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ABSTRACT

The socio-political and economic crisis in Venezuela has led to a substantial influx of migrants to Trinidad and Tobago, as millions seek refuge and a more stable environment. The islands currently accommodate a significant population of Venezuelan migrant children who encounter significant challenges in obtaining high-quality education due to socioeconomic inequalities, legal constraints, and language barriers. This study aims to examine the legal and legislative barriers, socio-economic variables, and existing educational strategies which affect the ability of migrant Venezuelan children to access education in Trinidad. The study involves qualitative analysis of secondary data sources, including newspaper articles, research papers, and journal publications, to explore three main chapters: "The Socioeconomic Context," "The Political Landscape," and "The Education System." The findings reveal significant challenges that are worsened by the political climate and deficiencies within the education system, requiring immediate amendments to legislation and a more inclusive educational approach. To effectively address these constraints and ensure universal access to education for all children, proactive measures including stakeholder involvement, teacher training, and coordinated efforts with international organizations are required. These approaches ultimately contribute to developing societal cohesion and sustainable development.

Keywords: children, migrant, education, language barrier, legal constraint, socio-economic variables.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Venezuela's socio-political and economic crisis is the primary driver of the current migration wave from Venezuela to Trinidad and Tobago. Millions of people have been compelled to leave Venezuela in search of safety and stability as a result of the country's crisis, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. In quest of safety and a better life, more than 7.7 million people have fled Venezuela. More than 6.5 million of these individuals have been housed in Latin American and Caribbean nations (UNHCR). A number of Venezuelan migrants and refugees have found it challenging to reconstruct their lives and assimilate into host societies around the region as a result of the rising cost of living, the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and high unemployment rates. Not only do half of all migrants and refugees in Latin America and the Caribbean lack access to safe and decent housing, but many also cannot afford three meals a day. Many Venezuelans turn to begging, indebtedness, or survival sex in order to get food or stay out of poverty (UNHCR). For Venezuelan migrants seeking work, education, and family safety, Trinidad and Tobago has emerged as a desirable destination due to its relative proximity and perceived economic stability. There were about 44,800 Venezuelan migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers residing in Trinidad and Tobago as of November 2023. As of 2024, the islands were home to 1.5 million people, making this the highest per capita population of Venezuelans in the Caribbean (ACAPS). Consequently, a large number of migrant children from Venezuela are now living in Trinidad and Tobago, where they frequently encounter significant obstacles in their quest for a quality education because of socioeconomic differences, legal constraints, and linguistic barriers. The needs and rights of migrant children in Trinidadian

society regarding schooling are urgently needed, since the number of Venezuelan migrants keeps growing.

Rationale

This research is crucial as it provides a new perspective on the ongoing migrant crisis in Trinidad. This study aims to provide new insights and add to existing literature by focusing on the often-overlooked educational aspect of the migrant crisis. By analysing recent developments and data, the study seeks to address factors hindering educational access and attainment for the migrant children population, including language barriers, legal restrictions, and socio-economic disparities. The findings could inform practices and policies regarding the education of migrant children, emphasising their specific needs and rights, leading to targeted interventions and support mechanisms for educational equity and inclusion. Furthermore, this research can contribute to broader discussions on migrant integration and social cohesion in Trinidadian society, fostering a more supportive environment for all residents, regardless of their background or origin.

Thesis Statement

Within the context of Trinidad and Tobago, it can be argued that Venezuelan migrant children encounter barriers in accessing education due to socioeconomic factors, political regulations and limitations within the education system.

Parameters

This research required for this study was conducted within the months of October to November 2023 and is limited to the island of Trinidad of the country Trinidad and Tobago. It explores a social perspective where it focuses on the challenges, impacts and policy implications that are associated with the ongoing migrant crisis with regards to accessing education. Lastly, it focuses on the community of Venezuelan migrants, documented and undocumented, who have children that are facing difficulty in accessing education.

Research Questions

- What are the legal and policy barriers that prevent migrant Venezuelan children from accessing education in Trinidad and Tobago?
- What are the socio-economic factors impacting educational access for these children?
- How can educational programs and interventions be tailored to address the unique needs of migrant Venezuelan children?

Research Objectives

- To identify and analyse the legal and policy barriers that hinder migrant Venezuelan children from accessing education in Trinidad.
- To examine the socio-economic factors influencing the educational access of migrant Venezuelan children in Trinidad.
- To assess existing educational programs and interventions aimed at migrant children and determine their effectiveness in addressing the unique needs of Venezuelan children in Trinidad.

