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SUPPORTS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY BLACK AFRICAN
IMMIGRANT UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BRIDGING
THEIR HOME AND SCHOOL CULTURES

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to my dad, who inspired me to aim high and to my sister, Tsahai,
whose support was invaluable.

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I am greatly indebted to the support of my family in the pursuit of my doctoral degree. Without their encouragement, support, and love, I would not have made it through this academic journey. I am especially grateful to my parents for planting the seed. To my husband, James Yobe, for picking up the baton, spending all those long nights with me while I work on my paper, and being my to go person for every technical support. To my children, Miguel and Ivan, for understanding my absence at times when I had to put in more time in my writing. To Aunt Nellie, Alinane “Nane”, and Phellie for all your support. To my siblings for praying and cheering me up.

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ABSTRACT

SUPPORTS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED BY BLACK AFRICAN IMMIGRANT UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS BRIDGING THEIR HOME AND SCHOOL CULTURES

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The purpose of this study was to examine lived experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students in regard to self-identification and education achievement and to explore the support that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. The data were collected through responses from semi-structured interviews of thirteen student participants. Through the careful coding of the interview data, the researcher analyzed the emergent themes and sub themes from the participants. The findings show that self-identification is fluid among immigrant students as they try to maintain their original identification and at the same time want to identify with the host country. All participants cited education as most important and a ladder for social advancement. Participants appreciated support from their parents, helpful professors, and friends. However, the data revealed that

parental support can sometimes be problematic when parents try to dictate what career path their children should pursue.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In the last decade, there has been an increase in the immigrant population in the United States (U.S.). The African immigrant population has almost doubled, growing from 881,100 in 2010 to 1,606,914 in 2012 (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017). The civil unrest and political instability in some African countries in the 1980s forced many individuals to stay in the U.S. and use the family reunification immigration channel to send for their families (Green, 2015; Kent, 2007). This act greatly increased the numbers of Black African immigrants in the U.S. Despite the fact that their numbers have increased, these youth are a largely understudied and invisible immigrant group especially in the classrooms (Allen, Jackson, & Knight, 2012; Roubeni, De Haene, Keatley, Shah, & Rasmussen, 2015). Learning about Black African immigrant students' experiences and challenges as they transition to their new environment will help educational leaders and policy makers make decisions that will increase student success among this group of students.

A person's background can be crucial to development. Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, and Wang (2010) asserted that there is a connection between one's background and cognitive development. Ukpokodu (2018) noted that U.S. K-12 school districts do not report aggregated or disaggregated assessment data for Black African immigrant students, so they end up being grouped together with African Americans. Categorizing Black African immigrant youth in this manner does not identify their educational challenges making it impossible to address their specific needs.

Research Problem

As many Black African families came into the country, the number of immigrant youth increased (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). Watson and Knight-Manuel (2017) asserted

that by 2013, African immigrants comprised about 4% of the U.S. immigrant population. Roubeni et al. (2015) observed that African immigrant children is one of the fastest growing immigrant subgroups in U.S. public school systems. Some of these students come from the African immigrant families that want to retain their home culture, at the same time that the students are trying to assimilate to their school culture (Green, 2015; Green, Chesla, Beyene, & Kools, 2018).

In addition, some students face conflicts due to parents' unwillingness to let go of their native culture (Castillo, Zahn, & Cano, 2009; Green et al., 2018). Therefore, immigrant students negotiate between cultures and possibly face family conflict as they face challenges and new learning platforms. Each student goes through the cultural assimilation process differently (Green, 2015; Green et al., 2018; Habecker, 2017). Ndemanu and Jordan (2008) observed that the cultural assimilation process may differ for each student due to their background and how they were exposed to other cultures in their home country. The authors also stated that the assimilation process can differ based on the country of the student's birthplace or the geographical areas within that country (Ndemanu & Jordan, 2018). For example, students coming from a rural area and students from an urban area may differ considerably in their process of assimilation (Ndemanu & Jordan, 2018; Nieto, 1999). Furthermore, Black African immigrant students have different immigration experiences, family situations, and personal histories (Green et al., 2018; Hersi, 2011) which may impact their assimilation process.

Another challenge that first and second generation Black African immigrant students face as they try to find a balance between their home cultures and their school culture is self-identification (Rong & Preissle, 1998). Self-identification is how individuals define themselves in regard to their background and how they perceive themselves in their new environment (Geerlings, Verkuyten, & Thijs, 2015). In some

cases, immigrant students want to identify with the mainstream culture which is their school culture (Geerlings et al., 2015), but their parents will not let them because they want to preserve their home culture (Schwartz et al., 2013). Awokoya (2012) in her study of identity constructions and negotiations among 1.5 and second generation Nigerians asserted that “self-identification of African immigrant youth is highly influenced by their interactions with school, family, and peers which can sometimes be complex and conflicting” as they live between cultures (p. 256). The 1.5 generation refers to students born in their parents’ country of origin who were brought to the U.S. prior to their adolescent years (Awokoya, 2012; Habecker, 2017; Ukpokodu, 2018), while second generation refers to children of immigrants who are born and raised in the United States (Awokoya, 2012). Black African immigrant students struggle to find a balance between their home culture and school culture; as a result, they sometimes fail to fit in with their peers in the school environment. Living between cultures may affect Black African immigrant students’ self-esteem (Weisskirch, 2013). However, Zhou, Lee, and Syed (2018) claimed that immigrant students with positive self-identification are more likely to adjust easily in their new environment. Students with positive adjustment do well in their academic and psychosocial outcomes.

Historically, there is little research about Black African immigrant students’ life experiences (Green et al., 2018; Njeru, 2009; Roubeni et al., 2015). Kumi-Yeboah and Smith (2017) stated that even though the African immigrant population has increased in recent years, educational leaders and policy makers continue to overlook the growing number of African immigrants, so Black African immigrant students’ needs go relatively unexamined or unattended as compared to Latino and Asian immigrant students (Green et al., 2018). Furthermore, Black African immigrant students are understudied and in some cases, they are studied under “Black immigrant population” which focuses on people

with Caribbean origin. Sometimes they may be studied together with African Americans (Allen et al., 2012; Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017; Rong & Fitchett, 2008). This does not give an accurate picture of Black African immigrant students' lives. Allen et al. (2012) added that classifying Black African immigrant students as a "Black immigrant population" (P. 2) makes them an invisible immigration group in the education setting. As a result, they are given little attention and their needs are not addressed properly.

Njeru (2009) argued that there is a need to know Black African immigrant students' experiences to better understand their lives. As educators, it is important to understand the experiences of these Black African immigrant students as they try to bridge their home and school culture so that they can receive the needed assistance with their educational goals. Researchers and scholars in education have increasingly demonstrated the strong connection between students' academic performance and their home backgrounds; hence the need for educators to possess such knowledge so that they can assist in giving students the needed support (Moore, 2013; Njeru, 2009; Rong, & Preissle, 1998; Schwartz et al., 2010). Learning about the challenges Black African immigrant students face would be important, not only to educators and parents to find ways to assist them to transition smoothly, but the research would also give Black African immigrant students a voice and a frame of reference for their lives (Swanston, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Researchers and scholars in education have increasingly demonstrated the strong connection between students' academic performance and their home backgrounds (Moore, 2013; Njeru, 2009; Rong & Preissle, 1998; Schwartz et al., 2010). Kumi-Yeboah and Smith (2017) discovered that culture differences influence the academic performance of Black African immigrant students. Educators need to know the experiences of Black

African immigrant students so that they may assist in giving them the needed academic support (Allen et al., 2012; Njeru, 2009). Knowing the experiences of Black African immigrant students may open avenues for support as they try to bridge the cultural gap between their home and school culture. There is a connection between one's background and cognitive development (Schwartz et al., 2010), making it important to study how Black African immigrant students transition from their home culture to their school culture. Understanding their day to day life as immigrant students may help educators find ways to help them transition smoothly (Allen et al., 2012; Swanston, 2015). If Black African immigrant students' voices are not heard and their lived experiences not studied, then many youth may not have the quality of adulthood they desire for themselves. Their maturation to adulthood may also be affected because some may still struggle with self-identification issues and with making sense of being Black Africans in the U.S. (Allen et al., 2012). Additionally, they may miss out on the needed help in their transition to the school environment as they may not know what supports are available to them.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine lived experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students in regard to self-identification and education achievement and to explore the support that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. The following questions helped to guide this study:

1. What do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as influences in their ethnic identity development?
2. How do Black African immigrant undergraduate students' perceptions of their ethnic identity influence their decisions to participate in academic and non-academic pursuits?

3. What factors do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as supports and challenges in their academic achievement?

Theoretical Framework

Ethnic identity development refers to one's identity formation in relation to others (Phinney, 1990) and "exploration of what meaning ethnicity brings to the understanding of one self" (Svensson, Berne, & Syed, 2018, p. 187). Ethnic identity is fluid and changes as students grow into adulthood (Chao & Otsuki-Clutter, 2011; Maramba & Velasquez, 2012; Nieto, 1999). Geerlings et al. (2015) noted that immigrant students might identify themselves with their home culture and country at one time and re-identify themselves with their school culture at other times. Rumbaut and Portes (2001) argued that children of immigrants tend to go through phases as they seek to discover themselves. These changes in self-identification are developmental, but shape the children's personalities as they grow.

Ethnic identity formation is an ongoing process (Thibeault et al., 2018). Ethnic identity refers to the extent to which people define themselves in relation to their nationality, and the extent to which they value being a part of their ethnic group (Schwartz et al., 2009). Most people want to be attached to their ethnic group (Phinney & Ong, 2007) and have a sense of belonging. The desire to belong drives individuals to explore their ethnicity and to look for their rightful place in their communities. Individuals also have to assert the socially constructed boundaries of their group. People learn about their culture, history, and traditions seeking to find who they are (Svensson et al., 2013). Ethnic identification is important to immigrant students' development, maturation, and well-being as they find their rightful place in their communities (Ovando & Collier, 1985). It is also beneficial for educators to understand the challenges immigrant students face as these students try to bridge the gap between their school and

home cultures. Hence, this study was based on two frameworks: social identity (Phinney, 1990) and acculturation (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003).

Phinney (1990) asserted that social identity assists individuals to have a sense of belonging. It gives them a group identity making them feel that they are a part of something. The fact that they can identify themselves as part of a group helps them to maintain a sense of well-being (Schwartz et al., 2009). According to Thibeault et al. (2018), a strong ethnic identity can lead to a greater sense of connectedness and social support. African immigrant students are trying to be part of a group, either their original ethnic group or that of their host country (U.S).

Acculturation is the process of adapting or learning another culture as a result of prolonged contact (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). Phinney (1990) observed that ethnic identity is meaningful to individuals where two or more cultures collide over a lengthy period of time. African immigrant students live between cultures. As they make sense of who they are, they learn values, behaviors, and attitudes of the host society in addition to their own African values, norms, and practices. Njeru (2009) noted that maintenance of one's original cultural values and beliefs might be a cumbersome task for minority groups living as immigrants within larger, dominant societies. African immigrant students may want to be part of their host society because for them it is the natural thing to do. They may want to be like their peers and easily adapt to their school culture. As a minority, African immigrant students follow the mainstream culture. At the same time, they may want to maintain their heritage culture. This kind of dilemma may be very stressful for immigrant students (Thibeault et al., 2018) and may push them to seek different sources of support within family and school.

Phinney (1990) noted that “social identity and acculturation frameworks acknowledge that ethnic identity is dynamic, changing over time and context” (p. 502).

Phinney (1990) stated that ethnic identity is a complex process that is achieved through an individual's decision making and constant self-evaluation. According to Maramba and Velasquez (2012), identity is both an outcome of college student development as well as a door that facilitates the development of other critical outcomes such as a sense of belonging, a sense of competence, interpersonal relationships, and commitments. College students are at a stage where they can process most information and experiences as individuals and in relation to others. During this time, they are moving from moratorium (a stage of exploration without making any commitment) to an achieved identity according to Marcia (1980) and Erickson's (1968) ego identity formation theory. This stage of achieved identity resembles Phinney's (1990) ethnic identity achievement or internalization stage in his theory. However, Quintana (1998) noted that identity development models can also apply to adults. At this time individuals take time to explore and make decisions pertaining to their ethnicity and their own identity within their ethnic group. They are clearer regarding who they are; they feel connected and have a sense of belonging to their ethnic group.

Definitions of Key Terms

Achievement gap is academic performance disparity (as measured by educational indicators such as grades, graduation rates, standardized test scores, college admission, course selection) between or among student groups. The groups may be defined by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, English language proficiency, gender, or geographic location (Maydun, 2003).

Acculturation is the process of adapting or learning another culture as a result of prolonged contact (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003).

Assimilation is the process of acquiring and incorporating a different culture than your own (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). Taylor and Whittaker (2003) described assimilation as

that which occurs when individuals do not maintain their own culture when they are in an environment other than their own.

Bridging the cultural gap occurs when individuals are able to live in diverse groups, be connected, and understand the differences and distinctions of those groups but still manage to negotiate between both cultures, knowing fully well that they can safely return to their point of reference (Akiyama, 2008).

Cross-cultural harmony is a positive relationship between two cultures (Merriweather & Morgan, 2013), which occurs when people are able to negotiate between their norms and cultural differences and learn to work together with an understanding of individuals' uniqueness.

Culture, according to Taylor and Whittaker (2003), are values and norms which are learned throughout life by participation in the family and community, shared by an identifiable group, and developed to accommodate to environmental conditions and resources. Culture does not remain static; it keeps on changing all the time. Thinking of culture as static can be harmful and difficult (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003).

Cultural identity is how individuals identify themselves within a particular group of people and share the same practices and traditions (Fuligni & Tsai, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2010). People may change their attitudes and behaviors when they come in contact with other people with a different culture from their own (Schwartz et al., 2010).

Culture homelessness is the feeling that individuals who do not have a connection to a place feel, and they feel they do not fit in either environment due to their unique experiences (Swanston, 2015). These individuals live between cultures.

Ethnic identity refers to the extent to which people define themselves in relation to their nationality, cultural self, and the extent to which they value their ethnic group to be part

of it (Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009).

Ethnic identity development refers to one's identity formation in relation to others (Phinney, 1990) and the "exploration of what meaning ethnicity brings to the understanding of one self" (Svensson et al., 2018, p. 187).

First generation immigrant students – For the purpose of this study, these are students who are born in their home country to parents who emigrated from Africa (Stoll Turton, 2015).

Heritage culture encompasses the customs, practices, norms, and values of a community passed from one generation to another (Weisskirch, 2013).

Home culture consists of values that students associate with their parents and grandparents. These values in most cases differ from those of their new community, creating conflicts between the home and the new environment (Green, 2015).

Identity is a sense of self; it describes who or what a person is as an individual and in terms of what their ethnicity means to them (Schwartz et al., 2009).

Personal identity is how individuals define themselves in regard to their background and how they are in their new environment (Geerlings et al., 2015).

School culture is a set of norms, values, and beliefs that make up a school environment (Hoy, 1990).

School engagement refers to students' sense of connection and belonging to the school community, which is reflected in their participation in academic and non-academic pursuits (Chiu, Pong, Mori, & Chow, 2012)

Second generation immigrants are defined as children of immigrants who are born and raised in the United States (Awokoya, 2012).

Self-identification is how individuals define themselves in regard to their background and how they relate to their new environment. Immigrant students tend to shift from their original identity “toward a stronger identification with American society and the self-descriptive adoption of American label” (Geerlings et al., 2015, p. 503). Self-identification cannot be defined exclusively from one’s heritage language and culture. Some immigrant students find themselves at crossroads when they cannot speak their native language, therefore, they are unable to identify themselves as part of their home culture (Geerlings et al., 2015).

Social identity is a person’s sense of who they are in relation to their group membership (Phinney, 1990). Social identity assists individuals to have a sense of belonging (Phinney, 1990).

The *1.5 generation* refers to students born in their parents’ country of origin who were brought to the U.S. prior to their adolescent years (Awokoya, 2012; Ukpokodu, 2018).

Conclusion

The number of Black African immigrant students is increasing in the U.S. as many African families decide to settle in the country. These Black African immigrant students live between cultures. Their parents want to maintain their home culture while the children try to assimilate to their school culture. Learning about these students’ experiences can be beneficial to educational leaders. The current study sought to examine lived experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students in regard to self-identification and education achievement and to explore the supports that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. The next chapter consists of the review of the literature that will focus on defining personal identity and ethnic identity; the relationship between culture,

language, and identity; parent involvement and family support; and school as a community.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The U.S. population continues to become more diverse due in part to dramatic changes to immigration patterns caused by the federal immigration policies such as the Hart-Celler Immigration Act of 1965 which abolished national quotas, the Refugee Act of 1980, Immediate Relatives of U.S. Citizen (IR), and the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program (Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017). As the world is changing and more people are looking for a better life, the U.S. is receiving more immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Central and South America. A century ago, the majority of immigrants were people from Western Europe (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003; U.S. Immigration and Naturalization; Watson & Knight-Manuel, 2017). With the growing immigrant population from all over the world whose cultures, languages, races, and ethnicities are different from mainstream American culture, there is a need for people to be familiar with and at ease with diverse cultures. Taylor and Whittaker (2003) stated that it is important to teach people to gain the knowledge, understanding, and skills to work together as a community for the common good.

The purpose of this study was to examine lived experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students regarding self-identification and education achievement and to explore the supports that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. The literature review in this chapter focuses on defining personal and ethnic identity, the relationship between language, culture, and identity, parent involvement, and school as a community.

Personal Identity and Ethnic Identity

Identity is a sense of self; and it describes who or what a person is (Fuligni, & Tsai, 2015; Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, & Rodriguez, 2009). Erikson (1950)

stated that identity is a fundamental developmental task of adolescence and that adolescence is a transition to adulthood. He continued to say that a clear and reasonable sense of identity is a prerequisite to meeting the challenges of adulthood (Erikson, 1950). Students may identify themselves differently at different stages in their lives. Self-identification refers to individuals' awareness of themselves with respect to the set of traits and characteristics they assign to themselves. Identity formation is a process that both adolescents and young adults must go through because they are still trying to figure out who they are during this time (Thibeault, Stein, & Nelson-Gray, 2018).

It is sometimes a challenge for youth and young adults to identify themselves as their self-identification is fluid. Geerlings et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study that focused on the relations and changes in ethnic self-identification and preferred language use of adolescents. The participants in the study were a total of 2,777 respondents, of which 638 were of Asian origin and 2,139 of Latin American origin. The data were collected using the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study, which is a three wave panel survey. The first survey (Wave 1) was conducted in 1992 when the participants were in their early- to mid-adolescence. The second survey (Wave 2) was held three years later when most (mid- to late-) adolescents were graduating from high school. The last survey (Wave 3) was done ten years after the first survey (2001-2003), when the participants were young adults. In the first two waves, face-to-face interviews were conducted, but in the third wave mailed questionnaires were used because participants had moved to 30 different states. Some of the questions asked were: "How do you identify, that is, what do you call yourself?" and "In what language do you prefer to speak most of the time?" Geerling et al., (2015) noted that for both groups a shift in self-identification was evident. As the participants matured, they identified themselves more with their ethnic identities.

