EXAMINING SCHOOL, HOME, AND COMMUNITY ACCULTURATION

EXPERIENCES OF FOUR LIBERIAN IMMIGRANT YOUTHS IN

THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

by

LYCHENE N.WOLO SAAH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

December 2011

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Examining School, Home, and Community Acculturation Experiences of Four Liberian

Immigrant Youths in the United States. (December 2011)

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Historically, Liberian immigrants to the United States tended to be wealthy, educated individuals who wanted their children to acquire a Western education. The thirteen-year Liberian Civil War resulted in a new wave of U.S. migration. Many recent Liberian immigrants hold low socio-economic statuses. Some came to this country illiterate or with gaps in their education. This has created a cultural-educational gap amongst newly arrived Liberian immigrants. Many young Liberian immigrants struggle with educational and socialization issues.

Studies have been conducted on the acculturation experiences of youths from Europe, Asia, and South and Central America. Yet to date, very little research has been done on the lives of African youth, especially those who emigrated from Liberia after the civil war. Their voices have been missing from the literature.

This qualitative study provides narratives of four Liberian immigrant youths, between the ages of 18 and 22 years old, who formerly attended schools in Liberia, have lived in the U.S. less than ten years, and have attended at least three years of high

school in the United States. Each youth was interviewed regarding their school, home, and community acculturation experiences. Excerpts of their interviews allow the reader to hear the participants' stories in their own words.

Findings of the research from emergent themes indicate that the Liberian immigrant youths had many commonalities in their acculturation experiences such as: accent ridicule, bullying by peers, fights between African Americans and Liberian immigrants, and lack of appreciation for African cultures. The participants also struggled with ethnic identity issues, limited finances, and unjust educational and social systems in the United States. All four Liberian immigrants experienced some type of external and internal conflicts.

A relationship was found between the possession of resiliency traits and the Liberian immigrant youths' abilities to handle conflicts and successfully acculturate to the United States. Two participants possessed strong resiliency characteristics such as autonomy, problem solving abilities, abilities to forgive, a sense of purpose and future, and creativity. They had favorable acculturation experiences, successfully graduating from high school. Two other participants lacked resiliency traits and had less favorable acculturation experiences. They succumbed to external and internal conflicts and dropped out of high school.

DEDICATION

Foremost, and above all others, I dedicate this dissertation to the Almighty Lord who was my pillar, strength, and inspiration during my doctoral journey. It is truly only by the *"strength and hand"* of the Almighty that I endured the challenges I faced throughout this journey and was able to successfully close this chapter of my life. All praises to God!

To my late Father, Mr. Benjamin N. Wolo Sr., also fondly called "Uncle Ben," I dedicate this study. "Uncle Ben" instilled in me a strong determination to accomplish my dreams and goals. No dreams or tasks were too big for his little girl, Lychene. He stood by me and mentored me always. When I started my first business at the age of eighteen years old, he helped type up my first few contracts. His lessons on negotiation skills and writing effective business contracts have carried me a long way. Additionally, his long hours of counsel on Liberia's history, his insights on the Liberian Civil War, and genuine interest in my study on Liberians and other African immigrants encouraged me to remain focused. I will always cherish his love and words of wisdom.

"Uncle Ben," although I promised you over six years ago that I would complete this doctoral program and dance with you during the celebration, God had other plans for you. I know that you truly loved me and were very proud of all of my accomplishments.

To my sweet, loving and supportive mother, Mrs. Lucille N. Wolo, I also dedicate the completion of this dissertation. Your unending support, inquiries, and

encouragement to "just finish the work, Lychene," ushered me forward. You were willing to help out with my children, and drive long hours with me to submit hard copies of my assignments on deadline days. Your expert advice and insight as a retired Liberian School Principal were very beneficial to my studies. I could never wish for a more loving and supportive mother than you! God gave me the sweetest, nicest, and most beautiful mother of all mothers! Thanks a billion Mom! Merci. Gracias, Todah Rabbah. Na Bessieh! Thanks a million ways.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my three beautiful, well-mannered, highly intelligent, and loving daughters - Dalychia, Lucille, and Danelle. You all have provided me with technological support, encouragement, and patiently waited for Mommy to complete her dissertation that seemed to go on endlessly.

Dalychia, thanks for providing me with some excellent photographs and art work to include in my study. I've always enjoyed conversing with you on many social issues. Lucille, "Luci," thanks for your eagerness to come to my aid. Your high level of energy and no nonsense approach to life will help you accomplish your dreams. Danelle, thanks for coaching me for my dissertation defense. You often played the role of my professors and asked me some thought provoking questions. Additionally, you have asked me a million times, "Mommy, what will you do when you finish your dissertation?" Although, I jokingly replied, "I'll come and sit in your classes next to you and be your new classmate," I do have lots of interesting plans to help empower many marginalized children in the US and Liberia, Africa. God has given me the best daughters any mother could wish for. I love you all dearly. Thanks for caring!

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I would like to thank the almighty God for his blessings, finances, divine protection, guidance, and wisdom. Although I have acquired a significant amount of human knowledge, I have come to the realization that it is definitely secondary in comparison to the wealth of knowledge and wisdom that I have acquired from diligently studying the word of God, which has given me a broader view of life's purpose and journey.

