

## The Driving Factors for the Rise of African Student Migration to Russia

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**Abstract.** This study investigates the factors that drive African students to Russia. The number of African students studying in Russia from the 2010/11 to 2022/2023 academic year increased more than fivefold: from 6.7 thousand to 34.4 thousand. The paper was based on an online survey provided to African students between February and November 2023. A sample of 275 African students from 28 countries was used. Findings revealed that the major factors that draw African students to Russia are the quality of education and the quality of life. We compared the quality of education between both genders along with the quality of life. The findings also revealed that females are more interested in the quality of life than males, while males are more interested in the quality of education than females. The findings suggested that policymakers should consider age and previous education as major variables in student migration.

**Keywords:** migration, African students, education, Russia, pull factors

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## Факторы, способствующие росту миграции африканских студентов в Россию

Научная статья

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**Аннотация.** Цель данного исследования – изучить факторы, определяющие приток африканских студентов в Россию. Количество африканских студентов, обучающихся в России, с 2010/11 по 2022/2023 учебный год увеличилось более чем в пять раз: с 6,7 тысячи до 34,4 тысячи. Работа основана на онлайн-опросе, проведенном среди африканских студентов в пе-

*риод с февраля по ноябрь 2023 года. В опросе приняли участие 385 африканских студентов из 28 стран. Результаты показали, что основными факторами, привлекающими африканских студентов в Россию, являются качество образования и качество жизни. Мы сравнили качество образования между представителями обоих полов, а также качество жизни. Результаты также показали, что женщины больше заинтересованы в качестве жизни, чем мужчины, в то время как мужчины больше заинтересованы в качестве образования, чем женщины. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что политикам следует учитывать возраст и предыдущее образование в качестве основных переменных при миграции студентов.*

**Ключевые слова:** миграция; африканские студенты; образование; Россия; факторы притяжения

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### Introduction

International student migration (ISM) is one of the ongoing debates. This debate is because of its relationship to development [1] The potential international students seek to escape an unknown future in their country of origin and limited job opportunities, or get a better education [2]. A few factors must be considered when choosing the host country such as the quality of education, the local language, the reputation of the host country, the host city, the host University, and job opportunities [3; 4]. Also, free education is a powerful factor to consider when seeking a higher education abroad.

Furthermore, the quality of life in the host country is another factor to be considered. The quality of life could be different for male students and female students, several changes might occur after migration such as returning or staying in the host country. Although some countries do not have widely known universities compared to other European countries, they have several foreign students [5]. Scholars discovered that free education provided by host countries helped to attract overseas students, as well as courses offered in medium English and joint programs inside other European universities [6; 7].

There is plenty of literature on ISM however, these scholarships focus on more developed countries such as the UK, Australia, Canada,

France, and the USA [3; 5; 8-10; 11-16]. Despite the extensive studies on this topic worldwide, there is less focus on the Russian context. Nevertheless, there are fewer studies discussing African students' migration to Russia in particular paragraphs [7; 17-19] Despite these few studies, they contain some limitations, such as they conducted qualitative studies and limitations in data [19]. In addition, the focus was on Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) and non-CIS, and again less focus on African students [7]. Therefore, our work fills a gap in the existing body of knowledge, using Russian as a setting, with a focus on African students. This work might help to understand the reason of this migration. The second gap concerns the contribution of English papers.

In 2000, Russia reformed its higher education system to attract more foreign students [20]. Some universities, like the Higher School of Economics (HSE), signed an agreement with the London School of Economics in the UK to provide double degree programs which might attract more international students [6]. Due to this investment in education, in (2011) the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)<sup>1</sup> reported an increase in international students in Russia to 3.7% globally. Russia's current ranking in terms of attracting international students is seventh globally [7].

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2011), Education at a Glance 2011: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, doi: 10.1787/eag-2011-en

Russia planned to enroll 6,000 students free of charge in higher education universities<sup>2</sup>.

