to accommodate participants' schedules; although these settings sometimes involved background noise, they provided important access to participants who might otherwise have been unavailable.

### **3.8 Data analyses**

The study utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) as the primary means to decipher the information gathered from participants. This analysis seeks to identify consistent themes that contribute to forming a conceptual framework. A theme is significant if it reflects a notable aspect of the data concerning the research question, indicating a recurring pattern or meaning across the dataset. Thematic analysis helps find, study, and report recurring patterns (themes) in the data. While it fundamentally organizes and provides a detailed description of the dataset, it often extends beyond mere description to interpret various facets of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998).

As a researcher, I used thematic analysis to investigate the topic of parenting in migration and the lived experiences of Congolese parents raising their children in South Africa. Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase method was utilized to discover major themes and patterns in the available literature on the topic.

- 1) The first step was to become acquainted with the data by reading academic publications, books, and reports about the experiences of Congolese parents in South Africa. Through this process, I recognized crucial ideas related to parenting in migration, such as language barriers, cultural adaptability, discrimination, and social isolation.
- 2) The second phase entailed creating preliminary codes by recognizing significant words, phrases, and ideas within the data. I labelled each piece of information with a

descriptive code, such as "language lessons" or "culture practices," using an open coding method.

- 3) The third phase entails searching for themes, which includes going over the initial codes and discovering larger patterns or themes in the data. In this case, potential themes include communication issues, the impact of cultural beliefs and traditions, and the search for support networks.
- 4) The fourth process entailed assessing and refining the prospective themes by thoroughly examining the data. This procedure entailed modifying or combining preliminary codes to produce more sophisticated themes. For example, I would go over the codes relating to communication issues and discover sub-themes, such as acquiring competency in speaking IsiZulu, and cultural traditions.
- 5) The fifth phase consisted of defining and naming topics, as well as producing a clear and succinct description of each subject. In this example, I defined cultural adaptation as "the process of changing to a new cultural context while maintaining one's cultural identity and values."
- 6) The final stage entailed creating the final report, which included a full description of each theme supported by quotes and data examples. This process provided me with great insights into the obstacles that Congolese parents encounter in South Africa, as well as the techniques they employ to adapt and offer a supportive environment for their children.

Thematic analysis was an effective qualitative research method for examining the lived experiences of Congolese parents raising their children in South Africa. I was able to uncover major themes and patterns within the data by following the six-phase method indicated by Braun and Clarke (2006), providing useful insights into the issues faced by migrating parents and the techniques they employ to overcome them. The ecosystems theory I used for this study also affected how data was analysed. The ecosystems theory is holistic in nature, and by design, it includes how individuals interact with their environment. Employing an ecological systems theory in this study automatically produced themes according to the micro, macro, and mezzo systems. Therefore, it made sense to use the mode of thematic analyses. The use of thematic analyses allowed me to identify repeated patterns of meaning across the data I had collected.

### **3.9 Fieldwork challenges**

The task of recruiting participants for this study proved to be difficult. This was because the potential participants had their guards up because I am a South African and they are Congolese.

In normal circumstances, this would not be a problem; however, in my case, it was because of the various encounters that participants had experienced with xenophobia. The difference in nationality made it hard to build rapport with the participants. To overcome this, the gatekeeper suggested I conduct the initial interviews in his presence to introduce participants to the nature of this research. After doing this in subsequent interviews, I was welcomed, and the participants were comfortable with sharing their experiences with me. While some people were keen to participate in this study, during the recruitment phase, some were skeptical and felt that it was a timewaster as they were previously participants in other research studies that had no incentive for them. It took some time to convince them that although there is no monetary incentive, their participation would give representation to their population, which will offer insight and understanding of their unique experience of parenting in the diaspora.

Another challenge was that it was difficult to get the parent participants to keep to the interview agreed-upon times; most of the interviews took place over the weekend on Sundays after church. Many people had house chores and commitments to make for the week ahead. This required a lot of patience and renegotiations of schedules before I could finally have interviews with participants.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

The protection of human subjects using suitable ethical standards is critical in any scientific project because of the in-depth nature of the study process, and ethical considerations have a special resonance in a qualitative investigation.

Ethics issues are crucial in qualitative research because they ensure that the rights and dignity of study participants are maintained and that the research is conducted ethically and responsibly. Before acquiring any data, researchers must obtain participants' informed consent and maintain confidentiality and anonymity throughout the research process. In addition, researchers should be conscious of their personal biases and positionality, which can influence the acquisition and interpretation of data. In addition, researchers must ensure that their work is conducted with integrity and openness, in accordance with the ethical standards and rules established by the relevant regulatory bodies. Ethical considerations are crucial to ensuring that qualitative research is conducted in a responsible, respectful, and trustworthy manner.

#### **3.10.1 School protocol**

I submitted my research proposal to the School of Social Sciences. Academics in the cluster reviewed the proposal. The proposal went to the Higher Degrees committee, and the reviews

suggested approving the proposal with certain amendments. Following the approval at the school level, I then submitted the proposal and the HSSREC form to the RIG online application to apply for ethical clearance before I could commence with data collection. Once ethical clearance was granted, I began recruiting participants and showed them the ethical clearance letter to demonstrate my credibility. The ethical clearance letter was also shared with the senior pastor of the church, where I recruited most of the participants in this study.

### **3.10.2 Informed consent**

Throughout the entire research process, I adhered to the four principles of research ethics. To respect their autonomy, I ensured that I obtained their voluntary and informed consent before they participated in the study. I also made sure they could withdraw from the study at any time without being penalized, and I provided them with all relevant study information. Miller and Boulton (2007) state that informed consent is based on the ethical principles of respect for the dignity and worth of every human being and their right to self-determination.

According to Green and Thorogood (2004: 58), the concept of consent in research implies that participants should be able to make an informed decision regarding participation, and their assent to participate should be voluntary. In other words, participants should be able to comprehend the nature of the study, its potential risks and benefits, and any available alternatives. In addition, participants should not be coerced, deceived, or manipulated into participation; rather, they should be given the freedom to participate based on their own judgment. Consent is a fundamental ethical principle in research that protects the rights, dignity, and autonomy of participants.

I drew up a consent form that participants who were willing to be part of the study signed. This form listed the topic, details about the study, and what participants could expect. Prior to conducting interviews together with the participants, we read through the form and discussed what it meant. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, that they could choose not to be part of the study at any moment, and that this would not result in any negative consequences or penalties.

The study's second goal was to make it work for Congolese immigrant parents and their children to promote beneficence. I tried to offer suggestions that could enhance these parents' experiences by focusing on the challenges they face when raising their children in a new country. Additionally, I wanted to raise awareness of the difficulties faced by immigrant parents in South Africa and cultivate a deeper appreciation for diverse cultural practices.

Thirdly, I mitigated any potential harm or distress caused to Congolese immigrant parents and their children because they participated in the study to ensure that it was not harmful. I made certain that the research questions and methods were sensitive to the participants' cultural and social contexts throughout the process of the study, and that their confidentiality and privacy were safeguarded. To advance justice, I made sure that the parents of Congolese immigrants' voices were heard and that the findings accurately reflected their experiences. I also ensured that there were no financial costs incurred by the participants to be a part of this study. I was also mindful of any potential power imbalances between the researcher and the participants. By adhering to the four principles of research ethics, I was able to conduct a study that was respectful, beneficial, non-harmful, and fair to parents of Congolese immigrants and their children.

### **3.10.3 Credibility and trustworthiness**

Member checks were utilized to bolster the credibility and reliability of the findings, aligning with the qualitative nature of this study. For the research's integrity, field notes were meticulously recorded, and bracketing was practiced, involving the setting aside of preconceptions to focus solely on the participants' perspectives. Accurately depicting the participants' experiences and ensuring fidelity to their words were facilitated by this method, which entailed presenting detailed descriptions derived from thematic development (Creswell, 1998).

The accuracy and credibility of the research findings were guaranteed by employing a member check, a technique in qualitative studies where researchers verified their interpretations or findings with the involved participants. The researcher's conclusions, interpretations, or data summaries were shared with the participants to ensure accuracy and alignment with their perspectives or experiences, allowing them to confirm, clarify, or provide additional insights, thereby validating the accuracy and credibility of the research findings. To further validate the findings, member checks were conducted by sharing the study's results with a subset of participants, ensuring accurate reflection of their experiences. However, the member check was limited to those who were willing and available for this process.

Themes were deliberately selected, adhering to the rule of two confirmations and no contradiction (Miles & Huberman, 1994), implying that a theme required corroboration by at least two participant responses to be considered significant in their lived experience. To augment the authenticity of these themes, direct quotes from participants were included, as

suggested by Patton (2002), providing profound insights into their emotions, worldviews, thoughts, experiences, and fundamental perceptions and thereby offering more background and enhancing understanding of the participants' experiences.

#### **3.10.4 Protection of identities**

According to Babbie (2001:472), confidentiality implies that only the researcher and possibly a few other relevant individuals (such as the researcher's supervisors, promoters, a translator, or an independent coder) should be aware of the identity of participants and that these other relevant individuals should also commit to keeping the identifying information of participants confidential. No one, including the researcher, should be able to identify research subjects afterward Strydom, in De Vos et al. (2005:62). According to Yegidis and Weinbach (1996:34), the purpose of the ethical principle of confidentiality is to protect research participants from any harm, pain, injury, injustice, or discrimination that may result if their identities are intentionally or unintentionally associated with any of the data obtained. All the participants were assigned pseudonyms to conceal their identities, including when reporting findings. The participants who did not give consent to record the interviews were respected. Only notes were taken and recorded under the pseudonym.

#### **3.11 Limitations of the study**

This study's limitation is that there was limited research on this subject in the South African context. This hindered my ability to have context-specific literature references. The literature I used was sourced from international studies because this is where the research on migrants, migrant families, and parenting has been explored. As I undertook the study and had meaningful conversations with participants, I saw a missed opportunity that I did not consider at the proposal stage of this study. Not all Congolese migrants were the same. There were refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented and Congolese migrants who had permanent resident status. While they were all Congolese, these documents affected their experience of what it is like to be in South Africa and raise children. It also affected how the young adult children of Congolese migrants perceived being raised in South Africa. As is reflected in the discussion chapters, it is evident that parents who had permanent residence status in certain situations had different experiences than those who were refugees or undocumented. Research done separately on migrants based on their specific permits, for example, research that focuses on refugee Congolese parents or undocumented Congolese parents.

### **3.12 Conclusion**

This chapter provides an in-depth explanation of how data was gathered and assessed in this study, encompassing the employed methods, procedures, and theories. Methodological rigor applied to address the research questions and hypotheses ensured the legitimacy and reliability of the findings. The meticulous approach taken to select appropriate research techniques, develop instruments, sample, and interpret data has been emphasized, alongside the commitment to upholding ethical standards throughout the research process.

The study design's suitability has been established, reflecting its effective support for investigating the research questions posed. The inclusion criteria have been clarified, shedding light on the participant selection process critical to the study's validity. Clear explanations of the data collection tools make the research transparent and reproducible. This study significantly contributes to existing knowledge, particularly in understanding the studied phenomena. Ethical concerns were addressed, affirming the research's respectful treatment of participants and adherence to ethical guidelines. In summary, this chapter has not only narrated the methodological journey of the study but also laid the foundation on which the research conclusions are built. It reflects a well-structured and executed approach, establishing the groundwork for the insights and contributions that this research offers to the field.

## **Chapter 4: Journey of Congolese Migrants in South Africa: Challenges, Aspirations, and Adaptation**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the journey of Congolese migrants in South Africa, beginning with their reasons for leaving Congo, such as economic opportunities, political instability, or environmental concerns. It explores their expectations before migrating and contrasts these with the realities they encounter upon arrival. The chapter also addresses the significant impact of financial struggles on their parenting roles and discusses the varying circumstances of migration, including planned and unplanned journeys. Furthermore, it investigates the legal challenges and immigration policies that migrants navigate in South Africa. Finally, the chapter explores the issue of xenophobia and social hostility, highlighting the discriminatory experiences faced by Congolese migrants and other African communities. Through this comprehensive exploration, the chapter aims to show the complexities and resilience of Congolese migrants within the socio-political landscape of South Africa.

### **4.2 Reasons for migration**

People migrating from Congo to South Africa do so for various reasons that shape their decision. Many cite Congo's high poverty rates as a major reason. Despite Congo's wealth in minerals, poverty is widespread, affecting access to healthcare, clean water, and enough food. South Africa seems appealing for its more stable economy and job opportunities. Political instability in Congo is another major reason. The country faces conflicts and governance problems, causing insecurity and threats to people's safety. Migrants seek safety and stability in South Africa, which has a more secure political climate. Many Congolese migrants prioritize their children's education. Congo's education system struggles due to lack of funding and infrastructure, sometimes disrupted by unrest. South Africa offers better educational opportunities that parents see to improve their children's future. These reasons show how migrants make practical decisions seeking better opportunities in South Africa. While it offers advantages, this migration also brings challenges for both migrants and the host country, like adapting to new cultures, sharing resources, and maintaining peace. When asked what made them move from Congo to South Africa, parents often spoke about their children. Economic difficulties, political instability, and corruption were mentioned, but these were framed in terms of what they meant for family life and the ability to raise children “properly.”

*“I don’t think we ever recovered from the war in our country. Financially things were difficult no matter how hard you worked, earnings were too little. I just wanted to improve my life and family, not work to eat.” – George*

Florence linked her migration choice directly to children’s stability:

*“Daily life in Congo can be frustrating, simple things just don’t work properly and it’s looked at as normal. We just needed stability and a place where we could try to live a better life. Although there are problems in South Africa, this country functions and it is possible to pay for children’s education and needs.”*

Other participants pointed to lack of growth in Congo, even for the qualified. Emmanuel explained:

*“Even if you could manage to find a job matching your qualifications, there was no stability, sometimes salary would be delayed for months and was not enough. Coming to South Africa would at least give us a chance, because we heard that it is better than Congo and people who had moved to South Africa were living big.”*

For Jean education was central:

*I moved to South Africa way before I got married, I planned to come here to study further for my master’s in engineering. The decision was based on affordability; South Africa worked out cheaper in terms of cost of living than the other place, which was my first choice. I just wanted to study further, so I came here. After completion of studies, I went back to Congo for 2 years. Things did not work out, so I settled back in South Africa until I started my family, so it made sense to stay here. Congo was frustrating me as a single man now that I had a family South Africa was better for me”-Jean*

These narratives show that Congolese parents migrate not only to escape hardship, but to meet cultural expectations of good parenting. In Congolese families, providing quality education and financial security are seen as the strongest markers of being a responsible parent. Migration becomes a way to uphold these values. Parents also compared themselves with other Congolese

families in South Africa who appeared to be thriving, reflecting the cultural importance of family reputation and status being tied to children's success.

Studies of African migration echo these themes. König and de Regt (2010) found that poverty, unemployment, oppressive governments, and failing education systems were common triggers. Yet for Congolese parents, these pressures are often expressed as obligations toward children's future. Migration is described as sacrifice for family honour and children's well-being, rather than only individual gain.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory helps explain this. At the microsystem level, parents were struggling to provide food, stability, and education. At the mesosystem, poor schools and corruption limited children's opportunities. At the exosystem, national salary delays and failing infrastructure added stress. At the macrosystem, Congo's political and economic instability contrasted with South Africa's relative functionality, which was believed to make it easier to raise children well. Over time (chronosystem), these shifts from single life to family life reinforced the idea that migration was necessary to secure children's future.

Congolese parents migrated not only for survival, but because in their cultural view, parenting means securing children's education and protecting family honour. South Africa was seen as the place where this responsibility could be fulfilled.

#### **4.3 Men first migrating to South Africa**

For many Congolese families, men were the first to migrate to South Africa. Participants explained that this decision was not only practical but deeply tied to cultural expectations of fatherhood and parenting. Walker, Lakika, Makandwa and Boeyink, (2023:6) state that in Congolese households, the father is often expected to act as the provider who ensures the family's survival. Migration, therefore, became an extension of this parental role, where leaving first was framed as an act of responsibility rather than absence.

*“I came first here, and my wife and children followed after I had settled in, had a job, and rented a flat. We did this on purpose because we felt it would be too risky to move at the same time, and we did not know what it would be like to live in South Africa. Moving alone was hard because I did not see my wife and children for two years. It took me longer than expected to find a job, so we did a long-distance marriage. It was very important for me to become stable before I could bring them here.” – Emmanuel*

George reflected on how separation affected him as a new father:

*“At the time I left Congo my wife was pregnant with our first child. Money-wise things were not looking good. A childhood friend of mine, who was already in South Africa, convinced me to try my luck. After months of job hunting, I finally got a small job at a bar, then started repairing electronics on the side to save. About a year later, my wife and son joined me. But I missed out on the birth of my child. My wife was with family, but it was not easy for her to have our first child without me. All I could do was send money.”*

These accounts show how Congolese men understood migration as a parenting decision which ensures that children would grow up in a more stable and supportive environment, even if it meant personal sacrifice. The absence of fathers during critical moments, such as childbirth or early child-rearing, was described with pain but also with justification: providing materially was prioritised as the father’s duty. In Congolese culture, parenting is often shared with extended family and fictive kin. When fathers migrated first, mothers were supported by relatives or community members in Congo, reflecting long-standing practices of collective child-rearing.

This staged migration model aligns with broader African migration patterns, where a “pioneer” (often the father) establishes work and housing before reunification (Gratton, Gutmann & Skop, 2007). Yet for Congolese parents, the strategy carried added cultural meaning. Fathers saw themselves as protecting family honour and stability by not exposing wives and children to the uncertainty of migration until conditions were secure. The cost was emotional strain. Long-distance fatherhood created gaps in parenting, where men contributed financially but missed everyday presence and guidance. As George’s story shows, fatherhood was redefined as providing from a distance, with emotional support limited to phone calls and remittances. For mothers and children, this meant adjusting to life without a father figure, relying instead on extended family or community support until reunification.

Research on transnational families has documented this “living apart together across borders” (Beauchemin et al., 2015). Scholars such as Kalmijn (2018) note that children in such arrangements often grow up with modified family structures. While the participants’ accounts

resonate with these findings, what stands out in the Congolese context is how strongly migration was narrated as an act of responsible parenting. Fathers emphasised that absence was temporary, justified, and done for the sake of children's future education, security, and family stability.

#### **4.4 Aspirations for children and themselves**

This study's findings show that Congolese parents relocating to South Africa have high expectations for their children's education as well as their professional growth. These parents have a great desire to give better prospects for their children's future success. In their dreams, Congolese parents place a high value on education. They see it as an essential instrument for overcoming obstacles, breaking the cycle of poverty, and attaining upward social mobility. As a result, parents place a high value on providing a high-quality education for their children, aiming for academic achievement. To achieve their dreams, Congolese parents seek to enrol their children in prestigious educational institutions known for their academic rigor and respected position. Parents in this study spoke strongly about their hopes for their children's future. Education was central in almost every response. For Congolese parents, migration to South Africa was not only about escaping hardship but about creating a path for their children to become educated, respected, and secure.

*“The dream is for my kids to grow up in a good home and have a proper education. Leave behind a life of struggle. I wish for them to reach the highest level of education. They are the reason we continue to stay in South Africa and make it work.” – Anita*

*“I want my children to be educated and possibly move to Canada after graduating. South Africa is good because it will give them an education that is recognized in the world, but I want them to have more. I want them to experience being stable financially and live a life better than mine.” – Helen*

*“I want my children to prosper in such a way that they can even afford to assist the family members we left back home. I want them to be educated, and my wish is for them to make it worth it to move to South Africa. I want them to come back to Congo as important and successful people.” – Josephine*

Parents did not only hope for education as a private good for their children but also as a communal resource. Success was linked to helping extended family, improving the name of

the family in Congo, and carrying the honour of being “important people” when returning home. This communal expectation is a distinctive aspect of Congolese parenting, where children’s success is seen as reward for the sacrifices of both parents and kin. Parents also viewed migration itself as a parenting strategy. By moving to South Africa, they believed they had fulfilled their duty to create better opportunities. Education was framed as the most important way of breaking the cycle of poverty and gaining upward mobility. Catherine explained:

*“South Africa is fairly stable politically, so I knew that my children could get into good schools and possibly university and they can qualify as professionals because you see other Congolese who are doctors are having a better time than us who do not have the good qualifications or university training. I want my children to have the opportunity to be better.” – Catherine*

The findings from this study show that Congolese parents often use an authoritative parenting style. They have high expectations for their children, especially in education, but these expectations are also linked with care and sacrifice. Parents see education as the main way for their children to move forward in life and escape struggle. For example, Anita wants her children to “leave behind a life of struggle and reach the highest level of education,” while Helen hopes South Africa will give her children an education “recognized in the world” that will open more doors for them. A key point is the transnational dimension of these hopes. Parents want their children not only to succeed for themselves but also to help support relatives back in Congo. This shows that their parenting goals are shaped by both the local context in South Africa and their ties to family abroad. It makes their approach different from many Western models of parenting, where the focus is usually on the individual child. This pattern is similar to what Akosah-Twumasi (2020) found in her study of Sub-Saharan African parents in Australia. She showed that migrant parents often mix cultural values like respect and family duty with the realities of raising children in a new country. The Congolese parents in this study do the same while they adapt to South African schools and laws, they still keep the cultural expectation that education is for both personal success and for helping the wider family.

#### **4.5 . The expectation of South Africa before migrating**

African immigrants often relocate to foreign countries with predetermined ideas and hopes about the kind of life they anticipate encountering in their new residences. These expectations are influenced by personal aspirations, societal narratives, and the perceived prospects

available abroad. Many visualize a life filled with improved economic prospects, aiming for better-paying jobs, thriving businesses, or access to resources not found in their home nations. The allure of a more stable political environment and safety, especially for those fleeing regions with political turmoil or conflict, is also a major factor. Education stands as another crucial expectation; numerous African immigrants believe that moving abroad will grant their children access to superior educational systems, setting the stage for a more prosperous future. Furthermore, healthcare, perceived as more advanced and accessible in other countries, contributes to shaping these aspirations. The reality often brings a mix of challenges and opportunities, with immigrants navigating cultural differences, adapting to new communities, and sometimes encountering barriers to employment and social services. This contrast between high expectations and actual experiences can significantly influence the overall integration and contentment of African immigrants in their new countries.

*“To be honest I thought South Africa would be this place that has it all and would be pleasant for me to live in. I expected to have a booming business and no lack of finances. People who travelled to South Africa always had positive things to say about the country which made me choose it and expect this prosperity.”- David*

*“I imagined South Africa as a place of growth where I could reach my dreams and get a good living. Congolese who left years before us and came to South Africa were doing well; their children were speaking good English and having a better life. I expected to get the same to live in a country well run and safe”. -Simon*

*“I expected South Africa to be good and filled with opportunities for a better life. Everyone who had been here said good things. The one thing I was warned about was to avoid getting HIV as South Africa has many people infected apart from that I expected it to be a place good for business and families.”-George*

*“I thought if I manage to get to South Africa that will be the start of a new life where I can make a living and realize my dreams. From what I was told by those who already moved was that life is good”. -Thomas*

The participant responses reflect a common narrative among migrants, characterized by optimism and expectations of better opportunities in a new country. This optimism often stems

from positive accounts shared by earlier migrants and the perception of the destination country as a land of economic prosperity and safety. The first response encapsulates the migrant's hope for financial success, which is a driving factor for many individuals seeking a new life in South Africa. The expectation of having a "booming business" and not lacking "in finances" points to the economic motives behind migration, a phenomenon well-documented in migration literature Castles & Miller, (2009). The second response adds another layer to these expectations, highlighting aspirations for personal and familial growth, improved living standards, and the importance of English proficiency for integration and success.

The third response introduced a note of caution with the mention of HIV, which signalled an awareness of the potential health risks associated with moving to South Africa. This concern reflects the complex decision-making process migrants undergo, weighing opportunities against risks (Van der Geest et al., 2004). Even so, the main feeling is still hopeful, concentrating on the chances for work and family life. The final comment underscores the belief in migration as a gateway to a new beginning and the fulfilment of dreams, a sentiment that resonates with the concept of the 'migration project' where migration is seen as a strategy to achieve specific life goals (Carling, 2002). These responses illustrate a pattern of high expectations among migrants, influenced by the narratives of those who have gone before them. The literature supports that while migrants are often hopeful about the opportunities that await them, they must also navigate the realities of their new environment, which may include unexpected challenges (Castles & Miller, 2009; Carling, 2002). The experience of moving to a new country involves balancing one's hopes with the realities one encounters upon arrival.

When asked if their expectations about South Africa were met, results showed that Congolese migrants had varied experiences regarding their imagined life in South Africa. According to the data, there are those whose expectations were met, but not at the ease that was anticipated. Participants emphasized the need for increased effort in managing finances and securing jobs, acknowledging that this was a gradual process. Some also shared the inconsistencies in the stories they were told in comparison to the realities of living in South Africa. Those who came first and enticed others were accused of exaggerating the quality of life that they had achieved since migrating to South Africa.

*“My expectations of South Africa were met however it was not as quick as I thought it would be. It took me two years to be able to afford to bring my wife and kids to South Africa. It was not easy to get a job; there was so much*

*rejection and disappointment. What people who came before us did not tell us is that when they say they got jobs, they meant car guard jobs or jobs like being a doctor if you have the qualifications. You see, those two people are not going to experience South Africa the same way. What I did not know is that if you do not have the right qualifications that are wanted in the market, you will have to do very humbling jobs. Jobs like security guards, doing garden work at people's homes, and even washing dishes at restaurants. I have made progress in my life in this country. I moved from being a day labourer cleaning gardens and doing yard work to being a technician, but it was not automatic as others make it out to be". -Emmanuel*

*"South Africa was not what I expected it to be, I thought it would be a solution to our problems especially financially. To an extent, our lives are better because both my husband and I eventually found jobs, even though in my case it is seasonal, and I must supplement with selling clothes. It was not easy because we had to take any available job, whether it was good or not, and it was important to improve English so that we could have a chance of better jobs. The difficult part was that even though we had qualifications while we were still in Congo, we could not get jobs using them. We are still not living the dream life, but we are grateful. We solved one problem, but other problems came up. I am not used to being alone with just my husband and kids. South Africa gets lonely for me, and I think I feel more pressure as a mother. Everything is on me without the support of sisters and aunts to assist with children. I never knew that I would have to be this independent financially and be independent in taking care of the children. If I could manage financially back home, I would go back". -Josephine*

*"South Africa is good for doing business because people here have some money to buy. So, my expectations were met to a certain extent. When it comes to looking for a job, it is not so great in my experience. Also, I thought that finances would be the only challenge I would face, but for me, fitting in has been a problem. You stand out because of the way you speak; even if you know English, you cannot change your accent; it says that you are not South African. I am used to speaking French. This country is not welcoming to foreigners; the people make you feel that you are not South African. People*

*here emphasize that this person is a Zulu, and this one is a Xhosa or Zimbabwean. Your nationality matters more than being a human being first. I never expected such discrimination from other black people in an African country. I thought that is something that you could experience if you go to Europe because of race being black or white. In this country it is a major issue to be from another African country that is why we are called foreigners even though we are still in Africa.”-David*

*“My expectations were not met, when I left Congo, I looked forward to using my qualifications but unfortunately, I have not secured a permanent job in my field I work contract jobs. I do the same jobs as locals and have trained some, but preference is given to them to fill vacant permanent posts. This is something I did not expect but it is the reality of not being a South African”-Marie*

It is worth noting that migrants' expectations are influenced by numerous factors such as their preconceived notions about the host country, their cultural backgrounds, and the information they receive from media or people and friends who have migrated to their desired location. In some cases, expectations of the host country are met; they may be partially met with some negotiations, or they may not be met at all. In the case of the participants in this study were expecting that there would be better job opportunities, and that South Africa would be a suitable place to run thriving businesses thus improving the families' financial position. Coming to South Africa was seen as a necessary step in achieving aspirations of a better life and a chance to raise children in a stable environment. The personal accounts shown in the image reflect the varied experiences of immigrants in South Africa. The experiences align with academic research that delves into the labour market outcomes, social integration, and discrimination faced by immigrants.

One participant, Emmanuel, notes the challenge of slower-than-expected progress and the necessity to take up jobs that may not match their qualifications. This is consistent with findings from the World Bank (2011), which indicate that immigrants can positively impact the job market but may also end up in jobs that do not fully utilize their skills due to the market's demand for specific qualifications. The sense of isolation and familial pressure mentioned by another respondent echoes the labour market incorporation challenges identified by Wentzel,

Tlabela, and Weir-Smith (2007), which include not just employment but also the broader social support system that affects immigrant women's labour force participation.

The discrimination and lack of belonging experienced by immigrants, even in business, are supported by the observations of Rogerson (1999) and Crush and Williams (2001), who note that xenophobic sentiments and a complex labour market pose significant challenges to immigrant integration. The final response, highlighting the difficulty in securing permanent employment and the preference for locals overqualified immigrants, resonates with the labour market complexities described by Rogan and Roberts (2017). These complexities include not only economic factors but also socio-political barriers that can impede fully realizing one's professional potential.

Looking at these responses through acculturation theory highlights the diverse adjustments people make and the struggles they encounter while adapting to South Africa's cultural and economic landscape. individual's experience underscores the gradual nature of acculturation, with initial challenges in employment leading to an extended period before family reunification could occur. This suggests a slower-than-expected integration process, in which the reality of job market dynamics and qualifications impacted their settlement experience. The second response highlights the psychological and social aspects of acculturation stress. Despite achieving some degree of economic stability, the lack of a broader familial support system has led to feelings of loneliness and increased responsibility. The longing for communal support back home reflects a strain between the desire to maintain cultural practices and the pressures to adapt to the new environment, which can be an isolating experience. The third participant points to a discrepancy between economic expectations and social realities. While their business aspirations were met to some extent, the social integration aspect was more challenging. Encountering discrimination and a lack of welcoming attitudes from locals can hinder the acculturation process, leading to feelings of exclusion and questioning the decision to migrate., the fourth individual's expectations were not met regarding professional employment, highlighting a barrier to economic integration. Despite having the qualifications and contributing to the workforce, the preference given to locals for permanent positions reveals systemic challenges that can impede full economic acculturation and sense of belonging.

Together, these experiences show a range of acculturation experiences, from slow economic integration to unmet professional expectations and social isolation. These responses indicate

that migrants may achieve some goals, but they encounter numerous difficulties related to society and the economy that impact their self-perception and integration into the new country. Collectively, these responses illustrate that while South Africa offers opportunities, it also presents considerable challenges for immigrants. The contrast between the expectation of a welcoming environment based on shared African heritage and the reality of discrimination and exclusion is particularly touching and indicative of a challenging migration experience that is not unique to European or North American contexts. These insights provide a broader understanding of the factors at play in South African immigrants' lived experiences.

What makes these parenting practices uniquely Congolese is the way education is framed not only as a personal achievement but as a family duty and a source of honour for the entire household. Children's success is expected to extend beyond the nuclear family, with the obligation to assist kin who remain in Congo, showing how migration decisions are tied to broader family networks rather than individual advancement alone. Parents also place strong reliance on Congolese community networks in South Africa for guidance, information, and models of success, reinforcing a transnational sense of belonging. At the same time, the experience of African-on-African exclusion in South Africa has reshaped parenting, with mothers and fathers deliberately teaching children how to stay safe, adapt their language use, and manage their behaviour in public spaces. These elements together shape daily parenting choices, where education, respect, discipline, and careful monitoring of friendships are seen as vital strategies to safeguard the family's reputation and secure children's futures.

#### **4.6 Financial Struggles and Their Impact on Parenting**

This study was focused on parenting; therefore, although participants were having a migrant experience, theirs was different because it was unfolding within the context of parenting. Disappointments in job prospects and financial pursuits had an impact not only on Congolese immigrants, but also on the children they were raising. When responding to the questions regarding the challenges of raising children in South Africa and advice for other Congolese parents considering coming with their children to South Africa, the following responses were shared, highlighting how a lack of resources, including money and employment opportunities, can affect one's parenting experience.

Numerous studies and reports highlight the substantial hurdles African migrants confront within the informal economy. The South African Human Rights Commission notes a considerable portion of these migrants engage in this sector, where labour conditions are

precarious: meagre pay, minimal job security, and absence of benefits. Consequently, they become susceptible to exploitation and financial instability. Operating outside formal labour regulations, these workers encounter difficulty in asserting their rights or seeking recourse against mistreatment. They endure adverse work settings, comprising extended hours, paltry wages, and unsafe surroundings. These difficulties are exacerbated by the dearth of formal job prospects, compelling many immigrants to accept any available work to sustain themselves and their families.

The Congolese parents' comments reflect the difficulties of parenting in South Africa without a steady income. They describe the stress of financial instability and its negative effects on both them and their children. They also advise other immigrants to ensure financial stability before moving their families to South Africa, stressing the importance of preparation and realistic expectations about the challenges of immigration and settling in a new country.