A project of this magnitude could not have become a reality without the valuable contributions of the dynamic members of my dissertation committee. Dr. Patricia J. Larke, my committee chair, I thank you enormously for your time, expertise, and advice on improving my study. Dr. Larke, thanks for encouraging me to *"Rise to the occasion."* Dr. Norvella P. Carter, I thank you for your advice, interest, and gentle reassurances. Dr. Mary V. Alfred, I thank you for your advice, interest, and kind words of encouragement. Dr. M. Carolyn Clark, thanks for your advice and interest in my research. I always left your presence elated about my studies and motivated to keep progressing. Thanks for having that effect on me. Thanks to Dr. Hassana Alidou, my previous committee co-chair, who was instrumental in developing my interest in conducting a qualitative study on the educational experiences of African immigrant students in the United States.

Special thanks to the four Liberian immigrant youths who agreed to participate in this study and who openly shared their acculturation experiences with me. I am also

A million thanks to Dr. Hilary Standish, my dynamic editor, who performed an excellent job as she meticulously combed through each page of this work, making sure that my dissertation met thesis office specifications.

I would also like to thank my uncle, Dr. Aloysius P. Hanson, along with his lovely wife Magdalene Hanson, who provided the catalyst to jump start my graduate studies in England and beyond. Many thanks to my Aunts, Valerie Johnson, Beatrice Nmano Helb, and Mrs. Regina Gaye, who frequently inquired about my studies, encouraged me, and laughed with me. Additionally, I am highly appreciative and indebted to my sweet Mother, Mrs. Lucille Nyeba Wolo for her unfailing support and love. Her quiet strength, wisdom, and fun nature make her a joy to be around. She is definitely a phenomenal woman indeed!

Finally, a million thanks to my lovely daughters, Dalychia, Lucille, and Danelle for their patience, understanding, encouragement, and providing me with some quality time to devote to my studies. God has given me the best daughters any mother could wish for. Thanks for caring! I truly love and appreciate you all, and know that God has a bright future in store for each of you. Thanks a lot. Muchas Gracias. Merci Beaucoup. Todah Rabbah and Na Bessieh !!

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"We don't think about tomorrow….Whatever happens, happens; because in five years so much change has happened. We never know anything for sure"
(Voice of an African immigrant youth, cited in Birman, Trickett, & Bacchus, 2001, p.10).

Recent changes in United States demographics have impacted many American educational institutions. Today, one in five U.S. students is a child of an immigrant parent (Portes & Rumbuat, 2006; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010). Urban schools are currently populated with students from many diverse backgrounds (Banks & Banks, 2010; Delpit, 2006; Neito & Bode, 2011; Traore & Lukens, 2006; United States Department of Education, 2001). School districts in United States are tasked with meeting the educational needs of these culturally, linguistically, ethnically, and economically diverse (CLEED) students. Classrooms in many urban schools, in particular, include students with diverse behavioral patterns, attitudinal orientations, and values. This cultural diversity presents educators with unique challenges as they attempt to promote the academic and emotional development of students within these complex and diverse urban classrooms (Erickson, 2010; Portes & Rumbuat, 2006; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010; Zehr, 2001).

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This dissertation follows the style of the *American Education Research Journal*.

Immigrant children from various countries make up a large percentage of urban classroom populations (Portes & Rumbuat, 2006; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco,& Todorova, 2010; Stritikus & Varghese, 2010). Several factors influence the academic achievement, assimilation, and acculturation of immigrant children in the United States. These factors are in turn tied to the immigrants' emotional, educational, linguistic, and cultural experiences in both their former and newly adopted countries (Olsen, 2008; Stritikus & Varghese, 2010; Zehr, 2001; Zhou, 1997).

Several studies have been conducted on the education and adaptation of Latinos, Asians, and other groups of immigrant children in the United States (Lew, 2006; Lew, 2007; Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Hones & Shou Cha, 1999; Neito & Bode, 2011; Olsen, 2008; Rumbuat & Portes, 2001). However, findings and assumptions that may apply to those groups of immigrants may not be applicable to African immigrants. This is important to note, since an increasing number of African students are enrolling in schools throughout the United States. Very few studies have been done on these culturally, linguistically and economically diverse groups of people who have immigrated to America from various African countries (Alidou, 2000; Rong & Brown, 2001; Traore & Lukens, 2006).

Recent African immigrant children in particular experience numerous acculturation and academic difficulties that are not common to other new immigrant children (Alidou, 2000; De Gourville,2002; Shepard, 2005;Traore & Lukens, 2006; & Zehr, 2001). This is partially due to prolonged war activities in some African countries, and high illiteracy rates in some regions of the continent. Many of these recent African

immigrant children have had little educational exposure or have endured disruptions in their educational training. Others have experienced atrocities of wars such as suffering the loss of very close family members, physical or emotional brutalities, or other horrendous treatments in their native countries before immigrating to the United States (Desouza, 2000; Good, 1999; Immell, 2000; Jalali & Boyce, 1980; Kaba, 2009; Saurez-Orozco & Saurez-Orozco, 2001). Some of these students have cultural and economic adaptation problems similar to those experienced by other immigrants, but they may in addition have psychological issues that are not necessarily familiar to the school personnel, especially to the counselors. Hence many educators and school counselors are now faced with unique problems that they have not previously encountered among mainstream students, students of color, or other immigrant students.

This shift in population dynamics in United States urban schools requires educators to become more adept at meeting the academic, emotional, and social needs of *all* students (Alidou, 2000; Banks & Banks, 2010; Dillard, 1983; Gay, 2010; Neito & Bode, 2011; Pang, 2005; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozo, & Todorova, 2010). School counselors and educators must utilize culturally responsive pedagogy and/or multicultural counseling strategies to help new immigrant children engage in active learning, to adapt to United States instructional patterns and classroom expectations, and to assist the immigrant children in leading meaningful and productive lives. This is especially important in contemporary America's culturally pluralistic society (Gay, 2010; Pedersen, & Carey, 1994).