This paper explores the motivational factors of African student migration to Russia. Therefore, the main focus is on students who are already in Russia and their perception of the quality of education, the quality of life, scholarships, and the university requirements in 2022-2023. The study collected data from 385 African students in Russia from 28 countries. The researchers employed statistical analysis to determine the factors that are driving the increase in African students' migration to Russia. Among the findings, the quality of education attracted more males than females. While quality of life is a more important factor for females. The paper contributes to the body of knowledge on the topic by adding that quality of education is not the only factor that draws African students to a specific country. Investment in quality of life, including access to free higher education, and access to cheap transportation may entice institutions and policy makers to recruit more international students.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 overviews African student migration to Russia/the former Union of Soviets Socialist Republics (USSR). Section 3 reviews the literature and theoretical background. Section 4 presents the result of the paper. Section 4 discusses the findings and offers recommendations for policymakers.

### History of African Students Migration to Russian and Former USSR Universities

The socialist government offered hundreds of scholarships to train Africans, specifically Ghanaians [21]. In 1959, there were officially only

seven students from Sub-Saharan Africa registered in former USSR universities [17], which was considered very low. However, gradually, this number increased from 72 to 500 students in 1960-1961, and before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of African students rose to 5,000. In the Khrushchev era, more African students were invited to study in Russia, especially technology [18].

In 1990, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of African students increased to 30,000 distributed throughout the former USSR, accounting for 24% of all international students [17]. To cope with the internationalization of higher education, some universities, such as HSE University, demanded government funds to reform their educational systems to attract more international students [7]. That is why these Russian universities received funds to reform their educational systems [22]. The growth of international students has been observed in 2016-2021 however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic this increase was interrupted [23]. This growth created a demographic balance in the country. Among the benefit of attracting international students, are (1) demographic balance, and (2) economic balance which is to fill job shortages [8; 24]. In 2022-2023 there are approximately 35,000 African students. More information is given in *table 1* in the data section<sup>3</sup>.

### Literature Review and Theoretical Background

Several scholars tested various approaches to examine international students' migration; such as; human capital theory [12; 24], the gravity model [25; 26], lifestyle migration [27; 28] and

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation (2022) Form No VPO-1 - Information about the organization that carries out educational activities on educational programs of higher education - programs of bachelor's degree, programs of specialty, master's programs. Высшее образование. (n.d.). Министерство науки и высшего образования Российской Федерации. Retrieved 12 July 2024. Available at: <https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/action/stat/highed/> (accessed: 02.04.2024).

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation (2022) Form No VPO-1 - Information about the organization that carries out educational activities on educational programs of higher education - programs of bachelor's degree, programs of specialty, master's programs. Высшее образование. (n.d.). Министерство науки и высшего образования Российской Федерации. Retrieved 12 July 2024. Available at: <https://minobrnauki.gov.ru/action/stat/highed/> (accessed: 02.04.2024).

the push and pull model [29]. The authors employed these last two theories which are widely tested in international students' mobility in general [7; 29-32]. The push-pull theory emphasizes that push issues such as war, poverty, and unemployment are associated with the place of origin, whereas pulling ones like security, jobs, free education, and a good life attract people to destination countries [33] (Lee 1966). Given the study's emphasis on African students in Russia, the researchers anticipate it helps to understand the increase of these students in Russian higher education institutions. [29] Tested the push-pull model to argue that economics and social factors motivate international students to select a specific country. One more point raised by [29] is that students calculate the cost of flights and the crime rate in the host country.

The second concept is lifestyle migration, which takes into account the location that migrants want to relocate to. These migrants take into account several variables, including their quality of life. That is why developed countries' better living standards attract more international students. These quality of life factors may have an impact on good hospitals, insurance companies, high-speed internet, transportation, cheap food, a clean environment, and roads [34]. Migrating as an international student may be temporary or permanent, depending on the quality of life in the host country [35; 36]. So, the higher the quality of life in the host country, the more time to stay permanently. From the perspective of migrating part-time or full-time, we believe that this notion is appropriate for African students in Russia. If African students see Russia as a quality of life, then the possibility of staying permanently is very high.