Njeru (2009) observed that some African immigrant students identify themselves according to how the identification makes sense to them. Some immigrant students tend to shift from their original identity to identify themselves with an American label (Geerlings et al., 2015), while others maintain their original identities. Njeru (2009) indicated that students identify themselves with the American culture for different reasons; for some Black African immigrant students it is because this is all they know, while others want to assimilate with their peers and the new environment in which they live. Hall (1992) argued that people tend to identify themselves as they perceive they are seen by others.

Ethnic identity refers to the extent to which people define themselves in relation to their nationality, cultural self, and the extent to which they value their ethnic group to be part of it (Phinney, Jacoby, & Silva, 2007; Schwartz et al., 2009). Personal-identity is how individuals define themselves regarding their background and how they exist in their new environment (Geerlings et al., 2015); it may evolve over the course of one's life. Green et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study that explored first generation female Ugandan immigrant youth perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward self-development and identify factors among their social contexts that impact their development and adjustment. The participants in this study were 20 English speaking Ugandan females aged 16–25 years who immigrated to the US after the age of eight. Green et al. (2018) conducted interviews and observed the participants during community events. The interview questions focused on the challenges and success of the immigration process and adjustment to the youth's new community. Participants were also asked to describe the conditions that impacted their identity development process, including timing of their immigration, the contexts of reception, their community, the school social setting, family and peer support systems and conflicts, the perceived value of Ugandan cultural

maintenance and the value of adopting their host culture. Green and co-authors observed that participants understood that identity is fluid and changes at different stages, especially for immigrants who emigrated at a very young age (Green et al., 2018).

The change in a youth's identity was also observed by Maramba and Velasquez (2012) when they conducted a qualitative research study to gain insight as to how students of color might perceive their ethnic identity in relation to their personal identity. The participants consisted of 19 students, 12 females and seven males; six African Americans, seven Latinos (Chicanos), and six Filipinos from a research intensive predominantly White institution. Sixteen of the students were born in the United States, whereas two were born in Mexico, and one was born in the Philippines. The students were current peer counselors, mentors, or tutors in the learning center on campus. They were high-achieving students, both academically and socially, and all participants held leadership roles in campus organizations. Purposeful sampling was used to choose participants so that researchers could gain insight into the participants' ethnic identity development throughout their college experience.

Participants in this study admitted that, as college students, they now spend more time and effort to learn about their ethnic group than before college. It is during this period when most immigrant students become more aware of their heritage and who they are in their communities as young adults. According to Maramba and Velasquez (2012), students reported becoming more aware of the discrimination against their ethnic group and their desire to bring equity and succeed in their educational goals to make their families proud. From their descriptions, it appears that ethnic identity is both an outcome of college student development as well as a door that facilitates the development of other critical outcomes such as behavior, attitudes, feelings, social interactions, social cognition, relationships, and self-esteem. Maramba and Velasquez (2012) suggested that

how students identify themselves might play a crucial role in their development, both academically and socio-culturally. Positive personal and ethnic identification have been associated with youths' overall well-being (Thibeault et al., 2017).

When Schwartz et al. (2009) conducted a quantitative study to examine the relationships of both personal and ethnic identity exploration to adaptive and maladaptive psychosocial functioning through identity confusion in emerging adults, they found that Black students reported significantly more ethnic identity exploration than Hispanic students, who reported significantly more than White participants. The sample consisted of 905 students, 186 males and 719 females. The students were enrolled in psychology, sociology, and human development classes at five American universities and were between the ages of 18 and 29 (mean age 19.84 years). Thirty-four percent of the participants were White, 16% were Black, and 50% were Hispanic. The majority of White (91%), Black (77%), and Hispanic (70%) participants were born here in the United States. Foreign-born Whites were primarily from Eastern Europe; foreign-born Blacks were primarily from Haiti and Jamaica; and foreign-born Hispanics were primarily from Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Peru.

The research indicated that personal identity and ethnic identity may be developed in different ways and may serve different functions in emerging adulthood (Schwartz et al., 2009). Developing a sense of personal identity is important for self-identification because, if individuals fail to have a good sense of who they are, that can create a sense of aimlessness. However, ethnic identity may have less effect on some individuals because, in most cases, it does not create despair or a lack of purpose. Furthermore, it was noted that the changes in self-identification impact the students' culture and way of living (Schwartz, et al., 2009). A shift in how immigrant students identify themselves makes them become more aware of who they are, which increases their resolve for continued

education to make a difference in their communities (Maramba & Velasquez, 2012). Schwartz et al. (2009) explained that personal identity should not be studied on its own. There is a need to include ethnic identity and cultural identity when studying personal identity because a person's identity is comprised of all three components. Cultural identity is formed when individuals identify themselves with a particular group of people that share the same practices and traditions (Fuligni, & Tsai, 2015; Schwartz et al., 2010).

People may change their attitudes and behaviors when they encounter other people with a different culture from their own (Schwartz et al., 2010). The authors stated that people from ethnic and cultural minority groups face the task of defining who they are at the ethnic-group level as well as at the individual level (Schwartz et al., 2009). Njeru (2009) conducted a qualitative study to investigate the experiences of immigrant families of Kenyan background in the U.S. The sample consisted of 16 participants, six parents, six children who were 5th and 12th graders, and four teachers who were teaching Kenyan immigrant students at the time or had taught them before. The teachers were included to provide the perspective of the educators who interacted with these children and their families. There were four families that lived in the mid-western region in the U.S. in a predominantly White city. Interviews were used to collect data for this research.

The researcher employed a multiple case design (Stake, 1995) to listen to and learn from the families' lived experiences in the U.S. Njeru (2009) used personal interviews to create a space for the voices of parents and their children. The data was collected for four months. The researcher conducted two or three interviews with each participant. The interviews were between 1.5 to 2 hours.

According to Njeru's (2009) qualitative research, people develop a personal identity within a multicultural society and sometimes they must form a sense of ethnic identity as well. Individuals examine and define ethnicity according to their perceptions

and how much they value the group with which they identify. Schwartz et al. (2009) observed that ethnic identity and cultural identity may become increasingly important for Americans as well as immigrants as people continue to migrate to the U.S. in large numbers. People want to hold on to how they define themselves as individuals as well as ethnically and culturally because self-identity increases one's self esteem and awareness.

Relationship between Culture, Language, and Identity

Culture is a learned behavior of a group of people and is transmitted from one generation to the next. Taylor and Whittaker (2003) defined culture as values and norms which are learned throughout life by participation in the family and community and shared by an identifiable group developed to accommodate environmental conditions and resources. Nieto (1999) described culture "as the values one holds dear, or the way one looks at and interacts with the world" (p. 47). With the growing number of immigrants entering the U.S., issues of culture are increasingly important because the dominant American culture will continue to change as it encounters other cultures (Schwartz et al., 2013). Nieto (1999) stated that culture is not constant. Culture is dynamic and should be approached as such. Likewise, there is a need for parents of Black African immigrant students to understand that culture is fluid; it changes every day especially when cultures collide. Nieto (1999) argued that the problem with thinking of culture as static is that it affects the way educators design the curriculum and pedagogy. Educators design their curriculum as if culture is constant.

Schwartz, Zamboanga, Weisskirch, and Wang (2010) conducted a quantitative study to examine the extent to which cultural identity constructs would be associated with adaptive and maladaptive psychosocial functioning. The aim was to find out if defining oneself culturally represents one way to consolidate a sense of personal identity in a multicultural society (Schwartz et al., 2010). The sample consisted of 773 university

students, of which 162 were males, 609 females, and two unidentified by gender. These students were enrolled in psychology, sociology, and human development classes at five universities in the U.S. Thirty-five percent were freshmen, 23% sophomores, 24% juniors, 18% seniors, and 1% graduate students. Sixty-eight percent of the data were collected from Florida International University, 21% from University of Massachusetts, 4% from the University of Miami, 4% from University of Nebraska, and 3% from California State University-Monterey Bay. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 29 (mean age 20.44 years).

Thirty-eight percent of the participants were White, 15% were Black, and 47% were Hispanic. The majority of White (92%), Black (75%), and Hispanic (69%) participants were born here in the U.S. Foreign-born Whites were primarily from Eastern Europe; foreign-born Blacks were primarily from Haiti and Jamaica; and foreign-born Hispanics were primarily from Cuba, Nicaragua, Colombia, and Peru. All data were collected in 2006.

Schwartz et al. (2010) used 5-point Likert-type scales for all measures. They measured personal identity consolidation using indicators from the Eriksonian (identity synthesis), identity status (identity commitment and achievement), and identity capital approaches. Identity synthesis was measured using the Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (12 items, Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981) to assess the presence of a coherent and internally consistent sense of self, the Ego Identity Scale (12 items, Côté, 1984) was used. Both instruments have been shown to be appropriate for multi-ethnic samples (Schwartz, 2006; Schwartz, Côté, & Arnett, 2005).

The findings of the study indicated that defining oneself culturally represents one way to consolidate a sense of personal identity in a multicultural society (Schwartz et al., 2010). Schwartz et al. (2010) continued stating that cultural values and practices might

contribute in helping students to build a sense of self as they emerge into adulthood. A strong self-identity may contribute to positive functioning and may protect youth against distress and problems that come with lack of self-identity. Youth may transition successfully into adulthood if they understand who they are personally and culturally.

Geerlings et al. (2015) in their longitudinal study found that self-identification cannot be defined exclusively from one's heritage language and culture. Some Black African immigrant students find themselves at a crossroad when they cannot speak their native language; therefore, they are unable to identify themselves as 'real' Africans (Geerlings et al., 2015). In some cases, second generation immigrant students may find themselves unable to speak their native language, and sometimes even the first immigrant students who came to the U.S. before the age of five, or those in the literature who are known as 1.5 generation, may lose the language they learned before coming to the U.S. Njeru (2009) claimed that people identify more closely with individuals who speak their language than those who only share their cultural backgrounds. For instance, Geerlings et al. (2015) studied changes in ethnic self-identification and heritage language preference in adolescence found that language represents the most important part of one's ethnic identity.

According to Weisskirch (2013), parents teach their children about heritage culture through language, cultural values and practices, and cultural artifacts like food and holidays. Weisskirch's (2013) conducted a quantitative study on family relationships, self-esteem, and self-efficacy among language brokering Mexican American emerging adults. The sample consisted of 75 Mexican American emerging adults, 47 were female, 26 male, and two who did not specify their gender. The participants were between 18 and 25 years old. The mean age of the sample was 20.82 years. The study sought out students who still translate for their parents as participants.

The ones who participated were from a local, suburban state university, a community college, and a vocational training center. The participants were asked to respond to a questionnaire about their experiences as a child from an immigrant family. Those who responded that they were still translating for their parents were included in the study. Seventy-three percent were born in the U.S. and 29% were born in Mexico. As far as generational status, 30% were first generation, born in Mexico; 66% were second generation, born in the U.S.; and four percent were third generation, whose parents were born in U.S., but their grandparents were born in Mexico.

Weisskirch (2013) used the Perceptions of Language Brokering Experience subscales of burden and sense of efficacy (Wu & Kim, 2009) to measure Language Brokering Efficacy and Burden. The alienation subscale from the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (Armsden & Grennger, 1987) was used to measure perceived alienation from parents. A condensed version of family obligation measure (Fulgini, Lam, & Tseng, 1999) was used to measure family obligation. The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (1965/1989) was used to measure self-esteem. For self-efficacy, participants rated 10 items about their feelings of self-efficacy using the scale 1 = Strongly Agree to 4 = Strongly Disagree (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

The findings indicated that language brokering itself was not a burden, but lack of parental support was a predictor of a sense of burden on the part of the youth. Youth who translate for their parents have an opportunity to practice and maintain the heritage language, and the practice of translation may influence children's sense of well-being and competency, especially if parents showed them support. Weisskirch (2013) stated that parents teach their children about heritage culture through language and in some instances, children learn more about their culture as they translate for their parents who may have little English knowledge. Chao and Otsuki-Clutter (2011) also discussed that

children who translate for their parents increase the quality of their relationship with their parents and gain more linguistic skills, as well as coping skills, as they take up the responsibility of brokering for their parents.

To ascertain the associations between acculturation and well-being in first-generation and second-generation immigrant college students, Schwartz et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study. Participants were 2,754 first-generation and second-generation immigrant students (30% men, 70% women), from six ethnic groups and from 30 colleges and universities around the United States. In terms of ethnicity, 9% of the sample identified as White, 11% as Black, 32% as Hispanic, 33% as East/Southeast Asian, 11% as South Asian, and 4% as Middle Eastern. The participants were between the ages of 18 and 29. Participants were asked to complete measures of heritage and American cultural practices, values, and identifications, as well as of subjective, psychological, and well-being.

The findings indicated that those students (participants) who adapted to the host culture and navigated well in both cultures (their home culture and host culture) achieved psychological well-being (Schwartz et al., 2013). Schwartz et al. (2013) argued that it is important to understand how acculturation impacts well-being in immigrant individuals. According to Tsang et al. (2003), some immigrants, once they attain citizenship, identify with the mainstream culture; but others find it hard to do so. Schwartz et al. (2013) ascertained that it is not accurate to estimate that only foreign-born individuals are undergoing cultural change. In some cases, this process affects the second generation immigrants as well even though they are born in the U.S. because their families practice the heritage culture. Like first generation Black African immigrants, second generation immigrants find themselves balancing their cultural heritage with the mainstream

American culture (Green et al., 2018). Successful acculturation improves individual's overall well-being.

Parent Involvement and Family Support

Educators expect immigrant students to do well in school if they have high English proficiency as they believe this shows that the students are familiar with U.S. schools, culture, and norms (Conger, Schwartz, & Stiefel, 2011). In as much as this is true, the authors also observed that in some cases retention of one's customs, values, and language of immigrant students' native cultures may shield them from negative influences of racial discrimination and academic low aspirations. Parents who speak their native language and are not easily assimilated to mainstream U.S. norms might be in able to protect their children from adopting negative behaviors (Conger et al., 2011). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) explained that parents who settle in cities where the immigrant population is high find resources that assist their children to transition smoothly and progress well in school. Large immigrant communities can provide the needed support system and social network that assist families to maintain cultural norms and values.

In a study on East Asian adolescents' ethnic identity development and cultural integration, Yoon et al. (2017), noted that reasonable parental expectations encouraged the students to work hard in school so that they could succeed. The students appreciated their parents' good intentions and support. Participants acknowledged that parental expectation motivated them to reach their educational goals.

Kumi-Yeboah and Smith (2017) found that African immigrant parents have high academic expectations of their children and hold them accountable for their academic performance. Participants reported that their success in school is due to their parents' support and advice. These studies echo what Ogbu (2003) asserted about parental

involvement and expectations regarding their children's academic performance. Children work hard to succeed in school if parents actively show interest in their academics.

Green et al. (2018) in their qualitative study of ecological factors that impact adjustment processes and development of Ugandan adolescent immigrant females found that parents were influential in their children's academics and life in general because children perceived their parents as having certain expectations in regard to their education. The authors stated that the community shared resources for their children to do well in school and aspire to go to college. Chao and Otsuki-Clutter (2011) noted that in immigrant families, children rely on their parents and extended families' support. At the same time children are also expected to assist in the home which helps them to be responsible individuals and gain coping skills for their well-being.

Huerta, McDonough, and Allen (2018) conducted a qualitative study to examine how young men of color construct a college-going identity. The researchers used focus group interviews to collect data. The 68 focus group interviews were from 60 to 90 minutes long. Each focus group had about five to eight students. The participants were 496 in number, Black, Latino, and Asian American Pacific Islanders. All participants were male students who were enrolled in 10 different urban and suburban high schools in California who intended to continue with postsecondary education.

The findings showed the importance of students' desire to achieve a social status, their resilience in the face of internal pressure to pay for higher education, and their willingness to explore other options in order to achieve their educational goals. One of the things that Huerta et al. (2018) observed was that students' motivation to attain higher education came from their parents and older relatives who constantly encouraged them to be successful and focus on education to move forward. The authors indicated how these young men value the role of mentors and role models in their academic journey. Older

siblings may play that role, and sometimes parents encourage their children to play that role as models for their younger siblings (Huerta et al. 2018). Huerta et al. (2018) added that participants considered their parents' concern and encouragement as positive pressure for their well-being and a good future. Most of the participants appreciated parental guidance even though a few participants thought high expectations put more pressure on the children.

Mantovani, Gasperoni, and Albertini (2018) conducted a quantitative study on higher education beliefs and intentions among immigrant origin students in Italy. The study investigated the extent to which immigrant students differ from their fellow native students in terms of characteristics associated with the likelihood they will pursue a higher education. The sample was drawn from 5600 students of which 525 were immigrant students who enrolled in 44 secondary schools, located in three northern Italian provinces. The participants were in their last year of high school. The study examined the similarities and differences between native students and first and second generation immigrant students regarding their perceptions of higher education pursuit.

The findings indicated that immigrant students were less likely than natives to pursue or have intentions to pursue higher education because of lack of support from family. The authors asserted that those immigrant students with parental support do exceptionally well as parents exert pressure on their children to pursue higher education to elevate their status and secure a high paying job. According to Mantovani et al. (2018), "...immigrant parents are generally aware of university degrees' economic and social benefits, which allow their children to compete in the labor market, earn higher incomes, increase their chances of upward social mobility and enjoy greater prestige and status" (p. 604).

Immigrant students appreciate the support of parents as they pursue their academic goals. Students with parents as cultural capital have fewer complications as they navigate higher education options. Collins and Magnan (2018) conducted a qualitative analysis of the lives of Haitian youth in Montreal to better understand the school experiences of second generation immigrant students and their educational pathways. The 11 participants were born in Quebec to Haitian immigrant parents. They completed their primary and secondary schooling in the French education sector of Montreal. Participants were between the age of 17 and 30, nine females and two males, and they were single with no children. Ten participants reported French as their home language while one reported Creole as a first language. Six were enrolled in pre-university programs, while five chose a technical option before university enrollment. The participants' parents had different social and educational backgrounds.

Collins and Magnan (2018) used semi-structured individual interviews to collect data. The interviews were 90 minutes and were conducted in French as preferred by participants. The interview guide covered five main themes: participants' family experiences during childhood and adolescence; school experiences in the youth sector of Montreal; experience in Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel (CEGEP— a publicly funded pre-university college); linguistic, cultural, and geographical identities; and future plans regarding post-secondary education and employment.

The findings indicated that, though the participants faced challenges and took different pathways before pursuing higher education, they had high university aspirations. University attainment was a driving force in their decision-making processes (Collins & Magnan, 2018). Participants reported that cultural capital was very instrumental regarding their prospects for university studies and choices. Students with educated

parents were able to navigate the process with fewer complications but those with the lack of parental support reported negative experiences (Collins & Magnan, 2018).

Many immigrant students need some guidance on higher education requirements and the process to get in college. Parent support makes a difference as they go through the college application process. Percy Calaff (2009) conducted a qualitative study to examine the college preparation process for Latino students using interviews and observation to collect data. The researcher interviewed nine Latino high school students in the College Support Program (CSP). CSP is a college preparation program at a state university. The nine participants included two freshmen, five sophomores, and two seniors. Six were female and three were male. All the participants were enrolled in college preparatory classes and had passed almost every required end of course state exam they had taken during high school. These were first and second generation immigrant students who reported that they spoke Spanish at home.