My Personal Interest

As a concerned Liberian immigrant living in United States, a former public school teacher with international and national teaching experiences, a certified school counselor, a parent, and as a community activist, I developed an interest in investigating the educational experiences of recent Liberian immigrant children in the United States.

I grew up in Liberia and obtained my primary, secondary, and college education in Liberia, in addition to graduate studies in London, England and the United States. As the fifth of nine children, I grew up in comfort and attended the best private schools in Liberia. My formative years hold many fond and peaceful memories. At that time, Liberia was known as the most peaceful nation in Africa. This was before the Liberian Civil War.

The Liberian Civil War slowly crept up on us in early 1990. I departed Liberia on the last British Airways international flight from Liberia, just before full blown civil war hit the capital city of Monrovia. Hence, I did not physically experience the atrocities of war that many Liberians did, including the participants of this study. However, I agonized many nights over the sad news that reached me during the almost fifteen years of war activities in my beloved homeland. I lost many loved ones and valuable assets during the Liberian Civil War. I also had to come to terms with the reality that I may never be able to return to Liberia and recapture those serendipity years again. I now had to reluctantly accept the fact that my intended temporary stay in the United States may have to be extended into permanent residency. This also required a career change from conducting research on tropical diseases in Liberia, to obtaining

United States certifications to teach in American public schools, and dealing with ignorance of many U.S. educators who had very little knowledge of Africa, its development, and its diversity.

From observations, conversations, and regular interactions with other Liberian immigrants to the United States, it became disturbingly clear that many immigrant parents were very dissatisfied with the educational experiences of their children in the U.S. public school system. Some recent Liberian immigrant parents appealed to me to mediate on their behalf with school personnel. Others requested me to counsel their school–aged children regarding acculturation issues.

On a few occasions, I physically sat in meetings with new Liberian immigrant parents and U.S. school personnel to discuss placement decisions and other recommendations made by some U.S. school staff members. Other times, I made phone calls to the teachers, counselors, or administrators on behalf of Liberian immigrant parents that resulted in significant differences in how the Liberian immigrant student was treated in the future. Additionally, I provided suggestions to Liberian immigrant parents on how they could be more actively involved with their children's schools in order to positively impact the quality of education that their children received in the United States.

One major difference between attitudes of Liberian parents and those of American parents is that Liberian parents, in general, do not believe in interfering with educational systems. Many Liberian parents operate from a reference point that dictates a separation between home and school. They believe and trust that teachers know

what's best for their children, and that these teachers would faithfully seek their children's best interests.

Secondly, some Liberian parents have limited school language skills and may feel intimated in conversing with teachers and administrators. Hence, Liberian parents in general do not question decisions made by teachers in the way that American parents do. Rather, Liberian parents support teachers by directly handling complaints of misbehaviors, and by providing additional school materials and assistance as requested by teachers.

Contrary to this practice in Liberia, teachers in U.S. schools expect parents to be actively involved in educational decisions as a sign of support and care for their children's academic success. American teachers usually view parents as non-supportive if parents do not attend school meetings, return phone calls, or occasionally call schools to inquire about their children's education- especially when the students are having difficulties in school. This disparity in Liberian parents' and American teachers' perceptions of their respective roles often lead to miscommunications and frustrations among both parties. They each exhibit opposing views of home /school collaborations which can be easily rectified by cultural orientations and effective communication.

A major concern that some Liberian immigrant parents in the United States have is excessive recommendations and placement of their children in alternative settings, such as special education classes (SPED), behavioral adjustment classes (BAC), adult literacy classes (ALC), and English as a second language (ESL) classes, even though some these students speak fluent English. Other parents have shared that American

schools have labeled their children as emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded, learning disabled, or as slow learners. Some recent Liberian immigrant children have also shared horror stories of their experiences in U.S. classrooms, administrators' offices, cafeterias, school hallways, school grounds, and school buses.

I conducted a pilot study that concurred some of the stories shared by recent Liberian immigrant youth. The results of the pilot study indicated that some recent Liberian immigrant children have experienced rejections by students, teachers, and others in their new environments. Many recent Liberian immigrant children experienced wars and fled atrocities in their homeland before arriving in the US in search of safety, respect, human dignity, and perhaps a brighter future. A large percentage of recent Liberian immigrant children missed three or more years of schooling due to civil war in Liberia and other neighboring African nations in which they sought refuge before immigrating to the U.S. Once in the U.S., these students were sometimes placed in higher grades to commensurate with their ages. Some students have reported increased frustrations associated with the academic challenges of higher grade levels, have developed behavioral problems in some cases, or dropped out of school in other cases.

These current educational situations, coupled with abuses, traumas, and other psychological stresses that some recent Liberian immigrant students experienced during the Liberian civil wars, have resulted in very aggressive outbursts in some, while other students have suffered deep depression. It is within this context that I decided to investigate this phenomenon by conducting a qualitative study. For the purpose of this study, only students from one African nation - Liberia - were studied.

Unlike other African nations, Liberia is unique because of its historical ties with the U.S. Liberia was established by freed slaves that were repatriated back to Africa in the eighteenth century. Liberians have freely visited the U.S. in the past as tourists, businessmen, or students. The former groups of Liberians to the U.S. blended well in society and were successful because of similarities in their social statuses, languages, and educational or intellectual abilities (Dunn-Marcos, Kollehlong, Ngovo, & Russ, 2005).