If we compare the education in African countries and Russia we will find a big gap, how about the quality of life in general? To understand the increase of African students in Russia we conceptual (1) the age of students, and the pushing factors (2) the influence of the host

country; (3) parents who studied in Russia or the former USSR; (4) the quality of education; (5) the university requirements, and (6) the quality of life.

### **Age upon First Arrival to the Host Country and the Pushing Factors**

Age is among the factors which are considered by foreign embassies in developing countries. That is why when an individual applies for a visa to Western countries, foreign embassies consider age during the visa process. Therefore, the rejection rate varies from one embassy to another from 2% to 40%<sup>4</sup>. Embassies need to perceive a sense of attachment to the country of origin to return upon completion of the degrees. Attachments such as real estate or a business, then a visa is provided. However, at young age (22) years old, a person might not marry or have a fortune. At this age, people are keener to explore life abroad [10]. Investigated skilled international migrants' age upon arrival. The authors revealed that the majority of skilled international migrants arrive in the host country at the age of 22 and hold at least a secondary school diploma or territory education [27]. To identify African students' age upon arrival in Russia, we analyze age as an essential demographic variable. At 22, people might have finished their bachelor's degrees and desire to pursue master's degrees or doctoral degrees abroad [2].

Examined Ghanaian youths' intention to seek higher education abroad to escape an unknown future. Ghana's economic and political situation is similar to many other African countries [2]. Therefore, limited job opportunities, access to free higher education, and political situation are among the factors that push Africans to seek higher education abroad. These three pushing factors could be the main factors that drive Africans to seek knowledge in Russia. For instance, the living conditions in Russia are at least better than in Ghana and Africa in general. Living conditions such as; (1) quality of education, (2)

<sup>4</sup> OECD (2020), Education at a Glance 2020: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, doi: 10.1787/69096873-en

access to free education, (3) access to cheap internet, (3) job opportunities, (4) transportation, and (5) good health services. These living conditions could be one of the elements that inspire African students to travel to Russia.

### **The Influence of Host Countries on Potential International Students' Decisions**

The influence of the host country is represented in several ways: language effect, job opportunities, security, exchange programs opportunities, environment, culture, and access to higher education. Claimed that access to higher education institutions in the host country determines student mobility [10]. What is more, the host country could be a vital factor in a student's decision to study abroad. [37] pointed to three push factors behind student decisions to study abroad: (1) personal development; (2) job opportunities; and (3) language; the authors also mention (1) culture, (2) location of the country globally, (3) college reputation, (4) and the visa process as pull factors. The authors explained that the strongest push factor is personal growth, while the strongest pull factor is college reputation and the visa process. Similarly, the location of the city and the host university affects prospective student choice [32].

Russia has 5% of international students worldwide<sup>5</sup>. The percentage of international students among national students in Russia is 4%. 6% of foreign students enroll in a bachelor's degree, 7% enroll in a master's degree, and 9% join doctoral programs or the equivalent. According to [22] in 2022-2023 the number of foreign students in Russia is about 325 thousand; 55% enroll in a bachelor's degree, 28.5% in specialist degree, 13% in a master's degree, and 3,2% join doctoral programs or the equivalent. According to the last updated data<sup>6</sup>, there were 340,326 international students in Russia in 2022.

### **The Impact of Relatives and Friends on Potential International Students' Decisions**

Potential international students consult those who have studied abroad to determine the country, city, university, programs, and job opportunities in the host country then the choice will take place [38]. Furthermore, the students who have studied overseas can inspire their countrymates to travel to the same host nation, resulting in networking, this is how alumni affect potential international students' decisions and resulting in social networks among them. Alumni play an important role in marketing the university where they completed their studies [39]. Alumni also serve the university in a variety of other ways; however, if this alumni had a negative experience with a specific university, recommendations may not be forthcoming. According to [40], networking plays a significant role in students' migration decisions. Whereas, indicated that when migration is well-proven, family networks become less significant.