- To propose recommendations specifically designed to meet the educational needs of migrant Venezuelan children in Trinidad, considering their cultural background, language proficiency, and socio-economic status.

Methodology

For data collection, secondary sources of data will be utilised. These sources include newspaper articles, website articles, research papers and journal publications. These sources were accessed through internet searches and online repositories. The genre of this study is a social study, and it involves a qualitative examination of textual data. The collected data will be analysed qualitatively to explore the challenges, impacts, and policy implications associated with the ongoing migrant crisis concerning access to education for Venezuelan children in Trinidad and Tobago. Textual data from the selected secondary sources will be carefully analysed to extract relevant information and insights regarding legal and policy barriers, socio-economic factors, and educational programs and interventions tailored to address the unique needs of migrant Venezuelan children.

Chapter Outline

Before delving into the specific chapters, the study will begin with a comprehensive review of literature. This section will thoroughly examine and compare secondary sources of scholarly literature related to the migrant crisis and access to education for Venezuelan children in Trinidad and Tobago. Following this, Chapter 1 “The Socioeconomic Context” will focus on the socioeconomic factors hindering access to education for migrant Venezuelan children. Through qualitative data analysis techniques, this chapter will identify and analyse the various socioeconomic barriers affecting educational access. Moving forward, Chapter 2 “The Political

landscape” will explore the current policies and legislation concerning education access for migrant Venezuelan children. Utilising a qualitative examination of textual data from relevant sources, this chapter aims to identify existing policies and their implications. Lastly, Chapter 3 “The Education System” will assess the current and future education programs in place for migrant Venezuelan children. Through qualitative analysis, this chapter will evaluate the effectiveness of educational programs and interventions tailored to address the unique needs of migrant children, while also considering potential areas for improvement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

i. Barriers to Education regarding Venezuelan migrants.

Adbul-Majied, S et al. (2022) aimed to identify significant concerns that the Trinidad and Tobago government should address in order to provide support for young Venezuelan migrant children in early childhood settings. Adbul-Majied et al. conducted a comprehensive analysis of data obtained from policy documents, government releases, peer-reviewed articles, and press reports. As a result, six main themes were identified: policy gaps, fear/xenophobia, resource limits, familial support, political risks, and child rights infringements. These findings emphasised the systemic problems that are making the challenges experienced by Venezuelan migrant children worse. They also highlighted the urgent need for intervention to prevent psychological and social concerns that are impeding their potential for growth. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the present fragmented strategy in dealing with the Venezuelan migration problem has resulted in inadequate support for migrant children throughout the previous five years. The recommendations brought forward, such as greater funding, improved teacher training, and the allocation of support staff, provide useful insights into policy implications and focused actions to tackle educational inequalities. Nevertheless, the study recognised constraints, such as the absence of empirical investigation explicitly centred on the early life requirements of Venezuelan migrant children in Trinidad and Tobago. Furthermore, the study was limited to data obtained from documents written in English, which restricted the possibility of gaining insights from sources written in Spanish. To further investigate this topic, the study proposed that future research should utilise an explanatory design and include interviews with migrants. This would allow for a more thorough knowledge of the difficulties experienced by Venezuelan migrant children in Trinidad and Tobago's educational system.

Caarls K. et al. (2021) sought to thoroughly analyse the influence of migration on educational outcomes, identify obstacles to education for migrant children, and acknowledge successful policies and approaches to tackle these problems. Caarls et al. conducted a comprehensive global evaluation from 2000 to 2020, analysing information from various sources such as peer-reviewed journals, online publications, books, chapters, and grey literature from governmental and non-governmental organisations. The methodology utilised a meticulous approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods to guarantee a thorough comprehension of the subject matter. The review findings indicate that migrant children experience significant shortcomings in schooling, such as lower rates of enrollment, higher rates of dropping out, and inferior academic achievement in comparison to their native peers. The discrepancies were ascribed to multiple factors including language hurdles, discrimination, inadequate access to educational resources, and poor support systems. In addition, the study emphasised effective strategies and actions to address these difficulties, such as the utilisation of online educational platforms and the establishment of cooperative efforts between global organisations and local non-governmental organisations. The significance of this study resides in its ability to provide valuable information about the educational requirements of migrant children, which is in line with UNICEF's mission to advocate for the rights and welfare of children worldwide.