The findings suggested that Latino students appreciated the parental support and the sacrifices that their families have made on their behalf (Percy Calaff, 2009). Some of the participants indicated that their parents came to the U.S. for the purpose of giving their children the opportunity to pursue an education and the parents kept track of their progress in school. All students acknowledged the importance of a college education and that their parents motivated and helped them to succeed (Percy Calaff, 2009). Students reported a desire to give back to their families and make a difference in their families and communities. Three participants mentioned that college was a normal expectation that had been ingrained in them by their parents from a very young age. Parents aim at upward mobility for their children and this can only be realized if children stay in school and pursue post-secondary education (Percy Calaff, 2009).

School as a Community

The school is generally the first social and cultural institution that immigrant students face outside of their homes. Immigrant students spend most of their days in school for their academic and social skills development. Collier and Morgan (2008) asserted that students' success in academia is based on a complex relationship between characteristics of both the institutions and the individual students. According to Conger et al. (2011), some factors that determine immigrant students' success are the way they are received by the institutions in their local communities and whether they feel accepted as part of the community.

Kumi-Yeboah and Smith (2017) conducted a qualitative study to examine cross-cultural factors that promote educational experiences and academic achievement of Ghanaian immigrant youth in urban public schools as they transition to a new school environment. A purposeful sample of 60 Ghanaian-born immigrant students participated in the study, ages ranging from 16 to 20 years, 32 males and 28 females. The participants were from the Tampa Bay Metropolitan Area in Florida.

The researchers used individual interviews, observations, and focus groups to collect data, and the authors used Atlas.ti software (Atlas.ti.7.5.2 2014 version) to analyze data, using the questions as a framework for analysis (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017). The findings showed that positive school environment enabled these students to focus on academic work and succeed in school. One of the participants stated that positive school environment, school resources, safety, teachers who encourage open communication in class, and caring people are some of the factors that help him succeed in school. Teachers who encourage immigrant students to make contributions in class and have an open approach to instructional delivery were recommended as instrumental to these Ghanaian students' success (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017). The authors argued that the learning

needs of these immigrant students can only be addressed if educators and policy makers identify these needs (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017).

Green et al. (2018) also pointed out that school was a social setting that influenced immigrant students' development and academic success. Positive school experience with involvement in clubs, sports, and interaction with peers was observed as helpful for their well-being and to focus in school (Green et al., 2018).

School environment that promotes students' engagement has been recommended by researchers (Chiu et al. 2012, Nuñez, 2009). According to Tinto (2006), academic institutions are responsible for students' success and retention by creating a conducive environment for learning. Chiu et al. (2012) claimed that schools can foster social, political, and cultural values and attitudes that influence students' socio-psychological development and well-being. When students are engaged at school, they tend to be motivated which helps them to achieve academically (Chiu et al., 2012).

Nuñez (2009) conducted a quantitative study to examine Latino students' transitions to college. The author's focus was to assess the effects of social capital and intercultural capital -the capacity to negotiate diverse racial and ethnic environment on Latino students' sense of belonging in college and on their perceptions of a hostile school climate because of ethnicity. Nuñez (2009) used longitudinal data from the Diverse Democracy Project Study set to address experiences affecting students' cognitive and affective outcomes related to their capacity to participate as citizens in an increasingly diverse and democratic society.

The participants were first-year students during the 2000-2001 academic year and in 2002 when they were in their second year. There were 13,520 students who participated in the first wave of data collection but only 4,403 students completed surveys in both waves. Nuñez (2009) used the entire sample of 362 Latino respondents for her

analysis. Students were recruited from nine institutions: University of Vermont, University of Massachusetts–Amherst, University of Maryland, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, University of New Mexico, Arizona State University, University of California at Los Angeles, and University of Washington. The campuses were chosen because of their engagement in diversity initiatives and involvement in efforts to diversify their student body. Participants were surveyed about their demographic characteristics, high school experiences, college expectations, attitudes about social issues, and anticipated behaviors for the first wave. In their second year, they were surveyed about their college experiences related to diversity, feelings of membership in the community, and academic and social behaviors.

Nuñez (2009) found that a sense of belonging motivated Latino students to be engaged in their academic goals. According to Nuñez (2009), a sense of belonging which is a form of social capital reflects students' feelings about their connection with the university. Students' social capital includes their relationship with their peers as well as with faculty; this is when faculty take interest in students' development and encourage students to participate in class discussions. A sense of belonging is instrumental for students' academic engagement and success. This is in line with O'Keeffe's (2013) argument that it is necessary for institutions to have a caring environment and good support system for students because they develop a "sense of belonging" in students which is critical for students' success.

Students have acknowledged the help of faculty who create a caring school environment as a factor in their academic success. When faculty extend their services beyond formal classroom teaching to students' life outside the classroom, the schools are a community for the students, and this assists with their well-being (Hallinan, Kubitschek, & Liu, 2009). Cole and Espinoza (2008) conducted a longitudinal study with

a sample of 146 Latino students' in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics majors to examine factors that affect their academic performance. The findings suggested that students valued faculty support and encouragement. Cole and Espinoza (2008) posited that students' adjustment and success were positively correlated with their interaction with the faculty and attending a college with student-centered faculty. Campus climate helped to explain the relationship between students' college experiences and their academic performance. When students' feel they are being cared for and view faculty as supportive and accessible they tend to do well (Cole & Espinoza, 2008).

Espinoza (2013) agrees with Cole and Espinoza (2008) about the importance of social relationships in the life of the students. Students need social support from their fellow students as well as faculty both inside and outside the classroom (Espinoza, 2013). Espinoza (2013) conducted a qualitative study on the experiences of first-generation college Latino students in an engineering program. The author interviewed eight undergraduate seniors who were first generation college Latino students majoring in engineering. The interviews, which lasted about 30 to 45 minutes, consisted open-ended and semi-structured questions. All participants but two were to graduate the following year.

Espinoza (2013) found that support from faculty helps students to adjust smoothly in college, persist in their academic goals, have educational satisfaction, and academic success. Students are more appreciative of professors who are ready and willing to help them when they are stuck or have questions. It is hard on the students when professors pay less attention to them and seem to be more concerned with their research than teaching or helping students. Professors who are not patient with the students and seem unsupportive discourage students from seeking the help they need from them (Espinoza, 2013). Some participants acknowledged that the positive influence of their professors

gave them the courage to move forward and stay in the program. Receiving constructive compliments from professors gave students confidence that they could complete their courses and graduate with a degree (Espinoza, 2013). These were findings in a study on Latino students. Results may or may not look the same with a different group of students.

Taylor and Whittaker (2003) suggested that for teachers to be more effective in dealing with immigrant students, they should know the cultures within the school community and their distinct nature. Diverse cultural groups have differences, and teachers have to be familiar with those differences to be able to work well with each group. For instance, Black African immigrant students have different needs from Asians or Latino/a immigrant students, and there are cultural differences within the African immigrants as well. Green et al. (2018) noted that even among African immigrant students themselves their needs might be different due to their timing of immigration, circumstances that brought them to the host country, their background, and whether they are coming from rural areas or cities.

Summary

This chapter covers literature on various factors that are important to this study. The studies covered show that youth from adolescents to young adults sometimes struggle with self-identification until they reach a point or an age when they can identify themselves as individuals and be comfortable with who they are. Until then they depend on their families and school environment to help them figure out their personal and ethnic identities. Therefore, it is essential to listen to the voices of these Black African immigrant students as they strive to find a balance and bridge the gap between their home country and host culture. The following chapter discusses the methodology that was adapted for this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine life experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students in regard to self-identification and education achievement and to explore the support that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. A purposeful sample was solicited from several universities in Texas. The researcher for this study collected data from interview questions. This chapter presents an overview of the research problem, research purpose and questions, research design, participant selection, data collection procedures, data analysis, validity, privacy and ethical considerations, and research design limitations.

Overview of the Research Problem

The size of the immigrant population in the U.S. continues to grow (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017). As the number of immigrant families increases, the number of immigrant students also increases. In this study, the researcher is interested in exploring the support that can ensure a smooth transition for the students who came with their parents from Africa when they were 12 years old or younger and those who were born in the U.S.

Research Purpose and Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine life experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students in regard to self-identification and education achievement and to explore the support that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. The following questions guided this study:

1. What do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as influences in their ethnic identity development?
2. How do Black African immigrant undergraduate students' perceptions of their ethnic identity influence their decisions to participate in academic and extra-curricular pursuits?
3. What factors do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as supports and challenges in their academic achievement?

Research Design

This study used a qualitative design. The significant advantage of this design is that it allows for a thorough and in-depth exploration (Yin, 2014) of African immigrant undergraduate students' experiences within their perceptions of internal and external factors that contributed to their academic achievement. A purposeful sample of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students from several universities in Texas was solicited to participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions, were used to generate the detailed data needed to gain understanding about participants' perspectives and experiences. Interviews allow for confidentiality and thus open responses from the participants. The interviews focused on identity, support and challenges these students need in their new environment. Qualitative data that were gathered from students' interviews were analyzed using an inductive coding process.

Participant Selection

A purposeful sample of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students from several universities in Texas was solicited to participate in the study. The researcher selected study participants from the Black Student Association and the African Student Association for initial sampling. There was need for more

participants, therefore, the researcher also employed snowball sampling to identify additional participants. The researcher solicited students who came with their parents from Africa when they were 12 years old or younger and those who were born in the U.S. Both parents must come from Africa. All 12 participants were between the ages of 18 to 24 years. The sample included three males and nine female students.

Table 3.1

Participants' Selection

Participants	Country of Origin	
	Father	Mother
Eight	Nigeria	Nigeria
One	Liberia	Liberia
One	Nigeria	Liberia
One	Kenya	Liberia
One	Ivory Coast	Ivory Coast

In order to conduct this study within a limited time frame, the researcher planned to select participants from one university but due to scarcity of the population in question, students from other institutions were solicited. The researcher explained the study in general and gave the reason for the study. Students who showed interest and were willing to participate were asked for their email addresses and/or telephone numbers. After the initial face to face contact, the researcher contacted the students by email or text messages. The students who were solicited by snowballing were contacted by email and/or telephone. The emails and text messages had a brief summary about the research as a reminder of the initial contact. The researcher asked again if they were still interested

in participating in the study and asked for their availability to do the interviews. The targeted number for the participants was initial fifteen but the researcher identified only twelve students who were willing to participate in the study and fit the criteria.

Data Collection Procedures

The researcher collected qualitative data using semi-structured interviews after obtaining Committee for Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS) approval. Students who were willing to participate in the study were given an informed consent form to sign to be part of the study. The researcher conducted one personal interview with each participant for a duration of 45 minutes to one hour per session. The interview questions dealt with students' perceptions of ethnic identity development, school as a community, and parental involvement and family support. The participants from the initial campus did their interview sessions on the campus where students are enrolled and were conducted in either a classroom setting or a study room. The interviews for students from other institutions were conducted at a public place or on the telephone. The participants were interviewed individually. Students were asked about their self-identification, ethnic identity development, language used at home, support and challenges in their academic journey, immigration experience, family's view of education, and how students handle living between cultures.

All interviews were audio recorded, with participant permission, and stored electronically on a flash drive and the researcher's computer hard drive with a password protection on both storage locations. The flash drive containing the stored data will be locked in a safe at the researcher's home and will remain there following the conclusion of the research for five years before being destroyed.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher studied the collected data and listened to the audio tapes to make sure the data made sense at the end of every field day that interviews were done. Then data were transcribed every week to make sure that the information given was clear. When the information was unclear, the researcher revisited those areas with participants. The interview data were transcribed per participant. It was easier and quicker to access data when organized in this way. The researcher then analyzed themes and topics that were identified (Shang, 2015).

An inductive coding process was used to analyze the interview data to answer research questions. The data were coded to identify patterns and themes. After the transcripts were examined, a color coding system was used in order to identify the emergent themes which were used to describe self-identification and academic achievement of first and second generation Black African immigrant students. This study included codes that were selected based on precise statements within the interviews and from emergent concepts. The codes were used to increase the validity of findings and to connect the research literature (Saldaña, 2005). The codes were organized into a larger group of themes after all responses within the interview transcripts were coded. The sub-themes obtained from the emergent themes provided details into ethnic identity development and its influences in academic achievement as perceived by first and second generation Black African immigrant students as they settle into their host society.

Researcher's Positionality

My study focused on support that can be given to Black African immigrant students as they try to bridge their home culture and school culture. I was born and raised in Malawi, South East Africa. In my country there are many things, culturally, that affect education of young people especially girls. When I was told to choose a topic for my

dissertation, I wanted to write about how culture affects education in Malawi. The cultural aspect in Malawi, as in many other African countries, is dominant. Culture controls every aspect of people's lives. I was thinking how researching and writing something about it may bring more understanding to the struggles some Malawians face as they try to pursue their educational goals and start a dialogue or bring more awareness to what is on the ground.

Due to some other technicalities, I could not do a paper on Malawi, so I turned to what I do (working with youth in my church as a volunteer Christian educator) and my current position as an international student. One Sunday, the youth were given an opportunity to lead the service. As part of the program the youth had some time to express their concerns and struggles. What came up the most were their struggles as they live a life between cultures. I had some knowledge on how real this struggle is because I am an international student and also because of my interactions with them as I teach them.

I believe parents and educators can work together to create a conducive environment for the students both at home and school. Educators have to be more open to learn about the students and their concerns. Encouraging parents to be involved in their children's education may be another way that can assist parents to understand where the students are coming from and that their struggles are real to them.

I had questions on self-identification, school engagement, and parents' involvement in their children's life. As an African, I know that sometimes it is not easy for parents to be actively involved in their children's life. For instance, they may ask about school but do not give the needed support to make sure the children are given the full help they need. In addition, at times parents demand so much from children without considering what children are going through as they are trying to balance their lives

between home and school. I had some assumptions based on what I had heard from some youth of my church about their concerns. Also I had discussed my project, in passing of course, with a few college students; yet, I wanted to learn more on this topic and hear other people's views about ethnic identity development and its influence on academic achievement. I wanted to find out what kind of support is already put in place for Black African immigrant undergraduate students. Also, if the support is there, how can the students access the needed assistance? If the support is not there, what can be done to bring awareness of the lack thereof?

The disadvantage of being an outsider was that, some students may not want to talk about their immigration and school experiences thinking that I would not understand where they are coming from. The immigrant students I was interested in are those who came with their parents as children or were born in the US. As an international student, I am on a different visa than they are. I came here for school which puts us on different levels. As a result, some students might feel they cannot trust me or open up. Being an outsider might not be so favorable for my study. On the other hand, I believe being an international student is my advantage because I can identify with some of the students' struggles or that I am in a better position to understand what they mean. Secondly, I am from Africa, I may not be necessarily from their country of origin; but I know most African cultures are similar. My experiences as a foreigner helped me build a rapport with the immigrant students. I safeguarded against any prior assumptions to students' narratives so that my study could not be negatively affected. I put a check on myself as I listened so that I did not say much or offer solutions to their problems.

Validity

To enhance the validity of qualitative data analysis, the researcher recorded the interviews and transcribed them. The researcher organized the interview data into

preliminary results and verified the interview transcripts. The interview data were subjected to member-checking. The participants received a summary of preliminary results for review and approval. The goal of this step was to ensure that the data aligned with participants' experiences and to support the study's credibility. In addition, during the coding phase, the researcher continuously safeguarded against biases due to the researcher's prior knowledge and assumptions of the subject.

Privacy and Ethical Considerations

The researcher got CPHS approval from UHCL prior to the start of data collection. There was an informed consent form that was provided to every student who volunteered to participate in the study. Students who participated in the study were 18 years old and older. The informed consent forms included the purpose of the study and that participation in the study was strictly voluntary, the amount of time they were to participate in interviews, that students' identities would remain confidential, and that participation could stop at any time without penalty. All the data is protected in a locked cabinet and all the electronic data is password protected. Data would be kept for five years before being destroyed.

Research Design Limitations

The research design of this study has a few limitations. First, due to the small number of participants in this study, the results cannot be generalized to the larger population. Second, the interviews were used to collect data on students' perceptions of their school as a community. The data are only as accurate as the honesty of the respondents, which could potentially impact the results of the study. Third, given that only students from similar institutions were studied, the generalization of the findings may be limited. Lastly, this study explored first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students whose outcomes may not apply to third generation

immigrant undergraduate students. The third generation immigrant undergraduate students are those whose grandparents migrated, and their parents were born in the United States. This group may have been assimilated already to their current culture, and they may have already dealt with the initial shock of being in a foreign country.

The study may also not reflect the struggles of all immigrant undergraduate students from other countries as the sample for this study is Black African immigrant undergraduate students who have been born in the country (U.S.) or brought by their parents when they were less than 12 years old; those immigrant students who were brought by their parents when they were already over 12 years old are excluded.

Conclusion

This study covers self-identification of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students and their lived experiences as they negotiate home culture and school culture. There is little research of immigrant undergraduate students in the U.S. even though their numbers are increasing as more people migrate in search for a “good life” (Njeru, 2009). This study explored the support that is already put in place to assist these students for a smooth transition and what else can be done to help them as they bridge the cultural gaps between their home and their school. The following chapter discusses the key themes in the qualitative data gathered from interviews.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to examine life experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students regarding self-identification and education achievement, and to explore the supports that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. This chapter presents the thematic results of the data analysis for current study. The researcher drew the emergent themes of qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts. Interviews were conducted using semi-structured questions for the 12 participants. This chapter describes the demographics of the participants and results of the data analysis for each of the three research questions of the study. The following questions guided this study:

1. What do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as influences in their ethnic identity development?
2. How do Black African immigrant undergraduate students' perceptions of their ethnic identity influence their decisions to participate in academic and extra-curricular pursuits?
3. What factors do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as supports and challenges in their academic achievement?

Demographics of Participants

The researcher interviewed 12 students, nine females and three males; all were between the ages of 18 to 24 years. The first student participant, Monica, is 20 years old. Her mother is from Liberia, and her father is from Kenya. She was born in St. Paul, Minnesota. The second student participant, Mercy, was born in the U.S. but returned to Nigeria until the age of eight, she is now 24 years old. The third student participant,

Irene, is 18 years old, and her parents are from Nigeria. She was born in Houston, Texas. The fourth student participant, Dyna, is 19 years old with parents from Nigeria. She was born in the UK and migrated to the U.S. when she was 10 years old. Twenty year old Emma was born in Houston, Texas; both her parents are from the Ivory Coast. Grace is a 19 year old who was born in Houston, Texas, whose parents are Nigerian but come from different tribes. Sofia was also born in Houston, and she is 22 years old. Sofia's mother is from Liberia while her dad is from Nigeria. Jim is 18 years old and was born in Benin City, Nigeria. He came to the U.S. at the age of one. Jim's parents are both Nigerians but come from different tribes. The ninth student participant, Chidube, is 20 years old and was born in Trenton, New Jersey. Chidube's parents are both from Nigeria. The tenth student participant, Linda, is 21 years old and was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She moved to the US before her fourth birthday. Jane is 22 years old and was born in Monrovia, Liberia. She migrated to the U.S. when she was six years old. Lastly, Chance is 23 years old and was born in Houston, Texas. Chance's parents are both from Nigeria. The responses from all participants' interviews were assigned to themes and subthemes.