After the start of the Liberian civil war in 1990, an unprecedented, large wave of Liberians sought refuge within the borders of the United States. Many of the initial groups entered as visitors and were able to blend into U.S. culture. Later, large groups of displaced Liberians living in other African nations were granted refugee status by the U.S. government and brought to the U.S. as refugees. These latter groups contained a significant percentage of illiterate Liberians who found it more challenging to acculturate to living in the U.S.

It is important to note that a large number of Liberian immigrant students perform well in U.S. schools. Some of these new Liberian immigrant students have strong academic foundations in math, reading, and language arts. Often these students have educated parents that value education and strive within their means to provide additional academic stimulation for their children. Although some of these students' academic performances may drop from traumas experienced in the past, with proper support and nurturing, they can blossom academically.

The focus of this qualitative study is on recent Liberian immigrant youths that were still experiencing acculturation processes. Capturing their voices as they recounted their lived experiences in U.S. public schools shed light on their plights and their resiliency in adapting to their new country. This knowledge can help educators improve teaching pedagogy and help parents develop successful parenting skills in working with immigrant youths.

Statement of the Problem

Immigrant children and the children of immigrant parents have contributed to a rapid growth of the U.S. child population since the 1980s (Portes & Rumbuat, 2006; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010; Stritikus & Varghese, 2010). This has resulted in much ethnic and racial diversity among US school-age children. Some of these immigrant children have successfully acculturated to the US educational system and are doing well. However, there is one group of children that continues to struggle and remain "invisible" - students from Africa, especially those from Liberia. Even though Liberians bear much phenotypic resemblance to African Americans, Liberians' cultural and linguistic backgrounds diverge from the aforementioned group. Some of these students are not experiencing success in the United States (Ghong, Saah, Larke, & Webb-Johnson, 2007; Traore & Lukens, 2006). Furthermore, Liberian community leaders and parents are concerned about their children's experiences in the United States as reflected in home, school, and community contexts. There are an estimated 350,000

Liberians living in the United States, according to the Liberian Embassy in Washington, D.C. (Liberian Embassy in Washington, D.C., personal communication, May 7, 2010).

Several studies have been done to explore the experiences of immigrant children from Latin American countries, Europe, and Asia living in the U.S. Some limited studies have also been done recently on African students in U.S. schools (Deng, Deng, Ajak, & Bernstein, 2005; Hamilton & Moore, 2004; Traore & Lukens 2006). However, despite these limited studies conducted mostly on Somali and Sudanese refugees, there is a need to study the acculturation and schooling experiences of immigrant children from Liberia and other African countries (Alidou, 2000; Kayma, 1997; Shepard, 2005). Two-thirds of all African immigrants in the United States arrived after 1980 (Arthur, 2000; Kaba, 2009; Zeleza, 2009). Taking into consideration the recent changes in the population dynamics of African immigrant children in United States, this dissertation research seemed both necessary and urgent.

Rationale for the Study

African immigrants represent a diverse group of people from a huge continent, with complex cultural, religious, social, academic, and ethnic backgrounds. They also exhibit a wide spectrum of economic assets, meaning they range from millionaires to extremely poor individuals (Okpewho & Nzegwu, 2009; Portes & Rumbart, 2006; Ungar, 1995). In the past, only wealthy Africans, scholars, and students immigrated to the United States of America. The first wave of immigrant students attending K-12 (kindergarten through grade twelve) schools did not experience educational problems

(Alidou, 2000; Arthur 2000). Some of these African immigrant students earned academic scholarships in Africa to study abroad and already possessed strong academic foundations in math, reading, and science prior to immigrating to the U.S. Other students had wealthy or educated parents that valued education and provided additional academic stimulation for their children. But with increasing political problems in Africa, the diversity of African immigrants that have immigrated to United States within the past twenty years has become more and more complex. African immigrants are not a monolithic or culturally homogeneous group. They represent an immensely diverse and heterogeneous population with various linguistic, religious, political, economic, cultural, social, psychological and educational differences (Alidou, 2000; Arthur, 2000; Speer, 1995; Zeleza, 2009). Due to the complexity of this immigrant group, one African nation, Liberia, was selected for the focus of this qualitative dissertation in an effort to richly capture the voices and experiences of Liberian immigrant youths living in the United States.

This study on Liberian immigrant youths in the United States is important because knowledge and understanding of Liberian immigrant youths' acculturation experiences could provide a valuable tool for educators, counselors, parents, mental health professionals, social workers, and criminal justice professionals in working with this population and other immigrant youths facing similar predicaments. Liberian immigrants are unique because, unlike other African nations, Liberia was established by freed slaves from America. Thus, English is Liberians' national language, and consequently, this population does not need to be placed in English as a second

language (ESL) classes or bilingual classes when they migrate to the United States. Additionally, because of the historical relations between Liberia and the United States, Liberian immigrants should be the easiest of African nationalities to acculturate to life in America. However, this has not proven to be the case for some Liberian immigrants in the United States.

Personal narratives of young people from a variety of ethnic and racial backgrounds are becoming increasingly popular in United States educational literature because such narratives reveal the intimate and social experiences of those who feel like invisible outsiders. Case studies and personal stories of immigrant students in the U.S. have become important in providing recommendations for educational reforms and best practices to be used in culturally relevant pedagogy. Educators are now being encouraged to explore issues of inclusion, exclusion, racism, discrimination, equity, and assimilation in their daily practices (Banks & Banks, 2010; Grant & Sleeter, 2010; Hood, 2007; Igoa, 2007; Neito & Bode 2011; Saurez–Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010; Traore & Lukens, 2006).