*“You can love your children and be a good parent, but if you do not have work, you cannot really provide well for your children, which is stressful. When they are young, they are unable to understand hardships you are facing but once they are older, they do understand and they also stress which affects them”. - Josephine*

*“If you live in South Africa you need to have money, things are sometimes expensive, as a parent if money is not coming in you are stressed and anything done by the children can just make you lose your temper”. -Thomas*

*“It becomes difficult when you do not have a permanent job or income, the rent is waiting for you, and children are busy being children. You cannot tell them what is going on. It is even worse when you are away from home. Who will accommodate you if you cannot pay rent? That is why I tell everyone wanting to come to South Africa that they must be realistic; yes, you can make it, but it is not easy. You need to make sure you earn before you bring your children to South Africa, come alone first.”-George*

The responses reveal a strong connection between financial stability and parenting in South Africa. They highlight the importance of having enough money to provide for children beyond just love and good intentions financial stress affects more than just material needs. It also impacts parents' mental health and emotions at home, The stories also show the tough situation families face in South Africa, where living costs are high, but wages are low. They bring

attention to the challenges immigrants deal with when they move without proper support. These stories aren't just about individuals; they show that bigger changes are needed in how society works to better support families and children. `

Analysing the Congolese immigrant parents' responses through Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, we see the complicated setup of influences affecting their family life in South Africa. Within the microsystem, unemployment creates a direct stressor, compromising their ability to provide for their children and straining familial relationships. This stress permeates the mesosystem, potentially affecting the children's behaviour in other settings like school. The exosystem looms large as factors like job availability and housing stability remain outside their immediate control, influencing their capacity to create a stable home environment. Societal and cultural forces within the macrosystem, including attitudes towards immigrants and economic policies, further impact their ability to find stable work. Finally, the chronosystem reflects the dynamic nature of their situation, with the parents' advice to immigrate alone initially acknowledging the necessity of adapting over time to the changing socio-economic landscape. This layered analysis highlights the interaction between individual, family, community, and societal factors in shaping their experiences and decisions as immigrant parents in South Africa.

For Congolese parents, financial struggles are not simply individual frustrations but collective failures that touch the whole kinship system. Parenting is judged not only by how well one provides for children in South Africa, but also by one's ability to send remittances and support extended family back in Congo. The inability to secure stable income therefore brings shame and threatens one's identity as a responsible parent within Congolese cultural values, where fatherhood and motherhood are measured by visible provision. Mothers feel the absence of sisters and aunts who would normally share childcare, leaving them to cope with childrearing pressures alone in South Africa. Fathers, meanwhile, stress over their breadwinner role, where Congolese norms dictate that their dignity is tied to consistent provision. These uniquely Congolese expectations intensify the stress of low wages and precarious jobs and explain why participants warn others not to bring children before establishing themselves. Parenting here is shaped not just by South African economic conditions, but by Congolese cultural expectations of honour, family responsibility, and the fear of being seen as failing both children and kin.

#### 4.7 Economic Struggles Enroute to South Africa

Information about Congolese immigrants' specific experiences as they journey to South Africa can be gleaned from various studies and reports that document the arduous routes and the many challenges these migrants face. The journey for many Congolese immigrants often involves traversing multiple countries and dealing with various barriers. Financial constraints play a significant role in the journey, as many Congolese migrants leave their country due to conflict and instability with limited financial resources. They usually rely on their own money or assistance from family and friends, and they may even have to sell their belongings to pay for their trip. (Tshimanga, 2013). The lack of resources on the route to South Africa is particularly acute for Congolese migrants, who may travel through countries where they have no social network and do not speak the language, such as when crossing East Africa or navigating through the various countries in Southern Africa to reach South Africa. This can lead to a dependence on informal networks, which may include other migrants, diaspora communities, or local citizens sympathetic to their plight. These networks can provide information, shelter, and sometimes employment, although the latter may be precarious and exploitative (Vigneswaran, 2008). Traveling through countries such as Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe can be risky for migrants because they might face hostility from local people, unfair treatment by officials, and various kinds of mistreatment. The situation is often compounded by the necessity to secure transit visas or other documentation, which can be difficult and costly, leading to a situation where migrants may end up in an irregular status, further increasing their vulnerability (Crush & Tawodzera, 2011).

*“It was such an effort for us to be able to come to South Africa, although we had planned for the move, there were challenges we did not expect so we had to rely on some friends who were already in South Africa to host us for a while until we sorted our challenge” -Catherine*

*“Family was very helpful in raising money for me to come here since I left alone. My wife was still at home, so she stayed and was taken care of by our family. Her travel to come to me was also partly shared by family members which is why even today we can freely send money home because for us to be here was made possible by them.” -George*

The responses emphasize how important it is to get help from friends and family when moving to a new country. The first participant, Catherine, talks about needing friends in South Africa

to help overcome unexpected problems when they arrived. The second participant, George, mentions how their family back home helped pay for their move, which is why they continue to send money back. Both stories show that strong relationships with others are essential for migrants to settle in and maintain ties with their home countries. Both stories highlight the communal and interdependent aspects of migration, where the collective efforts of friends and family are indispensable. They also highlighted the financial and emotional commitments linked to migration. These commitments can persist well beyond the initial move, affecting family dynamics and responsibilities in the long term. Stark (1991), states that often overlooked are the ‘contractual arrangements’ and ‘bargaining power’ within a family or household (for example, the migrant worker abroad reimburses the debts that the family accumulated to pay for the migration or makes payments based on an agreement made with the family before migrating, cited in Nzonde (2018). These narratives suggest that migration is not a solitary act but a shared journey that involves the sacrifices and support of a wider community.

#### **4.8 Circumstances of migration: Planned and unplanned migration**

Migration in Africa is a complex phenomenon driven by a variety of factors, including conflict and economic aspirations. It can be mainly divided into two types: planned and unplanned. Planned migration involves a deliberate choice, often for better economic opportunities or improved living conditions. People or families plan their move, considering destinations and potential benefits against challenges. Unplanned migration is a direct response to immediate threats, like conflict or natural disasters, compelling people to leave quickly for safety. Conflict is a major driver of unplanned migration, causing people to flee as refugees or displaced persons. Economic conditions also influence migration, with some seeking better prospects and others moving out of desperation. Regardless of the type, migrants choose destinations based on safety, economic opportunities, and social networks

*“When we left Congo, we were taking a leap of faith It was not that we were ready, but we just had to move. There was not much planning; the focus was just to get going and make use of the opportunity of the people we knew who had already moved to South Africa. The invitation to stay with them when we arrived was not an opportunity we could let go of. It was our choice to come to South Africa, but it was a quick choice because most of our belongs and were sold and split when we already left, and money was sent to us later.” - Anita*

Anita shared their journey to South Africa, offering a touching glimpse into the realities of migration. This individual described their decision to leave Congo as "taking a leap of faith," highlighting the mixture of hope and uncertainty that often accompanies such life-changing moves. The urgency of their situation was evident in their words, "We just had to move." This urgency, lacking the luxury of time for extensive planning, is a common thread in many migration stories, particularly when individuals are compelled to leave due to unstable or unsafe conditions in their home country.

The participant's story shows how important social networks are in the migration process. They talked about using help from friends who had already moved to South Africa. Being able to stay with these friends when they arrived played a big role in their decision to migrate. This highlights how social connections can offer vital support and make it easier to handle the challenges of moving to a new country. The participant also shared how quickly they had to make the decision to migrate, and the sacrifices involved. They described selling most of their belongings not because they wanted to but because they had to. The money from these sales sent to them later was essential for their early days in South Africa. This shows the financial struggles and tough choices migrants often face especially when leaving in a hurry.

*"We were a few guys when we left Congo, and we had planned to leave but we were not in any way ready. We did not have much money; we did a few painting jobs to raise the money to travel. We knew people who were already in South Africa; that is how we survived for a few months. We applied for documentation, and we were given refugee status because you know about Congo and the war. Coming to South Africa was not easy; we just lacked money, which just goes to show that having enough money is part of the planning. Our journey was going to be better if we had money. Not having money affected where we stayed, which was mostly in questionable places, but we could not afford to be picky."-Simon*

A participant reflected on their migration from Congo to South Africa and shared an experience that highlights several challenges and realities of this journey. They described their departure as being planned but admitted a lack of readiness, particularly in financial terms. This discrepancy between the intention to migrate and actual preparedness underscores a common scenario where the urgency to leave doesn't always align with optimal preparation. Financial constraints were a central issue; they had to undertake minor jobs, such as painting, to raise

money for their journey. This situation underlines the crucial role of financial resources in migration, impacting various aspects of the journey and subsequent settlement. Upon arrival in South Africa, their initial survival hinged on connections with acquaintances already in the country, illustrating the importance of social networks in providing essential support in new and unfamiliar environments. Receiving refugee status because of the conflict in Congo shows how migration and seeking asylum intersect. Lack of sufficient funds significantly influenced their living conditions, leading to stays in "questionable places" due to financial limitations. This experience reflects a common challenge among migrants, where limited financial means often lead to compromises in living standards and safety. The individual's reflection on how their journey and initial settlement could have been easier with more funds highlights the often-overlooked aspect of financial planning in migration, which can significantly impact the overall experience from travel to settling in. Their story offers valuable insights into the lived experiences and challenges faced by many migrants under similar circumstances.

In analysing the participant's migration experience from Congo to South Africa, the microsystem and mesosystem levels of the ecosystem's theory provided a nuanced understanding of their journey. The microsystem analysis revealed the participant's personal motivations and the urgent circumstances underpinning their decision to leave Congo. Their efforts to raise travel funds through painting jobs, as well as the subsequent financial struggles, were pivotal aspects of their experience. This level of analysis also illuminated the emotional and psychological impacts of their journey, such as the stress associated with rapid decision-making and the challenges of adapting to new living conditions under financial constraints.

At the mesosystem level, we explored how the participant's personal experiences were intertwined with their immediate social interactions. The support they received from acquaintances in South Africa played a critical role in their initial settlement. This level of analysis highlighted how the participant's social network provided a crucial buffer against the hardships faced due to limited financial resources. The dynamics between their reliance on these social supports and their individual experiences were key to understanding their adaptation process in a new country.

The combined analysis at these two levels painted a full picture of the participant's migration experience. The microsystem level shed light on their individual journey, coping mechanisms, and the direct impact of their choices and actions. In contrast, the mesosystem level offered insights into the complexities of their social interactions and how these relationships influenced

and were influenced by their personal experiences This study emphasized how an individual's personal journey connects with their surrounding social environment during migration.

#### **4.9 Structural and Emotional Challenges experienced by African immigrants**

Migrant children often deal with many different emotional and social difficulties, as noted by Carballo et al. (2004). These issues are deeply rooted in both familial and social environmental contexts. Cultural conflicts and disruptions in family life, often a result of migration, can cause significant emotional and social adjustment difficulties for these children. Additionally, economic hardships frequently force migrant parents into low status, demanding jobs, leading to their absence from home during crucial non-school hours. This lack of parental presence can hinder the provision of necessary guidance and support. A notable challenge within these families is the language barrier, as children typically adapt to the local language and culture more quickly than their parents. This quick adjustment may cause parents to worry that their children are drifting from their cultural traditions and embracing different beliefs Such familial strains, along with language and cultural differences, can escalate into intra-family stress and parent-child conflicts. These tough situations can lead to serious emotional problems in migrant children, such as feeling bad about themselves, guilty, and generally having a tough time with their mental and emotional health. The combination of these factors demonstrates the various challenges faced by migrants' children, impacting their mental health and development.

*“My children overall enjoy being here it’s all they know, but when they were younger this was not the case. At school, they had to adjust because you know how kids are with name-calling of Kwerekwere and all those negative things. So, we had to help them understand that it is okay to not be South African, they must be proud to be Congolese, and that they must not take to heart of what was being said after all their schoolmates learn that behaviour from their homes.”-Louise*

In examining the response provided by the participant about the children's experience in a South African school environment, a multilayered analysis emerges when applying Social Identity Theory, Acculturation Theory, and Ecosystems Theory. This analysis serves as an interpretation of the findings regarding the children's adaptation and identity formation in a multicultural context. Using Social Identity Theory, the results show that the children's social identity development was strongly affected Initially categorized as outsiders (as evidenced by the derogatory term "Kwerekwere"), the children faced challenges in establishing a positive

social identity within the school environment. This negative out-group categorization likely influenced their self-perception and peer interactions, highlighting the critical role of group affiliations in shaping individual identity. Acculturation Theory provides a deeper understanding of the children's cultural adaptation process. The findings show an initial struggle in adjusting to the cultural norms of the South African school, which is a common experience in acculturation scenarios. However, the parents' proactive approach in reinforcing pride in the children's Congolese heritage illustrates a deliberate strategy to balance the influences of the original and new cultures. This aspect of the findings underscores the dynamic and bidirectional nature of acculturation, where individuals navigate and negotiate between multiple cultural identities. Ecosystems Theory broadens the interpretive framework by contextualizing the children's experiences within a larger environmental system. The results indicate that besides their school and family, the wider society also played a role in how the children adapted. Behaviour learned from their peers' homes reflects the macrosystem's influence, where societal norms and attitudes, possibly including xenophobic tendencies, permeate into more localized settings like schools.

*“Many things can stress you when you are away from your home country, and it all affects how you parent your children. We need support. We were never meant to raise children alone. It becomes stressful when you have to deal with ensuring you are financially stable, live in a good environment, and try to make a home in South Africa. On those bad days I do get emotional knowing that if I were home in Congo, I would be receiving help with the children but I quickly remind myself that we came to South Africa to get a better life.”-Marie*

The participant's response reveals the challenges faced by immigrants, particularly those raising children in a foreign country. They articulate a range of stressors, including financial stability, adapting to a new environment, and the absence of a traditional support system, which is more accessible in their home country. This lack of communal support, a common issue for immigrants, exacerbates the responsibility and stress of parenting. The emotional undertone of the response reflects nostalgia and a sense of loss, yet also resilience and purpose, indicating a strong coping mechanism. The statement “We need support; we were never meant to raise children alone” highlights the critical need for community and highlights a gap where social services tailored to the unique challenges of immigrant families could help support immigrant families.

*“Sometimes the stress comes in fast because I wonder if I made the right decision to come here, especially when facing challenges. Yes, we have some form of support from church fellowship and other Congolese friends we have made here, but it is just not the same as having your blood relatives be with you. South Africa is good for me to make money; I struggled when I was in Congo, but I can see that as I’m growing older, I cannot retire here; I need a home. My plan is to return to Congo and build before my retirement so the children can stay in South Africa. They are grown and need to see which opportunities South Africa has for them. In my case, I need to be with my people”. -David*

The participant's response provides insight into the emotional and practical dilemmas faced by many immigrants. Firstly, the statement reflects a common internal conflict: questioning the decision to migrate, especially when encountering challenges. This shows that feeling unsure and having mixed feelings is common for immigrants. The mention of support from church fellowships and Congolese friends in South Africa highlights the importance of community networks in easing migration challenges. The participant clearly distinguishes this support from the deeper emotional connection felt with blood relatives. This distinction underscores the nuanced nature of social support. While community ties are valuable, they may not fully substitute the comfort and familiarity of family. Economically, the participant acknowledges the benefits of living in South Africa, particularly regarding earning potential compared to Congo. This economic motivation is a common factor driving migration. Yet, the participant also wishes for a feeling of 'home' and community, which they connect with Congo. This reflects a common trade-off immigrants face: economic opportunity versus cultural and familial connections.

The participant's plan to return to Congo to build a home before retirement reveals a long-term perspective on their migration journey. It suggests a strategy that balances the economic benefits of living in South Africa with the desire to eventually return to their cultural roots. Additionally, the participant's perspective on their children's future in South Africa indicates a recognition of the opportunities available there, which may not be as accessible in Congo. This shows an understanding of the generational differences in the immigrant experience and the desire for their children to have better opportunities.

The statement "I need to be with my people" is powerful and speaks to a deep-seated human need for belonging and identity. It demonstrates that emotions and culture matter in the immigrant experience, going beyond just money and stability. Findings from a study on internal migration in India (Oberai et al., 1989) cited in Arowolo (2000) suggest that migrants might go back to their home country if they don't achieve their goals for leaving or if they struggle to adapt to the new social environment. Another study by Margaret Peil (1995), cited in Arowolo (2000) in selected towns in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Zimbabwe, found various reasons for people returning to their home country, especially elderly and retired individuals. In general, Africans prefer to return to their place of origin when they retire or before, rather than settling permanently in the new place. This choice is influenced by economic and social factors; going back home may mean keeping or getting back land rights, giving them the chance to support themselves by farming. This response clearly shows the mix of feelings and tough choices immigrants deal with. It highlights how they balance things like job opportunities, family connections, cultural traditions, and planning for the future, which are key parts of the immigrant experience.

For Congolese parents in this study, the emotional and structural challenges of migration are intensified by the break from a kin-based parenting model. In Congo, raising children is rarely the task of parents alone. Aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents share in the work of discipline, advice, and emotional care. In South Africa, by contrast, parents face the shock of raising children without these wider kin network. The loss of support makes them nostalgic and sometimes guilty, as they compare their current struggles with the help they would have had in Congo.

Xenophobic exclusion gives these challenges a distinctly Congolese shape. Parents teach their children to be proud of being Congolese. They warn them not to take insults such as *Kwerekwere* to heart. They also stress the need to be careful in public. Parenting becomes protective as well as corrective. Parents seek to shield children from stigma while insisting on discipline and respect to keep the family's honour. These responses show how Congolese parenting is redefined in South Africa. Parents still hold to the communal ideals of childrearing, but they now practice them under the pressure of isolation, discrimination, and the struggle to preserve dignity in a society that marks them as foreigners

#### **4.9.1 Navigating Legal Challenges and Immigration Policy for African Migrants in South Africa**

This part addresses the legal complexities and immigration regulations confronting African migrants in South Africa. It investigates the detailed laws and administrative processes that dictate how immigrants enter, reside, and become part of South African society. As a prominent destination for those seeking improved prospects, South Africa has established a variety of legal requirements and policies, which include stipulations for visas, residency, and the conditions under which different migrant categories, such as refugees and those seeking asylum, can live and work.

The section also sheds light on the difficulties these individuals often face, including procedural delays, inconsistent enforcement of immigration rules, and the broader political context affecting immigration policies. These legal problems greatly affect the everyday lives of African migrants, affecting their chances to get jobs, use public services, and live safely in the country. The discussion aims to provide insight into the pressing legal issues African migrants encounter in South Africa and underscore the importance of policy changes that advocate for a more welcoming and equitable approach to immigration.

A study by Sabet-Sharghi (2000) outlines the legal aspects of refugee acceptance in South Africa for nationals from specific African countries like Zaire now Democratic republic of Congo and Somalia, who are typically granted "Prima Facie refugee status," allowing for easier asylum. However, not all recognized refugees are granted asylum, and many face long, complicated processes due to a lack of knowledge and overwhelmed host systems. For those not qualifying as refugees or asylum seekers, South Africa might offer a Temporary Permit to Prohibited Person (TPPP), which allows them to stay, work, and study temporarily but comes with significant disadvantages like stigma and financial restrictions.

*"It took me time to be able to open a bank account, that was because of my papers I kept trying different banks and was declined up until I got an account with Standard Bank. I was relieved because it is difficult to keep the cash I made from selling on me; it's safer with the bank. Just not having a bank account gave me stress and inconvenience. If I needed to pay rent, I would need to pay cash, and my landlord just couldn't understand why I am not transferring the money, for children's school fees, I or my wife would need to go to the school and pay. The most challenging was just being limited. This affected even plans for the future of my family, such as buying a house without a bank account. How could I keep money safely or even get a chance to have*

*a credit score because in this country the bank will need to see how I handle money before they can trust me with their money to buy a house? It's simple things like this that remind you that you are not at home in South Africa but at the same time you need to create a home because you have children depending on you". -Simon*

Simon had trouble handling his money at first because he couldn't open a bank account. Because he didn't have a bank account, he had to carry cash, which made him less safe. He had to pay his rent and school fees in cash, which made his daily life more difficult and stressful. This practical part shows how bureaucratic hurdles can make it hard for immigrant families to live their daily lives and handle their money. Simon had trouble in planning for the future because he couldn't open a bank account. Without simple financial services, it became hard to do things like save for a house or build a credit history. This lack of financial stability affects not only his immediate needs but also his long-term hopes and plans for his family's future. Problems like these make things even more stressful for immigrant families. For example, Simon says that the things that happened to him while he was trying to open a bank account show that he does not belong in South Africa. His feelings of alienation showed him that he was not fully accepted or included in South African society. His experience showed how complicated the process of adaptation is for some immigrant parents. When parents of immigrants have these kinds of problems, it can be hard on their mental health and relationships with other people, including their children. His story shows how much responsibility foreign parents have. They must deal with problems in their own lives as well as make sure their kids are safe and stable.

*"The papers we get are not good for development, they tie you down. It's hard to be considered for loans, and looking for a place to stay in the city is difficult because landlords are sometimes not sure if they are comfortable renting to people with refugee status, and sometimes they question the number of children we have. We as Congolese love children, so having six or more is normal, but in South Africa that is too many. No one at home questions the number of children you have; what they want to know is will you be able to pay rent. That is all". Helen*

The parent's concerns about documentation and societal attitudes in South Africa have significant implications for parenting in Congolese immigrant families. Firstly, the restrictive

nature of the documentation available to immigrants can severely limit opportunities for financial stability and upward mobility. Difficulty in accessing loans or financial assistance due to these limitations not only hinders economic progress but also affects the ability of parents to provide adequately for their children's needs, such as education, healthcare, and housing. The struggle to find suitable accommodation due to landlords' reluctance or discrimination based on refugee status and family size adds another layer of stress and uncertainty. Housing insecurity can disrupt family stability and impact children's well-being since it is a primary need for families as it may lead to frequent moves or substandard living conditions. Culturally, the differing perspectives on family size between the Congolese community and their experiences with some South African landlords shows the different norms between the host and sending country. What Congolese consider normal in the number of children is questioned in this country.

For Congolese parents, legal and policy barriers cut deeper than just technical paperwork. They affect the very way families are seen and treated. In Congo, raising many children is respected and expected; it proves family strength and ensures future support for the wider kin network. In South Africa, the same practice is treated with doubt and discrimination. Parents must defend their family size while also fighting for housing and security. Legal limits on banking, loans, and housing force parents to feel that they are failing in their duty, even when they are working hard. These challenges show how Congolese parenting is reshaped by restrictive immigration systems. Parents must balance their cultural pride in family size with the need to survive in a system that does not value it.

#### **4.9.2 Xenophobia and Social Hostility**

Xenophobia, an irrational fear or hatred of foreigners, is evident through discriminatory attitudes and actions, often leading to violence. Studies by Moge kwu (2005) and Harris (2001) explore this phenomenon, revealing its deep-seated causes. Xenophobia often happens because people are scared, they'll lose their social standing and identity and worry about how it might affect their finances. In times of national crisis, xenophobia can surface to reinforce national identity and boundaries, driven by a sense of superiority and a lack of accurate cultural understanding. This lack of understanding contributes to the perception of foreigners as threats. Moreover, xenophobia is closely tied to nationalism, where belonging to a political nation becomes essential to personal identity. However, this connection becomes problematic in situations where citizenship and national identity feel threatened, especially in impoverished and unemployed communities. Neocosmos (2006) suggests that xenophobia is particularly

common in transitioning countries, influenced by post-colonial politics. In these environments, foreigners are often blamed for societal issues such as unemployment and poverty, becoming scapegoats for unmet expectations in new democracies. Therefore, xenophobia is a multifaceted issue, connected to national identity, economic uncertainties, and the politics of post-colonial societies.

*“While it is better to stay in South Africa than Congo, the one thing I do not like is xenophobia and it does not need to be the big cases that make it to TV but it’s it is everyday life. When you are around Black South Africans, you have to be on alert and mindful of your surroundings foreigners are not really liked, we also hear other people’s experiences of xenophobia, and one can conclude that you can’t be as free as you want in certain spaces”. -Florence*

Another participant shared the hardship of parenting in a space where discrimination based on being a non-citizen is prevalent

*“Discrimination and xenophobia are very discouraging, as adults it is hard for us but even harder when we must teach our children about these things as they experience them. It is not easy to explain why your child is left out socially and address all the name-calling issues. It is even harder when they are grown and are aware that they are being discriminated against due to not being South African their frustration grows as they try to make something of themselves”. -Florence*

These narratives highlight the hidden, daily nature of xenophobia in South Africa. Parents report that even when violent outbreaks are not happening, foreign nationals face subtle exclusions, suspicion, and hostility. This affects both parents’ sense of security and children’s everyday social lives. For parents, the challenge is not only personal stress but the need to prepare their children to face exclusion at school, in public spaces, and in future workplaces. Social Identity Theory explains how immigrants are positioned as outsiders. Being called names such as “*Kwerekwere*” categorizes Congolese children as an out-group, undermining their self-esteem and shaping peer interactions. Acculturation Theory further shows how parents try to manage these pressures; they reinforce pride in Congolese identity while helping children navigate South African norms. This balancing act is emotionally demanding, as parents must motivate their children to succeed while also preparing them for discrimination. Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory broadens this view. At the macrosystem level,

apartheid legacies and nationalist discourses reinforce xenophobia. At the microsystem level, this hostility seeps into schools, neighbourhoods, and peer groups, directly affecting how children relate to others. For Congolese parents, xenophobia reshapes parenting in ways that are both cultural and practical. In Congo, raising children in large families and extended kin networks meant support and protection. In South Africa, the same children face exclusion, forcing parents to become their children's first line of defence. Parents draw on Congolese values of resilience, respect, and family honour to shield their children from shame. They teach their children to take pride in "being Congolese," even when others label them outsiders. This insistence on cultural pride, combined with lessons in caution and discipline, reflects a uniquely Congolese parenting response to xenophobia: protecting family honour by raising children who can resist discrimination without losing their identity.

Xenophobia in South Africa has deep roots that can be traced back to the apartheid system, which perpetuated protection of white privilege and influenced new behavioural patterns Masikane et al. (2020). This xenophobia is not a recent phenomenon but has been ingrained in the societal fabric, with South African citizens exhibiting high levels of prejudice and discrimination towards fellow African citizens (Adjai & Lazaridis, 2013). The issue of xenophobia in South Africa is often associated with anti-immigrant sentiments and stereotypes stemming from social, political, and economic misconceptions (Yingi, 2023).

Parenting in the context of xenophobia in South Africa. The fear and hatred towards foreign nationals can create a hostile environment that affects how parents raise their children. Children growing up in such an environment may internalize xenophobic beliefs and behaviours from their surroundings, leading to the perpetuation of discriminatory attitudes (Mgogo & Osunkunle, 2023). The structural forces that shape xenophobia in South Africa, rooted in colonial and apartheid forms of exclusion, contribute to a systemic environment that can influence parenting practices (Tewolde, 2023). In South Africa, the impact of xenophobia on parenting extends to how families from immigrant backgrounds navigate their daily lives. Somali refugee women, for example, face challenges related to xenophobia and Afrophobia, which can significantly affect their parenting experiences (Waiganjo, 2018). The xenophobic conundrum post-democracy in South Africa has led to foreign nationals being scapegoated for domestic social issues, further exacerbating tensions and potentially influencing parenting dynamics (Mlambo & Mlambo, 2021).

Being a minority affects how parents raise their children differently compared to factors like culture and social class (Pachter & Dumont-Mathieu, 2004). Teaching children about prejudice, discrimination, and racism is a crucial job for all parents. However, for ethnic and minority parents, this task is more complicated. They heavily influence their young children and how they react to prejudice and discrimination affects their children's behaviour, self-esteem, stress response, school performance, and social beliefs. On one side, parents want their children to believe that hard work brings success, promoting the idea of meritocracy, which boosts their motivation and resilience. On the other side, parents also need to prepare their children for the sad truth that they might encounter discrimination and prejudice. These harsh realities can block opportunities and impact mental wellbeing. Juggling these two aspects isn't simple. Parents must inspire their children to thrive while also educating them about potential barriers due to discrimination. How parents manage this dual role has significant effects on their children's growth and future. It's a delicate balance, aiming to raise children who dream big but also understand the challenges they might face as children of immigrants. In conclusion, xenophobia in South Africa has multifaceted implications for parenting. The pervasive attitudes of fear and discrimination towards foreign nationals can shape parenting practices, influence intergenerational transmission of beliefs, and impact how immigrant families navigate their parenting experiences in a xenophobic environment.

#### **4.10 Chapter Key insights**

This chapter focuses on the complicated journey that Congolese migrants took to reach South Africa. It starts with the reasons behind their migration, which include unstable politics, economic opportunity, and the desire to provide their children with an education. Despite the wealth of minerals in Congo, many people leave the country in search of better opportunities in South Africa due to widespread poverty and lack of access to basic amenities. The chapter draws a comparison between the ambitious hopes held by migrants and the harsh realities they encounter upon arrival, such as severe financial hardships, complex legal issues, and xenophobia. The initial migration pattern, in which males frequently relocate first to gauge living circumstances and build a financial basis before bringing their families, is one important finding. This method highlights the strategic yet difficult character of migration, impacted by traditional gender norms and economic need. The chapter also emphasizes how much Congolese parents value education and see it as a vital means of attaining upward social mobility and ending the cycle of poverty. This focus on education is part of a larger pattern among immigrant families, who put their children's future achievement ahead of their own,

despite financial and social struggles. When their expectations and reality are compared, the chapter shows a variety of experiences. While some immigrants succeed in their plans, many encounters unforeseen challenges, such as difficulty in getting employment and problems integrating into society. Financial difficulties have a significant impact on parenting responsibilities, family stability, and everyday survival. The chapter shows how many environmental elements, ranging from immediate financial instability to broader socio-economic situations, shape the experiences and decisions of migrants, using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory.

Alongside these broader migrant struggles, several aspects of parenting stand out as uniquely Congolese. Education is not seen only as an individual opportunity but as a family duty and a source of collective honour. Parents expect their children's success to extend beyond the household, with the obligation to assist kin who remain in Congo. This sense of responsibility reflects deep communal ties and the ethic of reciprocity in Congolese family life. Parenting is also shaped by reliance on Congolese networks in South Africa, where news of other migrants' successes or failures serves as a model for setting expectations. At the same time, the shock of facing exclusion and xenophobia from fellow Africans influences how parents instruct their children about safety, respect, and public conduct. They insist on discipline, language awareness, and cautious friendships to safeguard the family's name and protect their children's future. These elements highlight that Congolese parenting is not only about adapting to South African conditions but also about reproducing cultural values of duty, respect, and solidarity that travel with them across borders.

#### **4.11 Conclusion**

Chapter four concludes with a detailed exploration of the migration of Congolese people to South Africa. It explains their history, why they decided to leave, what they expected when they arrived, and their long-term plans. The chapter looks at the different reasons for this move, like money, politics, and the environment, that caused people from the Democratic Republic of Congo to come to South Africa.

A significant portion of this chapter focused on the challenges faced by Congolese migrants because of migration laws. It highlighted how these laws create barriers, making it tough for them to find stability and progress in their new home. This discussion shed light on the real impacts of these laws, emphasizing the necessity for more understanding and practical legal solutions. Using personal stories and analysis, the chapter aimed to clearly show and explain

the experiences of Congolese migrants: their initial hopes upon arriving in South Africa, the realities of their daily lives, and their ongoing dreams for a better future.

## **CHAPTER 5: Parenting Practices and Beliefs of Congolese Migrant Parents**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Theme four provided us with background information about our participants, including the factors that motivated them to establish their lives and families in South Africa.

The chapter further gave us insights into the aspirations the parents have for themselves and their children. Finally, the chapter highlighted some of the encounters and challenges the families experienced once in South Africa. Notably, the data documenting the challenges reveals that Congolese parents face similar issues to other African immigrants in South Africa, but their difficulties are often more pronounced as they navigate these challenges while simultaneously raising their children. Fleck and Fleck (2013:130) state that “Parenting involves transmitting culture and values to children and many immigrant parents were well-prepared for parenting in their original culture and country”. In the context of migration, parents do bring with them their cultural values and prescriptions of how to raise children from their home countries; however, whether these values are practiced is highly influenced by the environment of the host country. Foner (1997) in her study of immigrant families in the United States of America, found that people from other nations bring their social customs and cultural beliefs with them when they relocate to the United States. These habits and beliefs shift and adjust to suit their new surroundings they don't stay the same. Even so, as they establish new lives in the United States of America (USA) immigrant families continue to draw from their home countries' experiences, family values, and cultural backgrounds. They find a balance that suits them in their new home.

In academic literature, the role of culture in shaping parents and parenting practices is widely acknowledged. Scholars such as (Bornstein & Lansford, 2010; Harkness et al., 2007) suggest that culture is not only constructed by parents but also influences their cognitive processes, which in turn shape their parenting behaviours. The process of parenting can be challenging because it comprises many aspects that are subject to the influence of different factors, such as cultural values and beliefs. Parenting styles can affect everything from punishment and education to orientation and relationship issues. Understanding Congolese parents' parenting styles can help us appreciate and respect how they raise their children. This section examined some of the important social traits and beliefs that shape the nurturing practices of Congolese people. These practices and their core beliefs give an understanding of how culture affects parenting. This chapter is particularly insightful in addressing a few questions of this study as

it sheds light to Parental coping strategies, migration's impact on parenting and South African environment's effect on immigrant adaptation which are themes central to the research questions.

## **5.2 Cultural values and beliefs that inform parenting practices.**

Parenting practices in African immigrant families are influenced by cultural values and beliefs that guide how parents raise their children. Studies have indicated that African immigrant parents often prioritize instilling traditional values such as respect for elders, religious adherence, and a strong sense of community in their parenting (Salami et al., 2020; Mbao & Hamilton-Mason, 2021). These values are crucial to the identity and unity of African immigrant families, reflecting a commitment to preserving cultural heritage and passing it on to the next generation (Akinsulure-Smith et al., 2016; Tetteh & Dube, 2023). However, parenting in a new cultural context can be challenging, as African immigrant parents balance preserving their cultural values with adapting to the norms of the host country (Mbao & Hamilton-Mason, 2021; Sanagavarapu, 2010). These cultural values and beliefs influence not only daily routines but also parents' long-term goals for their children. To truly understand parenting across societies, it's crucial to comprehend these cultural foundations. This introduction lays the groundwork for examining the various cultural values and beliefs that shape parenting among the Congolese people studied in this research. This will give us a chance to understand their aspects of family life. Studies have also stressed the importance of acknowledging the diversity within African immigrant communities, as grouping them into larger categories can obscure the unique historical and cultural characteristics that inform their parenting practices Bah & Kagotho (2023).