The discussed studies offer significant insights into the barriers encountered by migrant children in accessing school and propose solutions for effectively resolving these problems. Abdul-Majied et al. specifically examine the situation of Venezuelan migrant children within a local context, whereas Caarls et al. offer a broader, worldwide outlook on migration and its impact on schooling. Both studies highlight shared barriers, such as linguistic difficulties, prejudice,

insufficient access to resources, and absence of support networks, which result in lower enrollment rates, greater dropout rates, and inferior academic performance among migrant children in comparison to their native counterparts. Furthermore, both studies highlight the significance of governmental actions, such as proper funding, enhanced teacher training, and the employment of online educational platforms, to effectively tackle these barriers. In addition, they acknowledge the necessity for additional research to further aid the comprehension of the educational requirements of migrant children and contribute to current policy and practice.

ii. Venezuelan Migration in Trinidad

S. Sookram (2021), examined the opinions of Trinbagonian inhabitants towards Venezuelan migrants in Trinidad and Tobago from 2018 to 2021. The objective was to get insights into the perceptions, apprehensions, and treatment of Venezuelan migrants within the local society. The data collected from a questionnaire distributed to 123 participants using Google Forms, comprising 92 females and 31 males, was analysed using both qualitative methods such as thematic coding and quantitative methods such as numerical analysis. The results unveiled a range of perspectives regarding male and female migrants, including both favourable and unfavourable perceptions. Favourable perceptions of male migrants were associated with characteristics such as industriousness and a strong focus on family, whereas unfavourable perceptions depicted them as disagreeable and maybe involved in criminal behaviour. Positive perceptions of female migrants emphasised their resilience and strong focus on family, whereas unfavourable perceptions portrayed them as susceptible to exploitation and discrimination. Trinbagonians have expressed concerns about the economic burden caused by the arrival of migrants, the potential for the spread of illnesses during the ongoing pandemic, abuses of human

rights, and a rise in criminal activities. Sookram emphasised the significance of comprehending and dealing with the intricacies related to migration, offering valuable information for policymakers and educators to enhance their responses and alleviate the difficulties associated with migration.

Chinyere H. (2021), explored the complex situation and perception of identity of Venezuelan refugees who are seeking asylum in Trinidad and Tobago. Chinyere emphasised the difficulties they encountered in relation to migration policy, border control, government authority, and international human rights and protection. By conducting interviews and participant observation in the waiting room of the UNHCR office in Port of Spain, Trinidad, this study revealed the instability of globally recognised classifications like "refugee" and "asylum seeker" because of economic factors that compel people to migrate against their will. The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, gathering statistical data through surveys and anthropological-style information through informal interviews and participant observation. The analysis highlighted the restrictions of international law in offering enduring protection for displaced individuals, especially in small island governments such as Trinidad and Tobago. The situation emphasised the conflict between the specific circumstances of the region and the worldwide responsibilities for humanitarian aid, as the government's ability to help migrants was limited by geographical and economic factors. Chinyere highlighted the significance of comprehending the motivations and experiences of migrants in order to establish environments that offer enhanced protection and integration within the globalised contemporary world. It advocated for policies that surpass simple categorizations and instead tackle the multifaceted needs of displaced populations.

Reis, M. (2007) examined the frequently disregarded significance of migration in the discussion on development in Trinidad and Tobago. This discussion usually prioritises economic and infrastructural advancements, while giving little consideration to migration at the governmental level. Migration, although significant in terms of both sending and receiving migrants in the Caribbean region, has not been extensively discussed in the context of development. Reis focused on the substantial emigration of highly educated individuals and trained professionals, which has led to a brain drain problem that has attracted the government's attention. Migrant communities within Trinidad and Tobago and their contributions to socio-economic and socio-cultural development received less attention. The objective of the research was to analyse both emigration and immigration to Trinidad and Tobago, focusing specifically on the phenomenon of medical brain drain and the movement of professions such as teachers. The focus was mostly on the key migrant groups, specifically those from Venezuela, Guyana, Grenada, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The importance of migration in socio-economic and socio-cultural development was acknowledged, highlighting the need for appropriate policies to manage, regulate, and facilitate migration. Reis highlighted the necessity of implementing strategies to safeguard the fundamental rights of migrants, counteract the illegal activities of smuggling and trafficking, and foster collaborations and the development of skills, especially in relation to initiatives such as the CSME (CARICOM Single Market and Economy). In addition, Reis emphasised the psychosocial aspect of migration, specifically addressing the difficulties experienced by "barrel" children whose parents migrated for employment. This highlights the complex effects of migration on long-term progress and advancement. Reis, M. recommends implementing measures at both the national and regional levels, such as tackling the issue of

brain drain, harnessing remittances for development purposes, and strengthening data gathering efforts through regional and international collaboration, namely within CARICOM.