Claimed that students' decisions to study abroad are influenced by friends, family, and colleagues. Friends recommend Prospective international students to select a specific university or college [32; 38; 41;]. Furthermore, friends can affect potential international students' decisions by telling them about the school in which to enroll, staff treatment, and the university's global reputation, as well as the learning experience [42]. The effect of friends, family, and counselors diverges among people [43].

### **The Impact of the Quality of Education on Student Choice**

The leading countries for international students are the US, Australia, the UK, Canada, and New Zealand [21]. Due to the English language and the quality of education plus their university rankings, these countries have a greater proportion of international students

<sup>5</sup> OECD (2023), Education at a Glance 2023: OECD Indicators, OECD Publishing, Paris, doi: 10.1787/e13bef63-en

<sup>6</sup> Other Policy Relevant Indicators: Inbound Internationally Mobile Students by Continent of Origin. (n.d.). Retrieved 10 July 2024. Available at: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=3804> (accessed: 02.04.2024).

than other countries. That was supported by [4] who claimed that choosing a specific college that offers programs in English is considered as advantageous to the host university.

The quality of education attracts more foreign students [16; 44]. That is why some foreign organizations fund people to pursue higher education abroad [27; 45].

If the country's focus is to improve its financial situation alone, then the huge number of international students could affect the host country's marketing and the quality of education. Due to the high price of the UK's universities, several competitors started to appear. For example, Russia as a competitor started to successfully market itself as a destination for international students. Russia ranked 7th globally in 2020. That is the reason international students choose the best leading universities in Russia, which could be amongst the reasons that pull them [7]. These universities provide a good quality of education. Another possible reason is the scholarships that the government offers to attract foreign students. But, scholarship providers request recipient students return home upon completion of the degree, some students return while others stay in the host country [46]. Russian government funds the universities, but the choice of potential international students is based on high competition globally [7], while thousands of students pay tuition fees [9]. Accepting international students based on self-finance is good from an economic viewpoint; however, this may affect the quality of education in host countries. The decline in British universities ranking is an example of this outcome [37].

### **The Impact of the Quality of Life on Student Choice**

Examined skilled migrants to identify which cities are most appealing to them. The findings revealed that the higher the index the city has,

the more attractive it becomes [34]. To maintain the sustainability of any city, it needs to bring more skilled migrants, particularly PhD holders. Thus, highly competent individuals contribute to the economy's long-term viability by creating new job opportunities for citizens and supporting the economy as a whole. A study showed that Moscow was positioned 27<sup>th</sup> globally in terms of the most attractive city in the world, while London was first. For London, many factors play a significant role, such as the English language and the diversity of the UK labor market [47]. These factors motivate PhD holders to settle in that city. For Moscow, it is a little different; the Russian language and Russian labor market could attract more people from the former Soviet Union due to historical relationships. This could explain why Moscow was ranking so low. What can the Russian government do to attract international students and PhD holders specifically to settle in Moscow? [7] Stated that the Russian government launched a project in 2013 to attract foreign skilled migrants and international students to diversify its economy. [32] focused on PhD holders; it is not the language and labor market alone that motives students, other factors are associated such as a good health system, a good transportation system, security, and access to education [29; 35].

## **Research**

### **Methodology and Data**

The study implemented a quantitative method based on an online questionnaire that was conducted from February to November 2023. The survey was constructed using specific publications as references for some of the questions, such as the study conducted by the New Zealand Ministry of Higher Education on international students [48]<sup>7</sup>. The researchers received approval for the survey from the Institute of Demography HSE University.

<sup>7</sup> Ward, C., Masgoret, A.M. (2004). *The Experiences of International Students in New Zealand. Report on the Results of a National Survey*. Wellington: Ministry of Education. 161 p. Available at: [https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/15288/040604-final-report-for-printers.pdf](https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/15288/040604-final-report-for-printers.pdf) (accessed: 02.04.2024).