### **5.2.1 Respect as a core value in Congolese parenting**

In discussing respect as a core value in Congolese parenting, it's important to consider the cultural context. Congolese culture, like many African cultures, places a high emphasis on communal living, harmony, and social hierarchy, which greatly influences parenting practices (Ensor, 2012). This cultural framework places significant value on teaching children to show deference to their elders, a practice that is deeply rooted in traditional African values prioritizing communal well-being (Guzman et al., 2012). The use of authoritarian parenting styles, characterized by strict discipline and high expectations, is common in Congolese culture and is often employed to instill respect and obedience in children (Ensor, 2012). This approach is reflective of the broader societal emphasis on respect for authority and social hierarchy.

Furthermore, Congolese parenting often involves the extended family, aligning with the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child." This collective approach reinforces cultural values, including respect, through the influence of various adult figures in a child's life (Guzman et al., 2012).

*“As a parent, you know your job is done if you raise respectful children and it is important to start disciplining and prioritizing teaching your children respect while they are still young, so they do not shame you with bad behaviour as adults. No matter where we are in the world as Congolese people, we aim to raise respectful, good children. Children who respect all elders and not talk back or shout at their parents.”-Thomas.*

*“Respect is important, not just for you as a parent but your children to represent you on the street, how they act comes back to you as the parent because you are responsible for how they will turn out. I always tell my children that if you do not have respect, you are a bad person no matter how many things you have accomplished”. -Helen*

The responses from participants highlight the cultural value placed on respect in Congolese parenting. The emphasis on instilling respect from a young age and the notion that children's behaviour reflects on their families are common themes in parenting literature, particularly within collectivist societies. In collectivist societies, parents teach their children to be respectful, obedient, and to follow rules, which encourages a strong sense of community and shared responsibility (Akosah-Twumasi et al., 2020). This emphasis on respect and obedience stems from the belief that children's behaviour reflects their family which emphasizes the value of family unity and mutual responsibility (Parra & Geriguis-Mina, 2021).

The first participant's perspective aligns with the belief that effective parenting results in respectful children, which is a widely held view in Congolese society. This view is supported by literature suggesting that in many African cultures, including Congolese, the community highly values the upbringing of respectful children, as this reflects well on the family and the community's social fabric (Nsamenang, 1992). The early introduction of respect is also seen as a protective factor against future behavioural issues, a concept that is widely supported in the developmental psychology literature by Bornstein et al. (2010).

The second response from Helen reflects the idea that respect is an integral part of a person's character and moral standing. This belief is echoed in studies that examine the socialization goals of parents, where instilling respect in children is often associated with moral development and is considered a more important goal than individual achievement (Kagitcibasi, 2007). This sentiment is also related to the concept of "face," where an individual's actions are seen as reflecting upon the larger family unit, which is a key concept in many cultures Ho (1976). These responses show a culturally specific parenting goal that values the development of respect in children, not just for the benefit of the individual but for the family and community. This goal is deeply embedded in Congolese society and is reflected in broader parenting strategies that prioritize community values.

What makes this uniquely Congolese is the way respect is anchored in family honour and communal accountability. Parents are not simply teaching good manners; they are protecting the family's name and ensuring that their children embody Congolese identity in public spaces. Respect is reinforced not only by the nuclear family but also by extended kin and community elders, echoing the Congolese proverb that a child belongs to everyone. This collective enforcement makes respect more than an individual trait, but it is a cultural duty. Respect is a core part of Congolese parenting values. It is taught from a young age, reinforced by family and community, and seen as central to raising good children who will honour both their parents and their culture.

### **5.2.2 Imparting religious beliefs to children**

Mangu (2008:509) stated that despite the absence of a reliable census since the 1980s, it's estimated that the DRC has a population of around 65 million. The country is religiously diverse, with major faiths including Christianity, Islam, and African traditional religions. Prominent churches include Roman Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Orthodox, and Kimbanguist, while many still practice traditional indigenous beliefs. Christianity is the largest religion in the DRC. Participants shared that religions play a significant role in their parenting practices.

Many African immigrants hold religion and spirituality in high regard, influencing how they structure their families and approach parenting. For example, Congolese families frequently integrate religious teachings into their everyday routines, using them as tools to impart respect and moral principles to their children. This approach not only strengthens cultural identity but also offers stability to families adjusting to unfamiliar surroundings. For immigrant children, these religious beliefs and practices connect their heritage to their present lives, establishing a

basis of shared values as they adapt to a new society. Religion and spirituality also play a significant role in Congolese family life, with many families integrating religious teachings into their parenting, further reinforcing respect and moral values (Ensor, 2012). Findings in this study show that Congolese parents perceive their religious beliefs as important in their parenting journey because they provide them with a sense of meaning and guidance.

*“We raise our children on biblical principles. I always teach them what is right and wrong. They grew up hearing me quote to them that the Bible says to honour your father and your mother, so that God may give you a long life. You know when you raise children you cannot do it alone; you need God. The bible has it all anything they will face in this life is there”. -Florence*

*“We are believers. We raise our children according to the church's teachings. God directs how he wants his children to be raised. Children learn respect from home and the church, so our beliefs guide us in raising children. There are certain things we cannot allow our children to do because they are not part of us. We start with them when they are young. They grow up in the church and learn to be humble, serve, and pray; that is how we teach them morals and respect. It is so important to teach them about God, especially since we are living in South Africa. Children are having children at a young age, and marriage is not prioritised. Our children can be influenced but with the help of the church it is good because we are preaching the same message of self-respect. “Marie*

*“God is always at the centre of how we raise good children, that is where children get their values. When we are away from home, sometimes we experience great challenges that only God can help us overcome. Introducing our children to Christianity gives them a chance to be guided and learn about being prayerful just like we were. taught at home, and we have never changed from our belief. Raising children with godly principles helps them stay out of funny behaviours like smoking drugs and sex before marriage. It’s easier to correct a child who knows the word of God”. - Emmanuel*

Congolese parents deeply integrate their religious convictions into their parenting, using these beliefs as guiding principles to instil moral values in their children amidst the challenges of migration. This reliance on spiritual frameworks not only assists children in differentiating

right from wrong, but it also helps them build resilience against challenges encountered in new environments. The role of religious communities extends beyond personal support, filling the gaps left by distant extended family networks and contributing to the continuity of cultural identity through mentorship and spiritual guidance within immigrant churches (Ager & Strang, 2008; Ryan et al., 2008; Santa Maiko, 2007; Beryl, 2014). These institutions uphold core values, such as respect, by facilitating participation in services and culturally significant rites of passage, thus reinforcing a collective approach to childrearing that resonates with African traditions.

Parents shared the significance of biblical principles in shaping children's understanding of right and wrong through the commandment to honour one's parents, which exemplifies the moral guidance and promised rewards for virtuous behaviour inherent in their scripture. These teachings extend beyond the home into the community, with the church playing a pivotal role in reinforcing values of respect and humility through collective worship. For families facing the challenges of diaspora, faith acts as a pillar of strength and continuity, where introducing Christianity to their children provides both divine guidance and a connection to their cultural roots. For Congolese families, the home and church are primary microsystems where children are actively taught biblical principles and church teachings. These settings are where children learn the values of respect, humility, service, and prayer as directly imparted by their parents. The connection between family practices at home and the teachings received in church represents the mesosystem. These consistent messages across different settings reinforce the children's learning and internalization of their religious beliefs and moral values.

An important motivation for parents to raise their children religiously was to prevent them from participating in frowned upon behaviours and activities. Some parents shared that teaching young children religious ideas helps to steer them away from undesirable behaviours such as substance addiction and engaging in relationships before marriage by providing a clear set of norms to follow, hence facilitating parental guidance. Children who are familiar with these spiritual teachings are more sensitive to discipline because they understand the importance of adhering to such rules. In a country like South Africa, where there is a high prevalence of challenges such as teenage pregnancies and a declining emphasis on matrimony, establishing a knowledge of God in children is critical for fostering self-worth and ethical ideals. The church plays an important role in assisting guardians by reinforcing positive teachings and motivating youngsters to avoid negative influences. Religious teachings also address societal issues by providing a consistent framework for raising children who value the sanctity of marriage and

responsible behaviour. This way of parenting, which is closely tied to their religion, helps Congolese parents teach their children respect, morals, and a sense of community. It also lets them keep their religious practices as a key part of their culture, which is important as they adjust to living in South Africa.

### **5.3 Parenting Style: Permissive South African Parents**

Baumrind (1991; 2005) defines parenting styles as the approaches parents use in guiding and directing their children. These approaches are namely authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive parenting styles. The theme 'parenting styles emerged when respondents were describing the type of parent they are and answering the question, Are there differences between South African and Congolese parenting?

*“In Congo, you can easily tell who the parent is and who the child is. What I have seen in this country is that the children are very expressive. They speak their mind and say things as they are. In our country, I think we still do things the old way. There are things, yes, I have experienced. That’s how I know for a fact would not be received the same way in Congo. my sister, I can tell you that in Congo, you cannot just be with your girlfriend oh boyfriend in public while you are a child. The elders would deal with you before your own parents find out. Here children are free as an adult. You can be shy to see them in that state, but they do not care.” -Jean*

*“A good parent cares and provides and offers proper guidance to their children. I am a good parent because I am firm, and I teach my children what is good and bad. In my experience with some South African parents is that they don’t discipline their children properly, it's normal to see a child who is forward, and sometimes you see parents themselves do not act properly in front of their children for example drinking alcohol and having children without marriage. At home, it is not as common to see that.” -David*

*“When I first arrived in South Africa, I was shocked to see so many children in the streets. I wondered who their parents were. In this country, it seems it seems like people take parenting lightly. You see children having children, young ladies having children out of wedlock. At home, it is a shame to do all of this built in South Africa. It seems normal.” -Catherine*

*“I think Africa models too much of the American culture. Children are taught about their rights at a very early age, but they do not dwell on teaching them responsibility. I think children's rights are good, but they should not undermine the parents. It is our duty to guide our children. I had to explain to my children my rules and how they are meant to make them decent young men and women.”-Florence.*

*“When I tell my kids no, they are always asking me why. they tell me about their friends whose parents allow them to do things they like, but I always tell them about the dangers of not listening to your parents. My younger children seem to understand this, but I struggle with my 19-year-old son who thinks he is grown enough to do things in his way”. -Josephine*

An analysis of these responses from the parents yielded several important points. First, South African parents were perceived as permissive of certain behaviors that were regarded as ‘bad or disrespectful from the perspective of Congolese parents, who described themselves as strict parents. Baumrind (1966:889) delineates this style as follows: “non-punitive, acceptant, and affirmative towards the child’s impulses, desires, and actions.” South African parents were said to be imitating American ways of parenting because they don't enforce many rules or discipline, and they tend to give in to their children's wishes. Power dynamics between parent and child were highlighted as being necessary for Congolese parenting. The extract from the response “*In Congo, you can easily tell who the parent is and who the child is*” speaks to this finding. The old way of parenting was deemed more favorable than the current way, which is regarded as focused on being responsive to children’s rights and being indulgent without setting clear boundaries and responsibilities. The responses show that the respondents prefer traditional values of getting married before birthing children, which contrasts with the observed behavior of some people in this country becoming parents without being married. Congolese participants shared that there was a clash of values between their culture and that of the locals. Amisi and Ballard (2005) in their study shared that

*“At times, there is a noticeable dislike for the local culture, seen as too lenient. South Africans are seen as more influenced by Western ways, leading to a decline in respect towards older generations. People frequently mention how local women wear revealing clothes, unmarried couples live together, and children show less respect to their parents. Furthermore, there are worries about the commercialization of lobolo, the bride price, with one*

*respondent stating they don't want to treat their daughter as a commodity, as it is done in South Africa”.*

The responses reveal a cultural contrast in parenting styles between Congolese immigrants and what they observe in South Africa. The Congolese approach is depicted as more traditional, where there is a clear hierarchy between parent and child, and public displays of affection or defiance by youth are less tolerated. This is juxtaposed with the South African context, where participants perceive children as having more freedom and expressiveness, sometimes to the extent that it appears to undermine parental authority.

The literature supports the view that African parenting styles typically emphasize respect for elders and communal oversight of youth, which can contrast with more individualistic approaches seen in Western societies where child autonomy is encouraged (Nsamenang, 1992; LeVine, 2004). However, it's also noted that globalization is influencing parenting styles worldwide, including in Africa, leading to a blend of traditional and modern practices (Keller, 2007). These observations suggest that migrant parents may struggle to balance their cultural norms with the local parenting ethos, which may include more liberal attitudes toward child independence and personal expression (Chao & Tseng, 2002).

Acculturation theory explains that Congolese parents in South Africa face the difficult task of blending into a new society while keeping their cultural values as they bring up their kids. They notice that South African kids are more outspoken and free-spirited than children in Congo, which points to the difficulties these parents encounter as they adjust to different ways of life and parenting. They hold firm to their Congolese standards of discipline and moral teaching, emphasizing the importance of instilling clear distinctions between right and wrong from an early age, which contrasts with the more liberal practices they perceive in their new environment.

The influence of global cultures, particularly the perceived American emphasis on individual rights, further complicates the parenting landscape for these Congolese families. They express concern that a strong focus on children's rights could undermine parental authority, an essential aspect of their cultural and familial identity. This concern is particularly acute when faced with the realities of teenage pregnancy and unsupervised children, which they feel are treated with less gravity in South Africa compared to their home country, where such issues carry significant stigma, as highlighted by Burtscher, Schulte-Hillen, Saint-Sauveur, De Plecker, Nair and Arsenijević (2020:450) “Premarital childbearing is shameful because premarital sex

is shameful, and young girls go to extreme lengths to avoid these situations and protect their future marriage prospects”. In their personal narratives, these parents reveal the tensions that arise as their children interact with peers who have different freedoms and restrictions. The challenge is most pronounced with their older children, who question parental decisions and assert their autonomy, embodying a negotiation between the desire for cultural preservation and the inevitable influences of the surrounding South African culture. This ongoing negotiation reflects the delicate balance Congolese parents strive to maintain between holding onto their cultural roots and adapting to the cultural milieu of their new home, encapsulating the essence of the acculturation process.

#### **5.4 South African Rights and Congolese Parenting**

The following accounts illustrate how Congolese parents perceive differences between their own parenting traditions and the rights-based framework that shapes family life in South Africa. These reflections should not be read as objective descriptions of South African households but rather as immigrant parents’ interpretations of how local norms affect their authority and family structure. For many participants, South African schools, laws, and social institutions were seen as teaching children about their individual rights, often in ways that seemed to reduce parental authority. This perception created a tension between Congolese values of hierarchy, respect, and obedience, and the host country’s emphasis on children’s freedoms and protections.

*“Back home, we value each other. However, we follow the natural order, parents make the rules, and children follow the rules. Using this thing of rights against parents when being disciplined is a South African thing. Children learn these rights from school and are quick to say they will tell their teachers. There is a difference between hitting your child as abuse and hitting as a correction.”-Simon*

The rights issue in South Africa affected not only their children's parenting. It also had an impact on some of the respondents' marriages with their spouses. Two male participants were captured sharing the following:

*“In this country, women oversee the house and home life. For us, that is unusual as the man remains the head of the house, but in South Africa, men are absent, and women do their roles.”-David*

*“If you stay long enough in this country, you must be firm with your children and woman because they are taught about rights. That is not a bad thing, but who teaches them about responsibilities? Life here is based on what a man is doing, which a woman must also do, but no one looks at the clashes of that behaviour. South African lawmakers are trying too hard to be modern like America. I never thought things like this would be an issue in Africa. South Africa is good for opportunities but not for morality”-Simon.*

According to these reactions, immigrants from the Congo were identified as belonging to a culture that emphasizes order and a male-dominated society, particularly in parent-child relationships. Traditional Congolese societies highly value respect for seniors and authoritative figures. Children are expected to adhere to their parent's wishes and decisions. The hierarchical dynamic is often encouraged by orientation standards, which tend to place men in significant and influential positions. Other studies conducted in America reached the same conclusions regarding the issue of parental discipline, revealing a contrast between African and American perspectives, as shown in Mbakogu (2014) and Yenika-Agbaw (2009). Diaspora parents in the U.S. quickly learn that corporal punishment might be interpreted as child abuse, potentially leading to involvement from Child Protective Services if a child reports such behaviour (Rombo & Lutomia, 2016).

In Congo, some parents may use corporal punishment as a form of discipline, but in South Africa, this is seen as child abuse. This creates a difficult situation for these parents, as they have to adapt their approach to parenting. When asked if the parents have ever encountered child service protection or law enforcement regarding the use of corporal punishment, they all said no; however, they unanimously stated that the issue of child rights and child abuse was something that would constantly be said by their children when being disciplined, especially when somewhere still at school, as this is where they learned about rights. Breen, Daniels and Tomlinson (2015) “The South African Schools Act of 1996 outlawed corporal punishment in schools” Arthur (2000:117) discussed African immigration to the U.S. and how parents worry that the values they brought and held dear are fading away in the second generation. They are particularly concerned about their children adopting elements of urban hip-hop culture, which they feel doesn't emphasize important values like education, responsibility, delayed gratification, and respect for elders and authority figures.

These responses highlight a cultural dissonance rooted in differences between Congolese and South African understandings of family life. Using Baumrind's (1991) framework, Congolese parents tended to describe themselves as authoritarian or directive, placing emphasis on discipline, obedience, and respect for elders, while perceiving South African approaches as more permissive. From an acculturation perspective (Berry, 1997), these parents face stress in reconciling their cultural norms with local rights-based laws that restrict corporal punishment and promote gender equality. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (1979) helps explain this tension: schools and legal structures in the mesosystem reinforce children's rights, while Congolese parents in the microsystem stress hierarchy and discipline.

What emerges as uniquely Congolese is the conviction that authority in the home should remain clear and unquestioned, that fathers hold primary responsibility for maintaining moral order, and that corrective discipline is not abuse but moral training designed to safeguard family honour. Parents see themselves as responsible for raising children who respect elders and uphold communal values. When these norms are challenged by rights discourses in South Africa, they experience cultural dissonance, particularly in discipline and household authority, which they perceive as weakened in the host environment.

## **5.5 Strategies for maintaining cultural values and beliefs in a new cultural context.**

When families move to a place with a different culture, it's often hard for them to maintain their cultural values and beliefs. It's a matter of trying to grasp a part of home while adjusting to new surroundings. This part examines the various methods individuals employ to safeguard their cultural heritage. This part of the findings goes into the ways Congolese use to uphold their customs, beliefs, and values, even as they integrate into a new cultural environment.

### **5.5.1 Oral history-Sharing stories about Congo.**

Parents resorted to storytelling to share parts of the Congolese culture and way of living. Some migrated to South Africa while their children were still very young; others had children in South Africa. Storytelling was used as a strategy to teach their children about their homeland, Congo, and their cultural beliefs. Parents shared their childhood memories, as well as how things are done in Congo. These conversations would take place randomly as part of everyday life and when their children asked questions about Congo. To fully integrate into a family unit, Globalisation has increased the transnational lifestyle of immigrant parents. According to research by Levitt and Glick-Schiller (2004), migrants can keep in touch with their families

and friends back home. People shape their lives in the new nation by drawing on ideas and cultural practices from their original place. Migrant parents, according to some scholars, play a crucial role in passing on their culture to their children (Espiritu, 2003; Falicov, 2005; Kuczynski, Marshall, & Schell, 1997). When parents move to a new country, they rely heavily on memories and experiences from back home to help them adjust to their new surroundings and pass on important values and traditions to their children (Wolf, 1997).

*“We have conversations with our children about Congo, how we grew up, and how life is there. We share as much as we can just to give them a picture of our culture”. -Anita*

*“We talk to them about Congo and our culture, these talks come up naturally because they are a part of us. We came to South Africa fully grown adults so everything we do comes from how we were in Congo, and you find that children will have questions about how we do things because they are exposed to something else so sharing memories and experiences helps us to teach them about who they are and the Congolese way of culture”-Florence*

The responses from the participants reflect a significant aspect of cultural transmission within Congolese immigrant families. These statements show the parents' active engagement in sharing their cultural heritage and experiences with their children, serving as a bridge between their origin and current environment. This helps the children understand and connect with their Congolese roots. Both responses emphasize the importance of cultural transmission, with parents' keenness on sharing stories, experiences, and values from Congo. This is important for immigrants to keep their culture alive and help their kids feel like they belong and have a link to their heritage. Interestingly, the second participant points out that discussions about Congo and their culture arise naturally, indicating an organic integration of their heritage into their daily lives. It's not a forced insertion of cultural elements but a natural part of their family conversations. The response also highlights that children who are exposed to a different culture in South Africa naturally have questions about the differences they observe. This curiosity is a crucial part of identity formation, and by addressing these questions, the parents are aiding their children in understanding and reconciling the different cultural influences they are exposed to.

The value of this practice is that it allows parents to incorporate culture directly into their parenting. Stories become a tool for teaching respect, discipline, and communal responsibility

in everyday family life, even when children are growing up in a different cultural setting. What is uniquely Congolese here is the reliance on oral traditions as a primary way of transmitting and sharing culture. In Congolese society, oral history has long been central to teaching younger generations about values, social norms, and identity. Parents continue this practice in South Africa by using their own life stories to show children “the Congolese way,” making storytelling not just about memory but about maintaining a specific cultural approach to parenting.

### **5.5.2 Role of Language in Maintaining the Culture**

For Congolese immigrants settling into South African society, language stands out as a crucial factor in keeping their culture alive. This theme brought an understanding of how speaking their native tongue among family and community members helps maintain cultural practices and pass them on to the younger generation. It explores how language acts as a vessel for cultural expression, knowledge, and values that are integral to the Congolese identity, even as families navigate the challenges of a new linguistic environment.

*“It is not easy to teach our children about our Congolese culture because we must try to understand the ways of living in this country. If we were in Congo, we would keep living our lives, and our children would pick up our culture; being away from home means we must put more effort into teaching them about our culture. My two children, who were born in South Africa, do not know what it is to be Congolese. They live as South Africans. we try to introduce them to our culture, but their attention is on what is happening locally because this is what they are familiar with.”- Josephine.*

*“I taught my children about our culture, but I could see they struggled. To live well, they had to understand English and be fluent. They know French basics and some Swahili; however, they mostly use these languages when communicating with the rest of the remaining family in the Congo”. - Emmanuel*

*“They had to learn English very fast because this is what is used in school. They do understand and speak French; the language they use the most is English, followed by Zulu, which they picked up from their friends at school”. -George*

*“In South Africa, you must understand English. It makes finding your way around and even finding a job easier. It also helps if the children speak English because they use it at school. I insisted that all my children speak at least Swahili so that they could be connected to the family in Congo. However, I know that English is a priority because that is how we survive.”- Helen.*

The responses from the Congolese immigrants capture the tension between the desire to preserve cultural identity and the need to adapt to a new linguistic environment. Parents recognize the importance of teaching their children about Congolese culture, yet they acknowledge the practical necessity of embracing South Africa's lingua franca, English, for education and daily life. The strategic insistence on speaking Swahili and French is a clear attempt to create a cultural enclave, yet there is an understanding that proficiency in English, and to a lesser extent, other local languages like Zulu, is essential for their children's social integration and success in South Africa.

These experiences resonate with the findings of academic studies, which suggest that language is a core component of cultural identity but also a critical tool for integration and socioeconomic mobility in a new country Piller, (2001). The adoption of English by immigrant children is often rapid, influenced by the language's dominance in education and its perceived utility in the job market Chiswick & Miller (2001). However, maintaining the heritage language is seen as a link to family and cultural roots, illustrating the dual necessity of both cultural retention and assimilation for successful navigation in the host society (Portes & Hao (2002).

Immigrant families' language teaching practices reflect selectivity and fluidity, as demonstrated by Spanish-speaking Mexican immigrants in the USA, according to Adair and Tobin (2008). These families adjusted their expectations for their children to use Spanish in daily life and English for interactions outside the home. They acknowledged that their children may not develop writing or reading skills in Spanish, but being proficient in English, speaking, and understanding Spanish would be sufficient. As a result, these families redefined their language identities to reflect the new realities of an immigration context. The parents emphasized the importance of learning the local languages was mentioned by the parents as being very important. African immigrants adapt to their new lives by learning their new country's language. It is important to learn the host country's language in order to communicate and fit in socially.

Assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization are concepts describing how individuals and groups adapt to a new culture. The Congolese children in South Africa are blending in by learning local ways and languages like English and Zulu while also keeping their Congolese culture. Separation is evident when families stick to speaking Swahili at home, a clear effort to maintain their original cultural identity. Integration reflects a middle ground, where Congolese families engage with both their own culture and South African culture, such as speaking Swahili at home while the children learn English and Zulu for school, as well as broader social interaction. Marginalization, although not directly mentioned, is a risk for those who feel detached from both their native and the new culture. The challenges Congolese parents face in South Africa involve selectively acculturating and adopting certain South African cultural aspects, such as language for practical purposes, while preserving core elements of their Congolese identity.

Another participant took a firmer stance, insisting that their children speak only Swahili when they are at home:

*“To maintain our culture, we insisted these children speak Swahili when we are at home. The rule in our house is that once you are inside, you have arrived in Congo and therefore speak your home language. English is for school”. -Helen*

Other participants like this excerpt above explained that while their children quickly learned English and Zulu for school and social life, parents continued to speak French or Swahili within the household and with relatives in Congo. For parents, keeping the home language alive was a deliberate way of ensuring their children could stay connected to their roots and communicate with extended family. The value of this practice is that language becomes part of parenting. It is used daily to teach respect, transmit cultural knowledge, and reinforce family bonds. It also provides children with a clear sense of identity despite being raised in a different environment. What is uniquely Congolese is the strategic insistence on Swahili (and in some families, French) as a marker of cultural continuity. While many immigrant groups worldwide encourage bilingualism, Congolese parents frame Swahili as a symbol of “being at home” and as an anchor of Congolese identity within the diaspora. In this way, the home is turned into a cultural space, where speaking the home language signals belonging and helps preserve Congolese heritage across generations.

### 5.5.3 Sharing Congolese cuisine

Sharing Congolese cuisine is a vital way for Congolese immigrants to maintain their culture while living abroad. It serves as a powerful reminder of home and a means of preserving their cultural identity. Through traditional dishes, immigrant parents create a sensory link to their heritage, which they can pass down to their children. By involving their children in the cooking process, from selecting ingredients to preparing and sharing meals, parents impart valuable cultural knowledge and family traditions. This practice helps children feel closer to their Congolese background and teaches them to be proud and understand their culture. This way, cuisine becomes a delicious and nurturing tool for cultural education and continuity, helping families retain their identity while navigating life in a new country.

*“Although Congolese food is sometimes pricey in South Africa, we made sure that we introduce it to our children. They grow up eating Pondeu, Ndakala, and all the good food from home.”-Louise.*

*“The way we eat is influenced by what is available in South Africa, but in all ways possible, if we can find our home food, we cook it. Our children get to know about Congo through mealtime. We share a lot about our culture, and it brings back the feeling of being home. My children have never been to Congo, but they can taste dishes from the Congo and get to know a part of themselves and our culture. One day they will visit home, and they will be already familiar with some of the food”. -Catherine*

*“Our children are Congolese, so ensuring they eat their traditional food makes sense. If not, would they be Congolese? In whichever part of the world we go to, we carry the Congolese culture through our food, drinks, language, and style. Our food reminds us of home, and through sharing meals with our children, we teach and share culture. This is not always easy because once the children start going to school, they are aware of the difference in their food and the food of local children, so they end up preferring food like burgers and pies over our food.”-Florence.*

The responses highlight the role of traditional Congolese cuisine in maintaining cultural identity among Congolese families living in South Africa. Despite challenges such as the high cost and availability of traditional ingredients, these families prioritize introducing their children to dishes like Pondeu and Ndakala. This culinary connection serves not only as a means

of cultural preservation but also as an educational tool, through which children learn about their heritage and maintain a link to their Congolese roots. Academic literature supports the idea that food is a crucial element of cultural identity and plays a significant role in the acculturation process for immigrants (Satia-Abouta, 2002).

Additionally, food serves as a tangible reminder of home for those who have migrated and have not yet had the chance to return to their native country. It's noted that children's exposure to their native cuisine is a way of preparing them for future visits to their country of origin (Esterberg, 2002). However, the influence of local South African cuisine and the global popularity of Western fast food often leads to a dietary shift among immigrant children, which can be a source of cultural conflict (Airhihenbuwa & Liburd, 2006). This tension reflects the broader challenge of integrating into a new society while striving to retain one's cultural identity (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

The participants explained how they maintain their culture through traditional food. Their expression of what 'home food' and 'traditional food' was tied up to how they identified themselves. Eating Congolese food solidified one's identity as a 'true Congolese.' The social identity theory greatly explains this, as it states that people form their identity from the groups they belong to. Another participant stated:

*"Our food is part of who we are. It is more than just eating for the sake of eating, so our children must eat it. We also teach them how to prepare Congolese food because it is a part of our culture. We do eat some South African food, the children like it, but we also made sure they eat some Congolese food"-.* Anita

The above statement highlights some of the functions that Congolese cuisine serves to maintain cultural identity. First and foremost, food is more than a source of nourishment. It is an experience, a very important one; hence, the parents felt that it was a must for their children to eat Congolese food. Secondly, through food preparation, there is cultural transmission as Congolese immigrant children are taught how to prepare their home food. The responses also indicated that the parents do modify their children's diet based on the preferences of the South African food that their children seem to enjoy. According to Yenika-Agbaw (2009:7), food is the most difficult aspect of the immigrant experience for parents. As children determine what they will and will not eat, they may use food as a means of asserting or rejecting their African heritage.

The participant's response highlights the centrality of traditional cuisine in reinforcing cultural identity, a theme widely acknowledged in the field of social anthropology. Food is not merely about sustenance; it represents a narrative of heritage, an edible embodiment of culture that migrant families strive to preserve and pass down through generations, Fischler (1988). Teaching their children the preparation of Congolese dishes is a deliberate effort to maintain cultural practices amidst a foreign culinary landscape (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002). The inclination towards South African foods among the youth shows a natural process of cultural integration, yet the insistence on incorporating Congolese meals signifies a resistance to full assimilation, maintaining a tangible connection to their ancestral identity Pilcher (1998). This culinary dichotomy reflects the broader dynamics of globalization, where families navigate the complexities of preserving their own cultural traditions in a multicultural environment Appadurai, (1988).

*“In Congo, we have a variety of vegetables. In my experience, this is not the case in South Africa also. Most people here eat meat, but fish is a huge part of our diet in Congo. Over the years, our Congolese food has been less hard to find, but it is pricy and smaller in size. Our Congolese food is important to us, but sometimes you just cannot find it here. You just need to find something similar on this side.”-Florence.*

*“Staying in South Africa has even changed how I shop for groceries. Whilst at home, we used to buy groceries as we cooked daily, but in this country, you cannot do that. You must buy major groceries to last you the whole month. There is no backup food as we don't even have a garden here at the flats, we live in. I do not even like buying frozen meat that I will also need to keep frozen so that it lasts long. I used to cook fresh meat, unlike frozen meat which I believe is not healthy”. -Josephine*

Parents also highlighted the role of cooking as a teaching tool. By involving children in food preparation, they passed down specific practices such as the use of Congolese ingredients, cooking methods, and meal-time traditions. This reflects a strategy of cultural transmission where daily parenting tasks become vehicles for heritage preservation. Several parents acknowledged that their children preferred South African or Western foods such as burgers and pies, but they insisted that traditional meals remain part of family life to prevent cultural dilution.

What is uniquely Congolese in this context is the way cuisine is tied to identity and belonging. Parents equated eating Congolese food with being a “true Congolese,” suggesting that food serves as both a boundary marker and a test of cultural loyalty. While many immigrant groups use cuisine to maintain heritage, Congolese parents in this study framed their dishes not only as tradition but as proof of cultural authenticity. This insistence aligns with Social Identity Theory, where group membership and practices such as diet reinforce a collective identity. Thus, Congolese cuisine in the diaspora is more than memory. It is an active parenting tool for transmitting cultural identity and reinforcing boundaries between “home” and “host” culture.

#### **5.5.4 Actively seeking Congolese organizations**

This theme examines the experiences of how participants connect with their culture through community organizations. These groups are more than just social clubs they are vital for helping families keep their traditions alive, offering a slice of home in a new country. By joining these organizations, Congolese parents find ways to teach their children about their heritage and build a supportive network with other immigrants who share similar experiences.