Berry, J (1997) introduced a theoretical framework for studying the process of acculturation and adaptation, using research studies to summarise key results and conclusions. Berry emphasised the impact of both collective and individual elements on psychological adaptation to an entirely new culture. Group-level elements consisted of national immigration and acculturation laws, beliefs prevalent in the dominant society, and social support. On the other hand, individual-level components comprised various acculturation approaches. The utilisation of integrationist or bi-cultural acculturation tactics was found to be associated with more favourable outcomes in comparison to assimilation, separation, or marginalisation. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these techniques relied on the level of society approval and the personal choices of individuals. Berry highlighted the interplay between population-level and individual-level elements in influencing psychological adjustments. In addition, Berry explores the understanding of individual results in the process of adapting to a new culture, proposing a specific order or ranking that starts with developing social abilities and ends with managing stressors and potential mental disorders. Although the majority of persons undergoing acculturation demonstrated favourable adjustments, the process was not consistently straightforward, highlighting both possible concerns and opportunities for opposition. The essay highlighted the importance of conducting extensive longitudinal research to gain a thorough understanding of the acculturation process and its outcomes in various cultural settings.

The scholarly research on Venezuelan migration in Trinidad and Tobago reveals an in-depth insight of the difficulties and intricacies encountered by migrants and the local community.

Research conducted by Sookram and Chinyere demonstrates that there are various local perspectives on Venezuelan migrants, showcasing a range of positive and negative opinions towards both male and female migrants. These perceptions are shaped by elements such as diligence, tenacity, and considerations of financial strain and public well-being. On the other hand, Reis places emphasis on the governmental response and policy implications, highlighting the necessity of suitable legislation to oversee migration, safeguard the rights of migrants, and tackle socio-economic difficulties. Berry's theoretical framework provides valuable insights into the process of acculturation, highlighting the significance of both collective and individual elements in promoting psychological adjustment to a new culture. These studies highlight the significance of comprehensive strategies to tackle the complex issues related to Venezuelan migration, encompassing social, economic, and psychological elements. These strategies should aim to promote the integration and well-being of migrants in Trinidad and Tobago.

iii. Education Systems in Trinidad

Charran, C. and Seetahal, K. (2018) explored the concept of inclusive education in Trinidad and Tobago, highlighting the fundamental entitlement to education for all students, including those with disabilities, as acknowledged by international treaties and agreements. Although the right to inclusive education is recognised in theory, its practical implementation in Trinidad and Tobago has encountered various obstacles. The obstacles varied from limitations in resources to unfavourable attitudes among teachers and societal prejudice towards individuals with impairments. Charran and Seetahal discussed past endeavours to establish inclusive education throughout the 1980s, which were impeded by a scarcity of qualified special education instructors and support structures. Charran and Seetahal aimed to shed light on the present

condition of inclusive education in the country by examining existing literature and the current national policy on persons with disabilities. It is necessary for researchers, politicians, and the government to give more importance to the special needs population by focusing on research, financing, resources, and law. They also highlighted the importance of bridging the disparity between the theoretical requirements for inclusive education and its actual execution on a national scale. Charran and Seetahal stressed the importance of comprehending the specific circumstances of Trinidad and Tobago in regards to inclusive education. They also advocated for scholarly investigation in the area to create efficient models for inclusive education, not only for Trinidad and Tobago but also for the broader Caribbean region, which had insufficient research on the subject.

De Lisle, J et al. (2009) discussed the important role of the education system in fostering human capital growth, with a specific focus on Trinidad and Tobago. De Lisle et al. highlighted the persistent challenges of inadequate and unequal development of human capital in the country. De Lisle et al. focused on the inherent elitism and focus on exams in the education system that originated from British colonial authority. This system is characterised by the division of schools and the implementation of procedures such as academic monitoring, streaming, and setting. Although the government has made significant attempts to create a smooth system, there is still strong popular support for a system that treats various groups differently, especially when it comes to the top 20% of students. De Lisle et al. raised concerns about whether the existing system of education, which caters to distinct ability groups, effectively meets the needs of all students and aligns with the country's broader development objectives. The analysis utilised international assessments such as PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study) and PISA(Programme for International Student Assessment) to examine and compare the results of

Trinidad and Tobago's education system. It highlighted the importance of implementing effective compensatory education programmes and making significant changes to address the disparities in academic achievement that are influenced by factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, and living in rural areas. De Lisle et al. proposed the reduction of early tracking and streaming, as well as the implementation of comprehensive teacher retraining programmes to better assist children at risk or with special education requirements. These measures aim to enhance educational fairness and foster the creation of higher quality, more equal human capital for national progress.