The researchers first ran this survey with master's students from the Department of Population and Development, HSE University as a pilot study. The researchers explained the nature of the survey and the information that we wanted to collect. Participation was voluntary. Following the pilot study, then changes have been made. The researchers distributed the link to the survey to all African students in HSE. Then, the survey was directed to African students who were already in Russia, regardless of the city of the study. Furthermore, we distributed the survey to other African students who are enrolled in different Russian universities such as; Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Moscow State Linguistics University, Southern Federal University, and Ryazan Agriculture University.

The information was anonymous; participants were not required to provide university registration numbers, emails, or any identifying personal information. The survey could be filled out in 7-15 minutes, and the answers were registered directly. Some participants received the link to the survey from social media such as Telegram and WhatsApp.

The questionnaire contains three sections. The first section contains basic demographic information such as gender, age, marital status, nationality, and previous education obtained before coming to Russia. We employed age in our descriptive analysis to determine African students' age upon arrival in Russia and the representativeness of the youth in this migratory cycle [27]. The second section was about the rationale for choosing Russia as a host country for higher education, asking them to choose the best explanation for their decision based on their perceptions; these data included in the final analysis phase: (1) the quality of education (2) the quality of life (3) my parents studied in Russia, or the former USSR (4) my friend studied in Russia (5) reasonable university requirements; (6) other. 385 African students responded, however after cleaning the data we ended up with 275 participants. Their data were used for further analysis. Even though, the number of

respondents is not representative convenience is applied to this paper [48; 49].

### Empirical Results

The study consisted of a sample of 385 individuals; however, after cleaning the data, we ended up with 275 participants. Our basic demographic information was distributed as gender, with males representing 75.6% (208) and females representing 24.4% (67). The females' participation should be verified in the future because of the small size. Among all participants in the study, 81.8% were single (58 females, 167 males) 16.4% were married (7 females, 38 males) 1.1% were divorced (1 female, 2 males) and 0.8% were cohabiting (1 female) and 1 male was engaged. Ages ranged from 18 to 55 years. Students from 28 different African countries participated in the study. Northern Africa provides 28% of all participants (77 participants, 51 males, and 26 females), Eastern Africa 9.3%, (25 participants, 19 males, 6 females) Central Africa 9.1%, (25 participants, 19 males, 6 females), Southern Africa 0.8%, (2 participants, 2 males) and Western Africa 53.3%. (146 participants, 117 males, and 29 females). However, according to government statistics, 44% of African students in Russia are from Egypt (*Table 1*).

According to our data, 73.8% of all participants have a bachelor's degree (63 males, 11 females) 12.4% have a master's degree (49 females, 110 males) 10.2% enrol in PhD (5 females, 27 males), and 3.6% have a specialist diploma (2 females, 8 males).

Participants were asked to state their reasons for studying in Russia. 72.7% (200 participants) stated that the quality of education in Russia is better than in comparison to their home nation. While quality of life indicated 60.7% (167 participants). The simple entry to university 31.3% (86 participants) while, my parents studied in Russia/ former USSR indicated 4.0% (11 participants). My friends studied in Russia indicated 6.5% (18 participants) and others indicated 11.6% (32 participants) (*Table 2*). A descriptive cross-tabulation analysis was conducted to show the significance of determinant factors that motivate African students to study in Russia.

Table 1

**Number of African students in Russia According to the Ministry of Higher Education and Science  
and their funding 2022-2023**