*“Finding Congolese people is important because even though we are meeting in South Africa we come from the same place, and they experience what we experience as foreigners but more than that when we come together, we get to share our culture our children meet each other, and we are a solid Congolese community. Our children get to experience a part of Congo through the activities we have such as Weddings it is not everyone who goes back home to get married Congolese couples are getting married in South Africa to cut costs.”-Thomas*

*“Having friendships with other fellow Congolese helps because it makes us have a home away from home experience, those gatherings are important even if it is just at someone's house it is okay we all come together as Congolese. The food, music, and language are all Congolese that is the time our children get to feel what it is truly like to be Congolese”. -Helen*

*“I am open to socializing with South Africans who are friendly and other nationalities, and I enjoy their company, but it comes with a lot of compromising and negotiations. Things like having to use English all the time so we can understand each other and the food we eat differs each person wants to eat according to their preference. These things might*

*appear small but if you are constantly having to change and accommodate others or vice versa it gets tiring but when we are with other Congolese, we get to be just ourselves and our children see that and how we live.” - Jean*

Participants explained that connecting with fellow Congolese through community organizations, friendship circles, and cultural events is central to how they preserve their traditions and raise children in South Africa. These groups provide more than companionship. They create spaces where children can learn what it means to be Congolese through shared language, music, cuisine, and ceremonies. Parents described such gatherings as a “home away from home.” They saw them as contexts where cultural knowledge is reinforced without the compromises often required when engaging with South Africans or other nationalities.

For example, weddings held in South Africa by Congolese couples were described as important cultural events where children could observe Congolese marriage traditions. Others noted that simple house gatherings, where only Congolese food and languages were used, gave their children an authentic sense of Congolese life. One father explained that being with South Africans meant “constantly negotiating” language and food choices. In contrast, being among Congolese meant “we are just ourselves, and our children see that and how we live.”

The uniquely Congolese dimension lies in how community is treated as an extension of parenting. Participants highlighted that Congolese culture expects children to be socialized not only by their parents but also by the wider community. Through shared events and organizations, children are introduced to cultural norms such as respect for elders, communal belonging, and collective celebrations. This emphasis on collective child-rearing and cultural instruction through community structures was presented by participants as part of their Congolese identity, even while adapting to South Africa.

Sociological studies show that migrant communities often form enclaves to preserve heritage and provide support (Portes and Rumbaut, 2014; Zhou, 1997). For Congolese migrants, however, these enclaves are more than survival networks. They function as deliberate parenting tools, ensuring that children are exposed to Congolese ways of speaking, eating, and celebrating. This resonates with wider African patterns, but participants stressed that for Congolese families, events such as community weddings, French and Swahili schooling, and collective celebrations are consciously maintained to safeguard cultural continuity.

Other African immigrant families adopt similar strategies, such as “transnational timeouts,” where children are temporarily sent to live with relatives in their country of origin (Arthur, 2000; Halter & Johnson, 2014). In South Africa, Congolese parents instead described re-creating Congo locally through associations, restaurants, pubs, and schools founded by members of the diaspora (Kamuangu, 2006). These spaces allow their children to experience Congo without leaving South Africa. In this way, seeking out Congolese organizations becomes a key strategy for cultural preservation and parenting. It enables families to reinforce cultural identity across generations while navigating life in a different society.

### **5.5.5 Naming our children after family members**

The name of children in the Congolese community is not only used for the maintenance of culture and heritage but also for the strengthening of family ties. According to participants, the naming of a child allows honouring family members by naming your children after them. It is a common practice to name children after their grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Participants stated that this is a practice they still hold on to even in the diaspora.

*“We take the naming of our children seriously and back home it is part of our culture to name our children after older members of our families. Even when we are in South Africa, we continue to do so”. -Simon*

*“My daughter is named after my husband’s sister, these two have never met but their connection is amazing, and I know that because they share a name they are connected, and she is honoured to be chosen. I know that even if something happens to me, she will have her aunt to take care of her”. - Catherine*

*“In most Congolese people have multiple names and a person prenom (first name) is usually a name taken after one family member it can be either from the wife’s side or husband. When we do this the person whom the child is named after takes great pride and joy in that honour and this a part of what keeps us connected, the child will grow up to know and hear stories about that person even if they have passed on. We do also name our children using biblical names, but we make sure that we honour members of our families by naming our child after someone using the traditional Congolese names. -Florence*

Zittoun (2004) further states that the function of naming a child includes conveying social and cultural information, representing parental aspirations and visions for their child's future, and expressing their desire for their children to carry forward their culture and traditions. The tradition of child-naming holds significant cultural importance within Congolese communities, and this custom persists among those living abroad, including in places like South Africa. Naming a child after older family members is a profound cultural tradition that serves to honour relatives and forge a connection between the child and their namesake, which is often believed to transcend physical distance and even life itself. This tradition also ensures the continuation of family legacies and remembrance of ancestors, providing children with a sense of identity and belonging. The statements demonstrate how naming a child has an impact on forming family bonds and functions as a culture transmitter (Zittoun, 2004). This process of name selection occurs during the transition to parenthood, prompting parents to reflect on their roots and contemplate how they can pass on their identities to their children. The selected name often carries stories and expectations that contribute to a child's social identity within the community.

This naming practice aligns with the broader anthropological understanding of kinship and social ties, where names serve as symbolic links to family history and cultural heritage (Alford, 1988). Furthermore, the act of naming after a family member is not only a tribute but establishes a potential support system for the child, as exemplified by the belief that the namesake would care for the child if needed. The honour bestowed upon the namesake can reinforce familial bonds and responsibilities (Stone, 2010) furthermore, through Social Identity Theory, the Congolese custom of naming children after relatives helps build a child's sense of belonging to their family and cultural group. This tradition strengthens family ties and maintains cultural connections, especially important when living abroad, and gives children a sense of shared history and identity within their community. Congolese parents in this study show that naming children after family members is a keyway of preserving culture in the diaspora. The use of both traditional Congolese and biblical names reflects how parents combine cultural practices with religious identity. For them, names are not just labels but connections that maintain family honour, transmit stories, and keep Congolese identity alive across generations.

## **5.6 Key insights and conclusion**

This chapter examined the strategies Congolese immigrant parents use to maintain their cultural values and practices while raising children in South Africa. The findings show that cultural preservation is not a single act but a set of everyday practices, shaped by both necessity

and choice. Parents shared stories about Congo, taught their children native languages such as Swahili and French, cooked Congolese meals, and actively participated in Congolese community organizations. Naming children after relatives was another key practice that reinforced kinship ties and transmitted cultural identity across generations. The data also reveal the constant negotiation between maintaining Congolese traditions and adapting to South African realities. Parents emphasized the practical need for children to learn English and local languages for school and work, even while insisting that Swahili and French remain spoken at home. Similarly, children often preferred South African or Western foods, yet parents continued to prepare Congolese dishes as a way of reinforcing identity. These examples show how families selectively adopt aspects of the host culture while deliberately holding on to what they see as central to being Congolese.

The findings align with Acculturation Theory, particularly the strategies of integration and separation. Parents promoted integration by encouraging children to succeed in school and learn English, but they also applied separation when insisting on Swahili at home or Congolese food at mealtimes. Social Identity Theory helps explain why these practices matter: they reinforce a sense of belonging to the Congolese community and provide children with a clear cultural identity. Kinship theory also clarifies the importance of naming, where names serve as symbolic links to family history and obligations. What emerges as uniquely Congolese is the strong reliance on kinship and community as the foundation of cultural preservation. Storytelling, naming after relatives, and communal gatherings highlight a family- and community-based approach that ensures children remain tied to their heritage. While food and language are common elements in many immigrant communities, the Congolese emphasis on kinship obligations, biblical-traditional naming, and collective celebrations such as weddings in the diaspora stand out as distinct strategies. This chapter shows that Congolese parents in South Africa navigate the challenges of migration by blending adaptation with deliberate cultural preservation. These practices provide their children with both the tools to succeed in South Africa and a strong connection to their Congolese roots

## **CHAPTER 6: The Impact of Migration on family dynamics**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Migration has a significant impact on both the individual who moves and their families. This journey is often taken in search of better lives or to escape difficult situations. Although it brings new chances, it also challenges family relationships, as adapting to new cultures and languages in a different country can be tough Castles, de Haas, & Miller (2014). People move to a new country to find a better life, such as better schools, jobs, or a safer place. However, this often involves leaving family and friends, making it hard to stay in touch (Baldassar, Baldock, & Wilding, 2007) The stories of Congolese people who moved to South Africa show the many sides of migration. They talk about not just the good things migration brings but also the challenges of fitting into a new place while staying connected to their original home. They face things like keeping their culture, overcoming language barriers, and feeling at home in a new place (Matsinhe, 2011).

Migration also changes family roles. Mazzucato (2008) states that people who migrate often end up supporting their families back home financially, which can change how family roles work. Living in a new country can also change their personal views, sometimes causing disagreements with family members who stayed behind. These experiences also show how bigger issues like economic differences and political problems in their home countries and the way immigrants are treated in new countries like South Africa affect migration (Crush & Ramachandran, 2014) Understanding these factors is key as they affect the reasons people move to new places and how their lives change after moving The stories of Congolese immigrants in South Africa show how migration can really change family life. This chapter looks at how migration changes family connections, roles, and personal identities, bringing both good and bad changes (Portes & Rumbaut, 2014).

Migrating is a big change for both individuals and their families. It can bring new opportunities and promise a better future, but it can also change how people relate to each other. When people move, they often must leave behind friends, family, and their old surroundings. This can lead to feelings of separation, loss, and unease. Also, it can be hard to stay close to family while still negotiating your way around the new society. As a result, migrating can lead to both new opportunities for growth and new things for families to try. Through the narratives of interviewed Congolese immigrants, this chapter documents how they have experienced

migrating to South Africa and the complexities of relating to the families they left behind in their country of origin.

## **6.2 Initial Family Dynamics Before Migration: Establishing the Context**

In the Congolese family structure, interactions and roles are deeply rooted in traditional values and practices that emphasize respect, cooperation, and a strong sense of community. Hierarchical roles are prevalent, with the elder male typically serving as the head of the household, responsible for financial provision, and the elder female overseeing domestic duties and childcare (Tshilemalema Mukenge, 2002). This structure supports a clear delineation of responsibilities that contribute to the family's functioning and well-being.

Communication within Congolese families tend to be respectful, with a cultural emphasis on deference to elders and adherence to social etiquette that fosters family cohesion and respect for authority (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2002). The concept of 'Ubuntu' implying humanity towards others and the belief in a universal bond of sharing plays a central role in shaping family and community life, influencing how family members interact and support one another (Metz, 2007). The extended family system is also a cornerstone of Congolese family life, with aunts, uncles, and grandparents actively involved in raising children, often blurring the lines between nuclear and extended family members (Vansina, 2004). This communal approach to childrearing provides a support network that extends beyond immediate parents and fosters a sense of belonging and identity among family members. Education within the family is not limited to formal schooling but is complemented by cultural teachings and moral upbringing, which are considered equally important in a child's development (Mikell, 1997). Stories, proverbs, and community rituals serve as educational tools to pass down traditions and social norms to the younger generation. In the Congo, family interactions and roles are characterized by a collective approach that balances respect for traditional roles and hierarchy with the nurturing of close familial bonds and community support.

*“As Congolese people we value family, not just the family a person makes like wife or children but everyone including relatives and family-in-law respect and value each other that is how we live”. -David*

*“In Congo family is big and family is important, young and old everyone has a place. We are people who value relationships because this even applies to*

*neighbours; we call everyone mama or papa even though they are not your parents. We have formed good relationships. We value community”.-Marie*

The responses reflect the cultural significance of family and community in Congolese society. Both statements emphasize the broad definition of family, extending beyond the immediate nuclear family to include relatives, in-laws, and even neighbours. This indicates a collectivist culture where relationships and communal bonds are highly valued.

The first response from David highlights the respect and value placed on all family members, indicating a deep-rooted cultural norm of familial reverence and unity. The inclusion of family-in-law signifies an expansive notion of kinship, suggesting that marriage extends familial networks rather than creating separate ones.

These family structures and practices in Congo form the baseline against which changes after migration can be understood. The participants’ reflections highlight how family is not confined to the nuclear unit but extends to relatives, in-laws, and even neighbours. For example, Marie explained that Congolese people call others “mama” or “papa” even when they are not biological parents, a practice that shows respect and helps create a wider sense of belonging. This broad definition of kinship reflects a collectivist orientation where individual identity is shaped through extended family and community ties. Using Social Identity Theory, this can be understood as a process in which self-understanding is rooted in group membership, blurring the lines between biological and social kinship. Respect for elders, valuing of in-laws, and the emphasis on unity all demonstrate how relationships and communal bonds are central to Congolese identity. These values provide the foundation that Congolese parents carry with them into migration, shaping how they adapt and reconstruct family life in South Africa

### **6.3 Gender role conflicts in parenting**

Gender role conflicts in immigrant parenting are problems that arise when traditional gender roles and cultural norms are hard to balance in a new country. There can be tension and stress in the family when parents have different ideas about their roles and responsibilities. The struggle to reconcile these differences can impact the well-being of both parents and children.

Swigart (2001) asserts that both the composition of families and their dynamics within new homes are altered by immigration. To a greater extent than they may in their home country, many married couples now divide up paid and unpaid labour equally. Family and gender

norms, like any other social position, are constantly shifting. They were negotiated in light of the new circumstances and are subject to further negotiation if they change. The same sentiments were eloquently shared by Mahdi (1999) as he highlighted that gender roles had become a contested site of power, subject to both discursive and situational disputes and compromises, because of the dramatic shifts in male-female interactions over the last three decades.

As participants narrated their stories, it was evident that they, too, had experienced a change in gender roles.

*“Moving to South Africa changed our marriage because when we were still back home, we each had our own duties. I was responsible for caring for the house and our children. My husband was the sole provider, not involved in housework or looking after their children. Being away from home means we must depend on each other to look after our kids because no grandmother or auntie can babysit. We both must work to afford to pay our bills. I still try to do the domestic work in our home, but my husband also had to help”. - Catherine*

*“Back home, I have always worked, but my work was not so formal. I was selling in the market, but the profits were for my upkeep, not necessarily for the house. When we arrived, we quickly saw the need for my husband and I to work. I now work to contribute financially to my family. It took me a while to get used to the idea of letting my husband oversee that things in the house are okay and the children are taken care of. I have a way of doing my things that add a woman’s touch it’s not something I can teach to him”. -Anita*

*“In Congo, I had a job that could sustain the whole family. When I got to South Africa, I had to start at an entry-level job, which was also on a contract, so providing by myself became challenging. My wife had to work for money, but now she could not keep up with the house duties. I had to help with chores and children. At one point, we were both working shift jobs, so whoever was home first needed to do the necessary house duties. It was not easy because women care better for children and the house better than men”. -Emmanuel*

When probed further regarding the changes and adjustments in gender roles, participants shared that this was one area that caused tension and needed to be treated with sensitivity because it was something they were unaccustomed to. This was captured in the comments below.

*“My sister, you know it is not easy to ask for money from a woman, but in South Africa, you value your woman's income because it is not easy when you first get here.”-George.*

*“Every income in the house is welcome, so we both had to help each other to afford this life. It's not easy as a man to do women's duties, I try to help, but my wife does it better. I am focusing on getting more business so that she can stop working outside the home. We prefer it if we are all focused on our own duties. -David*

In Congolese families, traditional gender roles are well defined. Fathers are expected to provide financially, while mothers are responsible for household duties and raising children, often supported by extended kin such as grandmothers and aunts (Tshilemalema Mukenge, 2002). This division of roles is not just practical but part of the moral fabric of Congolese parenting, shaping expectations of what it means to be a “good” father or mother.

Migration to South Africa disrupted these familiar arrangements. Without the extended family system and faced with financial pressures, parents described the need to renegotiate roles. Catherine explained how she and her husband had to share both paid work and childcare because “no grandmother or auntie can babysit” and both incomes were needed to cover expenses. Anita described her adjustment to allowing her husband to take over tasks she felt only a woman could do. Emmanuel, who had been the main provider in Congo, reported struggling to take on childcare and domestic chores when both partners were working shifts. Fathers openly acknowledged that they found tasks such as cooking and childcare difficult because “women care better for children and the house better than men,” yet necessity compelled them to adapt. These accounts show that while traditional expectations remain strong, migration forced parents to adopt more flexible and egalitarian arrangements. The language participants used “it is not easy,” “it took a while to get used to” reflects the discomfort of navigating roles that contradicted their upbringing in Congo. For men, this meant engaging in domestic work they had rarely done before. For women, it meant combining economic provision with household responsibilities, sometimes creating tension in the home.

Gender role shifts in migration contexts are well documented. Swigart (2001) observes that immigration alters family composition and dynamics, often leading to more equal sharing of paid and unpaid labour. Mahdi (1999) further argues that gender roles become contested and negotiated under new conditions, creating a site of both conflict and compromise. These insights resonate strongly with the Congolese parents in this study, who spoke of financial necessity as the main driver of change.

The Congolese case also illustrates how parenting identities are anchored in cultural expectations. Back in Congo, a father's authority and a mother's domestic expertise were rarely questioned. In South Africa, however, parents confronted the reality that their cultural scripts no longer fit their lived circumstances. This tension between cultural ideals and everyday demands reflects what Donato et al. (2006) describe as the "unlearning and relearning" of gendered behaviours in migration. While some parents expressed a desire to eventually return to more traditional roles, others accepted the new balance as necessary for survival. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, the challenges reported here highlight how deeply gendered roles form part of Congolese parental identity. Shifts in these roles such as men doing "women's work" or women becoming co-breadwinners were not only practical adjustments but also disruptions to identity. This explains the sense of unease and tension described by participants. Migration brought Congolese parents into new terrain where traditional gender roles were difficult to maintain. While some saw these changes as temporary compromises, others acknowledged them as unavoidable adaptations. Either way, the adjustments reveal both the resilience of Congolese families and the strain of preserving cultural parenting norms in a context where economic realities demand flexibility.

#### **6.4 Older children as caregivers to younger siblings**

*"My two older children had to assist me with their younger brothers. On the days we were working the night shift when I was still employed, they had to stay and look after each other. Stay-in Nannies are expensive. I didn't feel good about this arrangement, but I had no option. I am grateful nothing harmful happened. We are in a better place now"-Louise.*

*"I used to work even on weekends, so I relied on my daughter to look after her young sisters. I did not have enough money to hire a weekend nanny because I was already paying for the weekday creche they attended. - Josephine*

In Congo, childrearing is typically shared within the extended family. Older siblings may help with chores or play with younger ones, but the core responsibility for childcare usually lies with mothers, grandmothers, or aunts. This system ensures that children remain under adult supervision, with caregiving seen as part of women's roles within the wider kinship network (Tshilemalema Mukenge, 2002). In South Africa, this structure was disrupted. With no extended family nearby and the high cost of childcare, parents reported depending on their older children to care for younger siblings. Louise explained, "My two older children had to assist me with their younger brothers... I didn't feel good about this arrangement, but I had no option." Similarly, Josephine shared how her daughter cared for her younger sisters on weekends because she could not afford both creche fees and a nanny. These accounts show that caregiving roles shifted from adult relatives, as would be expected in Congo, to older siblings out of necessity. This adaptation highlights the strain of raising children in a nuclear family setting. The older siblings took on responsibilities usually reserved for adults preparing meals, helping with homework, and ensuring safety. Although participants acknowledged that siblings caring for each other was familiar in Congo, they stressed that this never occurred in the absence of an adult. In South Africa, by contrast, older children sometimes became the *only* caregivers in the household when parents were working, a responsibility that went far beyond what was typical back home.

Literature on migrant and low-income families describes this practice as a form of "child fostering" (Abebe & Aase, 2007). Scholars note that while it is a practical coping strategy, it can burden older children with adult responsibilities, sometimes affecting their education and social lives (Evans & Becker, 2009; Ridge, 2002). Studies also warn that long-term caregiving roles can increase stress and reduce academic performance (Zilanawala & Pilkauskas, 2018). The participants in this study echoed these concerns, admitting that they were uneasy about relying on older children but felt they had no alternative. From a parenting perspective, this shift shows how Congolese families adapt their practices to new contexts while still carrying discomfort when norms are broken. In Congo, parenting authority rests with adults in an extended family network, with children playing only supportive roles. In South Africa, however, older children sometimes stepped into the role of sole caregiver, creating tension between cultural expectations and lived realities. This reliance on older children as primary caregivers illustrates how Congolese parenting identities are reshaped under migration pressures, moving from extended-family reliance to nuclear-family improvisation.

## **6.5 In South Africa, the village costs money.**

In South Africa, it's believed that raising a child is a community effort, involving not just parents but also uncles, aunts, grandparents, and neighbours. It extends beyond the parents' responsibility, thus the saying it takes a village to raise a child. This communal support is beneficial as it allows children to learn from various individuals, not solely from their parents. What happens if the parents are away from the village? Parents shared their struggles raising children without the assistance of their relatives and extended families.

This tradition is changing because many people need to leave their countries to find work. Migration to countries makes child-rearing more challenging and expensive. Parents, especially those with low incomes, often struggle with the expense of childcare. The absence of this communal support system deprives children of guidance and teachings from numerous family members. They miss out on family stories, valuable lessons, and the sense of belonging derived from being surrounded by extended relatives. Beyond mere childcare, it pertains to those who impart values, share family heritage, and help shape their behaviour.

This lack of community support is also felt keenly by parents. Relatives typically assist when parents are fatigued or occupied, easing the stress of parenting. The absence of this support network leaves parents feeling isolated, leading to a sense of loneliness and additional difficulty in parenting. Moreover, when families are dispersed, preserving cultural traditions becomes more challenging. Children may not learn as much about their heritage or the significance of specific customs, potentially impacting their self-perception and cultural identity. Therefore, the absence of this communal support system goes beyond financial implications. It significantly affects shared caregiving, learning experiences, and the strong familial connections that are integral to growing up in a closely-knit community.

Findings from this study revealed that migration disintegrated extended families living together in multi-generational households, as described by participants.

*“In Congo, we lived with extended family. Many aunts and cousins were in the house, so I was flexible when it came to working. There was someone always available to look after the children. In South Africa, we do have friends from Congo; however, they cannot assist us with looking after the children because everyone is working. There's no village here to help raise*

*children. Everyone is looking for money, and as a parent, my only option is day care or a nanny, but the problem is this is expensive". -Marie*

*"In this country, if you need help, you must pay for it. Everyone is busy, but we can get help from people at church on rare occasions. Apart from that, only you and your husband are responsible for your children. Back home, I could leave my children with the neighbours or relative, which wouldn't be an issue". -Josephine*

The experiences shared by Congolese immigrants in South Africa show a clear difference between the collective way of raising children back home and the more solitary approach they face in their new country. The communal ethos, deeply rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which emphasizes collective care and responsibility, clashes with the more privatized and commercialized care systems in South Africa Metz (2017) Congolese immigrants discover that the extended family support they relied on is absent in their new country, and the high costs of alternatives like daycare or nannies present a substantial financial challenge This shift from a community-based support network to a system where care is commodified necessitates a recalibration of family life and child-rearing practices. The reliance on formalized care services not only imposes an economic strain but also represents a departure from the culturally ingrained practice of shared parenting responsibilities Dyson, (2005). Additionally, the occasional support from church members highlights the continued need for a community connection, albeit in a less consistent form compared to their experiences in Congo.

Migrant parents may feel isolated in their parenting roles because of the loss of support from extended family members that occurs after migration. This feeling is supported by the findings of a qualitative study of parenting styles in Africa, which indicated that kinship ties are frequently severed because of migration Salami et al. (2017). Hartman and Hartman (1986) discovered something interesting in their research on immigrant Jewish families in Israel. When these couples were far from their extended families and support systems, they tended to become more tightly knit as a family unit. For example, they made decisions collectively and supported each other when dealing with challenges related to moving to a foreign country (Hartman and Hartman, (1986:1320). This study also found similar results; all couples in this study shared the hardships they encountered from being away from home; however, one couple mentioned a positive attribute about this. They stated that this situation of living in South Africa has forced them to be dependent on each other as a couple, and subsequently they have grown closer.

*“When you are in South Africa you really get to see what your wife or husband is willing to do to make your marriage and parenting work. If I were still in Congo, I doubt I would see this side of him where he cleans and cooks and cares for the children. It is not that in Congo men don’t do this at all it is just not common but here we have no choice because there is no one else to help so we need each other.”-Marie*

Marie's response reveals a shift in domestic roles and responsibilities within the context of immigration. In South Africa, the speaker has observed their spouse taking on more household and childcare duties, roles that, while not absent in Congo, are less commonly performed by men due to cultural norms. This adaptation highlights the flexibility and potential for redefining gender roles when couples find themselves in a new environment that lacks the extended family support system common in Congo. The necessity of mutual support in the absence of a broader community network becomes a catalyst for change, fostering a more egalitarian division of labour at home. This situation highlights the pragmatic adjustments immigrants make in response to their new circumstances, which can lead to a deeper appreciation for one's partner and a stronger partnership as both members contribute to making their marriage and parenting successful. This situation shows how immigrants adapt to a new place by changing family roles. They mix their usual customs with new ways to fit into their new life, especially when they don't have their usual support network.

This was not the same experience for other couples. The study "Socio-Economic Effects of Migration on the Family: Evidence from Zimbabwean and Congolese Families Living in Durban, South Africa" by Mawire, et al. (2020), revealed that migration often leads to significant changes within family structures, including divorce and abandonment, as individuals adapt to new countries. One mother recounted her marriage breakdown due to employment challenges and daily misunderstandings, which culminated in her husband's departure. Such instances were not uncommon; approximately 20% of participants reported changes in marital status after relocating to South Africa. The study indicates that the pressures of adjusting to a host country can strain and even disrupt family units, potentially leading to single-parent households where children might face the repercussions of diminished supervision and care.

While Congolese parenting is rooted in the belief that childrearing belongs to the family and wider community, migration to South Africa transforms this into a private responsibility that

comes with financial costs. Parents lose the cultural and practical support of the village and must either pay for childcare or reorganize family roles. This marks a significant shift from shared parenting to individualized parenting, showing how migration reshapes Congolese family life in ways that affect both parental wellbeing and children's cultural learning. In Congo, the village is always present and free; in South Africa, the village exists only if one can afford it.

### **6.6 Modification to parenting.**

When parents relocate to a different country, they frequently need to modify their approach to parenting. This topic examines how they adapt their conventional methods to align with the new culture and legalities of the foreign land. It revolves around striking the perfect equilibrium between preserving their cultural principles and ensuring their children can seamlessly integrate into their novel environment. This experience entails merging their longstanding knowledge with the wisdom they acquire in their newfound residence.

*“When I was a child in Congo, I used to do as I was told; if not, there would be consequences. In this country, children ask why when you tell them something. Parenting here is about negotiating with children. If you give out a rule, they will want to challenge it and have a discussion. I can say I have changed as a parent. When my children were younger, it was easier to raise them the Congolese way, but now, I can see the South African influence is not a bad thing, but I am not comfortable with not having that parent and child gap, we are not friends I am their parent.”-David*

*“My teenage children have told me things that I would have never shared with my mother. In this country, if you want to raise children successfully, they must be able to come to you and trust you. Having uncomfortable talks is what I was most unprepared for, but it's either you let them get the wrong information from their friends or take it upon yourself to give them the correct one. In Congo, you have talks with friends, but there must not reach your parents' ears, but here a child can ask you about sex. What can you do because she will tell you I learned about it at school. So, I am more friendly to my children than I would have been if we were raising them at home in Congo. -Josephine*

*“As a father, I take what is good from South Africa and use what is good from Congo. I love their principle of Ubuntu, so I want my children to learn from that. Raising children in this country has changed me partially. I see myself having to be sensitive because my children go through challenges that they would not go through if we were still in Congo.”-Jean*

When probed further about what issues his children face and what are the partial changes he has made? He stated that:

*“Things such as name-calling at school Kwerekwere Gweja and so on, so if my child came back crying from school as a parent, I need to be sensitive to her feelings the mother is not always available to be the one to comfort the child, raising children in this country means that even though you are a man you need to be sensitive because your children will deal with bullying and name calling. I also spent much time going back and forth with their school principal to resolve this nothing much changed. I built my children’s view of themselves so they would know how to react in such situations. -Jean*

*“Children’s right is a big thing in South Africa; even their schoolteachers are not allowed to hit them, so as a parent, you find yourself talking more with kids. I don’t want to lie. I did hit my children when they were young. It was necessary. I don’t see any other way I could have raised them; obviously, there was always that possibility of them reporting me, but I just told myself I would deal with that if it came. When I say hit, I do not mean hurting and abusing; I mean disciplining your child. I think the government that makes these South African laws is out of touch with what is happening in our homes when raising children. -Florence*

For Congolese parents, parenting has traditionally been shaped by respect for hierarchy, discipline, and clear boundaries between parents and children. Migration to South Africa has required significant modifications to these practices, as parents balance their cultural principles with the expectations and legal frameworks of their new environment.

David reflected on this shift: “When I was a child in Congo, I used to do as I was told; if not, there would be consequences. In this country, children ask why... Parenting here is about negotiating with children.” His comments show the contrast between the authoritative style

that many Congolese parents grew up with and the more discussion-based style that they feel obliged to adopt in South Africa.

Josephine also described how her teenage children openly ask questions about topics that would never have been discussed with parents in Congo: “In Congo, you have talks with friends, but they must not reach your parents’ ears. Here a child can ask you about sex.” This example shows how Congolese parents are adapting to South African norms of open communication, even though it represents a departure from their upbringing. Parents in this study recognised the value of these conversations but also admitted to discomfort, showing the tension between cultural preservation and adaptation.

Jean described another adjustment, being a more emotionally responsive father in South Africa because of the bullying his children experienced. “Even though you are a man you need to be sensitive... I built my children’s view of themselves so they would know how to react.” Traditionally, in Congo, the role of emotional comfort often fell to mothers or other female relatives. In South Africa, without this extended support network, fathers reported stepping into this role, showing how migration reshapes gendered parenting responsibilities.

Florence raised the challenge of discipline in the South African context: “Children’s rights is a big thing in South Africa... I did hit my children when they were young. It was necessary.” While physical discipline has long been part of Congolese parenting, South African law prohibits corporal punishment, creating a conflict between cultural practice and legal expectation. This points to one of the clearest modifications Congolese parents faces, finding new ways to discipline children while feeling that their traditional methods are being delegitimised.

These narratives reveal how Congolese parents are developing hybrid parenting strategies. They retain aspects of Congolese parenting, such as respect, discipline, and cultural storytelling, but also adopt elements from the South African context, such as open dialogue, emotional sensitivity, and legal compliance with children’s rights. Migration forces them to continuously weigh what is preserved and what is adapted.

Scholarly research supports these observations. Cheah et al. (2018) and Lansford et al. (2020) note that immigrant families often merge cultural traditions with host-country norms to ensure children’s wellbeing. In this study, the Congolese participants demonstrate this dual process,

upholding core values of respect and authority while also embracing elements of South African parenting they see as necessary or beneficial. Modification to parenting among Congolese immigrants is not about abandoning tradition but about negotiating two systems of childrearing. Their adaptations are shaped by legal restrictions, cultural expectations, and the realities of raising children without extended kin. What emerges is a distinctly hybrid form of parenting that is rooted in Congolese values but reshaped by the South African context

### **6.7 Keeping connected to home country: support systems and social networks.**

Many African immigrants look to their extended families to maintain ties to their home country and heritage. A person's extended family may serve as a vital link to their past, present, and future through the preservation of language, traditions, and cultural identity. Even though they may be geographically distant from their families, immigrants can still play an important role in their loved ones' day-to-day activities by sending them money.

Globalization has increased the number of immigrant parents who live a transnational lifestyle. According to a study by Levitt and Glick-Schiller from 2004, migrants can maintain relationships with their friends and family back home. People frequently borrow concepts and traditions from their home cultures as they adjust to their new life. Some academics think that migrant parents have a significant part in passing on their culture to their offspring (Espiritu, 2003; Falicov, 2005). To help them adjust to the new environment and pass on significant values and customs to their children, these parents largely rely on memories and experiences from their native country (Wolf, 1997).

*“It is very important for us to stay connected to our relatives back in Congo. My husband and I make sure our children have a relationship with their cousins. These are the people they will continue life with when we pass that bond needs to be there even though they do not see each other often”. - Josephine*

*“I call home often. Even my parents speak to my children every other day though they only met my children once. They have a good relationship we built on calling. Even today, my children know we have family in Congo that we share with and are responsible for. I take them with me to the agency we use to send money to my family in Congo. I always tell them we left home because of circumstances, but that does not mean we abandon those we left behind”. -Helen*

*“I had my first baby in South Africa. It was just my husband and I. We relied on guidance from the family in Congo about baby-related stuff and how to heal the c-section. We made endless calls, and my mother-in-law managed to visit us when the baby was three months old. It is important to keep the connection because we will always be family and need each other. We still need them to be with us through the journey of life”. -Catherine*

The participants' narratives highlight the pivotal role of transnational family ties and the effort to maintain these connections despite geographical distances. The practice of regularly communicating with family in Congo, involving children in calls, and participating in the remittance process reinforces familial bonds and instills a sense of responsibility towards extended family members. The responses highlight the importance of maintaining familial ties across borders, emphasizing that distance does not sever the connection to one's heritage and family back home. This sentiment resonates with the concept of transnationalism, where immigrants maintain strong links with their country of origin, often through regular communication and financial support (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004). The effort to nurture relationships between children and their extended family in Congo underscores the role of family as a source of identity and belonging, which is vital for the well-being of immigrant families (Bryceson & Vuorela, 2002).

These actions emphasize the continued interdependence between the migrant families and their relatives back home, particularly during significant life events such as childbirth. Moreover, the reliance on the extended family for guidance, especially in matters such as child-rearing and health, demonstrates the continuation of intergenerational knowledge transfer despite geographical separation Mazzucato, (2008). The physical visit from a mother-in-law for support after childbirth further illustrates the tangible support networks that remain active across countries. Research supports the notion that such connections can provide emotional support and cultural continuity, which are vital for the well-being of immigrant families (Baldassar, 2007). However, some scholars argue that maintaining such strong transnational ties might also place additional emotional and financial burdens on immigrant families, potentially affecting their ability to fully integrate into the host society (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004).