Table 4.1

Interview Participants' Demographics Data

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Age moved to the U.S.	Ethnicity/Self- identification
1. Monica	F	20	Born in U.S.	African
2. Mercy	F	24	Born in U.S.	Nigerian
3. Irene	F	18	Born in U.S.	Nigerian
4. Dyna	F	19	10 years old	African
5. Emma	F	20	Born in U.S.	African American
6. Grace	F	19	Born in U.S.	Nigerian American
7. Sofia	F	22	Born in U.S.	African
8. Jim	M	18	1 year old	Nigerian
9. Chidube	M	20	Born in U.S.	African/African American
10. Linda	F	21	4 years old	Nigerian
11. Jane	F	22	6 years old	African American
12. Chance	M	23	Born in U.S.	Nigerian American

Overview of Emergent Themes

To capture an in-depth understanding of Black African immigrant undergraduate students' life experiences, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data. Data were analyzed using an inductive coding process. The participants discussed their life

experiences as they live between cultures, and their support and challenges as they pursue their academic goals, which were categorized into themes and subthemes. The following are the themes that emerged: ethnic and self-identification, family's view of education, challenging factors about school and support from family, faculty, and friends. While culture, language, attitude towards school and school environment, school workload and time/task management, lack of diversity in the classroom, navigating the system, challenges from family, and student organizations on school campus emerged as subthemes. These themes and subthemes are discussed in detail in the following section.

Table 4.2

Overview of the Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Ethnic and Self-identification	Language Culture
Family's view of education	Attitude towards school and school environment
Challenging factors about school	School workload and time/task management Lack of diversity in the classroom Navigating the system
Support from family, faculty, and friends	Challenges from family African Student Association/Organization

Ethnicity and Self-identification

When the students were asked how they identify themselves, ethnicity and self-identification emerged as themes, and culture, language, food, traditional clothes, and music emerged as subthemes. All participants reported that they are more aware of who they are regarding their identities. For some, it took a few seconds before they could

respond to the question, while others were able to say how they identify themselves without any hesitation. Jim responded without hesitation by identifying himself as Nigerian. He stated:

I am Nigerian first and foremost... I am Nigerian. I am African, but I am Nigerian. I am from Nigeria, so when anyone asks me where I am from, I claim Nigeria. For I was born there, I grew up there, I spent most of my years there, most of my birthdays have been in Nigeria. All my family is in Nigeria.

When asked what he meant in stating that he grew up in Nigeria and spent most of his years there, Jim explained that, even though he came at the age of one, he is privileged to still visit Nigeria every other year. Since he was born in the summer, he celebrates his birthdays in Nigeria when he visits his relatives during summer break. Although Jim visits his home country frequently, he somewhat struggled with being African. He revealed that at some point in his life when he was younger, he did not claim his African side, when asked why, he responded that, "... at that time being African was like never an honorable thing like how African is now like the cool thing". He continued saying that now "everybody wants to be African". Jim shared that he is now comfortable claiming his African side because "being African" is not as embarrassing as it used to seem when he was growing up.

When Jim was asked how he handles being a part of two cultures, he stated that it was not hard for him to handle two cultures. He narrated how he greets some people differently and speaks to them differently. He said:

Balancing the two cultures is not hard at all. Is just a matter... is just, the only hard part about balancing is like... (he paused to think) is like how can I say it... like how you greet them is different. You can't just talk to them anyhow, you have to speak with a certain body language. You can't shake hands with your left hand

you must always use your right hand. So the little stuff like that is what is hard balancing between two cultures. But other than that, it's not really that difficult.

Jim acknowledged that his parents are strict and want him to keep his cultural values, but they understand that they are in a new environment. Jim's parents want to keep their culture, but at the same time they realize that Jim must adapt to his host culture. This is potentially why Jim can navigate between both cultures and keep a mental note on what he can and cannot do, so that he is still in line with his African cultural values.

In the same way, Chance, even though he was born in the U.S., does not identify himself as American but Nigerian American. He responded that he identifies with both cultures even though he considers himself as Nigerian first:

Most definitely Nigerian American. First, Nigerian first, always. Because that is who I am, you know, and that's what I will always hold close to my name and an American second. But I would say Nigerian first, because I see much of a Nigerian first. Even though I have the most American name in the world, (mentions his name). But my full name is (mentions all his names) I know all my native names. So... Yeah (laughs). Whenever we go to formalities, they don't call me my first or last name it is either (name) or (name). These two names always [are the names] that everybody in my family always calls me by.

Chance expressed that he can handle two cultures with ease at his age now because he has learned to merge them. He celebrates and maintains both cultures because at the end of the day he is both. He explained that sometimes he does not even realize that he is switching from one culture to the other, yet he does not let himself forget that he is Nigerian.

I just maintain both of them true to heart, you know, because at the end of the day, I am both. And really, nowadays, honestly, I feel like I have merged the two together. And they are just one entity, one culture that I know is my Nigerian-American heritage, that, you know, I will be doing some things, you know, and they are like why do you [keep] saying this this way? Why do you do this this way? I'm like my gosh, I didn't even notice. That's the same way my parents did it [when I was] growing up (meaning when he is acting like a Nigerian). So I just take after them. And then that's something that reminds me every day that, you know, I'm still Nigerian, you know, I can't forget that.

Chance recalled that he started being interested in his culture when he was in junior high because that was a crucial time in his life, and some things were complicated. He was not able to live with his parents, and for some time he lived with his Hispanic aunt. This drove his desire to be in tune with his culture. It was in college when he truly claimed his Nigerian identity after seeing how proud his Nigerian friends were of their culture. He wanted the same for himself stating:

Junior high is [when I started following my cultural values] because during high school years is when I didn't live with my parents anymore at that point. I was staying with my uncle...my auntie, actually, just because at that time there were complications, everything. I wasn't able to stay with my parents at the time. And my uncle, who was Nigerian, was gone as well. So we were staying with auntie, who is Hispanic, and my cousins who were half Hispanic and half Nigerian. So at that point is when that entire Nigerian culture that I knew was just completely gone... no way for me to really get in tune with the culture... Before I forget who I am... I took it upon myself to do that... But yes, in college, seeing at how much

pride people have in it and how important it should be and it needs to be to me, it became... I am Nigerian first that became really truthful to me.

Chance recounted that it has not always been easy for him. He has struggled with self-identification when he was in elementary school. He remembered that in his class there were only two black students, and the other person wanted to be just like the White people. He also wanted to be White, feeling like he had no choice. He stated that it was a hard time for him growing up, but now he is comfortable with who he is.

Dyna, who was born in UK and migrated to the U.S. at the age of 10, visits Nigeria quite often, and responded without hesitation that she identifies herself as African. When asked why African, since she was born in the UK and now, is an American citizen, she explained it like this:

Uh, I understand when people talk about nationality vs ethnicity, but I have always just held being African as like that was me... yes, I was living in England but I was an African living in England. I live in America but I am an African living in America. Yes, I was born in England but I just... I guess by also being surrounded by Africans you can't say like, 'yeah my parents are African but I am English,' (laugh) no you are an African. Yeah but African definitely (she said it while laughing but meaning it).

Dyna identifies herself as African because she believes her parents instilled and inculcated African culture in her since she was very young. She also said that with the fact that she has African parents, she sees it fit to claim her African heritage. However, at the same time, she was open to talk about her struggles with her identity when she was younger. She stated:

You know my parents always having to... (pause) I feel like it's a little bit more when you live in diaspora, like when you are out of your home country, your

parents [want] to make sure that you are ingrained in the culture so that they don't lose you and you don't get lost. Uh and so I feel like with things like food, cooking and you know certain traditions that we have to carry on as Africans, having to balance that and being in America is a little difficult because you find yourself like you might want to water down some of those principles but you can't, especially if you still live with your African parents and yeah that's a no no. It's a tag of war almost you want to be American but you have to be African (laugh) but yeah it is very interesting.

Dyna felt her upbringing was the way it was supposed to be since both of her parents were born in Africa. Her parents trained and instilled their culture and traditions in her so that she would be grounded in who she is. It has not been easy, but she accepted that it is who she is and that is the way things were supposed to be. She admitted that even to this day she still struggles at times to balance between cultures.

In a similar way, Mercy, who is also from Nigeria, responded to the question of identity by identifying herself as Nigerian. She was also forthcoming stating that she had struggled with her self-identification as she was growing up. She said:

Honestly, when I was younger I used to say that I am American just because I feel like sometimes we go through different identities. There was a point in time when I didn't want to do anything with Africa. I didn't want people to know that I am from Africa. I would be, 'oh no I am American,' but when I got older it's just like I feel like the African is just too much so I just say I'm Nigerian.

When asked why she does not consider herself as Nigerian American or African American, she responded:

Definitely when someone asks me what are you or where are you from? I say I am Nigerian. I don't say I am American or... I know sometimes people say I am American but my parents are Nigerian. I never understood that one.

Mercy also said she does not identify herself as African American. When asked why not, since she is from Africa and an American citizen. She responded:

I feel like African American is more like obviously you are from Africa but maybe... (she paused for a minute before she came up with her full explanation). Like sometimes when you ask the African Americans where are you from they say, 'oh I'm from Texas, I'm from Louisiana', it's like I mean I guess yeah they know where they are from but they really do not have the roots like, 'okay, I am from Ghana,' you know.

An assumption about Mercy's response is that she considers African Americans as those who came here through slavery even though she did not put it in that way. She thinks that African Americans do not have a "culture" and lack some background roots to trace their ancestors and connect to a specific African country. Surprisingly, this was the common understanding among the participants; only three of the participants did not mind being identified as African American.

Monica identifies herself as African. She explained that being from an African household while living in America, a person must know how to balance and act in one way when with family and another when with friends. Monica said:

Ok, so I say that I'm African. If you ask me... Because I feel like I'm African more than anything [else]. I was raised in [an] African household. Parents are African... I would say when I'm around, like my family, my African family, I will act a certain way and kind of abide by their traditions and rules and do what I'm expected of them. And when I'm with my friends or my peers, I act, I guess, more

Americanized more than my family would like me to. But it's just the roles I have to play because I'm both...so trying to balance them sometimes I guess is hard. So I just... When I'm around a certain group I kind of act a certain way and so forth. Monica pointed out that it was even harder for her to live between two cultures especially since it took time for her mother to adjust to American culture. She shared:

I guess because my mom, like when she had to deal with my sister and I, she wasn't used to... I guess this type of American culture that she felt we were bringing into the home. So she just shunned away from that. She wouldn't like accept [American culture] for a very long time. So it took her a while to, I guess, kind of warm up and accept that... I guess we are also this, too (meaning that they are also American, not just African).

Looking at what Monica's mother had to go through, a person can tell that it is not only hard for the children as they try to balance between cultures, but parents also have a hard time accepting the new culture where they now live. Based on Monica's comment, it seems it takes a while for parents to accept their host culture and start adapting to the culture of their new environment.

Grace, on the same identity question, responded that even though she was born in the U.S., she identifies herself as Nigerian American not just African American. She explained:

I identify myself as both... well as Nigerian American because an African American can be seen like a black person, somebody who doesn't really have a culture. In Africa, they're just... they're just black... So I say I'm Nigerian American to let people know that I have close relatives who were born there (meaning in Nigeria). You know, I'm still very in tune with my culture in

Africa... But I am also very Americanized because my parents were Americanized.

Grace claimed that even though she is very much Americanized, she is still very much attuned with her African culture simultaneously. Grace's mother kept their African cultural values, yet she did not force them on Grace. The mother laid everything on the table for Grace to choose the African cultural values if she wanted to. Grace chose to follow her African cultural values when she got older.

Linda, who came to the U.S. before her fourth birthday, also identifies herself as Nigerian American because she loves being both. She explained that since she was born in Nigeria and raised in Texas, she sees it fit to say that she is Nigerian but has lived most of her life in Houston, Texas. She explained:

I identify myself as a child of God, Nigerian, also from Houston. I like Texas a lot so I always say, Tex [when talking] about Texas... It's just like when I'm at home, it's like Nigerian, but also my parents feel it at their work and stuff... But, honestly, it's like when I'm at home and then when I'm outside or whenever my parents are with me and we are outside, it's still like I am Nigerian but then we are also Texans because my parents, they... kinda adapt to the environment, too.

Linda's upbringing in culture is Nigerian, but when in school and workplace she tries to assimilate to the host culture, and in her case this is Texan culture. Linda disclosed that even though her parents are also adapting to the culture, it has been a struggle to balance the two cultures, and it was hard for her to explain how she does it. Linda disclosed that, even though it is hard, she still tries to assimilate to her host culture when at school and work so that she can fit in with her peers. Assimilation refers to the process of minority culture being fully incorporated or absorbed into the majority culture. Taylor and Whittaker (2003) described assimilation as that which occurs when an

individual does not maintain his/her own culture when the person is in a new environment. In contrast, acculturation is the process of adapting or learning another culture as a result of prolonged contact (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003) while maintaining one's important cultural norms and traditions. A minority group may change some of its cultural norms but still maintains its important or unique traditions and cultural values when in a new environment. According to the responses of the interviews, all the student participants in this study were going through the process of acculturation. The participants were adapting and adjusting to their new environment while maintaining some of their unique traditions.

Sofia's mother is Liberian while her father is Nigerian. Sofia identifies herself as African although she knows the world sees her as Black, but, to her, Black is more general. She said, "I know the world sees me as Black, but I always identify as African just because I feel like Black is a little more general and I usually just say that I am African". But whenever she wants to be more specific she would identify herself as Nigerian. When asked why Nigerian since her mother is Liberian, she responded that, "...I spent more time with my dad's side of the family when I was younger. So, I felt more Nigerian. So, it's easy to just identify as Nigerian".

At the same time, Sofia acknowledged that she struggled with self-identification when she was younger stating:

It used to be a struggle, but because I'm older now and I just really love all the parts of where I'm from, I love being born in Houston and I love being Nigerian. I love being Liberian. It's not really a struggle anymore. When you are younger, it can be a struggle.

At present, Sofia feels like there is still a conflict regarding her culture and how people view her. She narrated:

[Living between cultures] is interesting because it's like when you are with Africans, you are looked at as American, even though you don't really feel American. And then, of course, when you are around American people, they look at you as like, oh, you are African, okay. You are not like... even though I was born here, I'm not really as American as they are. So it's... it's good having friends who are also first gen (meaning second generation according to researcher's definition) because they understand that too, even if they are, you know, Asian, like they understand like being both Asian and American in that way too. So it's weird to go back and forth, but it is part of who I am.

Sofia felt like sometimes she is in between identities to a point that she seems not to belong to either group. Americans look at her as African while her fellow Africans look at her as American since she was born in the U.S. She confessed that what helps her is making friends with people who are also second generation immigrants because they understand her dilemma.

Irene identified herself as Nigerian because she believes that is who she is. She continued, stating "I am an American by citizenship but deep down within me, I'm Nigerian. That's who I am. That's who I always will be". Irene also shared that even though she tends to gravitate towards people like her, she is open to associating with other races. When asked how she handles two cultures, Irene was quick to say that "It's very easy (while laughing). I mean, because I know how to identify with both. I can relate to a Black American and I can relate to a Nigerian American or just a Nigerian. Because, I mean, it's not hard".

On the other hand, Jane and Emma consider themselves as African Americans. They both acknowledged that there is controversy between being African and being African American. Emma claimed that it is appropriate for her to identify as African

American because she was born in the US. She explained that they are all Africans even though a person knows their background or not. Chidube shared the same view as Emma in stating that he does not mind whether he is identified as African or African American; to him this means he is not from here (meaning from US). He is an immigrant; therefore, he is fine with either identification. When Chidube was asked how he handles having two cultures, he struggled to respond. Finally, he was able to state that he did not know how to answer the question, but he somehow has surrounded himself with African friends despite the fact that he goes to a predominantly white school. The way Chidube struggled to answer the question showed that, as much as he is trying to balance the two cultures, he has not really figured out how he does it. Somehow there was a hesitation, as if he still struggles as he is working towards the person he wants to be.

Emma was open about her struggles when she was younger, but now she can tell people about who she is without being embarrassed. Emma shared:

Uh, I feel like growing up it was a little hard. So, you know, like when people hear or think of Africans, it's always like negative or like they actually ask dumb questions like, 'oh, like how do you guys live? Or do different things like that?' I feel like when I was younger, it was a little harder. But I feel like now that I'm older and the time we are living like people are becoming... are trying to learn more about the African culture. And I'm able to, like, reference my friends that I have who aren't actually African. I'm able to talk to them about my culture. I'm able to share some of the music and I'm able to even like have them try some of the food. Like now that I'm older, it's not as hard as compared to how it was before. And just like balancing both cultures. I think it's okay now since I am older and I'm able to speak up and tell more people about it since I am not

embarrassed. If I were to be embarrassed, would obviously be a little more challenging.

Emma was embarrassed about being African when she was younger because according to her, many people were ignorant about Africa. When her friends asked her about how different things were done in Africa, she felt like all the questions asked were indicating that Africa is a primitive place. She did not know much about Africa herself, so it was hard for her to speak up about her continent. Now, Emma is more knowledgeable about Africa, her country, and culture; therefore, she is no longer ashamed of who she is. She can educate her friends about Africa and sometimes she shares African music and food with her friends.

Jane, even though she identifies herself as African American, shared that when it comes to handling two cultures, she is all African because she is surrounded by Africans all the time apart from the time she is in school. She said:

Honestly, I feel like I'm more accustomed to my African culture since that is all I am around 24/7. I'm only around American culture when I'm in school. Honestly, since I am mixed with African-American students, Latinas, and the whole nine yard [sic] day, I am stuck in my African ways. I don't feel like there's any changes at all. I don't see any ways that I am blending the two, I don't see any of that. I just see strictly African, African, African. That's all I know. So...

Although Jane insisted that Africans and African Americans are more similar than different, she claimed that the only difference she sees is that Africans are “closer to the roots” than African Americans, but all are of African descent. Yet, Jane seemed to be more inclined to her African cultural values.

Almost all the participants admitted that they struggled with self-identification and balancing between two cultures at one point in their lives. Some participants

struggled in elementary or middle school, some in high school, while others are still struggling in college. They identify as Africans instead of their specific home country as they try to negotiate their identities. Most of these students would rather identify themselves as Africans instead of just being identified as “Black” since they think “Black” is too general as one participant stated. As observed, in the minds of the participants, the term “Black” is already ascribed to African Americans. Being identified as Africans helps them to have a claim closer to their ethnic group and is associated with a cultural identity. One of the participants pointed out that it is easier for them to identify as Africans now because “being African” is considered as “a cool thing” in their communities.

There are several factors that helped these students to be able to identify themselves, one of which is the community or neighborhood that they live in now or lived in when they were young. The community influenced some of the participants to reach a place where they started being comfortable with who they are. One participant shared that when he moved to a different location where there were many people from his home country, he started associating more with his people and claiming his “African side”. Another factor is friends. A participant revealed that when he went to college, he saw how proud his friends were of their culture and he did not want to be left out. He wanted the same for himself. Parents were also a factor that helped students to identify themselves. Some participants acknowledged that their parents instilled their African culture in them. Therefore, they identify themselves according to that culture. For example, Dyna claimed that her parents instilled African cultural values in her; therefore, she sees herself as more African. In contrast, Chance started claiming his identity as Nigerian when he wanted to find some normalcy in his life when everything else seemed

complicated. As observed from the interview responses, the participants could not identify themselves apart from their culture.