Speaking on educational reforms in 2002, former United States President, George W. Bush, stated that "If our country fails in its responsibility to educate every child, we are likely to fail in many other areas" (*No Child Left Behind Act* Of 2002). With the passing of the "*No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) *Act* of 2002 by the U.S. Congress, no child (including the Liberian immigrant child) should be left behind, according to the U.S. educational standards. The NCLB Act mandates that *all children* have a fair, equal, and increased opportunity to obtain high quality educations, and all

are entitled to be educated to their fullest potentials. The first of seven prioritized blueprints of the *No Child Left Behind Act* is: "Improving the academic performance of disadvantaged students." The third priority is "Moving limited English proficient students to English fluency" (NCLB Act, p.2). The NCLB Act also requires that all students perform at proficiency or higher by the year 2014 (Grant & Sleeter, 2010). Thus, when these mandates are fully carried out with accurate accountability and full adherence to the standards, all students indeed will experience success in U.S. urban classrooms.

How are Liberian immigrant children coping in schools in the United States? The answer to this question cannot be deduced from analysis of existing school districts or national educational data banks because Liberian immigrant students, along with all other African immigrant students, are often classified as African Americans. Hence, more nonconventional methods and studies are necessary to examine the educational status of the Liberian immigrant student population.

Educators need to be cognizant of the fact that very distinct differences exist between immigrant children from Liberia and other African nations, and African American children whose ancestors are Americans by way of the slave diasporas. African immigrants may be from war-infested countries in Africa, while African American children, the latter and predominant group, have not been impacted by immigration factors or civil wars. Additionally, unlike immigrant youths, African American students living in the US do not face acculturation factors since they are born in America.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify home, school, and community acculturation experiences of Liberian immigrant youths in the United States. The study aims to capture the perceptions and the realities of those Liberian youths who are contending with profound changes associated with moving to a new country, cultural shock, disorientation, academic challenges, and loss of previous relationships. This study also serves to reduce the gap created by the limited number of multicultural studies on recent African immigrant students.

Significance of the Study

This study has significantly broadened the research and understanding of how Liberian immigrant youths make sense of their U.S. acculturation experiences, by illuminating the strategies that they have adopted in their new homeland – the United States. Secondly, this study has created an awareness of the ethnic, cultural, and historical differences that exist between Liberian immigrant youth and African American students, with whom they are often confused or ignored by educational staff.

Research Questions

The guiding research topic was: How do Liberian immigrant youths describe their acculturation processes in the United States regarding their school, home, and community experiences? The following three primary research questions guided this study:

1) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe school experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

2) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe home experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

3) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe community experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were frequently used in study. Definitions are provided below in an effort to clarify their usage for the reader:

1. Acculturation, as defined by Gordon, (1964) is the process by which "groups of individuals, having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups" (p. 61). Igoa (1995) maintains that acculturation allows immigrants to become a part of the mainstream culture without discarding their own valuable traditions.

2. Assimilation, according to Gordon (1964), " is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experiences and history, are incorporated with them in a common life"(p.62). Some scholars like Igoa (1995), argue that assimilation is unfavorable because immigrants have to

give up cherished cultural values in order to become a part of the mainstream culture.

3. Immigrants are citizens from other countries who are admitted to the U.S. on the basis of family ties, professions, or jobs qualifications (Darboe, 2003).

4. According to the United Nations (UN), young people are defined as individuals aged between 15 and 24. UN states, "Those in the 15-24 age bracket are still developing their careers and/or still studying, and this has been taken to be characteristic of youth" (UN, 2011).

5. Liberian Immigrant Youth describes Liberian immigrant young adults between the ages of 18 and 22 years who were born in Liberia, formerly attended schools in Liberia before immigrating to the U.S.A., have attended at least three years of high school in the United States, and have lived in the United States for less than ten years.

6. Liberian immigrant parents are biological parents or guardians who were born and raised in Liberia, and who make educational decisions for Liberian immigrant youths.

7. Refugee refers to a person who has fled his or her homeland and seeks protection in another country on the grounds of fear of persecution in their native country. Prior to entering the United States, persons seeking refugee status must prove that they have a well-founded fear of prosecution based on race, religion, membership in a social, ethnic or political group (National Immigration Forum, 2003).

8. School is used to describe the academic settings or environments that positively or negatively influence school experiences of immigrants.

9. Home describes the residence where participants reside with parents, guardians, or other family members. These environments can either positively or negatively impact the acculturation experiences of immigrants.

10. Community refers to neighborhoods or other non-academic environments, such as churches, private and public gatherings, and communities at large that influence the acculturation experiences of immigrants.

Delimitations

This study was limited to Liberian immigrants located in and around one metropolitan area in the southern United States. It was understood that the participants in this study could only provide information on their own personal experiences. Hence this study was not intended to provide generalizations to the larger groups of Liberian or other African immigrant populations in the United States.

As a human instrument, I cannot separate myself from the data analyses, and my interpretations are based on my own personal understandings of the participants' perspectives and accounts. Furthermore, I am a Liberian immigrant professional and cannot separate myself from the attendant biases associated with that identity. However, during the research I made every effort possible to keep my subjectivity in check and to verify my interpretations with the participants.