Koehler, C. et al. (2019) analysed the results of comparative research on the academic achievements of immigrant youth and second-generation individuals in European countries. Koehler et al. compared these findings with the actions taken by European educational systems to address the integration difficulties caused by the arrival of refugee and newly arrived children since 2014. Koehler, et al. utilised insights gained from previous interactions with immigrant children to assess the extent to which contemporary educational approaches are consistent with these insights and effectively tackle the unique difficulties encountered by refugee adolescents. The article highlighted several crucial points: the significance of immersing immigrant and refugee children in mainstream education rather than keeping them separate, the acknowledgement that many refugee children are likely to permanently stay in host countries, the requirement for institutional responses that can handle the continuous arrival of diverse immigrant children, the understanding that education goes beyond compulsory schooling and should cater to late developers and young adults, the necessity of ensuring that laws regarding foreigners and asylum seekers do not impede educational and vocational opportunities, and the universal human right of minors to education, regardless of their legal status or background.

Koehler, et al. promoted the idea of granting refugee children prompt and unrestricted access to education, without any kind of discrimination and irrespective of their legal status. It emphasised the significance of creating educational environments that are supportive and inclusive.

Maharaj-Landaeta, S. (2019) sought to present the firsthand accounts of educators who interacted with migrant children in Trinidad & Tobago. The objective was to provide valuable insights for educators worldwide who are faced with similar populations. Maharaj-Landaeta emphasised the distinct difficulties encountered by educators who offer alternate educational options for migrant children unable to attend regular schools owing to legal limitations. By utilising a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the research demonstrated the significance of recognising the existence of migrant children and addressing their comprehensive requirements, including their educational needs. The report highlighted the societal obligation to guarantee that every child is not excluded, promoting inclusive measures and government assistance. The findings emphasised the importance for Trinidad & Tobago to prioritise the educational requirements of this disadvantaged group and actively work towards their integration and inclusion. Nevertheless, the study recognised that it had limitations in its concentration on teachers' viewpoints. It proposed the necessity for more extensive research that includes different stakeholders and utilises various methodologies to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties and possible solutions related to the education of migrant children in Trinidad.

The discussion of education systems in Trinidad and Tobago encompasses a comprehensive examination of inclusive education, the development of human capital, and the difficulties encountered by migrant communities. Charran and Seetahal explore the theoretical right to inclusive education for all students, highlighting the importance of bridging the gap between

theory and practice through extensive policy changes and academic research. De Lisle et al. analyse the elitism and exam-oriented structure of the education system and argue for reforms to rectify inequalities in academic performance and promote fairer development of human capital. Koehler et al. expand upon the discussion around immigrant integration, highlighting the significance of inclusive educational settings and the inherent right to education for refugee children, regardless of their legal standing. Finally, Maharaj-Landaeta offers firsthand accounts of the difficulties encountered by educators who work with migrant students. She emphasises the significance of implementing inclusive strategies and receiving government support to meet their educational requirements and facilitate their integration. These studies emphasise the need for extensive reforms, inclusive policies, and specific interventions to guarantee fair and equal access to high-quality education for all children in Trinidad and Tobago, particularly those from marginalised and migrant backgrounds.

CHAPTER 1- THE SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

In Trinidad, Venezuelan migrants encounter a plethora of challenges in order to access their basic needs and rights. The most recent development in these challenges is navigating the access to education for the children of the Venezuelan migrants. In the socioeconomic context, factors such as legal vulnerability, lack of employment opportunities, discrimination and xenophobic attitudes and a language barrier significantly contribute to the hindrance in accessing education.

1.1 Legal vulnerability

The government of Trinidad and Tobago affirms that they have registered approximately 16,400 migrants, which signifies a significant amount per capita for the country (Herbert 28). However, this still leaves a considerable amount of people unregistered as there were approximately 44,800 Venezuelan migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the country as of November 2023. This places these undocumented migrants in a state of legal vulnerability.

When considering the opportunities for documentation, asylum-seeker rights granted by the UNHCR only guarantee non-refoulement and depend on nation-states and law enforcement to maintain this right (Herbert 26). The UNHCR Refugee status is also limiting as it only permits the rights to not be deported, to be permitted free movement in the host country and family reunification (Herbert 26). Therefore, registration through the government of Trinidad and Tobago improved their status more effectively than the refugee and asylum-seeker status granted by the UNHCR (Herbert 26).