Culture

Ten out of twelve participants expressed how strongly they value their culture and desire to hold on to their roots. Since most of the participants were born in the US, they depended on their parents to introduce them to the African culture. Therefore, their exposure to their culture and traditions varies amongst individuals depending on their parents' willingness to teach and instill the culture in them. A few participants depended on friends they surrounded themselves with, while others depended on their community. Chance said his culture makes him who he is. He was forthcoming in saying that his mother did not put forth an effort to teach him about his culture, but when he was growing up, he was surrounded by people from his home country. He stated:

I would say [my neighborhood] just helped me get in tuned with the culture for sure. Because at home, even my mom, I had to push her to teach me... [my neighborhood] supports me just to make sure that I know, you know, my values of where our people come from, how we act in whatever our formalities are. I feel like if I wasn't in that area, I'd lose sight of actually who I was because most definitely even though in those densely populated Nigerian areas, in school, I was the only black kid in the class. So I'm happy when I go back home. You know, I will go outside and play on. My Nigerian friends all around us were very opposed from how it was at school.

Chance believes that one's cultural background is what makes a person richer in one's identity. His quote supports the idea that culture grounds and helps a person to navigate in a society. His belief about culture can also be connected to an answer he gave

when asked what kind of advice he would give to a young person who has just moved to the US. He said:

Keep those values at heart and that's gonna... it's going to help you... will help you. And it will... let you know and keep you at ease that you don't forget who you are, because you know, some people in America, they can't say the same thing... their culture is gone. You know, they don't have that right to be able to hold true to themselves who they really are, their history, their last name, [and] all that stuff. So just keep it true to heart. It's an important thing... culture... cultural pride, I would say, is one of the few good prides out there because it helps you in this society today. You know, without getting lost in whatever may come your way, keeping that true to you is very important. Very, very important.

Chance shared that people have to have that cultural pride so that they are not lost. He believes that keeping one's culture is very important. People are who they are because of their culture. It adds to one's identity. Chance continued sharing that he feels like people who lose their culture, lose part of their identity. They lose claim of where they are coming from.

Similarly, as much as Linda acknowledged that she must operate in both American and African cultures, she feels that her African culture is richer and shows more respect when addressing others. Linda revealed that she prefers her African culture. She articulated:

...I try to respect everybody. I don't feel good if I disrespect someone. I don't treat them like they hardly deserve respect. So, I think it's something I don't want to have is like respect of the American culture, which is like lack of respect but I want to have like the respect that the Nigerian culture has.

Linda's resolve to keep her African culture was also apparent in her response that she gave when asked what advice she would give to a young person who has just moved to the US. She said:

Uh, well, depend how young they are... If they are a little bit older I would tell them not to completely like dissolve their [heritage] culture and absorb their new culture that they are in, because my cousins were living in Nigeria longer than us and they came here recently and moved to Boston and then you can see kinda like differences between them... (meaning some of her cousins completely assimilated to American culture). I guess just be true to yourself and culture and don't try to force fit into somebody else's position. Other people may like your culture even if they don't, right, you are still who you are.

For Linda, it does not matter who likes your culture or not. People must be true to who they are and not feel forced to comply with a certain behavior or culture that is not their own. This notion is quite common to many of the participants. They feel like they are pressured to behave in a certain way, and it is hard for them to stand for what they believe in when they are young. Most times they felt like they must abandon who they are and become what they are not so that they can fit in with their peers.

When Linda was asked why she feels so strongly about her culture, she responded that it may be because she was born in Africa. Therefore, she is more inclined to her African culture although she is proud to be both. She also noted that when she was in elementary school her mother enforced some cultural values and behavior that were acceptable as an African child. She knew that it may be okay for some children to behave in a certain way but she was not to emulate that behavior. She explained that "I know that if I do this [behavior] at home or if I do this anywhere else... it's not something I am supposed to do". Linda knew her boundaries, so she behaved accordingly.

Chidube believes in keeping one's culture to heart. When asked what has been the most helpful thing in making his immigration experience work in the US, he responded that there are many things, but one of them is staying true to his own culture. Therefore, he believes that associating himself with other African friends helps him develop good traits, hold on to his roots, and maintain his cultural values:

Because I feel like you develop traits based on who you hang around with. Which is I think where whitewashing came from... if you hang around a lot with White people, you are going to lose sense of your own culture. By hanging around with other cultures, kinda you learn theirs, but you also want to stick to yours because you want to be different. You want to keep yours. I guess. Yeah. You want to hold on to your roots. You want to hold on to something that makes you different.

Chidube wants to be known as African and one way of identifying himself as such is by keeping his culture. He is also trying to visit his home country even though his siblings do not seem to be interested. He stated, "... for my siblings, they are not really interested in their roots or anything like that... So, I'm the only one who actually wants to go". He shared that it is important for him to stay connected to his culture and visiting his home country will help him relate more to his culture.

Mercy appreciated the fact that when they got to the US, her parents kept their culture and that they put a limit to what they could do as children. She compared herself with her cousins and friends from Nigeria whose parents are a bit relaxed in keeping their culture. Her parents insisted that they do household chores just like in African culture. She said:

I think just the same upbringing it was like obviously, I wouldn't say it was too strict but when I compare [with] my friends, like the way they would do things, for example, coming back from school, I remember sometimes my friends would

just come home, sit down and start watching TV and their mom would be okay with it. And for our household that's like, 'ah ah, this is your house you cannot just be coming home and just relax. You need to do some chores, there are things to do, you need to wash plates, you need to prepare food,' so that was different, but I feel that I like that kind of upbringing.

Mercy shared that it is important to keep those African cultural values. A person should not emulate behaviors that are not good or are disrespectful just because they are in the U.S. According to Mercy's view, keeping a good balance of both cultural values is beneficial for a person's well-being.

Jim regarding the same cultural values expressed that it is easy to identify Africans because of their culture. Africans act differently and they are respectful of their elders. According to Jim, African children and youth are taught how to speak or respond to their elders when in conversations with them.

Basically like you can tell when someone is African by the way they just do things, the way they go about things like... like for us we have different life morals and the way we greet people, the way we talk, everything is different. We are taught to just always show older people respect but for like here for like African-Americans, they don't really abide by that rule. As for me, if I was to see someone that wasn't nice to me I would probably just walk away. I won't say anything 'cause that's what I was taught to do. I was taught to always show respect no matter what.

In a similar way, Monica feels like there are certain things that Africans do differently because of their cultural values. She insisted that first generation immigrant parents expect students to behave in accordance with African culture and therefore, some behaviors are not allowed. She said:

The background that we are coming from... what Black American kids... (she paused trying to find the right way to put it) and I'm not trying to be disrespectful, but... Well, Black American kids are known for doing [things] that's not going to be allowed in an African household. Whether it's if you have tattoos, you are getting colored hair, you are doing all these stuff. It would not be allowed in African households.

Monica appreciated being connected to her Liberian culture but felt disconnected once they moved to a suburban area. She felt like her Liberian culture was what was giving her a sense of belonging. She treasured her community because she had more people from her home country, and she felt closer to her roots. The community she first lived in was heavily influenced by the African culture and that helped her stay connected and in touch with her culture. She explained:

There was a large Liberian population there. So, the Liberian culture was heavily influenced in that area... It's kind of like how it is here in Houston with the Nigerians. It was kind of like that. It was important to me because there was a sense of belonging. But once that was taken away, it just I don't know. I felt (pause) I guess I felt very alone.

Monica's sense of belonging was tied to her culture and Liberian community. She felt connected and a part of a group, a community. This is apparent even in her response when asked what advice she would give to a person who has just moved here. Her response was:

I would say if you have a network or a support [system], have those people with you, keep in contact, you know, be... Just be mindful of where you are, where you are at, what you need to get done, because there's going to be a lot of hurdles, hurdles that you don't even know are coming your way. So, you just have to be

able to prepare or prepare yourself for what's coming. And you just have to have that network. Don't go to a place say you're Kenyan, don't go to Utah where there's no type of Kenyan community that won't be able to help you. Don't do that. Go to a place where there is at least a group of Africans that can help you with this process, because if not, you will be lost.

Monica believes that a person's community helps to keep them grounded not just in the process of getting accustomed to the American system but also to reject some behaviors that are not acceptable in African culture. According to the participants, African culture is rich in traditional practices, values, and norms. A few participants gave an example of how they, as Black African children, respect their elders. They are careful with how they choose words as they interact with their parents or any elderly person. In addition, Black African children are expected to help their parents with household chores. Also, they are encouraged to work hard in school. All participants seemed to like their African culture and appreciate all the values that their parents instilled in them.

Language

While discussing culture and self-identification, some participants mentioned that language comes to play when they talk of culture. Speaking or just understanding their original language helps the student participants to be more attuned to their culture. Chance felt like he was missing out when he was not able to understand or speak his language. He recalled:

I was like I would see other kids, you know, my age, also Nigerian. They know how to speak [the language]. You know, the inside jokes and stuff. I didn't understand it because I didn't quite get it. But most definitely I said, you know what, I want to be able to laugh like all my Igbo friends as well. So, I need to start getting up to speed (meaning he needed to start learning the language).

According to Chance, he had always had the desire to learn his language, but his mom did not think it was important for him to learn the language since they live in the US. This made him determined to learn the language and he took it upon himself to learn it. When asked when he began, he responded that he started learning the language when he was in high school:

I would say kind of late in my life, honestly, before I just took it as is. But I would say around high school... Because at home, even my mom, I had to push her to teach me the language because she would always be like, 'oh, you know, you don't need to learn it over here, you know.' So but it pushed me to actually go and seek knowledge about it myself more than anything.

Chidube wants to stay connected with his culture. He explained that he does not want to be "whitewashed", which means he does not want to completely forget his culture and be more Americanized. He asked his parents to help him learn his language. He said:

I hear Igbo better than I speak. I only know a couple words like I can only speak a couple words, but I can hear it better... I understand [it]. I mean, they spoke to me in Igbo when I was little a lot, and then as I got older, they stopped so I asked them to start speaking to me in Igbo again so I can learn the language... Because I wanna stay in touch with my, I guess, Nigerian side. I don't want to become whitewashed. I want it... I want to stay with my culture.

Chidube believes that language is part of his culture and wants to learn it. He also said that his siblings are not interested in learning the language, and his parents are not pushing them to learn. But he wants to learn, and it is important to him that he learns the language.

In Chance's case, it might be that his mother did not see the reason why he had to learn the language while living in the U.S. According to the responses of the participants, other African parents may avoid teaching their children their original language because they think it would be confusing for their children to learn two languages at the same time. Weisskirch (2013) argued that it is important for parents to teach their children their heritage language because children learn their heritage culture through language. Irene disclosed that when she was young, her aunt taught her their original language but when she started school, they also had Spanish. Learning three languages was very confusing for her, and as a result, her parents had to stop teaching her their original language and stuck to English only. She explained:

So, when I was younger and my mom's sister, she came to look after us when [my mom] had me. So, she started speaking Igbo to me, like from [the start] (she snapped her fingers). And then they kinda stopped... once I started like mixing the two in school, like I was confused because I was also learning Spanish. So, I didn't know what I was [saying], you know. And then I think around like maybe fourth grade. I started watching movies only in Igbo. And I would force myself to understand, like use context clues based on what my parents say, what I hear, and then I learned it.

One can easily see the pride in Irene's eyes when she said this. She worked so hard to relearn their language. According to Cheatham and Ro (2010), children who are learning more than one language at the same time may develop "interlanguage" which is a "transitory grammar" (p. 19). During this time children are observing how the languages work. They may use both languages in one sentence or short answers but educators should be patient because this is not a sign of confusion, rather they are trying to understand which rules apply to the languages (Cheatham, & Ro, 2010). Cheatham and

Ro (2010) argued that educators should encourage students to maintain their heritage language by incorporating culturally diverse narratives which can easily relate to children's home experiences. Almost all the participants showed a desire to at least hear their language if they could not speak it. The participants who understand and speak their language displayed some pride in effort for keeping their original language. Linda proudly asserted that she has kept her original language, which is Yoruba, even though she came to the US at an early age of 4. She shared that she has kept it by speaking it when communicating with her family members.

Grace acknowledged that she is more Americanized, and her parents were relaxed in keeping their African traditions and culture. She recounted that her parents were not strict—as long as she was respecting the family name. However, she revealed that she wants to stay connected with her culture and roots because it is very important to her. She also wishes to raise her own family knowing her African culture, and if possible, to know her parents' original language because she does not want to lose a sense of who she is. She said:

To me, I feel like if you don't stay in contact with your culture, you lose a sense of who you are. So with me, I think it's very, very, very, extremely important to stay in contact with my culture, because one day when I raise my family, I want them to be able to eat the food that I know from back home. And one day I actually want to learn the language and my children to know their heritage language and things like that.

Grace's statement showed that even though she did not have the opportunity to learn the language yet, she will still work on learning the language soon in hopes of teaching her children. She treasures her culture and is very much part of it even though she knows she is more Americanized and that her parents do not expect her to learn the language. The

participants brought up food, dressing, and music as part of some of the traditional norms and customs that they kept. These norms are very much part of their culture.

Traditional Food, Dressing, and Music

Over half of the participants (n=7) mentioned how their traditional food and traditional dressing help them relate to their African culture. A few people included music as a source for them to connect with their home of origin. Sofia stated that when she is not close to her family, or around anyone who shares her ethnicity, she listens to the music from her home country and eats traditional food so that she can feel connected. Jim appreciated the food from his childhood neighborhood stating that if it were not for his neighborhood, “my African side would have left me completely. I would probably been more Americanized. I wouldn’t be eating the “stuff” (meaning the traditional food) that I eat...” He believed that part of his culture is knowing how to eat their traditional food. Irene also explained that they did not change much of their culture when they moved to the US because they still eat their traditional food, and wear traditional clothes:

I’m not really sure [if we changed because] we eat the same food; we wear our traditional clothes. We speak our language at home... like often times now, like that I am older my mom would... her first mind is to speak Igbo to me now because I understand it better than I did when I was younger.

In a similar way, Mercy shared that her mother still wears the African clothes and cooks their traditional food. She also stated that since her brother, who was born in the US, does not eat African cuisine, her mother is forced to prepare American food for him. However, her mother complains when making the food saying how fattening American food is.

Chance mentioned that his mother has traditional clothes and she always dresses up when going to the parties and Wake Keeping ceremonies that help them bridge the

cultural gap. He was also very happy to share that he owns his own traditional clothes. He stated:

It's another thing to be able to go to, you know, our own cultural gatherings, our own things, and those things help bridge that gap and make sure we don't forget where we came from and what our communities are actually like. Wake keeping [are done] the same style that they would have [at home]. Same with marriages... marriage ceremonies are very, very interesting. That won't change. And I'm forced to do the same whenever I get married as well. My mom most definitely still wears, you know, cultural clothes always to go to parties. Even if it's not that formal. She will still go in her finest clothes and go outside. And I have some myself, too. So, whenever we go out, I always love to wear it... because I don't have to get the option very often.

Language, food, traditional clothes, and in some cases, music, help the participants to stay in touch and connected with their culture and roots. One could easily see how proud these students are to participate in their traditions and cultural norms. The participants have a sense of belonging because they are connected and they are part of their community. Being part of their community affirms their identities which is very important to them and their well-being. Furthermore, according to the participants' views, their parents do not only encourage them to maintain their African cultural values but also to work hard in school.

Family's view of education

From participants' responses to how their ethnic identity influences their decision to participate in academic and non-academic pursuits, the theme of family's view of education emerged, while attitude towards school and school environment emerged as a subtheme. All participants responded that their families value education and academic

success. According to the participants, their parents are aware of the importance of education, and sometimes the students understand that obtaining an education opens opportunities for a better life and social advancement. Some parents encouraged their children to work hard and pursue further education because they are Africans. There is a perception among the participants that if a person is African or Black, one must work twice as hard. Dyna shared that her parents view education as more important than anything else in the world especially for an African. She recounted what her parents usually tell her:

[Education is] *important* (she said it with emphasis) than everything in the world. I think it's for every African in general. They hold education to a higher standard you go nowhere without a degree. Uh like, 'do you wanna work at [sic] or do you wanna work at McDonald? Uh no, you have to get a degree and you don't just stop at your bachelor's.' If you are not doing your master's you are doing your PhD. In my case it's a PhD. It's very very important, everything else comes second.

In Dyna's family, school is the number one priority. It seems Dyna's parents believe you cannot go anywhere without an education. According to Dyna, her parents encourage the children to aim at getting at least two degrees. For them, a person does not stop at the first degree.

Jim's parents view education in the same way as Dyna's parents, and insist that for Black people, education is vital. They look at education as the path to a good future, whereby one does not have to worry about paying the next bill or buying the next meal. He stated:

My parents think that education as far as for like black people, people of color is important because they feel like [an] educated black person can do more. This

feels like it's a way out. Like this is a way to just get advanced, have a good life, get a job, get a good career and just not to worry about bills and not to worry about where your next meal is going to come [from]. That's the only reason they came here in the first place is just for us to have better life. That's what they want for us.

Jim said that his parents came to the US so that they could have a better life. This appeared to be a common understanding among the Black African immigrant undergraduate students who participated in this study. Most of the participants shared that their parents migrated to the US because they wanted a better life for themselves and their children.

Irene also expressed the same understanding that, “education is important to them (her parents) because they worked hard. They didn’t come here to work hard just for us (meaning children) to slack off”. Irene also shared that her father’s entire family is educated; each one of them has at least two degrees.

Emma echoed Jim and Irene stating that her parents came here for a better future, and unless she gets a lucrative business, she must get an education. She said:

[Education] is something that is very important to them. And I'm the youngest of my siblings; and all of us, we are all in school. So, yeah, it's something that we think is very important that we need [to] further [our] education. And not only stopping in high school. I feel like it's like that because, you know, they came here from a different country to have a better life for their kids, and for themselves too. So obviously, I mean, it's something that I can like... unless one of us started like a business and it really took off... but they wouldn't be okay with like one of us working at like a fancy restaurant. When we can be getting an education or doing something better for ourselves.

According to the responses from the participants, it is seen that all parents are pushing their children to do well in school and the students treasured the opportunity to be in school so that they can have a bright future. The participants shared that education is not to be taken lightly. The participants' parents view education as very important, and the participants have also learned to take education seriously.

Sofia acknowledged that education is extremely important to her family especially because they are African. Everyone in the family has a certain type of certificate. If they do not have that, it means maybe they were in the military. She narrated that, "...being African, you are pretty much expected to get a degree. I think [it] would be funny if I didn't get a degree. The only family members that don't have one probably... they went to the military". She continued saying that, "even if you get something like just an associate". Pursuing further education after high school in Sofia's family is a norm. Sofia perceived that it would be strange for anyone in the family not to, because everyone gets at least an associate degree.

Jane's parents, like a few of the other participants' parents who did not have the privilege of obtaining a higher education, encouraged their children to work hard as well. Some of these parents had circumstances beyond their control, and that is why they were not able to go to college. Jane disclosed that her parents did not have an opportunity to get a college degree because their education was disrupted by war in their country of origin, but they hold education with the highest regard. Jane shared:

They take [education] to heart because it's something that was taken away from them due to circumstances that they could not control (meaning war). So, they take it personal. They want all their kids to go to and through school. They want their kids to achieve bigger and better things and not just a bachelor's degree.

They want all of us to at least obtain masters, doctorate like go far because they

feel like education is key and it will open doors for us that they didn't get the chance to, you know, to do it.