It is highly probable that if another researcher were to conduct the same study with the identical participants, the emerging trends would also be influenced by his or her own personal lens. Varying interpretations may result when any given body of qualitative data in analyzed, and therefore the research results are not likely to be identical. Unlike quantitative research, this interpretive aspect is one of the unique features of qualitative research, as replications and generalizations are not the objective of such studies. It is expedient that information gained from this study will be a valuable resource for educators, counselors, mental health professionals, social workers, criminal justice professionals, and other policy makers.

Assumptions

In conducting the research, it was assumed that recent Liberian immigrants who were interviewed for this study shared their acculturation experiences as fully as possible. They were assumed to be honest in their responses and to have provided information based on their own individual recollections and perspectives.

Organization of the Study

This study contains six chapters. Chapter I includes an outline of the problem, a statement of the purpose, and delineates the researcher's personal interest in the subject. Chapter II offers a review of related literature. Chapter III details the methodology used in the study. Chapter IV provides an account of the participants' acculturation experiences in their own voices. Chapter V reports the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter VI consists of a discussion of the findings, and offers conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

"The love of liberty has brought us here."
(Liberia's national motto, written by freed slaves repatriated to Liberia. Victor, 2007*).*

"Fear of death has caused us to flee and return to the US."
(Voices of Liberian immigrants in the U.S.A., personal communication)

In this chapter, a historical overview of the relations between Liberia and the United States, and changes in the U.S. immigration population with a special emphasis on recent Liberian immigrant populations is examined. Institutional, educational, and societal discriminatory practices in the U.S. that affirm some groups and render others "invisible" are addressed. Problems with meeting the changing educational needs of contemporary America's diverse student population are also discussed. Theoretical frameworks pertaining to the assimilation and acculturation experiences of immigrants are also discussed. Finally, controversies that exist regarding the educational needs of students of color will be brought to light.

Relations Between Liberia and the United States

Migration of Liberians to the United States today is not the result of force, but due to voluntary decisions made by the immigrants. Though those decisions may be severely impacted by existing political, economic, or civil unrests in their native land, it is important to note that Liberians today enter the U.S. by their own free will and not

involuntarily, as some of their forefathers experienced over two hundred years ago when they entered the United States as bonded slaves.

Ironically, Liberia's national motto that states "The love of liberty has brought us here" was uttered by repatriated African American slaves that returned to Liberia over 165 years ago to begin a new life. This statement, "The love of liberty has brought us here," is also contained on the top of the Liberian National Seal, as developed by repatriated, freed slaves in 1847. Liberia was formerly referred to as a, "sweet land of liberty," with its national anthem echoing such words as, "Long live Liberia, happy land, a home of glorious liberty…" Over and over in the past, Liberia boasted of freedom, pride, and liberty. In fact, an extract of parts of the Liberian National Anthem, written in 1847 by Daniel Warner, an African American repatriate, reads as follows:

All hail, Liberia, hail! (All hail!) This glorious land of liberty shall long be ours.

Though new her name, green be her fame, and mighty be her powers…

In joy and gladness, with our hearts united, we'll shout the freedom, of a race benighted.

Long live Liberia, happy land, a home of glorious liberty, by God's command.

In union strong success is sure. We cannot fail!

With God above our rights to prove, we will o'er all prevail

With heart and hand, our country's cause defending.

We'll meet the foe, with valor unpretending. Long live Liberia, happy land!

A home of glorious liberty by God's command! (Victor, 2007)

These African American slaves, seeking freedom and liberty, happily returned to Liberia with many dreams and aspirations singing; "We meet the foe with valor unpretending," not contemplating that the foe could be an *internal* enemy. Little did they know that about a hundred and fifty years later, their descendents would happily return to the United States in search of safety, refuge, and freedom from political and economic difficulties and the violent atrocities of a civil war. Thus, many of the new arrivals of Liberian immigrants to the U.S. were happy to state, "Fear of death has caused us to flee and return to the U.S. (personal communication)." A phone conversation with an official of the Liberian Embassy in Washington, D.C. in May, 2010, revealed that there are an estimated 350,000 Liberians currently living in the United States.

Since the assassination of Liberia's former President, Wilbert Tolbert, in 1980 during a military coup d'etat, Liberia has experienced several attempted coups, civil unrests, and finally total anarchy. In 1990, a civil war erupted, which quickly spread throughout the entire country and lasted over thirteen years, causing a huge displacement of Liberian citizens. This civil war ended in 2003, only after hundreds of thousands of Liberians lost their lives (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

History

Formerly known as the "land of liberty," Liberia was the first independent republic in sub-Saharan Africa and is hailed as Africa's oldest republic. Liberia and Ethiopia are the only two African nations that were never colonized by a European

nation. Liberia was once regarded as the most peaceful, most prosperous, and most stable nation by the West, prior to 1980 (Levy, 1998).

In 1816, The American Colonization Society was formed to repatriate freed Blacks in the United States back to Africa. On July 26, 1847, Liberia was officially established as a republic. Freed slaves continued to migrate to Liberia until 1865. According to Barnhill (2005) about 15,000 freed slaves emigrated from the United States to Liberia.

The first president of Liberia was an American born freed slave called Joseph Jenkins Roberts, who took office in 1848. The government, constitution, flag, and currency of Liberia were modeled after that of America. The constitution was written by scholars from Harvard Law School (Barnhill, 2005; Levy, 1998). Nineteen other male presidents ruled Liberia for the next 159 years. In January, 2006, the first ever female president in Africa, Mrs. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, took leadership of the Liberian government (Sirleaf, 2009).