Country	Self-funded students	Scholarship students	Russian Federal quota	Stateless persons	Total number of all students
Algeria	1029	4	265	100	1398
Angola	284	4	180	232	700
Botswana	112	0	52	30	194
Burundi	58	0	15	30	103
Cabo Verde	55	0	28	8	91
Cameroon	655	2	172	72	901
Republic of Central Africa	47	0	16	28	91
Chad	278	2	65	199	544
Comoros	45	0	3	15	63
Congo	335	0	308	210	853
DR of Congo	216	1	189	108	514
Benin	147	1	120	102	370
Burkina Faso	41	0	14	8	63
Egypt	14700	21	433	111	15265
Equatorial Guinea	77	0	64	83	224
Ethiopia	70	0	43	23	136
Eritrea	41	0	3	0	44
Eswatini	47	0	15	0	62
Djibouti	34	0	6	2	42
Gabon	186	0	66	37	289
The Gambia	46	0	12	18	76
Ghana	68	0	267	60	395
Guinea	199	0	172	54	425
Ivory Coast	292	3	265	115	675
Kenya	100	0	73	23	196
Lesotho	2	0	1	1	4
Liberia	8	0	8	6	22
Libya	75	0	5	0	80
Madagascar	98	0	12	45	155
Malawi	37	0	6	2	45
Mali	88	0	61	35	184
Mauritania	67	3	40	11	121
Mauritius	4	0	3	2	9
Morocco	3589	1	83	32	3705
Mozambique	89	1	42	64	196
Namibia	227	1	34	9	271
Niger	62	0	4	5	71
Nigeria	432	4	780	252	1468
Guinea Bissau	196	0	169	120	485
Rwanda	154	0	25	109	288
São Tomé and Príncipe	55	0	1	13	69
Senegal	102	0	75	38	215
Seychelles	0	0	1	1	2



Продолжение таблицы 1

Country	Self-funded students	Scholarship students	Russian Federal quota	Stateless persons	Total number of all students
Sierra Leone	91	0	20	5	116
Somalia	60	0	33	13	106
South Africa	185	1	40	26	252
South Sudan	64	0	19	13	96
Sudan	448	0	92	30	570
Tanzania	95	2	68	31	195
Togo	60	1	33	21	115
Tunisia	933	0	57	19	1009
Uganda	59	0	32	20	111
Zambia	467	2	87	313	869
Zimbabwe	186	0	159	111	456
Total	27095	54	4836	3015	35000

Table 2

## Descriptive Statistics of determinants factors of African students in Russia

Factors in the analysis		Frequency	Percent
Quality of education	Yes	200	72.7
Quality of life	Yes	167	60.7
My parents studied in Russia/ former USSR	Yes	11	4.0
My friend studied in Russia	Yes	18	6.5
Simple entry to university	Yes	86	31.3
Others	Yes	32	11.6

Source: authors' survey, 2023

Table 3

## The Chi-Square Test age and previous degree

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	46.299 <sup>a</sup>	18	.000
Likelihood Ratio	40.532	18	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.434	1	.004
N of Valid Cases	275		

a. 19 cells (67.9%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is .15.

Source: authors' survey, 2023

The relevance of students' previous education, which assumed an undergraduate credential, and the age range of 18-22 years upon arrival in Russia were determined using one-way ANOVA and the Test of Homogeneity of Variances. The result shows that African students arrive between the ages of 18 and 22 and have an undergraduate degree, indicating a disparity in age groups with previous schooling. The

Pearson Chi-Square test result indicated a p-value of 0.00, and the Nominal by Nominal Phi test p-value is 0.00. Age and previous education are significant because age on arrival shows the youth's motive to explore (Table 3).

The mean (M) of male and female preference for the quality of education is different; (females 0.63, males 0.76), which explains the different reasons for pursuing higher education in Russia.

Table 4

**Descriptive analysis of gender and motive to pursue higher education in Russia**

Socio-demographic characteristics		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quality of education	Female	67	.63	.487
	Male	208	.76	.428
	Total	275	.73	.446
Quality of life	Female	67	.33	.473
	Male	208	.41	.494
	Total	275	.39	.489
My parents studied in Russia / former USSR	Female	67	.01	.122
	Male	208	.05	.214
	Total	275	.04	.196
My friend studied in Russia	Female	67	.06	.239
	Male	208	.07	.251
	Total	275	.07	.248
Simple entry to university	Female	67	.30	.461
	Male	208	.32	.467
	Total	275	.31	.464
Other	Female	67	.15	.359
	Male	208	.11	.308
	Total	275	.12	.321