Using a theoretical perspective, the responses provided suggest a form of bicultural integration where individuals maintain strong ties with their culture of origin while also engaging with the

new culture. This is evident in the efforts to keep the children connected with their extended family in Congo, teaching them the importance of their roots and responsibilities towards family members who are far away. Regular communication with family in Congo, participation in the financial support system, and seeking advice from relatives for personal matters all indicate a deep connection with their home culture. The mention of educating children about the reasons for leaving Congo and the importance of not abandoning their family members reinforces the desire to preserve their original cultural identity and values. Simultaneously, these immigrants are also creating life in South Africa, which implies they are navigating the complexities of the new culture as well. Acculturation Theory shows how these Congolese immigrants are integrating into South African society while consciously maintaining their cultural heritage. They are not choosing assimilation, which would mean completely adopting the new culture and abandoning their own. Nor are they separating or marginalizing themselves from the new culture. They are finding a way to keep their Congolese culture alive while also fitting into life in South Africa.

### 6.8 Pseudo-family

All study participants described the importance of extended family in Congolese parenting and the gap that opened due to migration to South Africa. In Congo, childrearing is a collective responsibility where children grow up surrounded by relatives, neighbours, and elders who play an active role in their discipline, guidance, and moral education. Migration disrupted this system, leaving parents with the sole responsibility for their children in a context where kin are absent. As a response, Congolese migrants deliberately formed pseudo-families through friendships, church groups, and community associations. The motivation behind these arrangements was to close the gap left by the absence of extended family and to recreate, as much as possible, the communal parenting they were used to at home.

*“When you come to South Africa, it is important to connect with other Congolese people, and it makes life easier because they help support you and encourage you throughout your stay in South Africa.”-Simon*

*“I have Congolese friends whom I first met in South Africa, and it is good to live among fellow Congolese. We share pain and joy. Knowing I have made brothers and sisters for myself in this country is comforting”. - Florence*

*“It is good to be part of the Congolese community. We share a lot, and especially when you are new, you need someone familiar with South Africa to guide you and give you tips about how to go about establishing yourself as a Congolese. -Thomas*

These narratives show that the formation of pseudo-families is not just about companionship but about reproducing the Congolese parenting model in a foreign setting. Uniquely Congolese elements such as fictive kinship, where neighbours and family friends are treated as “mama” or “papa” and take on real parenting roles are re-created in these networks. In Congo, this practice ensures that children receive guidance from multiple adults, reinforcing values of respect, obedience, and communal identity. In South Africa, pseudo-families serve a similar role: community members counsel children, mediate disputes, and provide childcare in times of need.

The impact on parenting is significant. These networks allow parents to share the responsibility of raising children, offering emotional and moral support that reduces isolation. At the same time, they help maintain Congolese traditions of collective responsibility and cultural teaching, even when far from home. This adaptation highlights how Congolese migrants strive to preserve their communal approach to childrearing while navigating the individualised, more privatized structures of South African society.

## **6.9 The church as a source of support**

Places of worship offered huge help to migrants, providing a welcoming and inclusive environment where they could worship and connect with others. They offered a range of services to help them integrate into their new communities. In addition to spiritual support, churches offered practical assistance, such as language classes, legal aid, and job training.

Churches also provided essential necessities such as food, clothing, and transportation to help migrants meet their day-to-day needs. Pioneers offered profound help through counselling ministers and other churches, providing a listening ear and a strong presence during difficult times. By providing these types of assistance and assets, churches helped immigrants feel esteemed and upheld, giving them the help they needed to build new lives in South Africa.

*“Church is my source of strength, and I have found home in it. Among the 1st things, we did when arriving in South Africa was to find a church. They have given us emotional support and are always there for special events*

*such as baptism, you know being away from home we don't get to share the events in our lives properly with the family back home so getting support from church members always help close that gap of not having family here” - Florence*

*“Our friends were already in a local Congolese church, back home we were Catholic but when we got here, we joined our friends in their Congolese church. What made us change was the language it is good to worship in your own language that you grew up with and understand well. In the catholic church, we attended there was a mass in English and IsiZulu. Also, this church we go to now is made up of other Congolese, we are accommodated here in Swahili and French it is more like home”. -David*

*“In Congo, all my family members we are Catholic, so I still go to pray there and fellowship. They are very supportive emotionally and even financially they assisted with job referrals when I was new and sometimes food parcels until I got my first pay. The important thing for me is that since I am away from Congo, it's just me, my wife, and the kids we need people to socialize with so my fellow church members are not only for praying with but outside of the church we consider each other friends and family, these are the people we invite to our home and they do the same”. -George*

*“In my experience, the church has been very important in supporting my family and me especially when we were still new here to me the church is a safe space because we all come together to pray to God I also got to meet other immigrants from Congo and other African countries and we have become friends, we know the struggles of being foreigners in South Africa so we support each other. We share information about schools, where to buy in affordable ways, and which clinics to use during pregnancy you know like we show each other where it is okay to go you know with this xenophobia and stuff. Church members become family because you cannot live alone in a foreign country you have to build relationships with others” -Helen*

The findings from the participants suggest that the church primarily addresses spiritual requirements, but it also fulfils other important roles such as facilitating social connections and networking, providing emotional and spiritual support, offering practical assistance, preserving

language and culture, and fostering a sense of community and support. The experiences of Congolese immigrants in South Africa emphasize the church's multifaceted role in their lives, serving as both a spiritual haven and a practical support system (Foley & Edwards, 1996). The church provides not just emotional comfort but also practical aid such as job referrals and food assistance Hagan & Ebaugh (2003). This support is particularly significant given the physical and emotional distance from their families and their original homes. Furthermore, religious congregations are pivotal in building social networks for immigrants, offering a sense of belonging and a buffer against the isolating effects of xenophobia (Foley & Edwards, 1996; Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003). The church enables the sharing of vital information and resources, from educational advice to healthcare services, which is crucial for navigating life in a new country. For many Congolese immigrants, the church transitions from a mere religious institution to a community hub, where members extend beyond spiritual fellowship to become a chosen family and a critical support network in a foreign country (Hagan & Ebaugh, 2003).

In Congo, churches worked alongside family life, supporting the values children already learned from their extended relatives. In South Africa, churches take on the role of missing family members, carrying responsibilities that would normally be shared across generations. Parents now turn more to pastors, elders, and fellow church members for advice, guidance, and help with raising children. This recreates some of the communal style of Congolese parenting, but it also shows the difficulties families face when they must depend on institutions instead of relatives to pass on culture. It shows both the strength and the strain of trying to rebuild Congolese parenting in a new country.

## **6.10 Key insights and Conclusion**

This chapter has examined how Congolese families navigate parenting and family life in the context of migration. It began by describing the traditional family structure in Congo, where extended relatives play a central role in raising children, teaching values, and providing daily support. Migration disrupts this system, leaving parents to take on responsibilities that were once shared across generations. In South Africa, Congolese parents must adjust their roles and practices to fit a new cultural and legal environment. They continue to value communal parenting, storytelling, and fictive kinship, but these practices are reshaped without the presence of close relatives. Parents often turn to churches, community groups, and fellow migrants to fill the gap left by the extended family. At the same time, migration places pressure

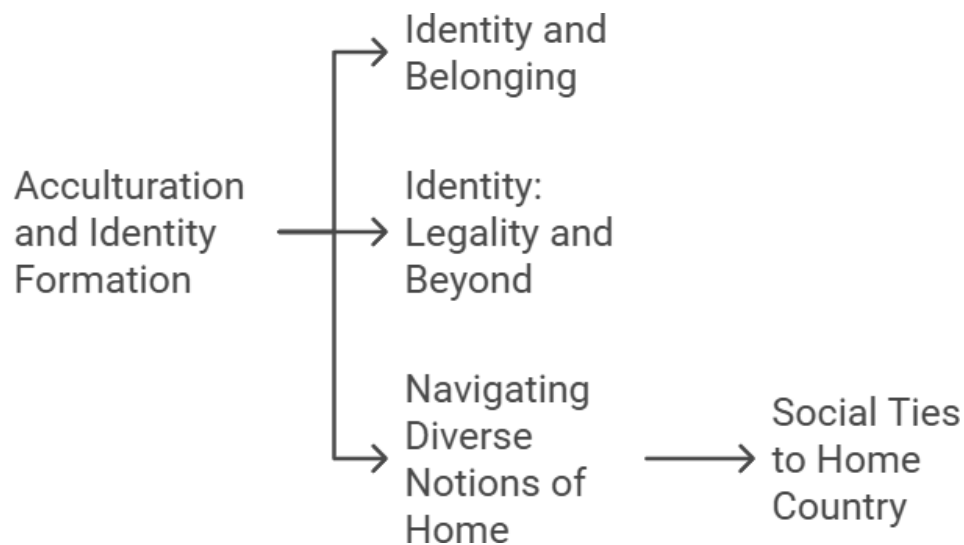
on gender roles within households, with couples negotiating responsibilities that were more clearly divided in Congo.

Congolese parents also face the same everyday parenting challenges as any family, such as discipline, childcare, and supporting teenagers, but these challenges are made harder by the South African environment. The cost of childcare, the absence of family support, xenophobia, and different legal rules on children's rights make parenting more complex and often more isolating. Migration is a transformative force. For Congolese families, parenting in South Africa is not simply about adopting new ways or keeping old ones. It involves creating hybrid strategies that blend Congolese values of communal care, kinship, and cultural teaching with the demands of South African society.

## CHAPTER 7: Journeys of Young Adult Children from Congolese Migrant Families

### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the lives of young adults whose parents came from Congo with them when they were young children, as well as the voices of those born in South Africa to their Congolese parents and settled in South Africa. It uses interviews to share their stories about growing up in South Africa, giving insight into their experiences and making sure their voices are heard. One focus is how these young adults were raised by their Congolese parents to manage being part of both Congolese and South African cultures. We are introduced to their challenges, how they adapt, and how they balance their Congolese background with life in South Africa as children of Congolese immigrants. These are more than stories; they reveal real struggles and successes, showing how complex it is to blend different cultures and form an identity. Sharing their stories helps us understand more about the many sides of parenting in migration in the Congolese community. It encourages readers to see the mix of cultural heritage and adaptation to a new place through the eyes of the children of Congolese migrants in South Africa.



*Figure 5: Themes and Subthemes on Youth Identity*

## **7.2 Theme 1: Acculturation and Identity Formation:**

In this study, we discover how Acculturation and identity formations is experienced by young Congolese adults blending into the cultures of Congo and South Africa. In South Africa, they're dealing with a society that has a tough past with racism and where people's backgrounds are very important. Data shows that the goal for these young adults is to create an identity that feels right to them, taking bits from both cultures with the support of their Congolese parents.

This theme presents the experiences of young adults as they assimilate and navigate the cultural landscapes of Congo and South Africa. It details their identity challenges, the tension of living between two cultures, expectations of their Congolese parents/family, embracing the demands of the South African landscape and their efforts towards cultural synthesis.

### **7.2.1 Identity and belonging**

For Congolese youth raised in South Africa, the journey of cultural adjustment involves a delicate interplay between preserving their rich heritage and adapting to the vibrant South African ethos. These young individuals find themselves at a pivotal juncture where familial traditions, often deeply rooted in Congolese culture, intersect with the diverse and dynamic culture of South Africa. This bicultural adaptation, as outlined by Alvarado & Ricard (2013), introduces a series of potential stressors that can influence their developmental trajectory.

The familial expectations to maintain ethnic identity may come into conflict with the pressures to assimilate into the broader South African society. These pressures are evident in daily life choices, from adopting local fashion trends and mastering new linguistic idioms to engaging in South African recreational activities and developing a palate for local cuisines (Zhou, 1997). Congolese young people in South Africa face the task of finding a balance between keeping their cultural traditions and fitting into the new culture while also creating their own unique identity. This ongoing negotiation between dual cultures extends beyond surface-level changes and taps into deeper aspects of identity, self-esteem, and community belonging. The outcome of this complex process is critical, as it can affect not just their social relationships within both the Congolese and South African communities but also their mental health and future aspirations.

*“I regard myself as a Congolese although I have never been to Congo. I am what my parents are, which is Congolese”. -Chloe*

*“I am a Congolese young man having a South African experience. DRC is my home. I am 100% Congolese”. -Charles*

*“I am a South African-born Congolese, which means both my parents are Congolese which makes me a Congolese who happens to be born in South Africa.” -Sophia*

*“I am a Congolese born in South Africa. I was born to Congolese parents, but I’m being raised in South Africa, and everything I know, and experience is South African. I consider both South Africa and the Congo a part of me. In my opinion, I am Congolese because that is who my parents are, but I do not have a connection to Congo. The family there doesn’t know me. We talk over the phone or on social media, but we don’t know each other well. In South Africa is all I know, but I cannot claim to be South African because I do not have citizenship, and you know, with the whole xenophobia thing, I cannot really claim to be South African”. -Olivia*

*“It’s hard to say because I’m a Congolese, but my life is in South Africa. Anything I know about Congo is based on my parents’ experience. I do have family in Congo, but relating to them is hard. I live like a South African, but legally, I am not South African. I’m in the middle. -Sarah*

*“I was born in Congo. I am Congolese. Although I came to South Africa as a child, I still regard myself as a Congolese. South Africa is a country I live in, but it is not a part of my identity. -Brian*

*“I am a Congolese and will remain a Congolese for the rest of my life. I don’t think I can claim to be South African. If you are not born to South African parents, you are regarded as Kwerekwere; South Africans cannot accept you. So even if I get citizenship, I will still define myself as a Congolese person. -Alex*

For Congolese youth raised in South Africa, the journey of cultural adjustment involves balancing the cultural traditions they inherit from their parents with the norms of South African society. Parents play a key role in passing down heritage, language, and values, even when children have little or no direct link to Congo. These identity negotiations show not only how children adapt but also how Congolese parenting shape’s identity in a migration setting.

The familial expectation to maintain Congolese identity may come into conflict with the pressures to assimilate into the broader South African society. Daily life choices such as fashion, language, recreation, or food reflect these tensions (Zhou, 1997). Yet behind these choices lies the influence of parents, who consistently encourage their children to stay connected to Congolese culture and values.

Chloe explained, *“I regard myself as a Congolese although I have never been to Congo. I am what my parents are, which is Congolese.”* This shows how parents transmit an ascribed identity, teaching children that belonging comes from family heritage rather than birthplace (Zhou, 1997). Similarly, Charles said, *“I am a Congolese young man having a South African experience. DRC is my home. I am 100% Congolese.”* His words reflect Berry’s (1982) idea of separation, where parents encourage children to remain close to the culture of origin.

Other children reflected a mixture of belonging. Sophia noted, *“I am a South African-born Congolese... both my parents are Congolese which makes me a Congolese who happens to be born in South Africa.”* Her identity illustrates how parents frame Congolese identity as inherited, in line with Smith’s (2002) view of family-based identity. Olivia shared, *“I consider both South Africa and the Congo a part of me... I cannot really claim to be South African.”* Her experience reflects a hybrid identity (Bhabha, 1994), but it also shows how parents sustain Congolese traditions at home even as children absorb South African ways through peers and school.

Some participants described feeling caught between two worlds. Sarah reflected, *“It’s hard to say... I live like a South African, but legally, I am not South African. I’m in the middle.”* Her response illustrates the limits of parental strategies in shielding children from exclusion, as xenophobia and lack of citizenship remain outside parental control (Crush, 2001). Brain explained, *“I was born in Congo. I am Congolese... South Africa is a country I live in, but it is not a part of my identity.”* This shows the strong weight of parental storytelling and emphasis on heritage. Likewise, Alex stated, *“I am a Congolese and will remain a Congolese for the rest of my life... Even if I get citizenship, I will still define myself as Congolese.”* His words show how parents instill loyalty to Congolese identity as a core family value, in line with Portes and Rumbaut’s (2001) findings on immigrant families resisting assimilation.

Taken together, these voices show that Congolese parenting strongly shapes how children see themselves, even when they have little personal connection to Congo. Parents act as cultural

transmitters, passing down identity through daily practices, language, values, and stories. At the same time, children must navigate the challenges of xenophobia, citizenship status, and exposure to South African culture. The reflections therefore highlight how Congolese parenting maintains heritage identity while children negotiate belonging in a complex and often exclusionary environment.

### **7.2.2 Identity: Legality and Beyond**

Another way the youth in this study identified themselves was through their legal status in South Africa. For young immigrants, having the right papers is crucial. It gives them a sense of belonging and stability. Without documents, they cannot easily go to school, get health care, or work. They may feel unseen and disconnected, which hurts their confidence. They also live with the fear of getting into trouble with the law. With documents, however, they feel safe, able to join community life, and plan for their future. Parents play a central role here. Many youths explained that it was their parents who first applied for asylum or refugee permits, and the parents' own legal insecurity shaped how children experienced belonging. Parenting in this sense extends beyond the home because it is tied to navigating bureaucracies and securing survival.

*“My mother has refugee status, and we are under her file, for many years were okay but after matric, I was taken out from being under her now, I had to apply for my own papers and my application is still in progress and I was told I need to renew my papers after 3 months so you can imagine the stress. That whole process reminds me that I am truly not South African, and it does not matter that I was born here and know the way of life of this country but I’m still a foreigner”. – Olivia*

*“In anything that you do in South Africa, you must produce papers, which is understandable because it is the law, but it is such a tiring process. Everything you do and want to do is tied up to these papers; sometimes I feel that it is what controls who I am now and in my future. Reality hit me after completing grade 12 and job hunting. Having refugee status can be a disadvantage. The delays with renewal are a nightmare because you can literally miss an opportunity or lose your job. Employers don’t have time to hear stories about home affairs they will hire someone else.” – Jessica*

*“The type of papers you have can sometimes tell you where you belong but, in my case, I think I have it hard. I cannot say I am Congolese or South African because, from a legal view, I do not have citizenship in this country, and I do not have it in my home country, Congo, since I was not born there.” – Brain*

*“I have applied and followed the process recommended by Home Affairs, but I am still waiting for their response. This affects where I can work and whether I will ever be able to go to university. My friends who have their papers sorted are in their final year at university, and some are done. I am happy for them but sad for myself and the future.” – Chloe*

*“The thing is with Home Affairs there is no consistency even if you follow their rules. Growing up our parents were refugees, and we were under them in one file, later they applied for permanent residency but only our mother got granted and our father has not gotten a response for many years and remains a refugee. We are under one roof but have different experiences regarding the papers we use. It is hard to plan life goals because you can't be sure what will happen with your papers. My father let it go because he was afraid of being asked to prove that he would be in danger if he returned to Congo. It has happened to some people, and they could not appeal further so rather stay as a refugee and keep renewing than risk with permanent residence.” – Charles*

The responses show the strong impact of legal status on identity. Many young people feel trapped in uncertainty. Olivia's account shows how dependency on a parent's refugee status ends once she finishes school, pushing her into stressful, temporary renewals. Jessica's story shows how paperwork controls job chances and shapes self-image. Brain and Chloe point to statelessness, being neither Congolese nor South African in legal terms. Charles highlights the different experiences within one family, where parents and children hold different documents.

Scholars describe this as “liminal legality,” where people live between categories, neither fully secure nor fully excluded (Menjívar, 2006). The delays and renewals echo De Genova's (2002) idea of “deportability,” where life is lived under the shadow of uncertain status. Some cases even suggest statelessness, where no state recognizes the person (Blitz & Lynch, 2011). Hallett

(2013) points out that such inconsistencies often divide families and block life plans. These challenges are not only legal, but parental. Parents' decisions about whether to pursue permanent residency or remain with refugee permits deeply influence how children view their own identity, belonging, and future security.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory helps explain these findings. At the microsystem level, the family directly experiences the stress of paperwork and renewals. At the mesosystem level, schools and employers demand documents, connecting the private family life to public institutions. At the exosystem level, immigration policies shape what is possible, even though children have no control over them. The macrosystem includes public attitudes and xenophobia, which reinforce feelings of exclusion. Over time, the chronosystem shows how laws and parental decisions affect children's identity and future paths. Acculturation Theory also applies here, since access to documents often decides how far children can integrate into South African society. Social Identity Theory shows why some children define themselves as Congolese regardless of their papers, this proves that identity is not only legal but cultural, rooted in what parents teach at home. These accounts show that parents' choices and struggles with documents are carried directly into their children's lives. Parenting in this context extends beyond care and guidance in the home. It also includes navigating immigration systems, applying for documents, and making decisions that shape whether children feel secure, excluded, or hopeful about the future.

### **7.2.3 Navigating Diverse Notions of Home**

When the youth in this study responded to the question, "Do you regard South Africa as your home? The concept of multiple homes emerged.

*"There is no easy to answer this question because I live in South Africa, which I can say is my home, but that is not entirely true because my home is Congo since I am from there."-Brain*

*"I decided to call home a place where my parents are. Since they are in South Africa, this means I am home if we were to move to another country that will be my home as long as my parents and siblings are there."-Rachel*

*"It's hard to say Congo is my home because I have never been there. South Africa is also not my home because I am not from here. I am in between homes. Congo is my heritage home, and South Africa is where I grew up and*

*formed a life. Because I am not South African, I cannot claim it. That means I am a Congolese based in South Africa". - Olivia*

*"South Africa is my home. It is all I know. I don't have citizenship, but it's home to me. What connects me to Congo is the family we have there. If they all left the country or did not exist, I would not have much connection to Congo. If it were allowed, I would regard myself as Congolese-South African. - Chloe*

*"I came here when I was young. I remember bits and pieces about Congo, but to be honest, South Africa feels like home. If there were no issues with xenophobia, I would say outright that it's my home, but home is where you belong, which as foreigners, we don't belong here, well, according to the people. I am familiar with the way of life here, but when I go to Congo, I feel like a visitor. So, Congo is a part of my history, but it does not feel like home."- Emily*

The response captures a sentiment common among immigrants who move to a new country at a young age. The individual's connection to South Africa is strong, feeling like home due to familiarity and socialization within its culture. However, the sense of belonging is compromised by external attitudes, specifically xenophobia, which challenges their claim to South Africa as home. This reflects the notion of "social belonging" which is not just about physical presence in a place but also about acceptance by the community and the feeling of being a legitimate part of the social fabric (Yuval-Davis, 2006).

The participant's feeling of being a visitor when returning to Congo, despite it being a part of their history, is indicative of the concept of "cultural memory" which refers to how memories of the homeland are retained and affect one's identity and sense of home (Hirsch, 2008). Congo is still important to who they are, but it doesn't feel like home. This shows how complicated it can be for migrants to connect with places and understand who they are (Ahmed, 1999) The tension between feeling at home in South Africa while also feeling like an outsider due to societal exclusion is a clear example of the "insider/outsider" dichotomy explored in migration studies (Anthias, 2002). This dichotomy is often influenced by societal reactions, including xenophobia, which can profoundly affect immigrants' integration and sense of identity.

The reflections of the youth highlight that Congolese parenting imparts a distinctive sense of belonging and identity that goes beyond ordinary immigrant experience. Identity is passed down as lineage, with many children affirming that “I am what my parents are,” showing how parental teaching makes heritage primary even when children have never seen Congo. Home is also defined through parents rather than geography, as several participants explained that wherever their parents and siblings live becomes home. Parenting further extends into the legal sphere, since youth described being included on their parents’ refugee files, navigating renewals, and experiencing insecurity tied to decisions made by their parents. Despite growing up in South Africa, children consistently claimed a Congolese identity because parents transmitted language, values, and family ties through daily practices. Finally, in response to xenophobia and exclusion, Congolese parents deliberately strengthened cultural identity at home, giving their children a secure moral foundation. Together, these patterns show how Congolese parenting uniquely shapes children’s notions of identity and home, combining cultural inheritance, family-based belonging, and protective strategies in a challenging South African context.

#### **7.2.4 Social ties to the home country.**

The social connections that immigrant youth have with their country of origin play significant roles in their lives; therefore, it is important to understand how these transnational relationships impact how immigrant youth experience their lives. All the immigrant youth who were part of this study indicated that they were connected to Congo and had communication with their relatives that remained in Congo; however, these relationships and connections were at varying degrees, and some youth communicated with their families in Congo more than others. Another noteworthy finding is that this communication was not always voluntary from the perspective of the Congolese youth in South Africa; it was initiated by their parents, who insisted that they should keep in contact with family. The few participants who felt pressured to communicate with the family in Congo mainly gave the reason of never having met the family they are expected to talk to and the different lifestyles they live, thus making them have nothing in common, as what made them hesitant to invest in communication with their relatives. Most of the youth participants viewed the social ties they had with Congo and their families as positive and pleasant in their lives.

*“Yes, I do keep contact with my family members from Congo, I have never met them, but we have this amazing relationship we do WhatsApp calls. I*

*enjoy it so much because I get to practice speaking French and Swahili, and I've really improved. I am proud of myself, and I thank my mother for insisting. I am not too familiar with my father's language or his home language Lingala, but I do know how to greet and say, basic stuff". - Emily*

*"We are in contact with our family from Congo which is very important because they are our true family, you can have friends in South Africa, but you need your family in Congo because someday we will return home. If we have neglected them, who will we go back to? Keeping in touch is the closest thing to experiencing Congo and just seeing grandparents and hearing them share about Congo is a blessing. We have so many cousins in Congo it would be a shame to not know them we will need each other in the future". -Brain*

*"Our parents make us speak with the rest of the family in Congo, whenever they call, they make sure we all get a turn to speak. Most of the time it feels weird because I am expected to speak to people, I have not met; we have no history; I just know we are related. I tried giving it a chance, but the problem is my cousins do not speak English; they speak French, and then I do not speak French fluently. That makes it frustrating and to be honest they question if I'm a true Congolese. My mother says I'm being a snob, but she does not consider that she grew up with her siblings so the calls they make are a continuation of already existing relationships and on my side, I have to create the relationship online using a language I am not good at"-Sarah.*

*"It is so important to keep in contact with your family in Congo, in a way it's good for all of us. I know that when I go to Congo, I will have several homes to accommodate me because I have family, regardless of my parents not owning a home there. The last time I was there, I was rotating houses; relatives were willing to host me. I have friends there who I met through my cousins who live in Congo. I also keep in contact with them. This helps me to not forget my Swahili. I want to keep my options should I choose to go and live permanently in Congo after my studies. I do not want to go there and restart life as a stranger. I prioritize communication. The family will have a home in South Africa should they choose to visit"-Jessica.*

An important issue emerging from these findings is that some of the youth used the social ties and connections they had with families in Congo to acquire and maintain their Congolese languages. The ability to converse in either Swahili or French is important for facilitating communication, in the case of Congo, where French, Swahili, Lingala, and other native languages are widely spoken across the country but seldom English, especially among the older generation. In contrast to this, finding the youth that was not proficient in speaking either French or Swahili did not have a positive experience in connecting with the rest of the family in Congo; the inability to speak French made his identity as Congolese. The social ties to Congo exposed youth to their languages, which became a valuable tool to broker further relationships with other Congolese who were not relatives. Responses also show that parents were the initiators of communication between the family in the Congo and their children in South Africa; however, some youths have been intentional in maintaining communication as it has proven beneficial in enabling them to have access to both countries and have a Congolese community in both.

Keeping up family ties and cultural links is crucial for young Congolese people living in South Africa. It helps them stay connected to their roots and gives them a feeling of belonging that goes beyond the place they live. For some, regular communication with relatives in Congo is not only a means of cultural and linguistic retention, celebrated through improved fluency in native languages, but also a way to secure a tangible link to their ancestral home, ensuring a welcoming return if they choose to go back (Fishman, 1991; Basch, Glick Schiller, & Blanc, 1994). However, for others, these interactions can be a source of identity conflict and frustration, particularly when language barriers impede meaningful connection and lead to feelings of alienation (Zhou, 1997; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Despite these challenges, the overarching experiences highlight the importance of these transnational ties in preserving identity and securing social capital within the diaspora community (Coleman, 1988).

The responses below depict the barriers and challenges of staying connected to the family in Congo:

*“What keeps me connected to Congo is the family that remains there, but to be honest, that is all, I have never been there, but based on the stories I have heard about Congo, it does not seem like a place I would want to stay in, I would like to go there to meet everyone and see the country for myself officially.”*

*“Yes, I speak to my family back home very often. They are very involved and influential in our lives. Any major thing that happens to us will be informed. My brother always complains that we have double parents. We must always explain ourselves and why we live the way we do. Sometimes I find it difficult to keep up with them and their way of doing things because I know them online and the few that have visited us in South Africa. I have never been to Congo yet most of my blood relatives are there”. -Charles*

In some cases, the youth who have never been to Congo found it difficult to maintain and foster relationships with their family members there. The participants allude that it is due to the differences in lifestyle between the two and differences in behaviour, which often warranted unwelcoming probing by relatives; furthermore, the fact that relationships were established online seems to indicate that they are not strong enough to form proper bonds. The responses from participants suggest that some only experience a blood tie because they have neither been to Congo nor met their relative; however, their relatedness due to blood still stands.

When the participant was asked to explain what she meant by *“We always have to explain ourselves and why we live the way we do”* she said there is a difference in the way South Africans and Congolese behave and live and that these differences exist between them are always questioned by the family in Congo. She gave the example of her 23-year-old cousin, who is already married, yet she is not even in a romantic relationship. This comparison between the two is uncomfortable. She stated

*“The way my life is fine I have so much going on and considerations to make for my future that I cannot imagine being someone's wife and here in South Africa among my friends, no one puts me under pressure to get married. I do know that in Congo marriage is a big deal and they tend to get married early in my case I will consider that in my thirties for now I'm sorting out my life. Marriage is a subject that exhausts me because I cannot end a call from Congo without someone asking me when I am getting married, and that time is going. To me, that is distasteful because I have other positive things going on in my life, like being educated. I do not need to be validated by getting married”. -Lilly*

Using theory to interpret these experiences the social identity theory helps understand the internal struggle that Congolese young people in South Africa experience between their heritage and the culture they are raised in. Without personal experiences in Congo, they may struggle to relate to their family there, which can result in less strong family connections. They often feel compelled to explain their way of living, highlighting the difference between their family's norms in Congo (the in-group) and their lifestyle in South Africa (the out-group) The young people may feel like outsiders to the Congolese in-group because they live differently, influenced by their life in South Africa. They resist the pressure to follow Congolese traditions, such as early marriage, preferring to align with South African norms where there's less pressure. Their educational achievements and life goals, although a point of pride, put them at odds with their family's Congolese expectations.

So, Social Identity Theory helps us understand how belonging to different groups with conflicting values can lead to identity struggles and affect how these young people interact with their families and the broader cultural landscapes they live in. Based on the participant's response, it is evident that maintaining social ties with the family who remained in the sending country does not always yield pleasant results. Kondemo (2011) states that in the Congo, people consider heterosexual marriage very important. They believe it plays a big role in defining a woman's true identity. In this case, it shows the dynamics of expectations based on the traditional norms of Congolese people prioritizing early marriage versus the goals of the participant who has grown up in South Africa and chooses to attain success first and delay marriage until a later age. Regardless of these clashes in values and worldviews, some youths were not deterred from interacting with their families in Congo and had aspirations as it relates to these transnational connections. To capture this, they were quoted:

*“One day, I would like to visit Congo and see all my family members that I have not met. I would just like to see the country; that would be nice”. -Alex*

*“Going to Congo is one of the things I desire to do; I have a few memories about the place, but it has been too long; I'm sure many things have changed.”-Rachel*

*“I want to visit Congo; when I sort myself out financially, I will make it an annual visit. It would be great to visit my true home. If I like it there, I can even have a holiday home”. -Sarah*

The quotes from the interviews echo a common sentiment among young adult Congolese migrants in South Africa: yearning for connection with their roots and a homeland they feel distanced from. This longing is not just for the physical land, but also for their familial ties and the cultural essence that Congo represents. The first quote touches on a desire for familial connections and a curiosity to experience one's country of origin first-hand. This suggests a sense of belonging that remains unfulfilled, a part of their identity that is intimately connected to Congo despite the physical distance. The second response from the participants reflects on their memory and change, suggesting an awareness that while their personal memories of Congo remain static, the country itself has evolved. This points to a form of temporal dislocation where their understanding of 'home' may not align with the current reality, highlighting a common challenge migrants face in maintaining a connection with their country of origin.

The third quote reveals a more practical and proactive approach, where the participant has a clear aspiration to reconnect with their homeland, seeing it as an integral part of their future. The mention of 'sorting myself out financially' speaks to the socioeconomic factors that often govern the feasibility of such visits. The consideration of establishing a 'holiday home' suggests a desire for a more permanent, tangible connection with Congo, which could serve as a sanctuary or a retreat, and perhaps as a bridge between their dual identities.

What stands out as uniquely Congolese in these findings is the way parenting extends beyond the nuclear household to embrace an obligation to kin and culture across borders. Unlike models of parenting that focus primarily on individual child development within the home, Congolese parents deliberately anchor their children's sense of self in the wider family network, often compelling them to sustain ties with relatives they have never met. This emphasis on collective belonging reflects a cultural worldview in which identity is inherited and maintained through kinship, language, and obligations to the ancestral home. Practices such as insisting on communication with family in Congo, encouraging fluency in Congolese languages, and transmitting expectations around life stages like marriage demonstrate how parents use transnational ties as tools of socialization. These strategies highlight that Congolese parenting is not only about raising children in South Africa but also about safeguarding the continuity of Congolese identity and values across generations and borders.