However, based on research conducted by Herbert (22), the majority of the Venezuelan respondents noted that they experienced fear of being deported despite having a safe arrival and

being registered. This sentiment was due to anxiety of police officers disregarding asylum seeker rights and documentation status and following the orders of the government to detain or deport “illegal” migrants (Herbert 22). In another study conducted by Sookram, it was discovered that many migrants also fear registration as Immigration and Border Control become aware of their presence and result in a fear of deportation during the registration process. This therefore eventually affects the ability of the migrants to access education as they are restricted to their homes and limit their movement to avoid immigration detention and deportation. Abdul-Majied and Kinkead-Clark (3) reference a study that indicated due to this fear of deportation and limitation of movement would result in low attendance at NGO centers that were established to deliver rudimentary education. An undocumented status also inhibits the opportunity to access formal education as registration is one of the requirements to qualify for enrollment of migrant students into public schools. This will be discussed further in the second chapter that highlights the political landscape.

1.2 Lack of employment opportunities

The Venezuelan migrants also battle with a lack of employment opportunities which can directly and indirectly restrict access to education for students. This can in turn be attributed to many factors. Changes that come with the migration process can affect the economic success of migrants. In the article of “Immigration, Acculturation, and Adaptation”, it is affirmed that “economic changes can involve a general loss of status or new employment opportunities for the group” (the immigrants) (Berry 17). In reference to Kunz refugee theory, it was noted that there are two main types of refugees, the anticipatory and the acute refugee (Abdul-Majied and Kinkead-Clark 6). Unlike anticipatory refugees who assess the political landscape and migrate

before, acute refugees usually enter “with limited financial means, limited to no knowledge of the dominant language” and often are disadvantaged in the regard that they have difficulty integrating into society to earn an income (Abdul-Majied and Kinkead-Clark 6). In most cases, parents are unable to secure employment resulting in their families living in poverty (Abdul-Majied and Kinkead-Clark 3). In other cases, they can encounter danger in seeking employment. In Trinidad and Tobago, female migrants from various backgrounds are “often lured by offers of legitimate employment” and “are subjected to sex trafficking” (Herbert 18,21).

This economic foundation therefore impacts the opportunities to access education. Many students come from situations where their parents’ inability to work results in a lack of basic necessities (Maharaj-Landaeta 277). In reference to Save the children, teachers noted the trend of students who would have low attendance or eventually drop out as they were needed to contribute to the family income instead (Maharaj-Landaeta 276).

1.3 Discrimination and Xenophobic attitudes

Additionally, instances of discrimination may restrict educational opportunities and inhibit migrants from seeking out opportunities. In 2019 the President of Trinidad and Tobago said that the number of Venezuelan migrants has encouraged xenophobia and racism among citizens of the host country (Abdul-Majied and Kinkead-Clark 11). It is also noted that citizens believed that the migrants would ‘take their jobs’ (Abdul-Majied and Kinkead-Clark 11). Despite efforts made by NGOs to accommodate migrants and their pursuit of education for their children, there are citizens that discriminate against migrants and greet them with hostility. This can in turn inhibit the progression of programs created with the purpose of educating the migrant children and discourage the migrants from seeking these opportunities.

1.4 Language Barrier

As aforementioned, the language barrier can impact the efforts of integration of the migrants into society. This is especially the case when accessing education in a monolingual society such as Trinidad and Tobago. According to Caarls et al, Venezuelan children face difficulty in overcoming language barriers, especially in countries with a dominant language apart from Spanish. In a study that consulted teachers involved in alternative education for migrant students, the teachers identified that students demonstrated a low proficiency in English languages, despite residing in the country for over a year and two-four years in other cases (Maharaj-Landaeta 277). The teachers also noted that students only learn English in a case of absolute necessity, highlighting that they felt embarrassed to speak the language (Maharaj-Landaeta 277). It was then learnt that the students were encouraged to speak Spanish in the home and use English as survival skills to navigate the country (Maharaj-Landaeta 277). This further underscores the sentiment that language facilitates a hindrance to education in reference to a study conducted by Birman et al. that said that “refugee children often have exposure to multiple languages and academic mastery of none” (Maharaj-Landaeta 277).

CHAPTER 2- THE POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

In examining the pursuit of educating Venezuelan students in Trinidad and Tobago, the current political landscape should be considered. The government has taken the step to facilitate the enrollment of migrant students in primary schools and has highlighted the necessary regulations and requirements. However, these present a multitude of limitations that further act as a hindrance for equal access to education.