Source: authors' survey, 2023

Table 5

**ANOVA results for the differences between groups and within groups**

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Quality of education	Between Groups	.893	1	.893	4.544	.034
	Within Groups	53.652	273	.197		
	Total	54.545	274			
Quality of life	Between Groups	.367	1	.367	1.536	.216
	Within Groups	65.218	273	.239		
	Total	65.585	274			
My parents studied in Russia / former USSR	Between Groups	.056	1	.056	1.447	.230
	Within Groups	10.504	273	.038		
	Total	10.560	274			
My friend studied in Russia	Between Groups	.003	1	.003	.048	.827
	Within Groups	16.819	273	.062		
	Total	16.822	274			
Simple entry to university	Between Groups	.018	1	.018	.083	.774
	Within Groups	59.088	273	.216		
	Total	59.105	274			
Other	Between Groups	.096	1	.096	.928	.336
	Within Groups	28.181	273	.103		
	Total	28.276	274			

Source: authors' survey, 2023

The standard deviation (SD) for females is 0.48, while for males it is 0.42, which makes sense because males are attracted by the quality of education more than females. Then the mean for the quality of life for females is 0.33, the standard deviation is 0.473, and mean for the quality of life for males is 0.41, and the SD is 0.494. This difference shows that females are enticed by quality of life more than quality of education compared to males. For “My parents studied in Russia/ former USSR,” the M for females is 0.01, and the SD is 0.122. Males have an M of 0.05 and an SD of 0.214, which is higher than females. For “My friend studied in Russia”, the M for females is 0.06 and the M for males is 0.07, with the SD being 0.239 for females and 0.251 for males. The following variable is simple entry to university, where the M for females is .30. The M for males is .32, which is almost the same as the SD for females .461 and .467 respectively. The final variable is other causes, where the M is .15 for females and .11 for males, and the SD is .359 for females and .308 for males (Table 4).

An ANOVA test was performed to determine if there is a difference in interest between males and females in coming to Russia for higher education. This test was carried out to determine whether differences exist and whether the quality of education differs between and within groups. The only variable that is significant between and within groups is educational quality; all other variables are not significant. There is a difference that is statistically significant  $F(4,544) = 1.273, p < 0.03, n = (275)$  (Table 5).

### Discussion

This paper explored the push and pull factors in the increase of African student migration to Russia. Firstly, in terms of the quality of education and the quality of life. The findings show a significant result that supports the assumption that the quality of education is one of the main pull factors that attract international students to certain countries. That is the primary reason students travel to Russia is quality of education along with the quality of life. This result is similar to [44] who stated that the quality of life

and the quality of education pull international students. As discussed in the literature section, the quality of education is one of the reasons to study in a specific country which is also comparable to [26] who state that the quality of education is among the strongest motives that attract foreign students. We found that 72.7% of the participants said that, the quality of Russian higher institutions attracted them compared to their home institutions. The quality of life in Russia was also significant (60.7%)—Moscow was ranked 27<sup>th</sup> worldwide. Although Moscow was ranked very low worldwide, it ranked higher than most African cities, attracting many PhD holders. However, the findings showed that the quality of life in Russia attracts African students but varies between genders and this result is similar to [32] who found PhD holders choose cities according to their global ranks. Our results could be compared to [10] who claimed that the influence of the host country and its involvement in the global economy might interest international students.

These two variables still motivate African students to travel to Russia at this difficult time in the global political situation. However, if we think about the quality of education alone as a single variable between genders, we find a difference. Females consider the quality of education to be less important compared to the quality of life, while males consider the quality of education to be more important. This difference in motivation has important implications. If males consider the quality of education more than the quality of life, this means males promote universities more than females which are reflected in the university rankings which take the number of foreign students into account. Another viewpoint, males could achieve their educational goals abroad more than females. This could be reflected in personal growth which was among the push factors. Such students might work in the host country upon graduation which is a big plus for the host country. Females consider the quality of life more than the quality of education including good transportation, the environment, and the health system. This explains why

countries like Russia have started to grow in terms of receiving international students as they appeal to different groups of students. If the quality of education alone attracts international students, then all international students should be enrolled in countries that have high-ranking institutions.