### 7.3 Theme 2: Educational and Career Challenges and Opportunities:

Immigrant youth often face both difficulties and opportunities in their education and career journeys. In South Africa, young people from Congolese families must deal with the realities of the school system, language challenges, and the consequences of their parents' legal status. While they bring resilience and determination, their progress is often delayed or limited by structural barriers. The youth in this study shared their lived experiences of schooling and aspirations for the future, which show the ways in which documentation, discrimination, and financial constraints shape their educational and career paths.

*“In South Africa, you can plan and have goals but you will be frustrated by papers, it all comes down to how your parents came into the country and what papers they have this influences your whole life, if you are illegal you cannot because when you try to get a job the employer wants to know which papers you use, so you end up doing small jobs and when you are still a child it can even delay you to start school until you have the right papers.” – Brain*

*“My mother has refugee status, and I was under her file, but after matric I had to apply for my own papers. This delayed me because every time I applied, I was told to renew after three months. That stress also affected my studies because you can't concentrate when you don't know what will happen next.” – Olivia*

*“The type of papers you have determines your whole life. For me it was a struggle because I couldn't go straight to university after matric. I had to wait until Home Affairs sorted my papers. It's painful when your friends move forward with their studies, and you are left behind.” – Chloe*

*“Having refugee papers is like living with one foot in and one foot out. You are in school, but you don't feel like you belong. After school, jobs are even harder because employers don't trust the papers. So, you feel limited no matter how much you try.” – Jessica*

The participants' stories show how access to education and career opportunities is directly tied to their parents' immigration status. Brain's testimony highlights how children inherit the outcomes of their parents' entry into South Africa, as their legal papers (or lack of them) dictate

whether they can start school on time or access jobs. Olivia and Chloe further show how the transition to adulthood, when young people must apply for their own papers, creates stress and delays in education. Jessica's account reveals the ongoing insecurity of refugee status, where even after completing school, the lack of proper documentation blocks career advancement.

These experiences demonstrate how Congolese parents' struggles with Home Affairs and legal status spill over into their children's lives, shaping their educational paths and limiting their future opportunities. From a parenting perspective, parents are placed in the role of protectors and advocates, trying to secure the documents their children need to succeed. Yet their limited power in the immigration system means that children bear the emotional burden of uncertainty, waiting, and exclusion. Applying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the microsystem of family life is directly linked to the exosystem of immigration policy. Children's schooling and future prospects are influenced by structures beyond their control, such as Home Affairs regulations. At the mesosystem level, the link between parents' legal struggles and their children's schooling demonstrates how two systems which is the family and bureaucracy interact with lasting effects on the young person's development. The macrosystem, which includes xenophobic attitudes and state policies, further shapes whether these youth feel accepted in schools and workplaces. From the perspective of Social Identity Theory, the lack of proper documentation can place children outside the in-group of South African peers. Even though they share the same classrooms, their inability to access equal opportunities reinforces a sense of exclusion and stigma.

These findings echo studies of migrant youth elsewhere in Africa. Mann (2002) found that Congolese refugee children in Tanzania also faced disrupted schooling, financial constraints, and parents' fear of exposure when enrolling them in schools. In South Africa, research by Hlatshwayo and Vally (2014) and Blessed-Sayah, Griffiths, and Moll (2022) shows that migrant children encounter discrimination, red tape, and barriers to higher education. The voices of participants in this study confirm these broader patterns while also showing the specific ways Congolese parenting culture and migration history shape the educational trajectories of their children.

The stories show that what is unique in Congolese parenting is how parents' migration history and struggles with legal papers directly shape their children's education and careers. Parents act as protectors and advocates, trying to secure documents so their children can start school, stay in school, or move into higher education. At the same time, they pass on resilience by

encouraging their children not to give up, even when systems delay or exclude them. This highlights that for Congolese families, parenting goes beyond daily care in the home to include navigating bureaucracies and defending their children's right to education. While these challenges are not unique to Congolese migrants, the strong role of parents in linking children to both legal survival and cultural continuity gives their parenting a distinct character in the South African context.

#### **7.4 Theme 3: Social Integration and Relationships:**

This theme examines the young adults' social engagements, highlighting their interactions with peers within the Congolese diaspora and the broader South African community. It also addresses their encounters with inclusion, discrimination, racism, and xenophobia.

A study by Morris, A., 1998 The investigation indicates that being a foreigner of black descent, particularly hailing from countries situated above South Africa's neighbouring nations, doesn't provide immunity from racial prejudice. Rather, individuals from these regions encounter similar levels of mistreatment, bias, and stereotyping as black migrants do in other global regions. This shows that xenophobia isn't exclusive to Europe or North America and implies that the anti-apartheid movement didn't foster a sense of global unity and appreciation for diversity. Furthermore, the study highlights systemic issues like soaring unemployment rates, uncooperative authorities and media, limited educational opportunities, and years of seclusion. These factors currently hinder a more inclusive stance towards African migrants in South Africa's current era.

##### **7.4.1 Exclusion in social institutions**

*“In South Africa, you are forced to learn the South African way of doing things for example, we would go to home affairs to renew our papers and we would be spoken to in isiZulu regardless of having expressed that we do not speak the language. When we sought clarity of what they were saying they would be irritated, so it's not a matter of whether you want to learn the language, but it's just put there to figure it out”. -Jessica*

*“Imagine you are a kid, and you have just figured out how to understand and speak English and then your teacher goes on to speak in the vernacular language, after you just managed with English, you now have to learn isiZulu because you can see that you will miss out on the important stuff.”-Rachel*

*“Primary school was a nightmare because I was so out of place; if I can describe it, I would just say it was a period of confusion because in the class the teacher would mix English and isiZulu, and I could see that my classmates would be nodding indicating they understand. It was such an adjustment because at my school in Congo, everything was taught to us in French, and when I got here, everything was in English and isiZulu. It did not end there. Even on the playground, kids would speak isiZulu. It seemed as if they would tire of speaking English. I must say that although it was difficult, that is where I picked up isiZulu during playtime. The more I spoke isiZulu, the more friends I made”. -Brain*

The significance of language in forming personal identity, acquiring knowledge, and cultivating community ties is well-documented. It is essential for cultural exchanges and the transmission of beliefs, as noted by Bonvillain (2020). Immigrant children find themselves submerged in an already existing cultural identity and face the challenge of adapting to an unfamiliar educational milieu and its language requirements. Tajfel (1974) describes social identity as an element of self-perception that emerges from recognizing membership within a social group, along with the emotional relevance of such an association. Language, as an emotionally charged medium, influences thought processes and social behaviour. Discrimination experienced by children can severely damage their self-esteem, undermining confidence and deterring active participation in school and social engagements. Such experiences of exclusion further aggravate feelings of isolation. The sharing of knowledge between immigrant and native students is impeded by these dynamics, which is problematic as language is known to profoundly inform and define human experiences, a concept highlighted by Rovira (2008).

Participants' stories reveal the sociolinguistic obstacles faced by migrants in South Africa, including language barriers in administration and education. This is in line with Buckland's (2011) discussion on language hurdles in education and Crush & Tawodzera's (2011) work on migrants' legal and social barriers. The administrative frustrations reflect Manjengenja's (2014) findings on the difficulties migrants face in securing identity documents without linguistic support, demonstrating language's role as an identity marker (Blommaert, 2010). The cognitive and social challenges of adopting a new language in schools are examples of "subtractive bilingualism" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), and the social learning of isiZulu through play aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) social interactionism theory. These narratives emphasize the need for

inclusive language policies to support migrant integration, resonating with Hlatshwayo and Vally's (2014) advocacy for accommodating linguistic diversity in schools. These personal stories reflect the wider sociolinguistic challenges and the resilience of migrants in South Africa.

Parents also play an important role in how their children deal with exclusion in schools and public institutions. Some parents encouraged their children to learn isiZulu and English as a way of “surviving” in South Africa, even if it meant placing less emphasis on French, Lingala, or Swahili at home. Others, however, worried that their children’s struggles with language in schools would affect their confidence and sense of identity. Parents were caught between wanting their children to adapt quickly in order to succeed and fearing that the process of adaptation came at the cost of losing their Congolese cultural grounding. This balancing act shows how parenting itself becomes shaped by institutional exclusion, as families must make decisions about which languages and cultural practices to prioritize in order to protect their children from discrimination while still keeping them connected to their heritage.

#### **7.4.2 Their values and our values**

Immigrant children usually inherit cultural values from their families that may differ from those in their new country. They may value community and tradition, while their new home might prioritize independence and new ideas. Balancing these can be tough for immigrant kids. They might face pressure to fit in by changing their values, leading to conflicts with their family or confusion about their identity. Despite these challenges, blending different values can also lead to personal growth and understanding. Schools and communities play a crucial role in guiding immigrant children through these cultural variances in a manner that honours their heritage while also embracing the beneficial qualities of both their native and new cultures. Congolese youth described the difference in values between them and their South African peers as a barrier to assimilating to local peer groups or even befriending South Africans.

*“Sometimes I found it hard to make friends with South Africans who were my age mates not because they were not nice it's just that their level of respect for teachers and elders was questionable. Things like rudely talking back to teachers were common at the high school I went to sometimes you can see that teachers let it go because they were intimidated by the students.”-*  
*Charles*

*“If my parents got a report that I was rude or backchatted my teacher or any other adult, they would beat me up that is a boundary I cannot cross. I know for a fact that my dad would have a problem with this. South African children can get away with it though. You see some don’t have parents who are involved in their lives, like respect in some homes is optional. I say this because in this country you cannot put people in the same group. You can meet a teenager who is so respectful, yet another will be extremely rude. In class you would see a student being rude to a teacher and the rest would cheer on and laugh.”-Sophia*

*“I am not saying as a Congolese youth that I am perfect, but I can say I’m raised right. In high school, I had some South African friends, and you could see that they are too free-spirited some would not follow rules set by their parents’ things as letting their parents know where they are and getting back home on time. I can’t really say their parents were okay with this but it’s just that in this country children have a voice, and they are not scared to use it because I think there are not many consequences if they do. I did not maintain most of my friendships with South African friends outside of high school because I felt that I would end up being in unpleasant situations. I am a Congolese, and I cannot afford to make the same mistake as them. I am here to make a good life for myself. -Brian*

*“I love my South African friends. They are a lot of fun, but in order for me to stay on track and have a good relationship with my parents, I had to limit my time with them. At the end of the day, I am a foreigner. I need to understand that I don’t have it as easy as them; my parents sacrificed for us to be here, so I need to make it count. I observed that my South African friends lived like the Americans we grew up watching behave in their copy lifestyle, inappropriately dressing. They want to be what they see; they forget we are black and African. I know what I see on tv is not always my reality if it gets back to my parents that I disrespected an adult I would have to find a new surname because I won’t be allowed to bring the dishonour of disrespecting a teacher to my father’s name”. Lilly*

Participants' responses revealed a variety of examples demonstrating the clash of values between Congolese and local youth. The youth in this study highlighted that respect was a value imprinted on them by their parents. On occasions they were found to be disrespectful, their parents had the appropriate consequences to deal with them, which in turn deterred them from being part of the crowd that disrespects adults and people in authority, such as their teachers. Some of the responses implied that the lack of involvement of some South African parents in their children's lives enabled the children to get away with being disrespectful because there is no one to discipline them whilst others believed parents were not in support of disrespectful children it's just that they were overpowered by their children's expressiveness. Another common theme that emerged from these responses was that immigrants understood their position of being 'foreigners' in South Africa as being a disadvantage and therefore held themselves accountable to ensure they are successful and avoid making the same mistakes as youth from this country. A study on the experiences of belonging among immigrant youth in schools by Vandeyar (2013) revealed that youth in South Africa were perceived as culture deficient and were easily swayed to Western culture. This collaborated with the findings from this study, whereby local youth were described as wanting to assimilate to the American lifestyle. The clash in values prevented some Congolese youth from having long-term South African friends; in another case, limiting time spent together was a strategy used to reduce participation in the inappropriate activities local youth were engaged in. It is worth noting that the theme of clashing values was also brought up by the immigrant parents as one of the concerns about living in South Africa.

The interview excerpts from young Congolese adults in South Africa reveal a cultural dichotomy, particularly in attitudes towards authority and personal freedom. These individuals struggle to reconcile the respect for elders and strict discipline ingrained in their upbringing with the more permissive and liberal attitudes they observe among some South African peers. They perceive a discrepancy in behavioral norms at school, where actions like talking back to teachers, which would be unthinkable in their own families, are sometimes met with laughter or acceptance. This contrast extends to broader societal behaviors, where the influence of Western culture is seen in the emulation of American lifestyles, something the respondents are conscious of avoiding honoring their cultural values and their parents' sacrifices. This mindset shows a conscious effort by Congolese youth to navigate their identity and maintain cultural integrity while adapting to their new environment, often choosing to distance themselves from influences that might lead them astray from their cultural and familial expectations.

The responses can be examined using Social Identity Theory, which suggests that our sense of who we are comes from the groups we belong to. The participants' remarks highlight the distinction between the behavioural norms and values of their own cultural group and those of the South African majority culture they find themselves in. The first participant observes a discrepancy in the level of respect for authority figures, such as teachers and elders, which seems to clash with their own cultural norms. This difference affects their ability to form friendships, as the participant struggles to align with peer behaviours that contradict their own cultural standards.

The second participant discusses the strict disciplinary measures employed by their parents, reflecting a cultural emphasis on respect and obedience, which is in stark contrast to what they perceive as the more lenient or indifferent attitudes of some South African parents. This underscores an intergroup dynamic where the participant's ingroup (their family and cultural community) has clear boundaries and consequences for behaviour that are not shared by the outgroup (South African peers).

In the third response, the participant acknowledges their cultural upbringing as "raised right," indicating a positive self-concept tied to their cultural group's values. They notice a difference in the perceived freedom of their South African peers, which they view as potentially leading to unpleasant or undesirable outcomes. This perception influences their decision to distance themselves from these friendships to avoid negative consequences and honor their parents' sacrifices.

The fourth participant also expresses affection for their South African peers but recognizes the need to prioritize their family's expectations and cultural values over peer relationships. They compare the behaviour of their South African peers to American media portrayals, suggesting a cultural imitation that does not align with their sense of African identity.

These responses show the participants' negotiation of their social identities within a context where their ingroup values, centred around respect and discipline, conflict with the perceived norms of the outgroup. The participants' sense of belonging and self-definition is influenced by these cultural distinctions, leading to decisions that prioritize their familial and cultural values over assimilating to the dominant culture's behavioural norms

From a parenting perspective, these accounts highlight how Congolese parents in South Africa actively shape their children's moral framework in ways that differ from local practices. Respect for elders and teachers, strict discipline, and accountability for behaviour are values

deeply embedded in Congolese parenting and passed on to their children, even in a new context. Parents use corrective discipline to reinforce boundaries and ensure their children do not adopt what they perceive as “looser” attitudes toward authority among some South African peers. By reminding their children of their foreign status and the sacrifices made to settle in South Africa, parents anchor respect, obedience, and responsibility as non-negotiable values. In this way, Congolese parenting culture serves both as a protective mechanism against perceived moral decline and as a strategy to secure the family’s dignity and upward mobility in the host society.

### **7.4.3 Xenophobia and bullying**

Research highlights the vulnerability of immigrant students to bullying, targeted discrimination stemming from differences in immigration status, race, ethnicity, and other cultural identifiers, which is a risk factor for adverse mental health outcomes (Holdaway, 2009; UNESCO, 2017). Furthermore, while there is a clear need for emotional and psychological support among these youths, a considerable number do not pursue necessary assistance due to various barriers. These include a limited grasp of how mental health services work, societal stigma attached to mental health issues, and logistical obstacles like transportation (Zwaanswijk et al., 2000; Cowen, 2001).

*“Xenophobia will always be an issue in South Africa. South Africans like to describe themselves using differences unfortunately if you are from outside chances are you will be bullied and there is nothing much you can do; our parents tell us to be strong and really that is really all you can do.”-Charles*

*“I experienced a lot of bullying for being Congolese, small things that I would not normally think about became a source of bullying for example your name, pronunciation of words sometimes your lunch can invite bullies. Over time, the situation got better it was easier to fit in and even defend myself once I knew isiZulu”-Brian*

*“If you are a foreigner in South Africa you can guarantee you will experience xenophobia, I also did but I don’t want to lie it was nothing compared to what Zimbabwean and Nigerian children experienced foreigners are not seen as the same for some reasons as Congolese we were not that targeted I believe I experience less xenophobia now than I did when I was younger it could be because I have grown and I know my way around here and I do understand both English and isiZulu. In this country, you need to be strong and not take*

*what some South Africans say to heart because you know who you are it is just that when you are a child you do not have this understanding even when you parents try to explain what is happening and encourage you to be strong it is hard to understand as a child.” Jessica*

The quotes reflect personal experiences of xenophobia faced by Congolese immigrant youth in South Africa, highlighting the pervasive challenge of being an outsider in a society that often emphasizes differences. The first statement lays a general foundation for the conversation about xenophobia, suggesting it's a widespread issue and indicating that being foreign can lead to bullying based on those differences. Participants detailed their encounters with bullying due to small cultural differences such as names, language pronunciation, and even food. This narrative also carries a tone of resilience, as the individual notes an improvement in their ability to fit in and defend themselves, especially after learning isiZulu, indicating that cultural assimilation through language can be a buffer against xenophobia.

The third quote from Jessica expands on the experience of xenophobia, positioning it as a guarantee for foreigners but also introducing a comparative element. The speaker acknowledges that while they faced xenophobia, it was less severe than what peers from other African nations experienced. This suggests a nuanced landscape of xenophobia where not all foreigners are targeted equally and where personal growth and language acquisition might influence the degree to which xenophobia is experienced. These experiences, examined through the broader theme of parenting in migration, suggest that young Congolese adults face a unique set of challenges in South Africa. These challenges are not static but evolve as they grow and adapt to their environment. Language acquisition emerges as a critical tool for social integration and potentially mitigating xenophobia. However, the scars of such experiences, especially during formative years, can have lasting impacts on their sense of belonging and identity. The testimony points to a complex interplay between identity, assimilation, and the external pressures of xenophobia that shape their lived experiences. From a parenting perspective, these stories show how Congolese parents play a crucial role in preparing their children to face xenophobia and bullying. Parents often stress resilience, self-control, and pride in their Congolese identity as tools to cope with discrimination. They encourage their children not to retaliate aggressively but to remain focused on their education and personal goals, reminding them that success will prove their worth in a society that may reject them. Parents

also insist on maintaining home languages and cultural practices, reinforcing a sense of belonging to their Congolese heritage, which gives children an anchor when they feel excluded in South Africa. In this way, parenting acts both as a shield against the harm of xenophobia and as a strategy to instil dignity and perseverance in their child.

#### **7.5 Theme 4: Interactions with Parents and Family Dynamics:**

This theme explores the influence of migration on family units and relationships. It scrutinizes the evolution of familial roles, the variance in expectations between the generations, and the nature of parent-child dynamics in the context of migration.

##### **7.5.1 Our parents are emotionally in Congo but physically in South Africa**

*“As I was growing up, I would feel that mentally my parents had never left Congo because most of the things they told us were based on Congo this Congo that. I don’t know. It was confusing because we are in South Africa, yet they are so adamant that we live like Congolese. -Chloe*

*We pick what we like from Congo and South Africa. Living like Congolese came naturally to them, but for us, it did not because, as much as we are proudly Congolese, we live in South Africa, and that has its own ways. -Sarah*

*“As much as I acknowledge that I am Congolese, the reality of my life is that I live in South Africa, which influences how I act and everything I do. Sometimes telling me about how things are done in Congo does not help because we are in another environment. For example, going out with friends does not imply that I am now wayward or challenging my parents. Preferring to wear normal clothes over traditional clothes does not mean I’m no longer Congolese; normal clothes are just practical. Traditional clothes are for occasions. -Lilly*

*“When I was younger, I thought my parents should chill, I still think they should chill, but now I understand them better even though I do not agree with them. If I go out with my friends to hang out and maybe come back by 8 pm, it’s a problem. They start going off about safety, and so yet I am grown, but if I stay out with friends attending a Congolese wedding, it’s no big deal. It’s perfectly acceptable. To them, anything that is Congolese is good, and*

*anything South African is bad, but it was their choice to bring us here”.-  
Charles*

*“My parents raised us on a perspective of fear, which is understandable South Africa is not safe for foreigners, especially during xenophobia. At the same time, we were kids, curious, and needed to live, but they were so limiting. Their parenting style was going to school, coming back, going to church, and coming home. If you want fun, have it with your siblings, so I feel we missed out on a lot of experiences. I am 21 years old, but my first visit to the township was a year ago. My parents would not allow it. They would be okay with our South African friends visiting us, but we were not allowed to do so. We were allowed sleepovers with Congolese friends. My parents tried their best to bring Congo to South Africa.”-Rachel*

Children of immigrants often struggle with their identity and cultural adaptation, trying to balance their parents' cultural background with the culture of their new country. This phenomenon is well-documented in sociological literature, particularly the concept of 'emotional transnationalism,' where immigrant parents maintain emotional, cultural, and social ties to their country of origin while physically residing in a new country Levitt & Glick Schiller (2004). This creates a hybrid cultural space where children of immigrants often pick and choose aspects of both cultures to form their bicultural identity (Berry, 1997). The notion of 'selective acculturation' is evident where these individuals assimilate certain aspects of the South African culture while retaining their Congolese heritage Portes & Rumbaut, (2001). They find themselves in a dual reality where traditional Congolese values clash with South African norms, creating an environment that necessitates a selective adaptation to navigate both worlds effectively Zhou, (1997). The tension between adherence to traditional customs and adapting to a new cultural environment is also highlighted. For example, the preference for 'normal' clothes over traditional Congolese attire for practical reasons demonstrates the pragmatic choices that immigrant youth often make Phinney, Ong, & Madden (2000). The parenting style that involves limiting children's social activities is often used by immigrant parents, particularly when they feel their safety or cultural values are at risk. This was discussed by Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco in 2001. Fear is exacerbated by instances of xenophobia, making parents impose limitations they believe will protect their family's cultural identity and physical well-being (Stewart et al., 2015). Understanding these narratives is crucial for developing culturally sensitive supports that facilitate the healthy integration of immigrant families into their new

societies while respecting their desire to maintain cultural ties to their homelands (Renzaho & Vignjevic, 2011).

The experiences shared by the participants also reflect the continuation of Congolese parenting culture in the migration context. In Congo, parenting often emphasizes obedience, respect for authority, and the protection of children from outside influences, particularly where social safety is perceived to be low (Kondemo, 2011). These values were carried into South Africa, where parents attempted to recreate a “Congolese home environment” by controlling their children’s social exposure, prioritizing family-based activities, and maintaining strong ties to Congolese networks. While youth viewed these restrictions as limiting, parents understood them as protective, especially in a society marked by xenophobia and insecurity. This generational difference shows how migration reshapes family dynamics children negotiate bicultural lives, adopting aspects of South African culture, while parents continue to ground their authority in Congolese traditions of discipline and communal responsibility.

### **7.5.2 Helping our parents integrate into South Africa**

One of the themes that emerged when asking the youth in this study to share their experience of being raised by immigrants was that of assisting their parents to integrate into their communities, and one of the ways that the participants did this was by assisting their parents in situations whereby there was a language barrier. The majority of the participants in this study had a substantial understanding of IsiZulu and English, which are the languages mainly used in Durban. In literature, this is termed cultural and language brokering, which refers to the helpful activities that immigrant children do for their parents. These activities make it easier for their parents to adapt to a new culture. Chao (2006) The children might translate papers, help talk to doctors, businesses, and government offices, assist with taxes, schedule medical appointments, answer the phone, and communicate with school staff. The text below captures how the youth help their parents to integrate and navigate everyday life in South Africa.

*“I speak better English than my parents, and although they have been here for a while, they still don’t speak isiZulu, so I help them out with understanding documents that they have to sign and navigating everyday life.”-Jessica*

*“My mum always sends me to ship for here, I speak proper IsiZulu even though my accent is that of a Zulu person, so if I’m negotiating a price with*

*the street vendor, they can't tell I'm Congolese, they think I'm one of them."*

*Brian*

*"My parents can't help themselves but be Congolese I don't know how to explain it. They stand out, and sometimes that is not in their favour. When we are using public transport, I handle talks. You know it's better if you say everything in isiZulu, like passing money and where you get off, those people don't like English."*-Sophia

The experiences of the youth in this study show a consistency with surveyed literature findings, which state that the children of immigrants born in host countries or migrated at a young age tend to acculturate faster than their parents, who migrate as adults and have greater language acquisition of the local language. Tsai, Ying, and Lee's 2000 cited in Cheung, Chudek, and Heine (2011) study found that Chinese immigrants under 12 embraced American culture more than those arriving later. Likewise, Minoura's 1992 research showed that Japanese kids under 15 found US life more natural than older immigrants. In this case, the youth take on an important role in assisting their parents to integrate and become accustomed to everyday life in South Africa. The acquisition of one of the local languages i.e. isiZulu and the unique position of being raised in South Africa puts the youth at an advantage of acculturating better than their parents thus bridging the cultural gap between their parents' background and the local language norms. The youth highlighted how they fared better than their parents in terms of blending in. They referred to their ability to speak IsiZulu with a proper accent and the ability to better comprehend documents written in English as being advantageous in connecting the divide between their parents and the local people they interact with.

In other studies, this language gap in immigrant families was observed in the school setting. In immigrant households, it's typical for children to learn the local language faster than their parents, which can be beneficial for their integration and future. However, this may create difficulties for parents in keeping up with their children's school life and education (Fillmore, 2000). Mooney and Evans (2015) note that while language skills give children an edge, they also shift family roles, making them key translators at home. Kamwangamalu (2000) discusses the importance of English in South Africa for better education and job prospects, mirroring the situation of immigrants worldwide. The situation highlights the need for schools to support parental involvement in education, especially for those who aren't fluent in the local language (Cummins, 2001).

Cultural broking has been documented in contrasting views, which leads one to wonder if this is perceived in a positive or negative light from both the perspective of immigrant parents and their children. The youth in this study viewed it as something positive, a way of helping their parents, who mostly were not well versed in speaking IsiZulu or too comfortable with speaking English. The same sentiment was shared by some of the parents, and they further elaborated that hearing their children speak English with fluency was a proud moment to witness since this confirmed that they have afforded their children the good education they have aspired to. Parents, however, did flag one thing as a disadvantage of having their children be more fluent than them and serving as translators in certain situations; they stated that there was a risk of their children omitting certain aspects of conversations that can get them in trouble, especially in a school setting. This was one of the responses that captured this idea:

*When we are at home affairs, I appreciate that my kids know how to speak English well in a South African accent, even though I understand and speak English my accent does not go away, but in other situations, it is not good for children to know too much of your business as an adult. At school, it is even worse during parent-teacher meetings because if you do not understand English these children can be smart and only tell you the good thing and leave out the complaints but overall, it is good for their future that they speak so well”.*

In the broader migration literature, language brokering is often framed as a burden on children, where young people take on adult responsibilities too early, leading to stress and even family conflict (Orellana, Dorner, and Pulido, 2003; Morales and Hanson, 2005; Chao, 2006). However, the Congolese families in this study reflect a different dynamic. Here, children’s ability to speak isiZulu or English fluently is not seen as undermining parental authority, but as a sign of respect and filial duty. Parents interpret their children’s translation skills as proof of educational success and as a resource for family survival. Rather than creating tension, this role strengthens the family bond and allows children to actively contribute to the family’s dignity in South Africa. This shows how Congolese parenting adapts to migration realities while still holding onto traditions of collective responsibility and honouring parents

### **7.5.3 Intergenerational Relationships**

Nancy Foner (2009:1), a scholar who has conducted extensive research on intergenerational relationships within immigrant families, asserts that discussing immigrant children engaged in

conflicts with their tradition-bound parents from the old country has become a trite notion. However, she cautions against embracing this presumption without scrutiny. While it is true that tensions and strife are inherent in the process of immigrant families trying to establish themselves in a new country, she further contends that many immigrant parents and their children also work out ways to negotiate and reach common ground.

#### **7.5.3.1 Chore allocation as a source of conflict**

*“We do have our disagreements but most of the time we manage to move passed them except for one which is housework. My parents are not fair about how they decide who does what. I feel my brothers get away with slacking but us girls we cannot do that we have to be the responsible ones and do the hardest housework”. -Olivia*

*“I am a third born out of 4 children, I have two older brothers and a younger brother who comes after me. You would think that my older brothers would be expected to do more, but they are not, and I have seen this even in other Congolese families: the girls do more housework compared to the boys. In my case growing up I was trained around housework more than my brothers now that I am older, I see that my mother relies more on me to get things done and that explains why she was always on my case”. - Chloe*

*“ I no longer argue with my parents about doing chores I just get it done because for years I have said the same thing but there is no change it must be an African thing that girls are expected to do more around the house I call it being deputy mum and my parents say they are preparing me for when I become a wife and have to manage my house, in my opinion, they are doing that because that is how they grew up in Congo so they are living that lifestyle in SA instead of adjusting with the time. Things are not the same now; chores are not for women. Even if I do get married it will not be to a man who will be comfortable with me being the only person who takes care of the house, it is quite frustrating, and boys get away with doing close to nothing.”-Jessica*

The accounts from Olivia, Chloe, and Jessica show that one of the most persistent conflicts in Congolese households in South Africa is around the division of household chores. Girls are expected to do the bulk of the housework, while boys are often excused. Participants described this as unfair, but also as something their parents defended as “preparation” for womanhood

and marriage. From the perspective of youth, this uneven distribution of domestic tasks feels outdated and frustrating. Olivia highlighted that girls are expected to be “responsible ones” while her brothers are allowed to “slack.” Chloe observed that this pattern is not only in her family but “even in other Congolese families.” Jessica captured the tension most sharply, describing her role as “deputy mum” and rejecting the idea that chores should prepare her for marriage: *“Things are not the same now; chores are not for women.”* These voices show how Congolese daughters view housework as both an area of unfair treatment and a direct link to gendered expectations that they do not want to reproduce in their adult lives.

Parents, however, offered a different view in their interviews. They explained that assigning more chores to daughters is part of their cultural practice of raising “responsible women.” One mother stated: *“In our culture a girl must learn to manage the home, because one day she will be a wife. If she does not learn now, she will suffer later.”* Another father explained that *“boys are taught to succeed outside, girls are taught to keep the family together.”* Parents did not necessarily see this as unfair but as a moral duty, connecting it to the way they themselves were raised in Congo. This reflects how Congolese parenting reproduces gendered household roles as part of a broader cultural framework of respectability, discipline, and family honour.

While this pattern is not unique to Congolese households’ studies show that women and girls still carry a heavier load of domestic chores in both African and South African contexts (Budlender, 2010; Dijkstra, Plantenga & Remery, 2013) what stands out is how Congolese parents explicitly frame chores as moral training. For them, chores are not just about keeping the household running but about shaping character and preparing daughters for future family roles. Boys, by contrast, are raised with more freedom, expected to achieve outside the home later in life. Comparative studies of other immigrant families show that conflicts over chores are often framed as part of broader generational clashes between “traditional” parents and “modern” children (Phinney, Ong & Madden, 2000). In Congolese families, however, the emphasis is not simply on generational difference but on parenting goals: discipline, respectability, and readiness for adult responsibility. This makes chore allocation a particularly sharp site where values are taught, contested, and renegotiated.

Nancy Foner (2009) cautions that we should not oversimplify intergenerational conflict. While the youth in this study clearly express frustration, they also demonstrate adaptation. Some continue to challenge their parents’ expectations, while others “just get it done” and accept the

role. This shows that chores, while a source of conflict, also serve as a key arena where Congolese parenting culture is transmitted and tested in the migration setting.

#### 7.5.3.2 Parents exert control of social engagements.

In the interview, I asked youth participants Do you have friends who are South Africans? If yes, was it easy to make them? If not, why don't you have South Africa?

Most of the respondents in this study, their parents, are very involved in their selection of friends and their social activities. Based on the respondents' responses it showed that immigrant parents often felt the need to oversee their children's social life including who they were friends with, where did they live, and where they hung out. This finding was consistent with the research finding of their study, which also highlighted that immigrant parents wanted to control their children's social engagements for various reasons, such as wanting them to be around friends who shared the same cultural values so that their desire to maintain cultural practices was achieved. In the case of Congolese immigrant parents in this study, the reason to control their children's social activity was motivated by protective instincts; some parents were concerned about their children being in the townships to visit their friends or having local friends because of potential xenophobic attacks. The responses also showed that parents were more lenient with their children if their activities involved other Congolese children or other immigrant children, but stricter if the activities or friendships included South African children.