In a similar way, Grace also explained that her father did not get a college degree, but it is very important that his children get the education they need.

Most of these participants' parents are first generation college students. They understand that education helped them excel in life, and they have high expectations for their children to work hard in school and achieve higher qualifications. Even those parents who did not have an opportunity to go to college understand that education is key to success and a brighter future. Since the parents have instilled the importance of education in their children's minds, the student participants have good and positive attitudes towards school for the most part.

Attitude towards school and school environment

Most of the participants said they liked their school even though their campuses are not as diverse as they desired. Only a few students claimed that their campuses were diverse with a good number of African students. When asked what they liked about school, some of them responded that they liked their teachers. A few stated that they have good friends at school and like making friendships. The participants appreciated college because they feel it brings a new whole experience which is very different from high school. They view everything in college as a learning experience. Sofia expressed:

[College] is hard when you first get here. Transitioning... but everything is a learning experience, not just in the class, but your interaction with people or even just having to learn how to navigate adulthood while balancing school. I feel like even though it's been hard, learning experience has been probably the best part [of college].

Similarly, Grace stated that she liked college because this is the time that students start learning what they are interested in. Grace shared that she enjoys her classes. She was grateful for college because it gave her the opportunity to learn what intrigues and interests her. She said:

The best thing about college is that you can now start to learn something you are extremely interested in. Other than high school, you are learning things that you don't really care about. But college you get to pick your degree, your major, learn things that interest you. For example, my major is pre-med and I want to go [to] medical school. I want to become a surgeon. That's what I want to do. I really like math. I'm extremely good at math. I love science. So when I'm in my classes and I'm learning these things, they intrigue me... You are learning something you are interested in.

Irene, Jane, and Chidube disclosed that they enjoy the freedom that they have at college because they are on their own, away from their parents' home. They viewed this freedom as an opportunity for self-discovery and to be their own kind of people. When asked what are the best things about school, Irene responded, "Freedom, I guess, because I go to school away from home, so I get a chance to kind of find myself instead of live by the kind of person that my parents want me to be". Jane also declared that she appreciated college because of the learning experience college life offers, learning to be independent. She stated, "I want to say being away from home and I guess learning to be my own person would be my best experience in college and learning how to be independent", she continued saying that she also liked her classes, "and also [I] like the classes. [They are] not as rigorous as people make it seem, it could just be that it's because of my major". Jane acknowledged that it could just be the program that she is pursuing but so far, she was managing her classes without a lot of stress.

Chidube claimed he liked the freedom that college life offers and learning how to be organized. He explained that in college, students learn good habits that can help them once they are in the real world. He believed that the skills students learn are very vital for their future life and the time management skills help a person to be organized. Chidube understood that college is not just about classes, but it encompasses everything that a person learns while at school including time management. He said:

Like, if you learn them (meaning good habits), then you become very organized.

You kind of work out your own schedule. You have a lot of freedom to do what you want that will actually help you when you go into the real world.

Jim simply liked the campus life because he had friends, and he could form friendships. He also cherished the fact that the campus had students who were like him. According to Jim, his school is diverse and has a sizeable population of Black African immigrant students who are from different countries.

Chance described his campus as very open and as a place where there are many opportunities for students. He stated that he has had a very good experience at his school. He has managed to focus on school during his time in college. He acknowledged:

I would say [my school] is very open and has a lot of opportunities for me as a person that I could benefit from. And I don't know, I don't really have many other schools to draw comparison from. But I would say my experience at [my school] has been pretty good. I haven't really had any issues, thankfully. I had to talk to a lot of friends who had many issues, you know, in their entire college career. But everything for me has surprisingly worked out and I've had no issues so far at all.

Five participants shared that they like their school because of their professors and the friends they have at school. Mercy shared that what she likes about school are the professors she has; so far, she has been lucky with professors. She said, "I think the

professors, yeah, I really like the professors so far I haven't dealt with like horrible professors you know." Monica stated that her professors are open to learning other cultures and willing to help. She shared, "I like the teachers here. They are very open to learning different types of cultures. And they seem very fascinated by it and always willing to help". Dyna revealed that school is hard for her because of her major, but she appreciates her professor for helping her keep on track. In a similar way, Linda is grateful, especially for professors who share real life experiences with the students. She felt that it makes it so real to learn from real life lessons not just classes, stating:

I do like the teachers because whenever they say something, you know, kinda not related to coursework they give like life lessons. I like to listen to people's experiences and learn from that, but also, I want to give them respect because they always have opportunities they may share with the class. It is up to you to take the opportunity or not. I really like the professors.

Linda felt that professors who share their life experiences in a classroom make a huge difference because they make a connection with the students' lives outside the classroom as well. She believed that real life lessons sometimes encourage students to continue working hard when they are struggling. She viewed this as important and very helpful to those students who want to learn from real life lessons. Learning real life lessons can help students to persevere when they face challenges in school.

Challenging Factors about School

Participants' responses to what factors they perceive as support and challenges in their academic achievement resulted in challenging factors about school and support from family, faculty, and friends emerging as themes, while school workload and time/task management, lack of diversity in the classroom, challenges from family, and student organizations on school campus emerged as subthemes. All participants agreed that

college is quite challenging. Some participants acknowledged that high school was easier than college. Eight of the twelve participants live away from home, which means they must balance living on their own and college life. The participants shared that some of the challenging things about school were managing workload and time, lack of diversity in the school, difficulty with navigating the system, and acquiring study skills. Offered below is a discussion of these challenges from participants' experiences.

School Workload and Time/Task Management

Some participants disclosed that time and task management is a challenge for them because of the kind of school workload they have. When asked, "What are the challenging things about school?", Chance, who is in an engineering program, struggles with the workload and was quick to respond:

The workload. I would say the workload that's the main and the only thing.

Everything else I manage to balance pretty well. It's just there's a lot of workload, especially since I'm in an engineering course. It's kind of... tough a little bit, but you just have to prioritize and get things taken care of and you should be fine.

Dyna, who is a Biology major, on a path to medical school, also disclosed that her workload can be very challenging at times because she takes a full course load every semester. She also revealed that writing papers does not come easy for her. In addition, she is also working as a medical assistant at one of the medical centers in the area which adds to her already busy schedule:

Having to balance school and work because I work as a medical assistant in [the area]. Sometimes it's a little tough, also the workload that I sometimes impose on myself with taking more than my take of classes in a semester which no one should do... but with things like that it does get a little difficult. What else? I struggle with writing papers a lot.

Dyna is a good student but still feels like she has so many things going on, that balancing school and work becomes a challenge. She acknowledged that her major is a difficult one and it contributes to the heavy workload; and taking many classes in a semester adds to the stress. At the same time, Dyna accepts that this is something that she must do.

Irene also says the workload is more than what she had in high school. High school was easy for her, which is not the case with college. In Irene's case, managing classes and assignments can be challenging for her. She stated:

The workload, because [it's] the transition from high school to college [so it's] very different because you are used to the same classes every day (meaning in high school), like they give you a paper too. But then [college is] like you have a class once or twice a week and you have like five assignments that are due by the end of the week while you are juggling three or four other classes.

Jim struggles with time in a different sense. He feels like he has too much time and he is always torn with thinking that he is misusing his time. He always wants his time to count. Therefore, every time he is relaxing, he feels like he is wasting time. He explained that his constant concern is time management:

Basically, for me... the way I do my schedule is that I have so much time on my hands, so sometimes I don't know what to do with the time. I feel like if I'm not doing something [sic] I'm being unproductive, or if I'm sleeping... I am probably sleeping too much. I am just worried about time because they give you a lot of time. All my classes are from 11:00 to 3:00, Monday through Thursday. So it's basically the time they give you... is up to me to use my time wisely and not waste time.

Time management can be a challenge to some students especially as they transition from high school to college, since in high school they did not have a heavy

workload. Some students struggle with time management because of programs they are pursuing, yet others struggle due to their schedules. Students may feel like they have so much time. As a result, they misuse their time instead of making a reliable working schedule that will aid in using their time wisely. As Jim disclosed, he struggles with time management because he always wants to use his time wisely. He is constantly assessing himself as to whether he is doing things that are important and necessary as he uses his time.

Lack of Diversity in the Classroom

Three of the participants, Monica, Emma, and Jane, were quick to admit that their campuses were not as diverse as they would have liked. Monica complained about the lack of an African community at her school. She shared that she would have liked the school to be more diverse. Emma agrees with Monica in her view stating that she was the only Black student in most of her classes. She credited the lack of diversity in her classes to the major she was pursuing. She stated:

I just started the semester like two weeks ago. Since I'm a political science major and I'm going into law. So, I guess not that many people who look like me are interested in that field. So, I was actually just telling someone how I'm taking a few classes on campus and some online and in these courses, I'm actually the only black girl and everyone else is Hispanic or White or Asian. So, walking in the classroom I was like... Ok. I'm probably going to have to work a little harder... it's obviously a little challenging because people already have that stigma, you know, like black people aren't educated... or like African people aren't educated.

Emma disclosed that her school is not very diverse, and sometimes that makes her feel a little uncomfortable, especially in the classroom because she is the only Black African student. She acknowledged that she has never been treated with indifference or

mistreated in any way, but the fact that she is the only Black student in her classes makes her more self-aware. Emma feels like her school environment would have been somewhat better if she had some students in her class who looked like her. She stated, “I mean, I feel like it would be like a little better [to] just at least have someone else in there who looks like you”.

Emma feels pressured because she is the only Black student in the class. She confessed that she had a similar situation the previous semester, but she did not feel very uncomfortable because the professor was Hispanic. Emma shared that she views Hispanics to be a little bit like her culture. But in the semester that this study was done, Emma had a Caucasian professor who put more pressure on her. That perceived pressure included that she must do well and prove that Black people or Africans are intelligent and can be educated. The pressure was not due to anything that the professor did, it was coming from within her.

Difficulty Navigating the System

Three of the participants disclosed that they were first generation college students. These students shared that it was not easy for them to navigate the system because they did not have anyone to guide them during the search and application process for college. Chance, who is not a first generation college student, also felt he needed more help to feel comfortable with the college system. Students who have parents with a college degree may be guided and given more information about application processes. They may also be advised on how to get other college resources by their parents especially if the parents attended U.S. colleges.

Sofia was slow to reveal that college life was very challenging for her at first, especially when navigating the system stating that, “I feel like being African because I'm like the first one to come here (meaning a four year college), it makes things a little

harder to be connected, and knowing how to navigate the system". She said her parents obtained associates degrees but never had the opportunity to continue with school. Sofia considers herself a first generation college student in her family since she is the only one who has gone to a four year college. She revealed that it is a challenge to connect with other students. This makes her feel quite lonely at times:

I feel like a lot of people don't talk about it but feeling lonely sometimes in the sense that you go through struggles of various kinds would be like... trying to make friends or dating or financial issues or, you know, not knowing what you want to do with your life. And it's something that everyone goes through, but nobody really talks about. So, it makes you feel lonely until you meet people that are also kind of in the same period of life as you are.

Sofia believed that having students who are going through the same struggles alleviates the feeling of loneliness and knowing the system helps students to access the needed resources that a college can offer. She was comfortable with saying that it has been hard for her to learn how to navigate adulthood while balancing school. Sofia continued stating that her situation has gotten better since she is now a senior, but it was not easy when she was a freshman.

Jane, who is also a first generation college student, shared that navigating college was not easy for her. She compared herself with other students who had parents who attended college. She stated that those students are privileged because they have parents who can assist them with navigating the college system. According to Jane, parents who attended college can guide their children through the application process as well as direct them on how they can access college resources.

So, it's easier for [my friends who] have both parents that went to and through college since they are not first generation [college students]. I am considered first

generation [college student] because both my parents didn't attend college, so it's harder. I'm teaching myself everything I know in college because I don't have like a background where both my parents finish education due to war, so they didn't get the chance to. So, it's harder for me than it is for other students who have both parents that have bachelor's degrees or PhDs. It's a lot harder for me, but it's not impossible like I'm still getting through it. It is just harder knowing that I have to do it on my own even though they are there to support me mentally. But I gotta do the work.

Jane acknowledged the support of her parents but also realizes that since they do not know the system itself, they are limited, and she has to go through the process on her own. In some cases, first generation college students may not know that they can apply for financial aid if they are from low and middle socioeconomic families. For example, Chance shared that his parents were paying for his tuition and fees before he discovered that he could also apply for financial aid. First generation college students may sometimes struggle to get the necessary information as well as access the college resources that are already available for them.

Supports from Family

All the participants responded that their families helped them to reach their academic goals. Parents are instrumental to the students' academic success. Some of the participants are full time students who depend on their parents for financial support, while others rely on their parents for emotional support, and some for both. Jane shared that her parents are her support system. Since she is a full-time student, they take care of all her living expenses:

To me, they (meaning her parents) are definitely the ones supporting me through this whole college process. They are paying for almost everything, well, not

everything, financial aid takes care of everything but like books, housing, they are the ones taking care of. My dad is the one financing my car that I drive back and forth. They are making sure my bank account is up to date because I don't work... currently, I'm a full-time student, so they take care of all those expenses. My parents are the ones paying my apartment rent right now. So, they're basically my financial, my spiritual, [and] my advisors basically like my only support system. Jane appreciated the fact that she can concentrate only on her studies and not worry about paying the bills because her parents are the ones taking care of that. Financial aid takes care of her tuition and fees.

Jim also said his parents support him financially and mentally. They make sure he is being practical, and he is balancing his school-work. He stated, "Basically, [my parents] just support me like financially [and] mentally. They support me in every way and that I am in college like they support [me] even [more] because I'm by myself. They make sure that I am staying levelheaded" (meaning he is staying sensible and practical as he lives on his own). Irene was also grateful that her parents support her not only when she needs school resources but for all her needs. She shared, "My parents are actually very supportive people. I mean, obviously, like they give me money and anything that I need that they can provide I have... like I have never lacked anything in my life that they could provide for me". Irene continued saying that they do not only support her financially but also emotionally and they motivate her to do better.

Six of the participants expressed that their parents support them by pushing them to work hard in school. Grace shared that her dad is extremely supportive and always tells her to "knock it out" meaning to pass her classes with good grades, like Chidube's father who pushes for education. Linda shared that her parents are also very supportive, and they always push her to continue doing excellent work. She said, "They have been very

supportive because they always push me and even when I do something good, and they are proud of me, and they cheer me on. But they also encourage me to be better and continue doing excellent work". Linda's parents cheer her on, but at the same time urge her to work hard and not be complacent.

Sofia confessed that even though her parents have not been able to assist her financially, they have been a source of encouragement, pushing her to work hard. They give her the support they can afford which is emotional support. Sofia's parents motivate her to work hard so that she can achieve her educational goals.

While my parents didn't get a bachelor's, they have associate's [degrees only]. They always pushed going to school. And I always knew I would go to college. They were, you know, they're mostly encouraging verbally, but nobody really has the means to support me financially. So, they just give me the support they can which is just the encouraging words.

Sofia acknowledged her family's position and was grateful that they are there emotionally for her. Because of the family's support, she knew without a doubt that she will continue with her education after high school. Sofia is determined to get her bachelor's degree as a first generation college student in her family.

Mercy appreciated that her mother was always encouraging her to do well. According to Mercy, her mother created a loving environment in their home which helped with her mental wellness. She asserted:

Obviously, [she encouraged me about] education like 'oh Mercy you have to work hard', you know, she supported with that. Uhm, she couldn't really give like ah I guess like really not really support but like actually [she gave]... I feel like the emotional support, you know, advise like the love like a loving environment I

was happy to be home, you know, we didn't have any issues where is like oh I wish I had a different [family] but just kind of a typical family.

Mercy acknowledged that her mother was helpful and encouraged her to pursue education. She could not help her with the actual schoolwork, but her mother created a warm and loving home environment that she was grateful for. The kind of environment that Mercy's mother created was good for Mercy's well-being as well as her mental health.

Challenges from Family

More than half of the participants were open and willing to share some challenges they faced in their academic journeys. Students disclosed that while their parents are very supportive, the students also faced some challenges as parents try to dictate what field of study they should pursue. According to the participants, some parents persuade or coerce their children to choose parents' dream careers.

Dyna expressed that if it were not that she was already thinking of enrolling in a medical field, it would have been a struggle with her father. According to Dyna, her father pressured her to study to become a medical doctor. Dyna feels like if she were interested in pursuing a different career than medicine, her father would not have been pleased with her. She shared that even though she was planning to pursue a degree in a medical field, she still felt the pressure when her parents suggested that she study to be a medical doctor instead of studying to be a physician assistant as she initially wanted.

You know, coming to college I wanted to be a physician assistant and I had been adamant about that since my sophomore year of high school; but I came in August as a Biology major, that never changed but my career path changed. You know they were like, 'you gonna spend two years in med school you might as well be a doctor.' So I mean they were on board for so long for me to be a PA then all of a

sudden they were like you can be a doctor. So here I am obviously it worked out well 'cause I just had my interviews with (name) two weeks ago and hopefully I get into it which will be great, but is just kinda like they did influence it. They were like, 'it is your choice but we are just saying we prefer if you were a doctor.'

Dyna acknowledged that her parents are supportive but feels like they put some pressure on her to go the extra mile. She does not mind it that much since she was already in the same field, but she realizes that if it were not like that things would have been hard. In addition, she also narrated that her parents are overprotective. She feels somewhat frustrated and overwhelmed at times because they do not let her do most things on her own. She said:

I think it was yesterday I left my phone in the car. I told my dad that I left my phone in your car can I quickly go down to get it; he was like no. I guess because it was 10 o'clock at night but at the same time I was like how long are you going to do this for? I am 19, you know, the whole thing of people taking you everywhere, very protective I feel sometimes it may be sadly overwhelming but I know their hearts are in the right place; but I feel like sometimes it's a little challenging like little things I would want to be able to do for myself but I am like uh how would they feel about that or would they see the way I am seeing it. You know so little things like that...

She confessed that sometimes it is so stifling, the support is counterproductive to her growth, and prevents her from making her own decisions. Dyna thinks she is now old enough to take care of some of her own needs. She desires to do certain things without the help of her parents. She wants to be independent, yet she does not want to hurt her parents' feeling because she knows they are doing everything for her out of their love and care for her.

Similarly, Mercy revealed that even though she appreciates her family support she also faced some challenges with their support, especially when choosing her career. She stated:

No, not really. I mean not challenges but you know I feel like especially with college and I was that type of person when I graduated high school, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I knew what other people wanted me to do and I knew what my parents wanted. But ah so I don't think they meant it in a bad way but I don't know I wish obviously it's too late but I kinda wish I hadn't jumped into college because I changed my major so many times just because I didn't know. Is like my mom would be like do nursing, do pharmacy, be a doctor, be a lawyer you know so I feel like I mean it's not a challenge 'cause I know their hearts mean well but they just have this mind set.

Mercy acknowledged that her parents meant well but whatever they thought would be good for her was not working for her. For a while Mercy attempted to follow her parents' desire for her but it was a huge challenge because she did not have a heart or passion for the suggested career options. Then she decided to follow her heart and passion. She declared that what she is taking now, "is not easy but because I enjoy it I don't mind putting in the work but everything else I was kinda just doing it... because of family [and] community peer pressure...(sigh)". One can easily see that it was such a burden for Mercy when she was trying to pursue careers that were dictated to her to please her parents and community.