Another possible reason for African students to come to Russia might be the influence of the country globally in terms of politics and economics, which relate to the quality of life that attracts these students. The quality of life might include a good living environment and a good place to seek a job. The visa process in the home country is a pull factor attracting African students to migrate to Russia. This result is similar to [37] who stated that the visa process at the country of origin is among the pull factors. Young students had to go through the visa process in their home country. Therefore, the issuance of student visas in Russian embassies around the world might not be very complicated if university admission is granted, which is in contrast to Western embassies.

The variable “My parents studied in Russia or the former USSR” was not a strong motive for African student migration to Russia. This result is comparable to [39] who stated that alumni play a significant role in potential students’ decisions on migration, if the alumni had a positive outcome in the host country they promoted the university, otherwise not. The reason could be that earlier African students did not recommend individuals to study in Russia. Or if they did it was in smaller numbers. Therefore these current students could recommend their children to study in Russia in the future. Nevertheless, in subsequent generations, this variable might be more significant since the number of African students in Russia is increasing.

The variable “My friend studied in Russia” indicated a very low percentage in this study since family and friends convince international students to attend specific universities and programs before migrating. This encouragement is considered an important variable when thinking of going abroad to study. Our result is similar

to [40] who showed that when migration is confirmed, family and friend networks become insignificant.

The variable “University requirements” varies from one country to another. For example, obtaining an IELTS certificate is one of the requirements for entry to higher education that teaches in English. The study findings showed that simple entry to university is not among the main reasons to pursue higher education in Russia, and this might interest decision-makers. Even though the bulk of programs are taught in Russian, many African students were unconcerned with the language used, implying that many of them are pursuing their degrees in Russian.

Age was investigated to determine the significance of youth migration upon arrival in the host country after the completion of an undergraduate degree at the age of 22 years. We discovered that previous education and age are significant factors when considering higher education abroad. According to our data, the majority of African migrants are aged from 18 to 22, which means a lot of African students who arrive in Russia at age 22 pursue masters and doctoral degrees. The data showed that 73.8% of African students already have a bachelor’s degree. This result is similar to [27] who indicated that skilled migrants’ (including students) age upon arrival in the host country is 22. If we compare this result to [2] who explains the intention of youth migration. These two studies indicated that potential students migrate on completion of the degree in their home country. That is why the bulk of African students arrive in Russia to pursue master’s degrees. Moreover, it means that access to free education is among the reasons that drive African students to Russia.

### Conclusion and limitations

This paper explored the reasons for the increase of African student migration to Russia. The paper contributes to the literature by showing that the quality of education and the quality of life are the main reasons for African students to come to Russia. However, this attractiveness depends on the gender of the student. To attract

more African students to Russia, policymakers might need to increase agreements with more African countries regarding scholarships. This implications may strength the African-Russian relationship. A further proposal is that universities and staff should encourage international students to absorb the local language and culture. If the quality of education is not enough to attract international students, governments should look for additional ways to recruit international students, such as increasing the quality of life which may also increase the life standards for local citizens.

This study acknowledges some limitations regarding the data, as the majority of students represent only three countries: Ghana, Nigeria, and Sudan. According to the Russian Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the majority

of African students are from Egypt. The second limitation was the study did not include African students who applied unsuccessfully to study in Russia. A third limitation is that the majority of respondents are from two Moscow universities: Higher School of University and People Friendship University of Russia. The last limitation is about the gender 67, females' participants, this sample size should be increased, and future researcher should verify gender balance.

#### Statement and Declaration

The authors do not have any related financial interest to any organization to disclose. We do not have any opposing interests to disclose. All respondents filled out this questionnaire as volunteers to help the authors. The materials discussed in this article are a part of a PhD thesis.

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