2.1 Regulations and Requirements

In order to qualify to enter public school, the children were required to satisfy regulations put in place by the government. The Minister of Education, Dr Nyan Gadsby-Dolly affirmed that the ministry has been collaborating with various local and international agencies including the “Living Water Community, the Catholic Education Board (CEBM) and the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)” to facilitate the incorporation of migrants into schools (Lee). Sharon Mangroo, the Chief Executive Officer of the Catholic Education Board of Management (CEBM) shared that the University of the West Indies had developed an instrument to be used to assess the proficiency of the English language of potential students (Catholic TT). She later indicated that only the children that demonstrate an adequate proficiency in the English language as assessed by the University of the West Indies and whose parents are documented and have obtained a permit from the Ministry of National Security would be permitted to attend school (Fletcher). The Minister of Education also ensured through the aforementioned assessment conducted by the UWI, that 100 students were deemed eligible for integration (Lee).

2.2 Limitations

While the efforts of the government prove to be a step in the right direction, they have proven to be limiting in many regards. It is noteworthy that the influx of migrants has placed significant pressure on the law enforcement, legislative and administrative systems of the State (Abdul-Majied and Kinhead-Clark 10). The Draft National Child Policy (13) highlighted that in July 2018, the UNHCR recorded 6,849 registered persons with 508 (7.4%) being children. Despite the eligibility of 100 students for integration, the schools involved in the program can only accommodate a few students before their capacity is exceeded. This further highlights that the government is somewhat restricted in what can be implemented without compromising the wellbeing of both the locals and the migrants. Additionally, one of the most apparent limitations of the initiative is exclusion of the children of undocumented Venezuelans. A refugee policy highlighted that refugees are entitled to several rights which include the access of education (Nakhid and Welch 42). However, many refugees have not been able to benefit from several of these rights which include the access to education (Nakhid and Welch 43). When the disparity between registered and unregistered Venezuelan migrants is considered, it is understood that a significant number of children of various ages are at the risk of being left behind due to their inability to access public education. Many of the children seek alternative educational opportunities such as mentorship provided by the Living Water Community and mentorship facilitated by UWI. However, in reference to the socioeconomic context discussed in the first chapter, various obstacles have resulted in an inability of the migrants to commit to these opportunities or forgo them entirely.

Various literature has highlighted the required urgency in the reform of the existing policies and the implementation of new regulations. The Draft National Child Policy (13) (Ministry of Gender Youth & Child Development 2018) indicated that reform was necessary as it acknowledged that children were not able to enter schools without a student permit and without the parents having a work permit. In efforts to expand access to education, it is imperative that host countries strengthen their systems in order to permit Venezuelans to secure their status and access basic services including education (Camilleri and Hampson 15). Additionally, it is necessary for host communities to adapt, modify and expand the educational programs and initiatives to accommodate the needs of students and consider their contexts (UNESCO).

CHAPTER 3- THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

This chapter aims to evaluate the education system of Trinidad and Tobago. The consideration of this perspective facilitates the assessment of the local education system and their preparedness to incorporate inclusive education. Moreover, this focus identifies potential gaps and highlights the following steps to be taken in permitting access to education for Venezuelan migrant children.

3.1 Local educational system

The education system in Trinidad and Tobago is originally based on the British Model but has advanced notably overtime (Trayte Freeman). The system consists of tiers which include primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Education until the secondary level is compulsory for children and is free (Trayte Freeman). While education is a principal priority of the government, some scholars have criticised its structure and effectiveness. De Lisle et al. (2) have described the education system to be noticeably “elitist and examination-oriented, designed to filter, segregate and retain students based on perceived meritocracy, as defined solely by performance in public examinations”. An education system with this design places a strong emphasis on the performance of students over attention to necessary learning needs and requirements. Thus, it is necessary to consider that with a system that falls short in assessing necessary needs for their local students, how can it accommodate the needs of the migrant student? The nature of the education system proves to be an additional barrier that migrant students encounter in their pursuit of education.

3.2 Barriers in the implementation of inclusive education

A universally acknowledged right of the child is their right to education. This right is independent of their “status, background and current country of residence” (Koehler and Schneider 15). In Trinidad and Tobago, barriers hindering the implementation of inclusive education has raised concern. A study that assessed the state of inclusive education in Trinidad and Tobago with a focus on students with disabilities stated that despite the existence of this right to education there were many obstacles to the incorporation of these rights for disabled students (Charran and Seetahal 108). The barriers highlighted included a lack of resources, lack of teacher preparation and training, negative teacher perceptions and a lack of prioritisation by the government (Charran and Seetahal 108). While this study highlighted inclusive education in the context of disability, a parallel can be drawn between that situation and the ongoing concerns regarding the migrant students. It further underscores that the education system is not equipped to accommodate marginalised groups as it does not consider their unique needs. The study highlighted that the allocated resources were inadequate to accomplish inclusive classrooms (Charran and Seetahal 111).