Chidube disclosed that his parents started pushing him to be a doctor way before he even decided on what he wanted to pursue as a career. He stated:

They (meaning his parents) really push for you to... I mean, I guess it's not a bad thing. Before recently, when I was a little younger, he would push for me to be a

doctor like him... this is before I actually wanted to do medicine. He pushed for me to.... He just said because doctors make good money.

When Chidube was asked what he wanted to pursue, he responded that, “no. I didn't know what I want to be. He (his father) was just pushing for me to be a doctor”. Chidube was honest in stating that at that point in time he did not know what he wanted to do but he felt very pressured when his parents especially his father continued pushing him to be a doctor.

Irene was quick to say that if she did not want to be a doctor in the first place it would have been a struggle with her dad, “so obviously like my dad, if not for the fact that I wanted to be a doctor already... me and my dad would have had a very, very big struggle with me going to school”. Irene is not different from the other students whose parents had chosen careers for them. According to Irene, her father wanted her to be a doctor. Irene shared that it only worked well because she also wanted to study medicine but if her career goals had been different, her father would not have been happy with her. Irene's response is very similar to Dyna's.

As observed from the participants' responses, Black African immigrant parents really expect their children to do well and they push them towards the brighter futures such as being a doctor, or going into one medical field or the other which may bring a lot of challenges for the students as they try to follow their parents' dream career paths as a way of appeasing their parents. Some parents were only concerned for their children to do well in school without dictating what career they had to take. These parents wanted their children to pursue whatever career they were passionate about and something that they would be good at to bring them fulfillment. The students appreciated the freedom to choose whatever career path they wanted to pursue.

Supports from Faculty and Friends

All participants were appreciative for the help of either their teachers or friends; a few participants are advantaged enough to have both their teachers and friends' help in their academic journey. College life can be hard on the students but with helpful teachers and friends, students may feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging which influence them to work hard. Professors who are able to create caring school environments assist students in having a successful college career.

Support from Faculty.

Faculty support is deemed as vital to students (Tinto, 2006). According to the participants, professors who were open minded and available to help students were instrumental to students' success. O'Keeffe (2013) argued that it takes good professors to create a conducive classroom environment and a safe space for all students. A safe space is where all students from diverse backgrounds feel a sense of belonging and not marginalization, and every student is valued and respected regardless of their race, culture, ability, gender, or class (O'Keeffe, 2013). Tinto (1994) pointed out that when students deem their classroom as a safe space and have a connection with their professors, they are motivated academically which helps them to succeed in their studies. In addition, helpful professors encourage students to work hard, and students are willing to put in the work because they feel a sense of belonging.

Sofia, who has difficulties in connecting with other fellow students on her campus expressed that it is important for her to have open and helpful professors. Sofia felt that college is difficult, and in most cases, there are high expectations for students to do well which adds to the pressure. She added:

All my professors are very nice and helpful when I need them. Yeah, definitely [it is important to have helpful professors] because, you know, in college, a lot of the

times we as students feel like we should know everything. And so, when you have professors who also have that expectation of you, it makes you feel like you're not there to learn and they don't want to help you. So, having open and fun professors makes things a lot easier for when you're struggling.

Sofia's view is that professors should not assume that students know something. They should be able to understand that not all students are knowledgeable about a particular subject and be open to assist the students when they need help without making them feel demeaned. According to Sofia, when students are struggling the last thing they want is to be put down because they are already feeling bad for not knowing, and all they want is a compassionate teacher to help them understand the subject, not a teacher who will increase the pressure they already experience. Grace also echoed Sofia on the importance of having helpful professors. For Grace having a good teacher especially in math is a must because math is her favorite subject.

Well, I had a math teacher my freshman year... it was really just my freshman year. And I loved her because when it comes to math, I have to have a good teacher to be able to teach me. And I loved her because she made me love math even more.

Grace stated that her freshman math teacher was a good teacher, she taught math so well that it was easier for her to understand the subject and it made her love math even more. Good and helpful professors appear to be vital to students' learning.

Emma pointed out that having helpful teachers is important but also having diversity in professors at a school goes a long way for students, especially students of color. She commented that "[the campus] is really a great community... there is a very great amount [sic] of teachers and diverse too". While Irene agreed with both Sofia and Grace that helpful teachers are important, but for her it is because students in their

freshman year can struggle as they transition from high school to college. At this stage, students need all the help they can get since in high school, according to Irene, “teachers literally [were] holding our hands to everything”. So, for Irene it makes sense for students to feel more comfortable knowing that they have helpful teachers who can be reached if there is a need.

Chidube recognized the importance of helpful teachers as well. He revealed that studying is a challenge for him, therefore, having helpful teachers makes life bearable in college. He disclosed that he had an unhelpful teacher once, and he did not do well in that class. Now he does his research before picking a course so that he ends up with a helpful teacher.

There's a way you can pick what teacher you get. Like you can pick your classes... you can also pick who teaches them. And you can research your teacher to figure out what type of teacher they are. For some teachers, there are teachers who will go above and beyond to help you... and there are teachers who don't care. So, if you fail, you fail. They're just there to be there, honestly. And I've had a teacher like that who just didn't care about her job. So, I didn't do [well in] that class. I passed, but I didn't do good. And it just depends on who you get. Honestly, college is so wishy washy.

Chidube knew that the support of faculty made a difference. He appreciated professors who assisted those students who are struggling even though they are genuinely trying to learn. Chidube acknowledged that some students are playful; they do not want to put in their time and effort yet there are some students who really want to learn but they are not getting the content. According to the participants, when professors are open and available to assist such students their help goes a long way and it makes an impact on students' lives.

Support from Friends.

Monica appreciated both her friends and professors who are always willing to help. Similarly, Dyna has good professors who help her stay on track in her classes, and she also has friends who assist her to be on top of her studies. According to Nuñez (2009), it is important for students to have friends who provide support during one's academic journey because friends increase a sense of belonging and purpose. As observed by the responses of the participants, college life experiences are enriched by open minded and helpful professors as well as friends who make the college campus environment feel like a community.

Dyna mentioned that her mother encouraged her to surround herself with friends who can help her academically. She stated, "My mom like really emphasized the fact that I needed to associate myself with people that would help me academically". According to Dyna, that kind of association has really helped her to maintain a good GPA. She declared, "Hanging out with that crowd really helped me with my GPA".

Mercy also recognized the help from friends in school as most helpful especially those who were also Africans and understood the struggles of an immigrant student. To keep other situations lighter, they would joke about the situations. She stated:

I think definitely like making friends with other African students at least just like having that, okay we are here together. We are all struggling. We can laugh and we can talk about it like, oh, they have mispronounced my name for the hundredth time again. Just having that, oh, I am not alone, there are other people also experiencing the same.

When asked if she was doing this with her friends from her home country or just any other African country, she responded:

Yeah, just Africa in general cause I feel sometimes we all share the same cause like I feel here obviously within ourselves we know the difference but people from here are so quick to group people together.

The participants felt a sense of connectedness to other Black African immigrant students even though they were not from the same country. As Mercy stated they feel that as fellow Africans would understand their struggles because they might be going through the same struggles themselves. Sofia mentioned that even if the other students are not Africans but are also immigrants, they kind of had the same experiences as they were growing up. Emma felt that just having someone who is like her would make her experience in school a little better. The other person may not necessarily come from Africa but she feels that if the person is also black that would create a more conducive learning environment for her. Almost all the participants acknowledged that apart from their parents' support they depend on their friends and sometimes teachers for their academic support.

Student Organizations on School Campus

Almost all the participants mentioned that student organizations, either Black Student Association (BSA) or African Student Association/Organization (ASA/ASO) have been a good part of their college experience. As observed by the interview responses, these organizations are helpful to Black African immigrant students. The students can associate with their fellow Africans whether they are first or second generation African immigrants or they are international students, they still feel connected and give them a sense of belonging. Sofia explained that these groups can sometimes be very helpful. They make a person feel connected and grounded in a place especially if a person is a minority. She did not have the opportunity to continue participating in the African Student Organization because of her class schedule. She said, “[these groups] are

important. If you can join them, if you have the time... that can really help you feel connected and grounded in a place where you are a minority". She continued with, "...unfortunately, I wasn't able to stick with it because, you know, I always had a class during the time they met. But it was nice when I [go] and did see other Africans on campus". Similarly, Mercy shared that she is also a member of the Black Student Association (BSA). Most of the members in this club are from Africa especially from Nigeria, but the majority are on a student visa. According to Mercy, BSA has members who are from Africa, and that makes her feel connected to her people.

Some students revealed that these organizations are their source of cultural enrichment. They learn their cultural values through their interactions with other students in these organizations. Grace shared that she joined the ASA when she started being interested in her culture. She said, "When I got older, I started being in African student groups, and I started making African friends. And I kinda just chose when I got older to pick it (her culture) up and take it with me". Grace explained that her mother taught her their African cultural values but did not force them on her. Grace's mother was open minded, she laid everything on the table so that if Grace decided to learn and embrace her African culture it will be her choice to do so. Grace was interested in her culture as she grew older, therefore, she decided to embrace her culture and joined an African student group to learn more about her culture. In addition, she started making African friends.

Jim disclosed that what he liked about school is the campus life which includes the ASA. He is part of it and appreciated the fact that they discuss different values (meaning some cultural values) and he likes the fact that he associates with people who are like him (meaning Africans). Jim shared:

The campus life is probably the good thing... we have the ASA - African Students Association. When we meet, we discuss about different values, different

things that we can do and we have like a very big African presence. That's what I like about it, but sometimes it can get overwhelming but other than that I really like it because it is really good to know that you have people like you... people that are exactly like you... you make friends and everything.

On the other hand, Monica bemoaned the fact that the BSA at her school does not attract students like her (meaning students who are interested in cultural activities) because of the programs they do. Their programs lack an African cultural context. According to Monica, the BSA at her school has a good number of Black African international students and some African American students. She believed this is so because the school itself lacks diversity. She revealed that she is not particularly involved in this organization because they do things that are not of interest to her. She stated:

I'm not very much involved in [the organization] at school in particular. I just feel like the programs here, at least for black students... in general, are not very much inclusive. But I just think it's because of the lack of diversity. And when it comes to organizations like BSA, I feel like there they are trying, but it's just like they are missing... to understand us because, you know, most of us are either African, most likely Nigerian. They are not going to get our attention by just the stuff that they're doing, like bake sales or BSA meetings. It has to be cultural activities going on for the kids to get involved like myself. So, I think the lack of culture is what's not letting me join.

Monica strongly felt that if BSA at her school had some cultural appreciation activities or was a resource for African students or the Black community, it would be very helpful to the African community. She believed that would also attract many students like her who are looking for ways to help the African community but do not know where to begin. She shared:

Anything regarding like resources for African students. Uh whether that can be financial, academic wise, uh like a cultural appreciation, I think would get a lot of people involved. Because when you show somebody that you're interested in, you know, getting to know where they come from... I guess you will see a lot of people at those type of meetings. So if BSA would come up with things that are helpful to the African community and even black community in general, I feel we would be more likely to participate in those instead of just doing like bake sales and just organizing or funding money just for this group.

In the participants' views, these African student groups are there to help them cultivate their cultural values. These groups are a resource where some find friendships that support their efforts to work hard in school and have a sense of belonging. These groups help them to connect with their fellow students who may not be from their home country but are of the same ethnicity, African. A few participants shared that they also have African Americans in these groups who are interested in knowing a little bit about their ancestors' cultural backgrounds.

Summary of Findings

Students who participated in the interviews showed that self-identification is a fluid process which changes with one's development and environment. Most of the participants identified themselves with their home and host country. It was not easy for them to identify themselves with one culture/nationality. Some students, even though they were born in the U.S., identified themselves with only their home country or as African, stating that they feel that they have more Nigerian or African traits than American. Most of the students agreed that one's identity cannot be defined apart from culture and language.

All the participants responded that they kept at least one or more of their traditions, celebrations, and rituals that they used to practice back home, and some responded that they just added some new traditions, celebrations, and rituals to their old ones. Students shared that with new environments and new friendships, their traditions shifted some. Furthermore, the new communities influenced some of their practices. But their parents kept their traditions even though some of the parents are not strictly observing all their traditions because they understand that they are in a new environment.

According to the participants, most parents view education as extremely important. Some participants claimed that their parents encourage them to work hard in school and get more than their first degree because as Africans, they cannot have a successful life without an education. Education is seen as one way or the way to elevate immigrant student status. In addition, the participants have an understanding that with a good education they may secure a high paying job. They view education as a key to a successful life.

All participants responded that their families help them to reach their academic goals and support them financially. Only a few acknowledged some challenges when it comes to their parents trying to choose a career for them or pressure them for the parents' dream career or aspirations. The students said they like their schools and enjoy learning new things especially because these are the things that they are passionate about. They reported that they have good and helpful friends at school and that they appreciated the support of helpful teachers and friends in their academic journey.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the results of the qualitative data analysis of this study. In the next chapter, this study's findings will be compared and contrasted with prior studies documented in the research literature. Additionally, the implications of these results are

discussed with consideration toward supports that can be beneficial to immigrant students so that they may receive the needed assistance as they transition in their new environment. Avenues for future research are also specified.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine life experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students regarding self-identification and education achievement and to explore the types of support that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. Although the Black African immigrant population has increased in the U.S. in recent years, there is little historical information in terms of research about their life experiences (Green et al., 2018; Njeru, 2009; Roubeni et al., 2015). There are not enough studies that address the educational experiences of these immigrant students especially during their college years. The student participants in this study were originally from Nigeria, Liberia, and the Ivory Coast. Eight were born in the U.S. and four came to the U.S. before the age of 12. Two theoretical frameworks were used to interpret the data for this study: social identity (Phinney, 1990) and acculturation (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003). Social identity assists individuals with having a sense of belonging (Phinney, 1990) which helps them to maintain a sense of well-being (Schwartz et al., 2009). Acculturation is the process of adapting or learning another culture as a result of prolonged contact (Taylor & Whittaker, 2003) while maintaining some unique parts of one's original culture.

To examine immigrant students' attitudes and perceptions toward self-identification and school engagement, thirteen Black African immigrant undergraduate students enrolled at universities in Texas participated in semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data enriched the researcher's understanding of students' perceptions and attitudes regarding school environment, the challenges and supports they have from family, teachers, and friends in their new life. The remainder of this chapter summarizes the findings of this study and contextualizes it in the larger body of research literature.

This chapter presents the summary, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Summary

Research Question One

Research question one, *What do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as influences in their ethnic identity development?*, was answered using a qualitative inductive thematic coding process of 12 semi-structured interviews of Black African immigrant undergraduate students. Responses were organized into two major themes: *Ethnicity and self-identity and Culture, Language, and Identity*.

Ethnicity and Self-identity

Students who participated in the interviews showed that self-identification is a fluid process which changes with one's *development and environment*. Eight participants identified themselves with their home and host country and five identified themselves with their ethnic group. Some participants disclosed that they struggled with their identities when they were younger. They were accustomed to working hard to try to fit in with their host culture and identified themselves with their host identity, but there was a shift as they grew older, even though some are still struggling as they live between cultures. This phenomenon correlates with Thibeault, Stein, and Nelson-Gray (2018) who observed that identity formation is a process that both adolescents and young adults have to go through because during this time they are still trying to figure out who they are. It was also noted that for some of the participants it was not easy to identify with one culture or nationality. This finding is in line with Geerlings et al. (2015) who noted that a shift in self-identification is common in adolescence. In addition, Njeru (2009) found that some students identified themselves according to how the identification makes sense to

them. In this study, some participants reported to have struggled with their identities when they were younger.

Njeru (2009) noted that some immigrant students tend to shift from their original identity to identify with an American label while others maintain their original identities. In the present research study, about half of the participants identified with the original identity of their home country, and the other half identified with both the American and original identities. The participants had different reasons for identifying themselves in the way they did. For some students, it was because they wanted to identify with their home culture, and they claimed that they have more Nigerian or African traits than American. Others wanted to assimilate with their new environment without losing their original identities which aligns with Njeru's (2009) observation.

According to Erikson (1950), identity is a fundamental developmental task of adolescence and adolescence is a transition to adulthood. Some of the participants reported that they were at a stage where they were content with their identities. They were aware of themselves in regard to who they were according to the set of traits and characteristics they assigned to themselves. This helped them to meet different challenges they faced during their college life. Erikson (1950) asserted that a clear and reasonable sense of identity is a necessary prerequisite to meeting the challenges of adulthood.

Jim, Chance, Grace, and Irene expressed that they were able to navigate two cultures with ease at their age now because they have learned to merge them. They celebrate and maintain both cultures because at the end of the day they recognize that they belong to both. These participants shared that sometimes they do not even realize that they are switching from one culture to the other, yet they do not let themselves forget that they are Africans. This finding is supported by Schwartz et al. (2013) who posited that students who adapt to the host culture and navigate well in both cultures (their home

culture and host culture) can achieve psychological well-being. In addition, both first and second generation Black African undergraduate students reported to have undergone some culture change which aligns with Schwartz et al. (2013) who ascertained that it is not an accurate estimation that only the foreign-born individuals are the ones thought of as undergoing culture change. In some cases, this process affects the second generation immigrants as well, even though they are born in the U.S. themselves, but their families practice the heritage culture. Similar to first generation Black African immigrants, second generation immigrants find themselves balancing their cultural heritage with the mainstream American culture (Green et al., 2018). Culture improves individuals' overall well-being. As observed from the student participants' responses, it is apparent that there is a relationship between self-identification, culture, and language.

Culture, Language, and Identity

All the participants were proud of their culture and cultural values; therefore, they identified themselves according to their culture. Some participants shared that cultural pride helps people to maintain their culture and keeps them grounded. The participants agreed that their culture assists them in not losing themselves. They believe that keeping their culture is very important, and they are who they are because of their culture. Culture adds to their identity; therefore, participants viewed a loss of culture as a loss of part of their identity and claim of birthplace. The participants also expressed how rich their culture is compared to their host culture. Research has demonstrated that defining oneself culturally represents one way to consolidate a sense of personal identity in a multicultural society (Schwartz et al., 2010). Further, Schwartz et al. (2010) stated that cultural values and practices might contribute building a student's sense of self as they emerge into adulthood. A strong self-identity may contribute to positive functioning and may protect youth against distress and problems that come with lack of self-identity. Youth may

transition successfully into adulthood if they understand who they are personally and culturally. Most of the participants at the time of the study were at the stage where they were comfortable with who they were.

Most of the participants agreed that one's identity cannot be defined apart from culture and language. Language for many of the participants was viewed as the most important part of their ethnic identity. Some participants reported to have worked hard to learn the language so that they would not miss out on inside jokes, and a few participants disclosed that they used music and movies to learn their language. These students wanted to learn their language so that they could fully identify themselves as Africans, which aligns with Geerlings et al. (2015), who found that when Black African immigrant students could not speak their native language, they were unable to identify themselves as 'real' Africans. Additionally, almost all the participants reported that they either learned their original language or had a desire to learn their language because they believed that their language was part of their culture and it enhanced their African identities. This agrees with Njeru (2009), who observed that people develop a personal identity within a multicultural society, and sometimes they have to form a sense of ethnic identity as well. Individuals examine and define ethnicity according to their perceptions and how they value the group with which they identify.