*“My parents were not comfortable with me having South African friends outside of school. If I did have any Zulu friends, whatever we were doing must be on my school premises for my safety. I felt this was limiting because we don't always connect according to our nationality but personality not all South Africans hate foreigners so that is what we would fight about with my mum”. -Alex*

*“My parents were okay with my siblings and I having Congolese friends or friends from other African countries they would allow us to hangout and have sleepovers but when we had South African friends they could not visit us at home and we could also not visit them in their homes so we would hang out at school only or at malls but our parents would ask us lots of questions and want to know our whereabouts. They also never had South African friends, just colleagues who never visited or attended any of the functions we had. Sometimes I felt that they wanted us to live like them, but we are still young*

*and need to have friends. Growing up in South Africa is different than growing up in Congo having friends from this country does make life easier and it is bound to happen because we cannot just base friendship on being Congolese we have to like each other and have things in common”.-Brian*

The sentiments expressed in the narrative touch upon the complexities of immigrant identity and integration within a host country. The concern for safety and preference for in-group socializing shared by the parents is reflective of a broader phenomenon observed among immigrant communities, where there is often a tension between maintaining cultural ties and assimilating into the local culture. Research on immigrant social networks suggests that while in-group ties provide emotional support and help maintain cultural practices, out-group friendships are crucial for integration into broader society Zhou & Kim (2006). The children's desire for friendships based on personality rather than nationality resonates with Berry's (1997) model of acculturation, which advocates for integration as an optimal strategy where individuals maintain their cultural heritage while also engaging with the wider society. Research conducted by Portes and Rumbaut in 2001 highlights the significant role that friendships across different cultures play in the psychological development and identity shaping of young immigrants.

The Social Identity Theory (SIT) is useful for understanding how individuals see themselves through the lens of their social groups, such as their nationality or culture. In the given story, the parents' hesitation to mingle with South African groups and their preference for connections from Congo or other African countries show a strong bond with their cultural group, which they find affirming. This preference for their own group can lead to keeping a distance from other groups, as seen in the parent's concern about their kids making South African friends due to safety concerns or cultural identity loss. On the other hand, the children are more open to being part of both their native Congolese culture and their life in South Africa, balancing two cultural identities and trying to blend their parents' traditional values with their personal life experiences also explains why people might prefer their cultural group, which is evident in the parents' favouring Congolese friends for their children. Yet as the children grow, they start to challenge this preference, choosing friends for shared interests rather than just based on where they come from. Congolese Parents were protective of their children's cultural values and traditional practices and limited their social engagements. These parents migrated from different cultural backgrounds and have their own beliefs and expectations regarding social

interactions. It is important for them to maintain their cultural values. They felt a strong sense of responsibility for their children's safety and well-being, which led them to closely monitor and regulate their social activities when their children were befriending locals. This involvement in their children's social lives was based on the desire to protect their children from potential negative influences and preserve their cultural identity. These patterns of parental control are consistent with Congolese parenting culture, where parents see it as their duty to closely monitor children's social environments and protect them from perceived risks. In Congolese households, friendships are often viewed not just as personal choices but as extensions of family reputation and values. Parents therefore feel justified in guiding or limiting their children's associations to ensure that they align with cultural expectations of respect, discipline, and collective well-being. Within South Africa, this protective stance was heightened by fears of xenophobia and exposure to different value systems. For Congolese parents, regulating their children's friendships was not only a matter of safety but also a way of preserving cultural integrity in a new and sometimes hostile environment.

### **7.5.3.3 Issue of identity from a cultural Perspective**

Children of immigrants often must negotiate between two cultures: that of their homeland and their country of residence (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This bicultural experience can lead to an internal tug-of-war as these children strive to maintain their ancestral customs and values while also seeking to integrate and be accepted within the new society. They may feel the pressure to conform to the norms of the host country, yet also face the expectation to uphold the cultural heritage of their family, leaving them straddling two worlds (Zhou, 1997)

*"I don't stress myself about the culture I just take what works for me from both sides and carry on with life, I am proud to be a Congolese I'm also grateful to live in South Africa, both countries and their people have good and bad, so I choose the good that works for me." - Charles.*

*"This thing of identity and culture gets complicated if you involve parents, they lived most of their lives in Congo, so I understand that they relate me to that side, but we are growing up in South Africa, and both these cultures are a part of us. It should not be an issue that I am a Congolese living in South Africa." -Alex*

The above responses show a pragmatic and individualistic approach to cultural identity among children of immigrants. The first respondent emphasizes personal agency in selecting cultural aspects that resonate with them from both Congolese and South African cultures, suggesting a flexible, hybrid identity that does not adhere strictly to either culture. This approach is aligned with the concept of 'cultural bricolage', where individuals take pieces from various cultures to construct their own identity (Levitt & Waters, 2006). The second response demonstrates the complexity of identity formation in the context of parental influence and the host country's cultural environment. The respondent recognizes the strong cultural connection their parents have with Congo, while also affirming that growing up in South Africa inherently makes both cultures a part of their identity. This reflects the theory of 'transnationalism', which describes how immigrants and their descendants often live their lives across borders, combining and maintaining relationships that span countries (Basch, Glick Schiller, & Szanton Blanc, 1994). Both statements reflect a broader understanding in the literature of how second-generation immigrants negotiate identity. They frequently undertake the process of blending and harmonizing the cultural standards and expectations from their parents' homeland with those of their new environment, which leads to the development of a dual cultural identity (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). This biculturalism can be beneficial, allowing for greater adaptability and cultural competence (Berry, 1997). The analysis of these comments underscores how immigrant children tend to shape their own identities by choosing and combining cultural elements from their parent's country of origin with those of the community they are raised in.

In this study, I explored how Congolese families deal with their sense of identity and what they consider home after moving to a new country. For these families, holding on to their culture including their customs, beliefs, and close family ties which is vital. It gives them strength and helps them understand who they are in their new community but when these families move, what they consider home changes. It becomes a mix of their life back in Congo and their new life in another country. Most children with Congolese parents, born or raised in South Africa, adopt elements of both Congolese and South African lifestyles. Feelings of longing and curiosity for their homeland are common among Congolese parents and young adults. Parents miss the places, societies, and ways of life they left behind. This yearning influences how they raise their children and teach values.

The study reveals how these families adapt their sense of identity while migrating. Parents incorporated in their everyday life their traditional beliefs of being Congolese so they can pass

them on to their children but also acknowledged the importance of assisting their children in familiarising themselves with the 'South African way of living'. This affects how they parent and the methods they use, as they connect their past to their current life in a new place. Additionally, the interaction between different generations in these families leads to a changing sense of identity and home. Young adults often must balance their inherited culture with that of the new country. This influences their self-view and how they feel they belong, leading them to form their idea of home. Overall, this theme highlights the complex relationship between identity and home for Congolese migrant families. It shows how they work to keep their cultural identity while adjusting to a new environment, with the notion of home evolving through memories, change, and the interaction between different family generation

For Congolese parents, identity is not only personal but also deeply collective, rooted in family honour, respect, and the transmission of cultural values. Their parenting practices often reflect a strong desire to ensure that children remain anchored in “being Congolese,” even while growing up in South Africa. This means that everyday parenting decisions such as disciplining behaviour, setting expectations for respect, or encouraging traditional dress and language become ways of safeguarding cultural identity. The youth in this study sometimes experienced this as restrictive, but it also shaped their bicultural development by pushing them to constantly negotiate between parental expectations of “living like Congolese” and the realities of “growing up South African.” In this way, parenting acted as a central force in how identity was constructed, contested, and redefined across generations.

## **7.6 Theme 5: Reflections on Cross-Cultural Upbringing**

Growing up in South Africa can offer a one-of-a-kind experience for young people, particularly for those who come from immigrant families. This theme seeks to uncover young people's perspectives on their own upbringing and their thoughts on establishing their future families in this diverse milieu. It explores their personal decisions about perpetuating their family lineage in South Africa and what improvements could enhance their formative experiences within its vibrant cultural mix. Additionally, it solicits guidance from these young people, who have first-hand experience with cultural integration, for others who are in the midst of their developmental years in this country. The aim of these questions is to gain a deeper understanding of the themes of identity, cultural awareness, and the prospects for stability and opportunities that resonate with the youth as they contemplate continuing their families in South Africa.

**7.6.1 I presented three questions to the youth, which were designed to elicit detailed reflections on their lived experiences and future intentions:**

- **Do you imagine yourself raising your future children in South Africa? Can you explain your reasoning?**

*“No, I would not want my children to grow up in South Africa because I do not want them to go through what I went through, I hope to raise my children in a country where there is less discrimination”. -Brian*

*“No because it will be too hard for me to raise them and I think I would be constantly stressed about their safety, it’s not all bad being here but I think I would want even better for them” -Chloe*

Growing up in South Africa gave Congolese youth both opportunities and challenges that shaped how they think about the future. When asked whether they imagine raising their own children in South Africa, their reflections showed how their lived experiences already influence the kind of parents they aspire to become.

Brian was clear that he would not want his children to grow up in South Africa because of the discrimination he experienced.

Chloe echoed this concern, highlighting the constant stress of ensuring children’s safety: *“No because it will be too hard for me to raise them and I think I would be constantly stressed about their safety, it’s not all bad being here but I think I would want even better for them.”*

In contrast, Jessica gave a more conditional response, linking her decision to future wealth and mobility:

*“If I become rich in life I will raise my children in South Africa because if I have a lot of money I will not be in the township or in towns, I would live in proper suburbs where your neighbours do not really know you. In South Africa if you have money life is good you can afford to be away from hungry, unemployed people who start xenophobic attacks.”*

Together, these reflections show how discrimination, safety concerns, and socio-economic divides are not just personal struggles for these youth but are already shaping how they imagine protecting and providing for their own children. From a parenting perspective, the protective

stance is consistent: Brian and Chloe seek to remove their children from the risks they endured, while Jessica believes wealth could provide a shield against those risks. What is striking in these accounts is how closely they mirror the protective and resilient strategies of Congolese parents documented earlier parents who emphasised shielding children from disrespect, exclusion, and insecurity. The youth now imagine continuing this protective role but adapted to their own circumstances. Using Acculturation Theory, Brian and Chloe lean toward separation, preferring to raise children outside South Africa to preserve dignity and avoid discrimination, while Jessica reflects a conditional assimilation, where financial stability could make South Africa liveable. Yet across these strategies, there is a shared sense of responsibility to secure better conditions for the next generation.

This shows something uniquely Congolese in outlook, the anchoring of parenting decisions in the values of family honour, protection, and sacrifice. Just as their parents framed migration as a sacrifice for their children's future, these youth frame their own imagined parenting around ensuring safety, dignity, and stability. Their reflections reveal continuity with Congolese parenting culture, but also change, as they project these values into cross-cultural futures where economic and social conditions dictate whether South Africa can ever truly feel like home for their children.

- **In retrospect, what could have enhanced your experience of growing up in South Africa?**

Reflecting on how the youth in this study were raised provides valuable insights into how their early experiences shaped their identities. Growing up in South Africa, with its diverse culture, rich history, and complex social dynamics, offers a unique context for childhood and adolescence. Participants were asked, "What could have enhanced the experience of growing up in South Africa?" This question prompts consideration of factors such as educational opportunities, community support, access to resources, and exposure to cultural heritage that might have enriched their formative years. It encourages a detailed examination of the past and contemplation of elements that could have positively influenced the transition from childhood to adulthood within the South African context.

*"School was challenging, especially at the beginning in primary school, it would have been better if our teachers were sensitive to that, you know if they were prepared to receive students from foreign countries it would be better, I believe if the adults acted right the children would follow. Your teacher*

*should be your first line of defence if you are being bullied, but how do you expect them to do something if they are also having funny ideas about foreign students? Brian*

The response provided sheds light on the significant challenges faced by Congolese students, particularly during their initial transition into primary school. It highlights the crucial need for teacher sensitivity and preparedness in dealing with diverse cultural backgrounds. The respondent emphasizes that the onset of schooling was especially challenging and posits that a more culturally sensitive approach from educators could have mitigated these difficulties. They propose that adults, especially teachers, set an example for children. This means teachers' positive and inclusive behaviour can create a more peaceful and helpful school atmosphere. Furthermore, the response underscores the expectation that teachers should act as the first line of defence against bullying, indicating a belief in their pivotal role in providing safety and support. However, the mention of teachers harbouring "funny ideas about foreign students" points to a perceived or actual bias, which can create an unwelcoming and even hostile environment for these students. This perception not only undermines the potential for a supportive teacher-student relationship but also hints at broader systemic issues within the educational framework. The need for increased cultural sensitivity, better teacher training, and a proactive stance against bullying and prejudice is evident from the respondent's reflection.

*"I think my experience as a child of immigrants would have been better if South Africa set it clearly as a country that they do not want foreigners in their country. Make it legally known that we do not want them here instead of seeming like they are okay with African foreigners being in South Africa only to ill-treat people once they are already here. I am sure our parents would have chosen other countries. Imagine a government home affairs worker messing up people's lives by discriminating against us even though we have followed the rules. It would be nice if the home affairs workers were fair. - Rachel*

The response provided an important perspective on the experiences of children of Congolese immigrants in South Africa, touching upon the broader implications of systemic and individual attitudes towards foreigners. Looking at it through the ecosystem's theory, which suggests people are affected by different environments, shows how serious the problem is. respondent suggests that a more transparent stance from South Africa regarding its position on foreign

nationals might have led their parents to make different choices about migration, hinting at the broader macrosystem. The overarching cultural and social policies and attitudes within the country. This system directly influences the mesosystem, which encompasses the interactions between different microsystems, such as the relationships between schools, communities, and government institutions like the home affairs department.

The mention of government workers discriminating against foreign nationals, despite their adherence to legal procedures, underscores the dysfunction within the microsystem of the immediate environment, which in this case includes government institutions. These institutions should offer help and organization but as explained, they're not doing it fairly or justly. Failure reflects back on the exosystem, which includes the broader social systems that do not directly involve the individual but influence their environment, such as government policy and administrative procedures.

The participants' call for fairness and transparency suggest a desire for a shift in the broader ecological systems that govern the lives of immigrants and their families. They imply that a change at the macro level, with clear policies and a definitive stance on immigration, could lead to more informed decisions at the individual level and potentially prevent the hardships caused by ill-treatment and discrimination

*“Having support maybe from the school where they make South African children aware that there are people of different nationalities attending in South African Schools so we can reduce bullying maybe have teachers or counsellors who help us settle into our new school, helping us with language and reading because it was hard transitioning from French to English, I need more support”.*

The participants thoughts capture the struggles of students moving from different countries and languages to South African schools. It shows that schools should be helpful, open, and include different people They suggest having programs in schools to make everyone aware of differences, which could help reduce bullying by making students more understanding. They also mention the need for specific support, such as teachers or counsellors, to help adapt to the new surroundings. This kind of support is crucial for both academics and emotions, especially when changing from French to English. Learning a new language isn't just memorizing words; it means adapting to new thinking and study methods, which can greatly affect grades and self-assurance. Isseri, Muthukrishna, and Philpott (2018) in their study about immigrant children's

schooling geographies. Participants asked for more support, emphasizing how important schools are in shaping experiences for students from diverse backgrounds. It highlights the need for schools to be proactive in supporting these students, ensuring a smoother transition and fairer educational experience for everyone.

The reflections of the youth show that Congolese parenting instilled resilience, self-discipline, and pride in cultural identity, which gave children important coping tools when facing xenophobia, bullying, or systemic discrimination. However, their accounts also reveal that parental guidance, while valuable, could not fully compensate for the failures of institutions like schools and Home Affairs. For example, teachers who should have been protectors sometimes held prejudices themselves, and government officials could misuse their authority to disadvantage foreign families. This highlights a contrast with other immigrant contexts, where scholars such as Orellana, Dorner and Pulido (2003) note that children's coping is often tied to institutional support structures. In South Africa, the youth in this study emphasize that while Congolese parenting created strong foundations, fairer and more inclusive institutional practices would have enhanced their upbringing.

- **What advice would you extend to fellow youths from diverse cultural backgrounds who are growing up in South Africa?**

*“My advice would be to get to know your people. What I mean by this is to invest your time in getting to know your extended family in the DRC or whichever country you are coming from. It will help you; you might even need them if you go back home.”-Brian*

*“Make friends with other Congolese in your school or workplace. What worked for me is that whilst still at school I made friends with other non-South African children because although we were not from the same country, we had something in common which is being a foreigner”. - Sophia*

*“I would tell them to be proud of who they are and respect their cultures. However, you need to know the time and place; sometimes, you can find yourself in situations where you need to blend in. What I mean by this is, for example, say we are a group of Congolese guys just chilling or walking; you are not going to start speaking French or Swahili because that will cause unnecessary attention. In this case, use English, which still makes me stand*

*out sometimes, but I would rather be called a coconut than hear commentary about my home language's weirdness". -Jessica*

*"I would encourage them to make use of all the opportunities available and make a living away from their home country worth it by being successful. Be prepared for a move at any given time because this is not our home."-Alex*

The responses provided by the immigrant youth in South Africa reflect a conscious effort to balance cultural identity with integration. The first piece of counsel about staying connected with one's extended family echoes the sentiment that family ties are a source of emotional and practical support. This advice can be especially pertinent for immigrants who may rely on these connections for help or a sense of belonging, which is a significant aspect of the human experience and can be crucial for immigrants. The strategy of building friendships with other non-South African children is an adaptive measure that fosters a support network, offering a shared understanding of the experiences unique to immigrants. Such solidarity is critical for the psychological well-being of young immigrants and can provide a semblance of community in a new setting (Kuah, 2020). The detailed advice regarding the expression of cultural identity reflects an understanding of the complexity of navigating a multicultural society and the potential for xenophobia or cultural misunderstandings. The suggestion to adapt one's cultural expression to different contexts may help to minimize conflict while still preserving one's cultural heritage (Kuah, 2020). Encouraging immigrant youth to take advantage of available opportunities and be prepared for relocation reflects the resilience required to navigate the immigrant experience. This perspective highlights the transient nature of some immigrants' stay in South Africa and shows the importance of adaptability and success, in line with the progressive refugee policy that South Africa has, which encourages integration and provides support akin to that offered to its citizens.

*"I would say learn to define yourself, just know who you are all the name calling of Kwerekwere is not your identity. Work hard so that you live a good life and have the option to leave South Africa if you want. Also be positive don't get in the politics of locals and foreigners just live your life."-Charles.*

The advice to "learn to define yourself" and to not be swayed by derogatory name-calling such as "Kwerekwere" is grounded in the concept of resilience, which is a key factor in the successful adaptation of immigrant youths. Studies have shown that resilience is vital for the

well-being of migrants and contributes to the social cohesion of the receiving societies (Motti-Stefanidi, 2019). It enables individuals to maintain their sense of self-worth and dignity in the face of adversities such as xenophobia and discrimination, which are unfortunately common experiences for immigrants. Working hard to create a good life, thereby enabling the option to leave if desired, is another aspect of resilience that is often emphasized in immigrant experiences. It's not just about financial stability, but also about maintaining autonomy and control over one's life choices. This is a form of empowerment that allows individuals to navigate their lives with greater confidence and less dependence on the acceptance of others (Brotsky, Buckingham, Fedi, Gattino, Rochira, Altal, & Mannarini, 2022).

The suggestion to avoid getting involved in the politics of locals and foreigners and to focus on living one's life may be seen as a coping strategy. Engaging in such political discussions can sometimes be detrimental to the mental health of immigrants, and choosing to focus on personal growth and day-to-day living can be a form of cognitive and behavioural engagement that has been shown to bolster academic resilience among immigrant students. The guidance emphasizes a way for immigrant youth in South Africa to be strong by defining themselves, working hard, and staying positive. It focuses on taking control rather than getting involved in dividing social and political situations. Studies on immigrant youth show that this approach can lead to better and healthier lives in their new homes. Additionally, the development of a resilient identity is closely linked to the ability to cope with the challenges faced during the acculturation process. A study on immigrant and non-immigrant adolescents found that resilience contributes positively to identity development, suggesting that coping strategies are integral to how young immigrants construct their self-identity in a new country Akgül, Ergin, (2023)

Applying Social Identity Theory to the participant's response, it appears that the participant is encouraging a sense of self that is independent of group-defined labels such as "Kwerekwere," which is a derogatory term used for foreigners in South Africa. The participant is suggesting that one's identity should be self-defined, thus rejecting the negative social categorization that Social Identity Theory identifies as a source of prejudice and bias. The emphasis on hard work and leading a good life reflects a strategy for achieving positive self-esteem outside of group affiliations, aligning with an individual mobility strategy within the Social Identity Theory framework. This approach advocates for personal success as a means of self-validation, rather than seeking validation through group status. Furthermore, the participant's advice to stay positive and disengage from the contentious dynamics of local and foreigner politics aligns

with a desire to avoid intergroup discrimination. This stance supports the idea within Social Identity Theory that distancing oneself from intergroup comparisons can mitigate conflict and the negative consequences of group categorization, instead promoting individual well-being.

### **7.6.2 The positive aspect about being raised in South Africa: youth perspective.**

Immigrant youth in South Africa have unique perspectives on the benefits of being raised in this diverse and dynamic country. Their experiences paint a picture of life in a nation known for its vibrant culture and relative stability. As they share their stories, they highlight the positives that have shaped their journey, offering insights into the advantages of growing up in a land that, despite its complexities, offers numerous opportunities for personal growth and connection to a broader African and global community. These voices provide a rich narrative on the favourable aspects of life in the 'Rainbow Nation'.

*I must say the school I attended here in SA was proper; they had resources, and we were exposed to various activities outside our academics. This country is quite stable when compared to what I hear about Congo, the war poverty, and all the hardships. -Sarah*

*“Being raised in South Africa was just such a hard experience I know I should be grateful for being the lucky person whose parents made it possible to come here. Everyone says I should be grateful, but it has been so hard. I feel like I did not get to be a full child; the issues with the ID and our papers were a nightmare. I remember having to stay at home with my siblings before we could start school in South Africa because of papers, so in this country, you are not treated like a human being if you don't have your papers in order. Besides that, what I like about being raised here is that you get to see and mingle with other people from other African countries, and South Africa is advanced. I like that because it's easy to be connected to the rest of the world. It is quite developed.”- Lilly*

The participant's story about growing up in South Africa shows both the good and tough parts of being an immigrant youth here. They liked the good education they got in South Africa. They mentioned schools with lots of resources and activities, which matches reports about South African schools improving after apartheid. These reports talk about how South Africa works to give all students a good education. They also appreciated the stability in South Africa compared to their home country, Congo, which has problems like war and poverty. South

Africa is perceived as more politically stable and developed than many other African countries. However, as immigrants in South Africa, they also faced difficulties. They had trouble with getting the right documents, which is a known problem for immigrants. Reports from groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch talk about the challenges immigrants face in South Africa, such as not getting the right papers and facing xenophobia. They also felt like they weren't treated fully as a child because of these document issues. This feeling matches studies showing how challenges like these can affect immigrant children's emotions and how important it is to help them feel included in society. This response highlights the nuanced and often dualistic nature of the immigrant experience, where gratitude for opportunity coexists with the pain of adaptation and acceptance.

*“Growing up here was good because I got to meet people from different countries which is something I think would not have happened if my parents were raising me in Congo, if you are going to be in Africa then I prefer it to be South Africa. Here you learn to live with people from other countries who are different from you”. -Sophia*

The response describes a positive view of growing up in South Africa, highlighting the diversity and multicultural interactions as a significant benefit. The participant expresses a preference for being raised in South Africa over Congo, implying that the opportunities for cultural exchange and learning to coexist with people from various backgrounds are more accessible or prevalent in South Africa. This perspective suggests an appreciation for the social and cultural environment in South Africa, valuing it as a unique place for growth and learning within the African continent. Learning to live with different people highlights a sense of personal development and broadened horizons, which the individual attributes to the South African setting.

*“When you are raised in South Africa you get exposed to all kinds of people and situations, it makes you tough if you can handle being a child of a foreigner in South Africa you can overcome anything, yes this at first is bad but it depends how you take it. In my case, it has made me stronger mentally not easily phased by tough times because I grew up needing to be tough”. - Brian*

The provided response reflects a narrative of resilience shaped by the experience of growing up as the child of a foreigner in South Africa. The individual describes a process of becoming

mentally stronger as a direct result of the challenges faced in this context. They acknowledge that while initially the experience may seem negative, the personal interpretation and response to these challenges can lead to significant personal growth. The statement suggests that exposure to diverse people and situations in South Africa requires one to develop toughness and resilience. The individual sees these difficulties not as insurmountable obstacles but as opportunities to build a robust mental fortitude. There is an implication that the skills and strengths developed in such an environment are transferable and can enable one to handle other "tough times" they might encounter in life. This perspective emphasizes the adaptive capabilities of individuals and suggests that the environment in South Africa, with its unique social and cultural challenges, particularly for children of foreigners, can serve as a powerful catalyst for personal development.

Applying the ecological systems theory to the individual's experience of growing up in South Africa, we see how their close relationships and community (microsystem) taught them to be tough. The way their family interacted with schools and society (mesosystem) could have brought challenges that made them resilient. Society's broader views and laws (exosystem), and the overall cultural attitudes towards immigrants (macrosystem), likely pressured them to be strong. Over time, as things changed in the country (chronosystem), they learned to handle tough situations better, viewing their tough upbringing as a strength.

### **7.6.3 Negative aspects of growing up in South Africa**

*“Growing up in South Africa is not easy because it’s like your childhood is cut short, once you are at the age where you are aware that you are not South African and that you are different because of the country you come from that is where your problems start. Things that are normal to you, like your name, are what make you stick out. I think your childhood becomes about survival, not living well like a child should. You can be happy at home with your parents and siblings but as soon as you will likely come across with situations and people who remind you that you are not South African”. -Jessica*

*“Growing up in South Africa as a child requires you to be strong mentally, let’s face it, yes, we are Congolese, but we know that we do not fully belong there, yet we are also not South African. The differences among those who were born and raised here are obvious when you compare us to others who grew up in Congo. Being raised in South Africa requires you to have a high*

*self-esteem otherwise you will not be able to handle comments about you being an outsider”.* -Emily

The responses depict the challenges faced by children growing up in South Africa, particularly those from immigrant backgrounds. They highlight a sense of lost childhood due to early realization of being 'othered' due to their origins. The experiences shared reflect on the necessity to adapt quickly and develop resilience, with issues like xenophobia affecting their formative years. These accounts show a constant struggle for identity and acceptance, contrasting their experiences with those of children in their countries of origin. The emphasis on mental strength and high self-esteem as survival tools in a foreign environment speaks volumes about the emotional and social challenges these children face. Furthermore, the need for mental resilience and high self-esteem is emphasized as crucial for coping with the frequent reminders of their outsider status. This narrative shows the profound impact of societal attitudes on immigrant children's development and identity formation.

*“Being raised in South Africa is good only on the part of making you strong emotionally, when you are a child of immigrants you develop this focus and need to survive. In my case, it has put me ahead of my agemates because I know going to my parents is not an option; they too are struggling; therefore, I must quickly learn how to be independent. It sounds bad when I explain it but it’s not long-term there won’t be any place, I cannot survive in. When I was at school, I knew that mediocracy was not for me and I made sure I excelled, even though the schooling route has not gone according to how I planned I decided to employ myself and I am doing great and I’m sure in due time I will be at university.”.* -Lilly

The reflections on the negative aspects of growing up in South Africa show how much the family context shapes these experiences. Jessica and Emily explain that once children become aware they are not South African, ordinary things like their names make them stand out. At home, parents and siblings create a sense of belonging, but outside the family children are reminded that they are different. This shows that while Congolese parents give comfort and identity within the household, they cannot protect their children from the wider society. Parenting here is about offering emotional security even when the outside world undermines it. Lilly’s account makes the parenting link even clearer. She notes that “going to my parents is not an option; they too are struggling,” which reflects the heavy responsibilities children

sometimes take on when parents face their own difficulties. This forces young people to grow up quickly, to take decisions and responsibilities usually expected later in life. In Congolese families, resilience is passed down not only through what parents say or teach but also through the example of their struggles. Children watch their parents endure hardship and feel they must also be strong, excel, and take initiative early. This shows that the negative aspects of childhood for Congolese youth in South Africa cannot be separated from parenting. Parents provide love and cultural grounding but, because of limited resources and discrimination, they depend on their children to adapt fast. The result is a combination of family care and premature independence, which becomes a defining feature of being raised in Congolese migrant households.

## **7.7 Chapter key insights**

This chapter has shown that the experiences of Congolese youth growing up in South Africa are deeply connected to the ways their parents raise and support them in a foreign environment. Parenting shaped both the struggles and the strengths that participants described. One key finding is that Congolese parents pass on a strong sense of collective responsibility within the family. Even when children take on the role of cultural and language brokers, this is not viewed as a burden but as a natural extension of family duty. Children learn from their parents that supporting the household is an honourable task, and this makes them active partners in helping their families adapt. Gender roles also surfaced as a persistent influence. Parents continued to assign more household responsibilities to girls, often justifying it as preparation for adulthood and marriage. While the youth found this frustrating, they also recognised it as part of the way their parents were raised in Congo. This shows how parenting practices travel across borders and continue to structure everyday life in South Africa. Another strong theme is the resilience that parent's model and children absorb. Parents provide emotional security at home, even when the outside world is unwelcoming. Children explained that their strength, focus, and drive to succeed came in part from watching their parents struggle and yet endure. In this way, parenting indirectly prepared them for independence and resilience, even when it meant childhood felt cut short. The reflections on future parenting show continuity and change. Participants want to protect their own children from discrimination and hardship, yet they also carry forward the values of respect, family honour, and resilience that they learned from their parents. Parenting among Congolese families in South Africa therefore combines cultural traditions with adaptive strategies shaped by migration. The accounts in this chapter highlight

that being raised in Congolese households abroad means growing up with strong family ties, clearly gendered expectations, and a collective sense of responsibility. At the same time, these parenting practices are reshaped by the realities of South Africa, producing children who are resilient, resourceful, and determined to secure better futures for themselves and the next generation.

## **CHAPTER 8: Research Conclusions and critical evaluation**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The research highlighted that moving to a new country significantly alters family dynamics, particularly parenting. Families from the Democratic Republic of Congo who settled in South Africa encountered challenges that demanded changes in how they raise their children. The specific experiences of these Congolese families offer valuable insights into an area that has not been extensively explored.

This research focused on the experiences of Congolese parents and their children as they navigated life in South Africa. It aimed to shed light on the various elements that shape their parenting, while also acknowledging the difficulties they face during this transition. Young people from these families shared their perspectives on growing up with parents who are adapting to a new culture. The discussions with parents and young adults revealed themes such as the influence of cultural and societal norms on parenting, the difficulties of adjusting to a new country, and the approaches taken to retain cultural ties. The study's goal was to deepen the understanding of the migration journey for Congolese families and to provide insights that could improve support and create positive outcomes for parents and children in similar situations. This chapter aims to assess how well the study met its objectives and critically analyse its findings. It also offers recommendations for stakeholders and outlines areas where further research is needed to support migrant families better.

### **8.2 Principal conclusions based on the study objectives**

This study was driven by the objective of comprehensively understanding the experiences of Congolese immigrant families residing in South Africa. It sought to explore various facets of their lives within the context of migration and adaptation to a new environment. Understanding how the migration process influences and shapes parenting roles within these families was a primary focus. Furthermore, the study explored various factors affecting how families adapt to a new culture, revealing both the difficulties and chances that come with this change. A significant aspect addressed was the presence or absence of support systems and social networks available to these immigrant families. Additionally, the study aimed to understand the experiences of young Congolese adults as they grew up in South Africa, offering valuable insights into their distinctive lives. A vital part of the study was finding out how immigrant parents handle the challenges of raising children in a new country. The research delved into the challenges and opportunities presented by the South African environment concerning

childrearing. The culmination of this investigation provided a comprehensive overview of the complex familial and societal dynamics encountered by Congolese immigrants striving to adapt and thrive within South Africa.

### **8.2.1 To investigate how migration influences parenting roles**

Parents play a crucial role in nurturing children, directing them toward developing their unique passions and abilities. As societal dynamics shift, parental involvement in their children's development becomes increasingly significant. Studies suggest that conventional perspectives often assign fathers the responsibility of being the family's main breadwinner, while mothers primarily handle childcare, household chores, and offering emotional nurture. Congolese families have had to adjust these roles after moving to South Africa, where such traditional divisions are less applicable. The shift in cultural context has necessitated a more flexible approach to parenting, where responsibilities are shared differently between mothers and fathers.

The first change was brought about by fathers having to take entry-level and low-paying jobs, which were mostly not aligned with their qualifications. Secondly, some fathers spent several months to a year without getting employment. The inability of men to solely provide for their families as per the Congolese cultural expectation resulted in most wives having to get jobs or generate income via small businesses. As a result, mothers became co-providers. Mothers in this study unanimously shared the same experience of having less time to do their womanly duties of housework and spend time with their children.

Mothers mentioned being overloaded with work and having to outsource some of their duties, like childcare, to institutions such as creche and daycare service providers. Other mothers relied on their older children to assist with childcare as they had long working hours, including weekends. This finding was collaborated by the young adult youth who were interviewed, who described that the way they were raised emphasized being responsible and helping the family. Some youth referred to themselves with the term 'deputy parent,' which inferred that they also had a parental role and responsibility towards their younger siblings. The deputy parents' term in this study was only mentioned by female youth, and they were the ones who stated they had responsibilities of childcare.

In this study, fathers were required to take on certain responsibilities usually associated with mothers. their wives engaging in paid work, the gap that opened was closed by fathers, who

then participated in cooking, cleaning, and looking after the children. According to the interview narratives, this role reversal was not pleasant for both mothers and fathers but was rather used as a strategy to ensure the family survives. This was evident from the words used by fathers to describe their situation, such as “It is not easy asking for money from your woman.”, “running the home is not a man's job,” “I have double work, and it gets stressful,” and “there In this study, it became apparent that migration brought about a change in traditional gender roles, particularly as mothers began working and contributing to the family's income. It's crucial to emphasize that certain women in this research mentioned they had prior work experience before migrating. However, they didn't feel compelled to allocate their earnings to support their families as intensely. When they did contribute financially, it was more feasible because they didn't bear the extra burden of childcare expenses, given that their families were consistently available to assist. Living and parenting in South Africa challenged the preconceived notion that the father was solely responsible for providing. As a result, parental roles and responsibilities had to be renegotiated.