Liberia served as a major navigation and communication site for U.S. intelligence. It once housed the Omega Towel Company and a U.S. military base. Several other countries' fleets of ships are registered in Liberia. About 1,611 of the 1,687 registered ships that fly the Liberian flag are foreign-owned, predominantly originating from Germany, Greece, Russia, Japan, the United States and China (Barnhill, 2005; Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

Land and Climate

Covering 43,000 square miles, Liberia is slightly larger than the State of Tennessee. Situated on the west coast of Africa, Liberia is bordered by the Atlantic ocean on the south, Ivory Coast on the east, Sierra Leone on the west and Guinea on the north. Liberia has 15 counties, spanning mostly flat or rolling coastal plains and plateaus, with some mountains in the northeastern region (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010).

Liberia has a tropical monsoon climate. Most regions of the country are warm all year with alternating rainy and dry seasons. In the northern Nimba Mountains, extreme cold temperatures are experienced. Liberia is rich with several natural resources. A few of Liberia's marketable natural resources are rubber, coffee, diamonds, gold, iron ore, and timber (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010).

Population and Languages

Recent estimates put the population of Liberia at approximately 3,441,790 people with an annual population growth rate of 4.91% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010). English is Liberia's official national language, predominantly because of the influence of America via the repatriated freed slaves from America who established the nation in the 19th century.

There are more than sixteen tribal groups in Liberia, including the Kru, Kpelle, Mano, Gissi, Grebo, Krahn, Bassa, and Via. These groups make up 95% of the total Liberian population. Another 2.5% of Liberians are American-Liberians, descendents of freed slaves from America who colonized Liberia in the 1800's. Congo people, who

comprise 2.5% of population, also make up a distinct ethnic group in Liberia. These are descendants of immigrants from the Caribbean who had also been slaves (Barnhill, 2005; Central Intelligence Agency, 2007).

Civil War

The American-Liberians ruled Liberia from 1847 until 1980, when a bloody military coup d'etat led by Samuel K. Doe overthrew the democratic nation. Samuel K. Doe ruled first as a military dictator, and then was unpopularly elected president of the Republic of Liberia. In 1990, ethnic clashes escalated throughout Liberia, and Doe was killed by besieging rebel leaders. A full-scale civil war then raged throughout the Liberian nation. An estimated 200,000 Liberians (mostly civilians) died. About 700,000 individuals fled to neighboring Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Guinea, and Ghana to escape the bloodshed. Additionally, 800,000 Liberians became displaced within Liberia as they abandoned their homes to flee widespread atrocities (Central Intelligence Agency, 2007; Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005; Kieh, 2008).

According to Moran (2006), about seven warring factions controlled various regions of Liberia during the Liberian civil war, utilizing sales of the country's natural resources like timber and diamonds to finance their operations while "pressing children as young as seven and eight into their armies and using starving local populations as 'bait' to attract donors of relief aid" (Moran, 2006, p. 120). Moran continued, "Horrendous massacres of civilians have been recorded, and human rights organizations have documented the use of rape, torture, mutilation, and ritual cannibalism to instill terror in the civilian population" (Moran, 2006, p. 120). The civil war ended in 2003. A

new, popularly elected female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, was sworn in and took office in 2006.

Education

The Liberian government provides free education for all children between the ages of six to sixteen in Liberia. The literacy rate is 57.5% of the total population, with a ratio of 73.3 percent of males to 41.6 percent of females being literate. Children in rural areas have poor school attendance because of limited transportation services. In addition, education is primarily in English, which is not spoken by most rural children. About 50% of schools are financed by missionary groups or are schools established by large mining companies for their employees' children (Levy, 1998).

College education is provided by one of two higher education institutions – the University of Liberia, in the nation's capital of Monrovia, or at Cuttington University College in Suakoko, Bong County. There are several teacher training schools, some nursing schools, and one medical school in Liberia.

Liberian Immigrants and Other African Immigrants in the United States

In contrast to other nationalities of immigrants, only a small number of Africans have been able to come to the United States. From 1820 to 1993, the United States took in 418,000 African immigrants, according to immigration and naturalization sources (e.g. Ungar, 1995). Within the last twenty-five years, the number of African immigrants has grown tremendously. Arthur (2000) stated, "…the Africans who have settled in the United States during the last twenty years represent the largest number of Africans in more than two hundred years to settle in America" (p.vii). It is difficult to get an

accurate count of the numbers of African immigrants living in the U.S. because the U.S. Census forms simply classifies individuals as either as Blacks or Whites. However, according to Zeleza (2009), there are over 1,000,000 African immigrants in the United States today.

Okpewho and Nzegwu (2009) and Ungar (1995) indicated two possible reasons why the number of African immigrants was lower in the past. Africans usually had difficulties obtaining U.S. visas. Hence, only a few students with acceptance to educational institutions and political exiles from Africa immigrated to America. Secondly, many Africans couldn't afford the expensive airfare to America. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2006), prior to 1965, U.S. immigration policies also made it difficult for Africans and some other ethnic groups to enter America. Later, a new U.S. immigration policy allowed migration to the United States on two criteria; family reunification and occupational qualifications.