Research Question Two

Research question two, *How do Black African immigrant undergraduate students' perceptions of their ethnic identity influence their decisions to participate in academic and extra-curricular pursuits?*, was answered using a qualitative inductive thematic coding process of 12 semi-structured interviews of Black African immigrant undergraduate students. Responses were organized into two major themes: *Family's View of Education and Attitude towards School*.

Family's View of Education

Overall, the participants understood the importance of education and that obtaining an education was their permit to a better life and social advancement. The participants reported that their parents knew the importance of education. They value education and academic success. Some parents encouraged their children to work hard and pursue further education because they are Africans. There is a perception among the participants that if a person is African or Black, one must work hard to climb the professional and social ladders. Black African immigrant students in the present study hold education to a higher standard stating that a person goes nowhere without a degree. This is in line with Mantovani et al. (2018) who asserted that immigrant parents are aware of economic and social benefits higher education brings to an individual. Education allows students “to compete in the labor market, earn higher incomes, increase their chances of upward social mobility and enjoy greater prestige and status” (Mantovani et al., 2018, p. 604).

Education is the number one priority in most of the participants' families. According to the participants in the present study, parents believed that a person cannot go anywhere without an education and that one has to aim at obtaining more than a bachelor's degree. Parents encouraged their children and insisted that education was vital especially for Black people. They look at education as a way to a good future and a way to elevate their status in society. This finding is in line with Huerta et al. (2018) observation that students' motivations to attain higher education came from their parents and sometimes older relatives who constantly encouraged them to be successful and focus on education as a way for upward mobility.

Attitude towards School

As observed by the responses of the participants, Black African immigrant students were appreciative of college because it brings a whole new experience which is very different from high school. They viewed everything in college as a learning experience. College gives these students an opportunity to pursue courses or programs that they are really interested in. Eleven of the twelve participants, by the time of this study, had already decided on their choice of careers. Eight of the participants were pursuing degrees in science, and six of these were in the medical field. It is evident that the participants in this study chose lucrative careers, because according to their perceptions, they wanted careers that were marketable and those that will elevate their status as Black Africans living in the U.S. Most of the participants acknowledged that their parents had some influence in their career choices. Huerta et al. (2018) pointed out that students' motivation to attain higher education came from their parents who constantly encouraged them to be successful and focus on education as a way to move forward.

Irene, Jane, and Chidube viewed college as an opportunity for self-discovery since they now live on their own. They were independent and able to function as individuals. Being away from home has given them the needed space to explore and mature, to learn about their social life as well as get an education. Some of the participants disclosed that this is the time when they learned to work hard in school so that they could achieve their educational goals. They also chose who they wanted to associate with as friends, and over half of the participants revealed that they tend to gravitate toward their fellow Black Africans. Friendships gave students a sense of belonging on the school campus. College life provided both social and academic

experience. This aligns with what Green et al. (2018) asserted that school was a social setting that influenced immigrant students' development and academic success.

Five participants, Monica, Dyna, Mercy, Chidube, and Irene, shared that they liked their school because of their professors and the friends they have at school. Over half of the participants shared that they like their school because they have good professors and have not dealt with bad professors by the time they participated in this study. The students stated that their professors were open to learning other cultures and willing to help students who were struggling. Professors who shared real life experiences with the students were also recommended because they make outside classroom connections with the students even though they share their experience in class setting. Students believed that real life lessons sometimes encouraged them to continue working hard when they were struggling. This is important and very helpful to those students who wanted to learn real life lessons.

Research Question Three

Research question three, *What factors do Black African immigrant undergraduate students perceive as supports and challenges in their academic achievement?*, was answered using a qualitative inductive thematic coding process of 12 semi-structured interviews of Black African immigrant undergraduate students. Responses were organized into three themes: *Support and Challenges from Family, Support from Faculty, and Support from Friends.*

Support from Family

The participants agreed that because of the support of their parents, they were able to pursue their college education without many concerns since their parents gave them financial and emotional support. Many African parents expect their children to work hard in school and encourage them to do so. This is in line with Yoon et al. (2017), who noted

that reasonable parental expectations encouraged students to work hard in school so that they succeed. Children work hard to succeed in school if parents are showing interest in their academics. The students appreciated their parents' good intentions and support. Participants acknowledged that parental high academic expectation motivated them to reach their educational goals, this finding is consistent with prior research (Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017; Ogbu, 2003; Percy Calaff, 2009). African immigrant parents have high academic expectations of their children and hold them accountable for their academic performance.

Most of the participants in this study were encouraged to focus on school and not to concern themselves with work. Parents took care of the bills. This finding is supported by previous research that showed that students appreciate the parental support and the sacrifices that their families have made on their behalf. As a result, they work hard in school (Percy Calaff, 2009; Taylor & Krahn, 2013). Participants reported that their success in school was due to their parents' support and advice. Similarly, Huerta et al. (2018) found that participants considered their parents' concern and encouragement as positive pressure for their well-being and a good future. Most of the participants appreciated parental guidance even though a few participants thought high expectations put more pressure on the children. Mantovani et al. (2018) noted that immigrant students with parental support do exceptionally well as parents exert pressure on their children to pursue higher education in order to elevate their status and secure a high paying job.

Challenges from Family

More than half of the participants reported having one common challenge from their parents. According to the participant, some parents try to dictate what program or career path the children should pursue in college. Dyna and Irene disclosed that their parents wanted them to pursue careers in the medical field; and they happened to be

interested in the same. If it were not so there would have been much conflict with their parents. This is in line with Taylor and Krahn (2013) who noted that parents exert pressure on their children in regard to their education and career choices, pressuring them to pursue programs that would guarantee high paying jobs, for instance, a degree in the medical field or engineering.

Support from Faculty

Three quarters of the participants acknowledged that good and supportive professors make a difference in their school experience. Professors who create a conducive classroom environment and a safe space for all students were recommended because a good classroom environment encouraged students to feel safe and have a sense of belonging. As a result, students are motivated academically which helps them to work harder in their studies. Supportive teachers and a good school environment that promotes students' engagement has been recommended by researchers (Chiu et al. 2012, Nuñez, 2009). In addition, Tinto (2006) posited that academic institutions are responsible for student success and retention by creating a conducive environment for learning.

The findings of this study show that participants appreciate teachers who are open, willing, and ready to assist students who are struggling enabling them to work hard and succeed in school. The participants stated that a positive school environment, teachers who encourage open communication in class, and caring professors are some of the factors that encourage students to care about their classes and help them succeed in school. This is in line with Kumi-Yeboah & Smith (2017) who found that teachers who encourage immigrant students to make contributions in class and have an open approach to instructional delivery were recommended as instrumental to students' success. Additionally, when faculty extend their services beyond formal classroom teaching to students' life outside the classroom, the school is seen as a community for the students,

and this assists with their well-being (Hallinan, Kubitschek, & Liu, 2009). A few participants expressed that when professors were less helpful and unsupportive, students were discouraged from seeking the help they needed from them which results in students' poor school performance (Espinoza, 2013).

Support from Friends

The participants reported that it is important for them to have friends who provide support during their academic journey because friend increase a sense of belonging and purpose. As observed by the responses of the participants, college life experiences are enriched by friends who make the college campus environment to feel like a community. A few participants shared that they were encouraged by their parents to choose friends who could assist them with being on top of their studies. Espinoza (2013) observed that students need social support from their fellow students both inside and outside the classroom insisting that social relationships were important in the life of the students.

Almost all the participants mentioned that campus service organizations, either Black Student Association (BSA) or African Student Association/organization (ASA/ASO) had been a good part of their college experience. The students were able to associate with their fellow Africans whether they were first and second generation African immigrants or they were international students, they still felt connected and gave them a sense of belonging. Green et al. (2018) also pointed out that school was a social setting that influenced immigrant students' development and academic success. Positive school experience with involvement in student organizations, sports, and interaction with peers were observed as helpful for their well-being and to focus in school (Green et al., 2018).

Implications

Following the results of this study's examination of life experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students in regard to self-identification and education achievement and the support they need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school, implications for teachers, administrators and policy makers, and parents emerged. Self-identification for first and second generation immigrant students continues to be a struggle as they try to live between their home and school cultures. According to the results of current research study, parental involvement and support, good school environment, supportive teachers, and friends were some of the helpful factors that supported immigrant students in achieving their educational goals. These factors may assist in the students' smooth transitioning of home and school culture and influence their sense of community.

Implications for Teachers

The results of current research support previous research findings that good school environment and supportive teachers are some of the helpful factors that motivate immigrant students achieve their educational goals. The participants acknowledged that the support of teachers assisted them to adjust smoothly and to reach their academic goals. Students who perceived their teachers as understanding, caring, and supportive were likely to be motivated to participate in the classroom. As a result, student do well in their classes.

Educators should celebrate diversity and create a safe space and conducive environment for learning for immigrant students. Some participants acknowledged that they appreciated the support from their teachers, and that without their help it would have been very difficult for them to make it. The participants acknowledged some teachers' openness to learn other cultures and inclusion of all students helped them to have a sense

of belonging. Taylor and Whittaker (2003) suggested that for teachers to be effective in dealing with immigrant students, they should know the cultural subgroups within the school community and their distinct nature. Diverse cultural groups have differences, and teachers must be familiar of those to be able to work well with each group.

Implication for Administrators and Policy Makers

Administrators and policy makers should give attention to Black African immigrant students as a distinct group because as a growing community their needs cannot continue to go unnoticed or unexamined. Black African immigrant students, as seen in prior research, are understudied or they are studied under “Black immigrant population” which focuses on people with Caribbean origin or sometimes they may be studied together with African Americans (Allen et al., 2012; Kumi-Yeboah & Smith, 2017; Rong & Fitchett, 2008). This does not give a full picture of Black African immigrant students’ lives. The administrators and policy makers should take a deliberate step to identify these students with their rightful label instead of classifying them as “Black immigrant population”. Classifying them as such makes them an invisible immigration group in the education setting, and they are given little attention and their needs are not addressed properly (Allen et al., 2012).

In addition, administrators can encourage a diverse and good campus environment. Some immigrant students are first generation college students while some are new to American system because their parents went to school in their country of origin. Therefore, these students need all the help they can get in navigating the system. Administrators can sponsor information sessions where immigrant students as well as their parents can get information about school resources. In this present study, a few participants shared that they did not know how to navigate the system. As a result, some applications and processes took longer for them to complete. Furthermore, they did not

know about financial aid until after their first year of college. Giving timely information about college resources to immigrant students is important because it gives access to students who may think college is out of reach for them because of lack of funding.

Implications for Parents

Research has shown that Black African immigrant students are appreciative of their parents' support. Parental involvement in their academic journey had been recommended as one of the factors that motivate the participants of the current study to work hard and aim at achieving their educational goals. The participants acknowledged the sacrifice that their parents had made on their behalf so that they can have a brighter future. As much as students were appreciative, they also expressed the desire to have the freedom to choose their own careers. Parents should try to give their children room to be their own persons without trying to control their future careers. Parents can guide and positively influence their children without pressuring them to choose parents' dream career or aspirations. It is important for parents to realize that this is their children's life and future.

The participants also acknowledged their parents for helping them keep their African cultural values. Some of the participants reported drawing from their cultural values as tools that enabled them to succeed in school. These cultural values are said to have helped keep Black African immigrant undergraduate students grounded. The participants shared that their parents instilled in them a good work ethic. As observed in this study, the participants acknowledged that their parents sacrificed and worked hard to be where they were for themselves and for their children. Therefore, children learned to value the hard-working spirit. In the current study, preserving original culture was recommended as important but at the same time, parents should bear in mind that they are in a different environment and their children will always have two cultures. Parents have

to be willing to help them navigate the cultures and get the best out of both cultures for the children's own well-being. In addition, parents should also help their children learn their heritage language as observed in participants' responses, children desire to know their original language.

Recommendations for Future Research

Findings from this study involved obtaining feedback (qualitative) from Black African immigrant undergraduate students. Although the findings provided data and information about students' attitudes and perceptions, recommendations for future research will help to expand the knowledge on this topic. The following recommendations are based on data and findings from this study. This study is a small study having taken place in a few suburban schools located in the region of Texas; therefore, the results are only applicable to similar colleges in terms of size and demographics. Research with an expanded population and sample may determine similar or different results if applied to demographically different campuses. A recommendation of future research for the same study at multiple universities may be beneficial to learn more about Black African immigrant students' life experiences.

Another study with parents, educators, and administration would be more informative for all stakeholders so that ways can be made to accommodate the whole diverse student body. Sometimes it is difficult for educators to deal with students who have a different culture from the mainstream culture. Involving educators in a study would help explore ways they can accommodate diversity in a classroom and assist to locate resources for educators who are not as aware of the complex of immigrant students' fluid self-identification which sometimes may affect their psychological development.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine life experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students regarding to self-identification and education achievement and to explore the supports that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school. Students with a good support system seem to thrive in their new life with no or few difficulties. Students appreciated the support of their families, teachers and friends for a smooth bridging of home and school cultures. Students reported to be more engaged at school when educators created a safe space and conducive environment that embraced diversity for the benefit of all learners.

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APPENDIX A:

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON CLEAR LAKE INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preamble:

My name is Thandizo. I am a student here at UHCL and the reason I wanted to meet you and ask some questions today is to learn more about first and second African immigrant undergraduate students and their experiences as young people in the US. I'm going to be asking you about good experiences and bad experiences related to your youth years. You are free to stop this interview at any time or choose not to answer any question.

1. Can you start by telling me your name, age and where you were born?
2. What language(s) do you speak to other members of your family? (Siblings, dad, mom, etc.)
3. Do you speak or hear any African language?
 - a. how have you managed to continue using it in the US?
 - b. If not, why not?
4. What would you pick out as the most important event in your life?
5. What was your immigration experience when you moved to the US?
6. What is your first memory in the US? Or first impressions? (if you were born in Africa).
7. Can you explain a little bit about the community and neighborhood you lived in when you moved here?
 - a. (Were there other people from your country?
 - b. Is there anything you think was different or unique about your community from other kids your age?
 - c. As a teenager, how was your neighborhood/community important to you?
 - d. Did it influence you at all?
8. Can you talk about how your immediate family changed, if at all when you moved here?
9. How has your family been a source of support?
10. How has your family created further challenges?
11. After you moved here did any family celebrations, traditions, or rituals that were important in your childhood change, or did your family develop new traditions?
12. Tell me about ways you have found to stay in touch with your home country?
13. How important is it for you to stay connected with relatives and friends from your home country?
14. Tell me about ways you are handling having 2 cultures both American and African? Especially your/parents' original country.

15. Tell me about the school you go to.
 - a. Are there other people from your country?
 - b. Or other immigrants in school?
16. What are the best things about school? (probes: Friends, Role models, classes, are there teachers or staff who are important to you?)
17. What are the challenging things about school?
 - a. Bullying, teasing, indifferent?
 - b. Do you think the teasing you faced was different than other kids because you were from another country?
 - c. Was there anything you were doing to make you feel better?
 - d. How did this affect you?
18. If at all, how do you think your school experience was/is different than other students because you are from Africa?
19. What is your family view of education?
20. If you were born in Africa, did your parents pay to have you attend school?
Discuss.
21. What are your perceptions of how faculty view you? as an African and your academic performance?
22. What relationships are the most important to you? Friends, Family, someone else?
23. How would your friends describe you?
24. How do you describe yourself? How do you identify yourself?
25. What do you think people think of when you say you are African or _____?
26. What traits do you think of when you think of your country of origin or Africa?
27. Is this different than African/Black Americans born here? How so?
28. Are the African traits you describe different than other immigrants? How so?
29. Where did you get your understandings of these different groups?
30. Is there a social order or ranking to these label or groups in the US? Explain.
31. Have you ever been mistaken as being in or from a different group? (How did you feel or reacted).
32. How did immigrating at your age/life stage affect you?
33. Can you talk about differences and similarities between people with African parents who were born here vs people like you that grew up in Africa and moved here?
34. What has been the single most helpful thing in making the immigration process/experience work?
 - a. Why?
35. Do you notice any differences as an African in the US vs other nationalities?
36. What advice would you give to a young person who has just moved here?

APPENDIX B:

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

You are being asked to participate in the research project described below. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate, or you may decide to stop your participation at any time. Should you refuse to participate in the study or should you withdraw your consent and stop participation in the study, your decision will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you may be otherwise entitled. You are being asked to read the information below carefully, and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to participate.

Title: Supports can be provided to students as they bridge their home culture and their school culture.

Faculty Sponsor(s): Leslie Gauna, PhD; Lisa Jones, EdD

Student Investigator(s): Thandizo Yobe, MACE

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research is to examine life experiences of first and second generation Black African immigrant undergraduate students in regard to self-identification and education achievement and to explore the supports that these students need for a smooth bridging of cultural differences between their homes and school.

PROCEDURES

The research procedures are as follows: Fifteen African immigrant undergraduate students who are first or second generation, will be purposefully selected. The data will be collected over a period of three to four months. You will be asked to participate in a personal interview for a duration of 45 minutes to one hour per session. All interviews will be tape recorded.

EXPECTED DURATION

The total anticipated time commitment will be approximately one hour for the interview. Clarifying and/or follow-up questions during the data analysis may be needed.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

There are no anticipated risks associated with participation in this project.

BENEFITS TO THE SUBJECT

The research findings may not directly benefit the students now but will assist students to know if they have any supports already put in place for their smooth transitioning, if there are no supports

already in place then the research may open up avenues that can be explored to give support to these immigrant students as well as those that will come after them. Educators and parents may also hear the students' voices and find a way to help these students as they try to bridge the gap between home and school cultures.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your study records. The data collected from the study will be used for educational and publication purposes, however, participants will not be identified by their real names. For federal audit purposes, the participant's documentation for this research project will be maintained and safeguarded by the Principal Investigator for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After that time, the participant's documentation may be destroyed.

FINANCIAL COMPENSATION

There is no financial compensation to be offered for participation in the study.

INVESTIGATOR'S RIGHT TO WITHDRAW PARTICIPANT

The investigator has the right to withdraw you from this study at any time.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

The investigator has offered to answer all your questions. If you have additional questions during the course of this study about the research or any related problem, you may contact the Student Researcher, Thandizo Yobe, at phone number (713) 825-2333 or by email at yobet9393@uhcl.edu, or you may contact Faculty Sponsor, Dr. Lisa Jones, at phone number (281) 283-3551 or by email at JonesL@uhcl.edu.

SIGNATURES:

Your signature below acknowledges your voluntary participation in this research project. Such participation does not release the investigator(s), institution(s), sponsor(s) or granting agency(ies) from their professional and ethical responsibility to you. By signing the form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

The purpose of this study, procedures to be followed, and explanation of risks or benefits have been explained to you. You have been allowed to ask questions and your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You have been told who to contact if you have additional questions. You have read this consent form and voluntarily agree to participate as a subject in this study. You are free to withdraw your consent at any time by contacting the Principal Investigator/Faculty Sponsor or Student Researcher. You will be given a copy of the consent form you have signed.

Subject's printed name: _____

Signature of Subject: _____

Date: _____

Using language that is understandable and appropriate, I have discussed this project and the items listed above with the subject.

Printed name and title: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON-CLEAR LAKE (UHCL) COMMITTEE FOR PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS HAS REVIEWED AND APPROVED THIS PROJECT. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING YOUR RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UHCL COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (281-283-3015). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT UHCL ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT. (FEDERALWIDE ASSURANCE # FWA00004068)