This sentiment places a focus on the possible lack of prioritisation by the government. In June 2019, the then Minister of Education, Anthony Garcia reiterated that educating the migrant children was not a priority (Maharaj-Landaeta 273). This attitude can be considered one of the barriers that exist within the education system. This reduces confidence in the stakeholders involved to prioritise the educational needs of the migrant students. Moreover, with a lack of priority in this regard, the necessary advancements required to incorporate inclusive education would not take place.

The lack of teacher preparation and training is also a major barrier. Effective professional teacher development is a fundamental issue that teachers of refugees encounter (Save the Children 36). The correct training and support are crucial because in its absence, teachers are more likely to misinterpret the behaviour of students due to misunderstanding their culture, language, or signs of underlying mental health concerns (Save the Children 36). In Trinidad, teachers that were involved in temporary learning centres, including those that possessed over 10 years of teaching experience, highlighted that no amount of teacher training was adequate to ensure their preparedness in helping their students (Maharaj-Landaeta 274). The teachers received training from the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and UNICEF on how to deal with young persons who have experienced trauma which they deemed highly essential (Maharaj-Landaeta 275). However, regarding the teaching of students, the teachers often delivered lessons on a ‘trial and error’ basis and were often required to tweak their strategies and lessons (Maharaj-Landaeta 275). Lastly, the teachers indicated that training in curriculum development should have taken place earlier as they often found themselves building materials and lessons from scratch (Maharaj-Landaeta 275).

3.3 What can be considered moving forward.

It is important to be proactive in the facilitation of education. Koehler and Schneider (14) reiterate that “every period of time not invested in children’s education is wasted time with implications for even higher costs and efforts at later stages”. Therefore, there is significant ground to be covered when considering the education system. It is important for policy makers to utilise a bottom-up approach, taking into consideration the opinions of all stakeholders before a decision is made. Teachers have reiterated that even though they are the stakeholders directly

involved with students, policy makers often disregard their input in the decision-making process and make poorly informed decisions (Maharaj-Landaeta 276). In addition, an effort should be made to find a balance between meeting the needs of the students and stigmatising them. Teachers affirmed that students wanted to be treated normally and disliked being referred to as a ‘refugee child’ (Maharaj-Landaeta 275). The successful implementation of this phase of education would open the door to more opportunities for progression in the future. The UNHCR has declared their commitment to supporting the government in this phase involving Venezuelan children and expressed the opportunities for collaboration in following phases that will hopefully include children registered from the other 41 nationalities present in the country (Lee). Lastly, an educational system that provides access to education for all children would be beneficial for development within the country (De Lisle et al.). It is important to consider that most migrant children will not return to their country of origin (Koehler and Schneider 14). Therefore, it is imperative that countries consider opportunities in managing migration that are beneficial to host communities and migrants (Reis 2007).

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the socioeconomic circumstances in Trinidad and Tobago provide significant obstacles for Venezuelan migrants who are striving to secure educational opportunities for their children. The journey to education is hindered by legal vulnerability, limited economic prospects, prejudice, xenophobic views, and language hurdles. Furthermore, the political environment and the current educational system in Trinidad and Tobago worsen these difficulties instead of providing complete resolutions. Notwithstanding the endeavors of the government and other authorities to streamline the registration process for migrant students, restrictions continue to exist. The omission of undocumented migrant children, along with structural obstacles within the education system, highlights the pressing necessity for policy overhaul and a more comprehensive approach to education.

To effectively tackle these difficulties, it is crucial to take proactive initiatives going forward. Policy formulation should be guided by a bottom-up approach that takes into account the opinions of all stakeholders. Furthermore, it is imperative to provide utmost importance to teacher training and support, while ensuring that migrant kids are not stigmatized, in order to establish inclusive learning environments. Effective cooperation among governmental bodies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is crucial for the development of long-lasting solutions. Ensuring universal access to education for all children, irrespective of their origin or status, not only benefits individual migrants but also adds to the overall development and prosperity of the host country. Given the ongoing phenomenon of migration worldwide, it is crucial to implement inclusive educational policies in order to promote societal unity and accomplish sustainable development objectives.

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