Mothers in this study welcomed the openness they had in terms of conversations they had with their children, which they stated was something that would have not happened if they were raising their children in Congo, as the conversations that their children brought home, such as dating, were considered taboo to share with parents. The mothers in this study saw this openness as a means of protecting their children by equipping them with the truth rather than letting their peers be the source of information. Some fathers in this study also observed the friendliness required to raise children in South Africa, but they were adamant that a parent should not aim to be friends with their children, but there needs to be a clear distinction between parent and child while still treating your children with respect. They regarded South African parenting as permissive and alluded to the fact that this might be caused by a lack of male presence in many homes.

### **8.2.2 To identify contextual factors that impact the immigrant family's acculturation process**

The study has revealed that language holds significant importance for both parents and their children when it comes to assimilating into a new environment. Utilizing the vernacular language facilitated seamless communication between these families and individuals hailing from South Africa, enabling them to seamlessly integrate into the local community. For parents, linguistic comprehension allowed them to offer better guidance to their children in

accordance with the local customs and traditions. Meanwhile, for young adults, linguistic proficiency translated into forging friendships and excelling academically, aspects that are important for a successful transition into adulthood and achieving autonomy.

Based on social identity theory, preserving their native language allowed these families to maintain their cultural heritage and individual identity, reinforcing their in-group status within their own community. This in-group identification is critical for their sense of belonging and comfort, even while living in the new environment of South Africa. For Congolese youth, the ability to speak either French or Swahili not only cemented their place within their extended family in Congo but also reinforced their identity as 'true Congolese' within this in-group. Striking a balance between adopting aspects of the new culture and retaining their native cultural practices helped them navigate the out-group dynamics in South Africa, ensuring they remained connected to their roots while integrating into their new society.

Maintaining their cultural identity while assimilating into their new environment is facilitated by language. Migrants who speak their native language can maintain cultural customs and identity by communicating with family back home. This sense of cultural identification is essential for migrants to maintain a sense of belonging.

#### **8.2.2.1 Xenophobia**

The study revealed that African immigrant youth had historically faced profound psychological distress due to xenophobia, which mostly took place at school. Phenomenal anxiety when there were xenophobic attacks in the country was highlighted by the youth, who shared that they had to be extra vigilant about the company they keep, and which places they can hang out in. Parents stated that the issue of xenophobia affects them because they had to have ongoing conversations about the slurs their children were subjected to, have to define derogatory terms such as *Kwerekwere*, and attend to the emotional effects of name-calling and exclusion of their children.

Xenophobia in the South African literature is well documented. The 1998 Human Rights Watch (HRW) report highlighted a worrying trend in South Africa's public attitude, marked by a growing xenophobia. According to the report, political figures frequently blamed migrants for numerous societal issues, including crime, unemployment, and even disease spread. This blame game has led to a rise in unfounded negative perceptions about migrants, making them increasingly vulnerable to mistreatment. The report specifically noted that the police, military, and Department of Home Affairs were often the perpetrators of this abuse. Refugees and

asylum seekers, particularly those with distinct appearances from distant lands, were found to be at a higher risk of facing such hostility (HRW 1998: 4). Cited in Fayomi, Chidozie, and Ayo (2015).

The experiences of participants in this study collaborate with what has been stated in the report mentioned, and the Department of Home Affairs was mentioned by both the parents as an institution that has workers who participate in uttering xenophobic sentiments. On top of the normal stress of parenting, youth parents stated that they had to ensure their children do not go to spaces where they can end up being victims of xenophobia, especially in Townships. Parents shared that although it is a good thing for their children to socialize with the local children this was a source of stress and conflict because they had to vet their children's friends so that introduced a power struggle over their children's friendships.

#### **8.2.2.2 Home Affairs Department in South Africa**

The Department of Home Affairs in South Africa plays an important role in managing immigration, which involves issuing various permits and documents that are essential for migrants to legally reside and work in the country. The department's operations have a direct and profound influence on the lives of African migrants, who often face a series of hurdles within the bureaucratic system. A significant challenge encountered by African migrants is the complex and sometimes protracted process of securing visas and permits. This procedure often demands comprehensive documentation, which can be particularly challenging for individuals from countries with less robust administrative systems or those classified as refugees or asylum seekers.

Historical records from the South African Department of Home Affairs have shown that inconsistency in decision-making by officials posed significant difficulties, with migrants sometimes facing unexplained rejections of their well-founded applications. These unanticipated denials, despite applicants fulfilling all stipulated requirements, resulted in extended periods of uncertainty, adversely affecting their prospects for employment, education, and access to vital services like healthcare.

The study also highlighted that African migrant contended with the impact of frequent policy and procedural changes within the department. These shifts often caused confusion and anxiety, particularly for those not well-versed in the nuances of South African immigration regulations, thereby introducing additional delays and barriers in obtaining the necessary legal documentation.

Complications were further exacerbated by overcrowded and chaotic conditions in Home Affairs offices, where lengthy waits and substandard service were commonplace. Such challenges were particularly pronounced for migrants who lacked proficiency in local languages or had a limited grasp of the bureaucratic processes involved.

The department's stringent immigration framework sometimes unintentionally contributed to xenophobic biases and discrimination against African migrants, fostering a sentiment of unwelcomeness, which was, at times, mirrored in public and official attitudes.

The Department of Home Affairs' effectiveness was identified as a critical factor in helping African migrants navigate the immigration system. The research showed the urgency for the department to streamline its processes, enhance its services, and cultivate more inclusive policies. Implementing these changes would not only assist migrants in securing the necessary documents but would also be a step towards fostering a more open and inclusive South African society.

### **8.2.3 To identify the lack or presence of support and social networks for Congolese migrants**

Congolese parents explained that they were not aware of any programs or services outside of church that were put in place to assist newcomer migrants and their families. They explained that you figure things out in South Africa as you go. Most of the participants in this study had already been friends or relatives in South Africa. This connection provided migrants with a starting point for building social connections. For people in Congo, the presence of friends or family members who were already in South Africa was a deciding factor in whether they should migrate to South Africa or not. Social networks were relied on to relay information on what was happening in South Africa.

When researching programs tailored for migrant families, I found the presence of a program called The Refugee Children's Project is a non-governmental organization (NGO) partner of the CSI Agency MAMAS Alliance. Its mission is to help migrant and refugee children, and their families start new lives by easing their integration into their local communities. This includes ensuring that the children have access to educational opportunities. The participants were not aware of its existence. Most participants did not know of support organizations, but they formed them among themselves. Unlike international West and global north countries, there were no known parenting programs for migrant families coming to South Africa.

The church was mentioned as one of the most important and helpful social institutions that aided migrant families. It has a dual function: to serve the spiritual and material needs of migrant families. Temporary accommodation and food parcels are examples of the assistance received. The church served as a place where migrant parents got information to navigate life in South Africa, such as schools and what documents were needed to process their applications at home. Migrants who have been in South Africa were an invaluable source of help. According to this study, Congolese migrants stated that their greatest support came from their home families. For a variety of reasons, they needed to stay in touch with their families and get help from them. Some of those reasons included the fact that family ties gave them a sense of belonging and identity, which can be beneficial for their emotional well-being and self-esteem.

Keeping ties to their home country, friends, and families' home country was also important for practical reasons, like maintaining professional networks, and being updated with the news, especially political climate and job market and social issues that may affect their home country. This was especially true for participants who still wanted to return to Congo.

Sending money back home was highlighted as being an important way for many migrants to help their families and give back to their homes, as extended family is important to them. This was also instilled as a value that their children should grow up with, and once established, they should take care of family members in Congo. Sending money home was also done on the premise that the extended family would be responsible for raising their children should something like a death happen to the parents.

Identity, both cultural and personal for young immigrant adults, keeping in touch with family members still living in Congo was an important step towards preserving both cultural and personal identity. The youth benefited greatly from hearing from family members the tales, traditions, and rituals that are significant to their heritage and upbringing. Others felt it was a daunting task. Overall, keeping ties to home for migrant families is important for maintaining a sense of connection, community, and well-being, both for the migrant parents themselves and for their children.

#### **8.2.4 To understand the experience Congolese young adults have, growing up in South Africa**

This study showed that navigating identity as a Congolese migrant youth was, at times, a difficult experience. Some of the youth participants felt isolated from their peers and society as they tried to navigate the complexities of their cultural backgrounds and the South African

environment, especially at the primary level with a slight improvement in secondary school. Xenophobia and bullying were mentioned as the leading factors that contributed to the difficulties of being children of immigrants. When responding to questions about identity and belonging, they indicated that their identity was not fixed, but rather something that was constantly changing and evolving. On a quest to navigate their identity, they started by better understanding their cultural background. By doing this, they learned more about their family, language, and beliefs and became familiar with the values their parents had passed down to them. This was done in many ways, such as keeping in contact with their families in Congo. Another important aspect of navigating identity as an African migrant youth was connecting with other African migrants, exploring events, and honouring invitations from the fellow Congolese community. The data showed that most participants embraced certain aspects of life from both South Africa and Congo. The youth was divided; there were those who identified with the South African way of life and had no connection

Connecting with peers who have similar backgrounds and experiences was a great source of support and understanding, especially in their schooling environment. The youth also joined online platforms and communities dedicated to Congolese living in South Africa and abroad.

#### **8.2.5 To ascertain the strategies used by Congolese immigrant parents to deal with the challenges of raising their children in South Africa**

Congolese immigrant parents in South Africa employed a variety of approaches to overcome the challenges of raising their children in a novel and challenging setting. These measures helped their children keep their cultural identity, achieve academic success, and overcome discrimination and other obstacles they faced.

Immigrant parents attempted to speak their native language at home and exposed their children to the customs and values of their culture. Immigrant parents sought out other families from their home country and cultural background to build a supportive community and establish strong social networks. In addition, they engaged in cultural activities and events that helped them feel linked to their heritage. Their children's bullying and prejudice were major concerns and obstacles for migrant parents. This made it important for them to teach their children resilience and adaptability. According to the interviews, parents had constant discussions about how to deal with the slurs and insulting labels their children were subjected to. During outbreaks of xenophobia, there were discussions about minimizing risk and remaining reasonably safe. Immigrant parents overcame the difficulties of reconciling their own cultural

values with those of the host nation. They modified their parenting method so that their children might succeed in their new surroundings while preserving a connection to their heritage. The church played an important role in providing assistance and a sense of community to immigrant families. By providing spiritual, emotional, and practical support, the church helped migrants overcome the challenges of adjusting to a new environment and establishing themselves within their new community. The church played a significant role in child rearing by giving moral and spiritual advice, social support, and positive role models through fostering a sense of community and delivering guidance and support to families.

#### **8.2.6 To identify challenges and opportunities of raising children in South Africa**

Congolese families residing in South Africa encountered notable obstacles, yet within these challenges, they discovered seeds of potential. Initially, language barriers posed a significant hurdle; manoeuvring through a country with 11 official languages necessitated adaptability and perseverance. Notwithstanding these difficulties, linguistic diversity presented a valuable cultural asset. The children of immigrants had the chance to become proficient in multiple languages, a skill that proved exceedingly advantageous for their educational and career prospects in an increasingly globalized world, especially with the English language, which is spoken in many places across the world.

In this context, mastering some of the languages mainly spoken in Durban, such as English and IsiZulu, surpassed mere communication; it evolved into a strategic instrument for survival and integration of the immigrant children into peer social groups to a certain extent. Proficiency in these languages equipped both parents and children to engage more fully with their community, as they noted gaining favour and better treatment from locals when interacting in isiZulu and seizing the educational advantages that South Africa provided. Regarded as decent by these families, the country's educational system offered a plethora of high-quality institutions that held the promise of brighter futures for their youth. Once the legalities of immigration were resolved and access to these institutions was attained, the prospect of upward social mobility became a palpable reality. It is worth noting that this has not been the experience of all Congolese immigrants; some are still trying to gain access, while others were only met with difficulties and could not experience any gains in accessing education for their children.

Beyond academia, the act of settling in a new country created resilience and determination within these young immigrants. They shared a common narrative of overcoming challenges and adapting. This created a strong sense of community and solidarity. This bond became a

source of support, nurturing a collective strength that aided in countering the challenges of living as foreigners. Economically, some families observed in the study discovered that South Africa presented opportunities that were unavailable in their home country, Congo. The ability to enhance their socioeconomic status was not solely a monetary advantage. It signified a significant improvement in their standard of living and granted their children the possibility of attaining higher levels of accomplishment.

In retrospect, the journey of African immigrants raising their children in South African society was characterized by profound challenges alongside promising opportunities. Parents were concerned about the cultural exchange. They were adamant that they did not value some behaviours they had observed in South African children, but they did value the acquisition of language skills as it enabled their children to be able to function in everyday life using South African language. Economic prospects were just a few aspects of the potentially fulfilling experience of Congolese immigrants, some admired and were motivated by fellow Congolese who had ‘made it’ in South Africa.

### **8.3 Significance of research on Congolese migrants in South Africa**

The importance of this study is multifaceted. It provides academic insights by delving into the experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children, shedding light on the impact of migration on familial ties, personal identity, and cultural assimilation. These narratives contribute to the broader field of anthropology. In terms of policy development, the findings are instrumental in shaping policies that facilitate the integration of Congolese migrants into South African society. These policies can lead to the creation of culturally aware services and anti-discrimination efforts to curb xenophobia.

This study is valuable because it specifically represents Congolese immigrant families whose experiences are not well documented in existing literature in South Africa. Therefore, this study can help contribute to a more inclusive understanding of the diversity of migration experiences and the concept of parenting in migration.

The study on Congolese families in South Africa not only addressed a significant research gap but also showed the importance of considering the cultural context of the host country in understanding immigrant experiences. This research not only contributed to enhancing the well-being of migrant families by offering new perspectives and data but also advanced the field of anthropology by providing valuable insights into migration and parenting dynamics.

Ali (2009) stated that anthropologists have traditionally written primarily for other anthropologists, rather than those with the potential to change the world. In the case of this research, the difficulties that the participants brought up showed that this research is applicable outside of anthropology and academia. To address the difficulties faced by Congolese immigrant families, a wide range of stakeholders can be involved, including legislators, community organizations, and social services. In order to enhance the lives of these families, the stakeholders can be guided by the study's conclusions when creating focused interventions and support networks, guaranteeing that the research has a significant and far-reaching influence outside of the academic domain.

## **8.4 Study recommendations on enhancing the experience of Congolese families in South Africa**

### **8.4.1 Support services for immigrant families**

The research shows the importance of developing support services tailored for immigrant families, particularly upon their initial settlement. These services should be culturally sensitive, addressing the unique needs of these families. This includes educational programs to improve parenting skills and mental health support, focusing on challenges faced by immigrant parents and children. It's crucial to provide language assistance services to ease communication barriers and community integration programs that facilitate connections with local resources, aiding in the smoother transition of families into their new environment. Such comprehensive support not only eases the adaptation process but also fosters the well-being and resilience of immigrant families.

### **8.4.2 Parental education programs**

Parental education is a crucial component of supporting immigrant families. These programs can guide parents in adopting parenting strategies that are congruent with the cultural context of their children's upbringing. For instance, programs could focus on the unique challenges immigrant families face, such as language barriers, offering strategies to overcome these difficulties. In the context of this research, many Congolese parents arriving in South Africa may only speak Swahili, not English, which limits their access to vital information.

### **8.4.3 Mental health services**

The study examined Congolese immigrants, noting the diversity within this group between economic migrants and asylum seekers-turned-refugees. The latter group often endures traumatic experiences on their way to South Africa, encountering additional stressors upon

arrival. These stressors are compounded by financial constraints and the lengthy asylum-to-refugee status transition, which affects their employment opportunities. Consequently, it is essential to provide mental health services that cater to the individualized needs of these immigrants. Families dealing with the isolation, stress, and trauma of migration, as well as the fear of deportation, may face significant mental health challenges. Culturally sensitive mental health services can offer a secure environment for families to articulate their emotions and seek assistance.

#### **8.4.4 Home Affairs and legalities in South Africa**

The study also suggests that the Department of Home Affairs trains its staff to deliver services effectively and consistently. This training should equip staff with the knowledge to assist immigrants in navigating the South African educational system and encourage the preservation of their cultural identities and histories.

To create support services that effectively cater to immigrant families, it's important to work directly with community members and cultural representatives. This helps in understanding their unique needs and challenges. Conducting needs assessments, focus groups, and community consultations will uncover the specific needs of these families. Based on this information, tailored programs and services can be developed. It's also crucial to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of these services and make any necessary adjustments, ensuring they continue to meet the community's needs.

#### **8.4.5 The role of schools and teachers**

Schools and educators play a crucial part in aiding immigrant children and their families. They offer more than just education; they provide a bridge to the new culture. By offering language assistance, they help children overcome barriers to learning and integration. Academic support is also vital, as it equips these students with the skills needed to succeed in their new environment. Language used in the classroom was mentioned by Congolese youth as a barrier to learning when they were still in school, especially when educators and other students would use other local languages instead of English. Furthermore, when teachers receive training in cultural awareness, they become better equipped to understand and address the diverse backgrounds of their students. Schools are particularly important to the socialization of immigrant students because they spend a considerable amount of time at school, and it is during this time that they are getting accustomed to the local culture and interacting with South African students.

## **8.5 Recommendation for future research**

This study was solely qualitative in nature, and although it yielded valuable findings, for future research, I recommend a mixed methods approach whereby the same immigrant group and topic are understudied. The rationale for introducing a quantitative approach is to gain a different perspective and more information on this topic, including insight on demographic patterns. Quantitative research involves collecting and analysing numerical data to understand patterns and relationships between variables. In the context of studying the acculturation process of Congolese immigrant families in South Africa, quantitative research would play several important roles, firstly to identify trends and patterns of the Congolese immigrant families. In practice, an example could be done by conducting research using surveys whereby responses could be analysed to determine the average level of language proficiency or the distribution of socioeconomic status among Congolese participants. The value this will bring to research and this immigrant group is that we will understand what is common among Congolese immigrant families in South Africa. For example, researchers could discover typical challenges that impact these families or factors and variables that are consistently associated with better outcomes concerning the adaptation of Congolese families in South Africa. This information can provide a foundational understanding of the experiences of these families and help identify key areas that need further research or assist in creating tailor-made interventions that are effective among this group. Furthermore, qualitative research makes use of statistical analysis in the context of this research with the intention to pursue it further. This analysis can assist with measuring relationships between variables and see what the correlations are between the factors and the ability of Congolese immigrant families to adapt to the South African context.

The sample size of this research project comes with limitations and thus affects the generatability of these research findings yielded by the study. The use of quantitative research will allow for a larger sample size, and this will produce more data and allow researchers to generalize the findings to a broader population of immigrant families beyond the limits of just the specific people who participated in this study. Finally, the incorporation of quantitative research in future studies will allow researchers to get numerical insights into the adaptation and parenting experience of Congolese parents and their children while complimenting the qualitative insights that have been generated.

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that there are insufficient support networks for Congolese immigrant families. It is recommendable that future studies can incorporate the

Congolese community itself through community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodologies. Working together with community members and stakeholders throughout the research process will allow and help identify a more profound insight into the community's strengths and the challenges it encounters. The outcomes of that research can help create strategies to deal with any service deficiencies identified. Most importantly, using the existing resources and networks within the community can enhance the effectiveness and cultural relevance of interventions directed to Congolese immigrant parents and their children. This method would help the Congolese families to be aware of any existing support from institutions such as schools, migration policies that support migrant families and their integration, places for English language acquisition skills, etc that exist outside their community. Adopting this approach can empower Congolese immigrant families in South Africa to become more resilient and take on an active role in shaping their support systems.

Given the challenges faced by Congolese immigrant families in South Africa, it is important to expand research on their parenting practices. Future studies should follow Congolese immigrant children over time to see how their early experiences affect their development and wellbeing. This can help create better policies and programs to support their integration and success. While this study focuses on Congolese immigrants it's also important to look at other immigrant groups. By comparing different communities, we can identify common issues and unique challenges based on factors such as economic status, country of origin, and length of time in South Africa. This information can help create policies that address the needs of various immigrant families. This study only captures a moment in these families' lives. To understand how they adjust over time, we need long-term studies that follow families for years. This can show how parenting styles change and what effects they have on children. Such research can reveal how immigrants integrate into their new society and what helps them succeed. We should also study how relationships between immigrant parents and their children change over time. These relationships evolve as both generations go through different life stages and face external challenges. Since many immigrant children are still young there's little information on how these relationships develop as they grow up. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for future research. Researchers should use long-term studies to track immigrants over time to see if changes are due to aging or adapting to a new place. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's 'chronosystem,' which focuses on how time affects development. Understanding this factor is key to knowing the real impact of migration. To better understand parenting in Congolese immigrant families, we should explore and document the strengths and support systems within

these communities. Using methods like participatory action research (PAR) can help establish and improve parenting programs with input from community members. This approach encourages active engagement from parents and young adults ensuring their experiences shape the study's outcomes. Using culturally appropriate terms based on participants' descriptions will capture the details of parenting practices in this context. Social institutions and professionals significantly impact the immigrant experience in South Africa. Future research could benefit from interdisciplinary teams studying immigrant groups and their parents. This approach could lead to a better understanding of these communities and more effective support for them.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

This study has provided understanding on how Congolese immigrants adapt in South Africa and deal with acculturation challenges. Despite some limitations noted by the researchers in the complex dynamics they face while adjusting to new social settings especially in areas, like parenting and cultural identity exploration, the results show that Congolese immigrants demonstrate an ability to adapt and meet the specific needs of their host community. The flexibility demonstrated here shows an understanding of the situations and difficulties in South Africa that aligns with existing research, on immigrant integration (Berry, 2007). The research emphasizes the thoughtful approach immigrants take when adjusting their parenting style by blending customs with modern societal standards. The equilibrium described by our study participants is in line with the argument (Berry, 2007; Portes, 1997) indicating that immigrant parents frequently blend their own customs with some of the customs in the host countries they have settled in. The study highlights the challenges faced by Congolese parents as they adapt to the breakdown of traditional support systems. This situation encourages a reconsideration of parenting approaches in response, to what Foner (2009) characterizes as cultural conflict. The process of adjustment goes beyond family life and includes young adults from Congo who are children of immigrants raised in south Africa who are trying to fit in while keeping their cultural traditions. They face challenges with language, education, and social acceptance.

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## **Appendix 1 – Information Letter**

### **Dear Potential participant**

I, Andiswa Tshibangu, am a PhD candidate at the University of KwaZulu-Natal Howard college campus in the School of Social Sciences. I am currently undertaking a research study titled “The lived experience of Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa”. This study is based on the parenting experiences of immigrant couples from Congo living in South Africa, who are raising their children in this country, furthermore this research seeks to explore the adaptation young adult Congolese who were raised in South Africa by their Congolese parents.

I am looking for married couples who would be willing to participate in the study, which would include an interview at the participants’ convenience. I am also looking for young adult children of Congolese immigrants that were raised in South Africa

Criteria for participation include:

- Married Immigrant Couples from Congo with at least 1 child being raised in South Africa
- OR
- Congolese Young adult child (18-25) raised by Congolese immigrant parents in South Africa

All names and other identifying information about the participants will be kept confidential. If you or anyone you know would like to participate, please contact me either [REDACTED] or 211514757@stu.ukzn.ac.za

In advance, thanks for your help. I look forward to talking to you!

Andiswa Tshibangu

School of Social Sciences

University of KwaZulu-Natal

## **Appendix 2- Informed consent**

### **APPENDIX A: STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT**

Dear Potential Participant

My name is Andiswa Tshibangu from the University of KwaZulu Natal, Anthropology department. My contact details are as follows: email-[211514757@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:211514757@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

You are being invited to consider participating in a study titled: **Parenting in migration: The lived experience of Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa.**

#### **Purpose of the study**

The research aims to gain an understanding of how immigration impacts the family life of Congolese couples and their young adult children. This research is focused on how parenting in the South African context affects their parenting and how their children adapt to a new culture.

#### **Study Procedures**

The data will be collected by means of an interview. The interview will be conducted either at your church, home, or a public place of your choosing. The interview is expected to be an hour and will be based on questions that aim to capture your experience of parenting in migration under the South African context. Information shared and collected from this interview will be kept confidential your real name will not be mentioned in the dissertation or any publication that might result from this study. With your permission the interview will be audio recorded for the purposes of referring to it when reporting information from the study. The audio will also be transcribed.

#### **Risks and Benefits**

There are no major risks involved in this study as it involves verbal interviews and written text where questions related to your experience of being a parent in migration/child raised in migration will be asked. If you are disturbed by any question or unable to continue with the interview you may choose not to respond to the question, postpone the interview or discontinue this study without any negative consequences. Your name will be kept anonymous using pseudonyms throughout the data collection, write up of the thesis and subsequent possible publications of the research findings.

The research provides an opportunity for you to reflect on your experiences raising children in South Africa/ being raised as a Congolese immigrant child in South Africa, which may lead to a new awareness of benefits and challenges. Although there may be no other direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the results gained from your participation may help families in similar circumstances understand their situation in the future. The research will also provide members of the wider community with awareness and a better understanding of immigrant families.

This study has been ethically reviewed and approved by the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at (██████████) or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

**HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001 Durban 4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557- Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: [HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za)

Participation in this study is voluntary, you may, at any stage, withdraw from this interview or choose not to answer any of the questions that you may not be comfortable with. For this research study your comments will be anonymous unless you request that your personal information be revealed and used. I will make all possible efforts to preserve confidentiality including using pseudonyms and arranging a secure place for data storage. Information gathered through this study may be published in academic journals and presented orally. But here too your confidentiality will be maintained. The interviews will be at least an hour per session.

Lastly, you will not incur any costs during this study. All data related expenses to facilitate online interviews should direct contact interviews not be possible will be paid by the researcher.

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## **CONSENT**

I have been informed about the study entitled.

I understand the purpose and procedures of the study.

I have been given an opportunity to answer questions about the study and have had answers to my satisfaction.

I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without affecting any of the benefits that I usually am entitled to.

If I have any further questions/concerns or queries related to the study I understand that I may contact the researcher at 211514757@stu.ukzn.ac.za

If I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

### **HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION**

Research Office, Westville Campus

Govan Mbeki Building

Private Bag X 54001 Durban, 4000

KwaZulu-Natal, SOUTH AFRICA

Tel: 27 31 2604557 - Fax: 27 31 2604609

Email: HSSREC@ukzn.ac.za

#### **Additional consent, where applicable**

I hereby provide consent to:

Audio-record my interview YES / NO

Video-record my interview YES / NO

Use of my photographs for research purposes YES / NO

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**Signature of Participant**

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**Date**

## **Appendix 3-Parents Interview guide**

### **Section A: Demographics**

**Age of participant at the time of interview**

**Occupation/Job**

**Number of years living in South Africa**

**Number of children you have**

**Motivating factors to move and raise children in South Africa**

- What made you choose to come to live in South Africa?
- Prior to moving to South Africa, did you think raising your children in South Africa would make parenting easier? Please elaborate.
- Were your expectations of what led you to come to South Africa met? How so?

**Parenting Principles**

- Please explain and describe what kind of parent you are
- What do you think influences the type of parent that you are?
- What do you consider to be good and bad qualities of a parent?
- Do you have any of these qualities? Please explain further
- What are some of the important rules that you expect your children to follow?
- What happens if they don't follow them?

**Acculturation**

- Do you regard South Africa as "home?" Please explain.
- Do you and your family visit your country of origin? How often? If not, why?
- Do you parent your children the same way as children are parented in Congo? Elaborate why it remains the same or changes?
- What are the main values that parents in your country teach their children?

- Are there any South African parenting practices that have influenced your way of parenting?
- Share any differences between DRC and South Africa and the influence they have on you as a parent?
- Have you deliberately made these changes to your parenting cognitions or unconsciously?
- Do you and your children maintain Congolese culture and heritage? Please elaborate
- Are there any aspects of culture that you have adopted in South Africa? Please share details
- Have you gained any resources since migrating to South Africa that facilitate your ability to parent your children effectively?

#### Experience of raising children in South Africa

- Do you experience any challenges raising children in South Africa? Please elaborate using examples
- Do you have any positive experience of raising your children in South Africa? Please use examples to explain
- Are there any notable differences and similarities of how children are raised between DRC and South Africa? Please share using examples.

#### **Social support and ties to country of origin**

- Do you have any other family members or relatives here in South Africa?
- Do you spend time together? Please elaborate
- What role does your social network play or influence in your parenting journey?
- How do you teach your children about Congolese culture? What is the commonly

spoken language at home? How fluent are your children in your Congolese language?

### **Raising children in South Africa**

- What concerns you the most about your children growing up in SA?
- In a perfect world, how would you make sure that you have everything you need to raise your children exactly how you would like, while here in SA?
- Suppose that you have properly taught your children in both Congolese and South African culture. When you evaluate his/her behaviour, which cultural mentality they mostly show? How do they consider themselves, being Congolese or South Africa?
- Do you feel you and your spouse made the right choice to raise your children in South Africa? Please explain your answer.
- What do you think is important for other immigrant parents who are considering raising their children in South Africa? What should they know beforehand?
- Do you have something more to say that I didn't ask but which you think important in parenting experience?

## **Appendix 4- Young adult children Interview guide**

### **Interview Questions-Young adult Children**

**Name**

**Age**

**Male or female?**

**Were you born in South Africa?**

**How old were you when you first came to south Africa?**

**Are you a student? Or are you employed?**

### **Interview questions**

- 1) Where are you from?
- 2) What do you think about Congo (food, people, and languages)?
- 3) Do you speak your parents' home language or any language from Congo?
- 4) Do you and your parents have conversation about Congo? What topics do you cover?
- 5) What are your experiences of being raised in South Africa? Which ones do you like & dislike?
- 6) In your experiences and understanding, what are the differences between your Congolese traditions and South African cultures?
- 7) Do you identify more with South African way of life or Congolese culture? Explain
- 8) While growing up in South Africa, were there any expectations from your parents to uphold Congolese cultural values? if yes what are they? were you able to uphold them?
- 9) What would make your experience of growing up in South Africa better?
- 10) Do you have friends who are South Africans? If yes, was it easy making them? If no, why don't you have South African friends?

- 11) Do you think your parents made the right choice about bringing you up in South Africa? Support your answer?
- 12) Would you raise your future children in South Africa? Why?
- 13) Do you have any plans of returning to Congo? Please elaborate why or why not?
- 14) Do you speak any South African language? If not, why? If yes, how did you learn?
- 15) What are some of the conflicts you experience with your parents? How do you resolve them?
- 16) Has being a Congolese raised in South Africa affected how you define yourself/your identity? Explain how?
- 17) Do you relate to your family members that remained in Congo? How do you differ? How are you similar? Explain
- 18) What would you say to other youth from other cultures/countries who are growing up in South Africa?
- 19) Do you go with your family to Congolese events? What are some of the activities that take place there?

## Appendix 5 – Gatekeeper Letter

### SOUND OF THE TRUMPET CHURCH



**Date: 23 December 2021**

**Dear Mrs. Tshibangu,**

The study titled Parenting in migration: The lived experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa, was reviewed by our church committee.

Your proposal to recruit and do your research at Sound of the trumpet church has been approved. We ask you to call ahead before coming to do your research so we can allocate you a time slot so you can be introduced to our church members and explain your study to them.

Please note that you are required to set your own times to do interviews for your study, they cannot be done during church time and church activities.

We welcome you and look forward to working with you.

**Yours faithfully,**

**Pastor Franck Mushid**



Mobile: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

Address: 30 Field street, Kingsfield, Durban 4001

## Appendix 6- Ethical Clearance letter



19 January 2022

**Andiswa Prettyangel Tshibangu (211514757)**  
School of Social Sciences  
Howard College Campus

Dear AP Tshibangu,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00003709/2021

**Project title:** Parenting in migration: The lived experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa

**Degree:** PhD

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 22 November 2021 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

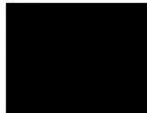
This approval is valid until 19 January 2023.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

All research conducted during the COVID-19 period must adhere to the national and UKZN guidelines.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



**Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)**

/ms

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee  
UKZN Research Ethics Office Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000  
Tel: +27 31 260 8350 / 4557 / 3587  
Website: <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics/>

Founding Campuses: Edgewood Howard College Medical School Pietermaritzburg Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix 7- letter from the editor

25 August 2025

**TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN**

**RE: Parenting in migration: The lived experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa**

I hereby confirm that I, Prem Michelle Chetty (Editor and Proofreader), have commenced editing the thesis titled 'Parenting in migration: The lived experiences of Congolese parents and their young adult children living in South Africa' by student **Andiswa Prettyangel Tshibangu (211514757)**.

The manuscript is being edited for all English related typographical, grammatical and formatting errors as well as editorial layout. A plagiarism check will not be conducted.

The edited manuscript will be returned to the Andiswa Tshibangu on 27 August 2025.

Please contact me on [chettymp@gmail.com](mailto:chettymp@gmail.com) for any queries related to the editing of the document.

Sincerely,



Prem Michelle Chetty

Senior Editor

**PROOFIT**

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PROOFIT

EDITING & PROOFREADING SERVICES

Email:  Cell: 

## Appendix 8 Turnitin Slip

### Andiswa Thesis

#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

<b>4</b> %	%	<b>4</b> %	<b>0</b> %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

#### PRIMARY SOURCES

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