Other sources attribute the current increase in the number of African immigrants to the United States to an increase in the number of African students and professionals who remained in the U.S. as a result of political and economic difficulties in some countries in Africa. Immigration laws allow for this highly educated group to obtain permanent residency status and remain in the U.S. This has contributed to what some call "brain drain in Africa" (Arthur, 2000; British Broadcasting Company, 2001; Kaba, 2009; & Mutume, 2003). The introduction of the Diversity Visa Program by the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the U.S. in 1999 also made it possible for many Africans to win the Diversity Visa Lottery and immigrate to America. This

program allows up to 50,000 citizens from regions around the world with low representation in the US to migrate to the United States through an annual computer-selected lottery.

In his writings, Speer (1994) characterized previous African-born residents residing in the United States as being highly educated, urbanized, and with one of the highest per capita incomes of any immigrant group. Speer (1994) indicated that apart from those African immigrants that enter the U.S. as refugees, three-fourths of all other African immigrants have some college experience, with one-fourth having advanced degrees. Speer (1994) also noted that about 88% of African adults that migrate from Africa to the U.S. have a high school education or higher.

In his survey of 650 African immigrants residing in the U.S., Arthur (2000) indicated that the predominant four reasons given by Africans for coming to the United States were; post-secondary education, family re-unification, favorable economic opportunities, and to escape political terror and instability.

African Refugees in the United States

Apart from regular immigration, the U.S. government also admits some ethnic groups at particular times for political consideration. Therefore, many Liberian and other African refugees immigrate through these qualifications. The U.S. government accepts a limited number of refugees each fiscal year. These refugees and their children may not have the skills necessary to acculturate successfully or to benefit from the advantages most African immigrants in the past enjoyed. Issues include high illiteracy

rates, pre–immigration traumas, low social economic statuses, language and communication barriers, and other difficulties (Clarke, 2009; De Gourville, 2002; Gueh, 1994; Imungi, 2008; Jarbo, 2001; Togo, 2006; Ungar, 1995).

A refugee is a person who has fled his or her homeland and seeks protection from another country on the grounds of fear of persecution in their native country. Prior to entering the United States, persons seeking refugee status must prove that they have a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, or membership in a social, ethnic or political group (National Immigration Forum, 2003). Additionally, those seeking refuge in the United States must fit into predetermined U.S. priority categories. These individuals must go through interviews with officers of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the U.S. embassy in the initial host country, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and final screening by the U.S. Bureau of Customs and Border Protection before entering the U.S.

With the passage of the Refugee Act by the United States Congress in 1980, many more Africans were able to immigrate to America (Arthur, 2000; Portes & Rumbuat, 2006; Ungar, 1995). The initial waves of refugees and political asylum seekers whom immigrate to America tend to come from higher socioeconomic status. With time, the number of illiterate refugees with lower economic status increases.

According to Zehr (2001), strong advocacy from the Congressional Black Caucus influenced the U.S. Department of State to triple the amount of refugees from Africa. According to the U.S. Committee for Refugee sources, six African countries

have significantly contributed to increases in the numbers of refugees to America. They are; Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, Zaire, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone.

Both the late Ogbu (2000), and Saurez–Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) found that refugees and some immigrants interpret their economic hardships as temporary problems that they can overcome through education and hard work. Their cultural and language orientations enable them to interpret cultural and language barriers in school as obstacles to be overcome in order to achieve their immigration goals, and hence make concerted efforts to overcome these barriers. Ogbu's description characterized most African immigrants in the past, in addition to a small percentage of African refugees that excel in school despite hardships and U.S. social, educational, societal, and institutional barriers. Unfortunately, some Liberian and other African refugees have not been able to fully transgress such barriers. In conclusion, the arrival of large numbers of political refugees, fleeing repressive regimes and violent conflicts in some countries in Africa, has created a drastic change in the Liberian and other African refugee population in the United States.

Changes in United States Demographics

"Tonight… in this defining moment, change is coming to America… The road ahead will be long. Our climb will be steep… But, America, I have never been more hopeful than I am tonight that we will get there" (President Obama, cited by the Poynter Institute, 2009, pp. 19, 59).

"Together, we the diverse people of the United States transformed America into a mighty economy and an amazingly unique society of varied races, ethnicities, and religions" (Takaki, 2008, p. 20).

It can't be denied that the United States is a nation of immigrants and diversity. The 2009 inauguration of President Barack Obama, a person of color, as the 44th president of the United States of America is a strong indicator of the demographic and social changes that have occurred over the past decades in the U.S. President Barack Hussein Obama, the son of a Black African man from Kenya, Africa and a White woman of European American heritage, won the 2008 U.S. presidential elections with a landslide victory. Banks and Banks (2010) state:

> Despite the impressive support he (President Obama) received from many demographic groups, Obama was the victim of veiled racial attacks that tried to paint him as an "Other" who will not be an acceptable American president"… Consequently, the campaign and election of Obama illustrate both the promises and challenges of diversity in the United States. (Banks & Banks, 2010, p. v*)*

President Obama's campaign mottos were "Yes we can," …"Change," and "Change we can believe in." Change is indeed needed within the United Sates' institutional, political, educational, economic, and health systems. Rampant political unrest, worldwide migration, and current globalization trends have resulted in rapid demographic changes in developed countries, including in the United States. Portes and Rumbuat (2006) and other scholars, such as Stritikus and Varghese (2010), indicate that more than half of the foreign-born population of the United States arrived after 1980. According to Banks and Banks (2010) racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity are increasing in the United States. They stated, "Diversity in the United States is becoming increasingly reflected in the nation's schools, colleges, and universities"

(Banks & Banks, 2010, p. v). Banks and Banks further indicated that over forty-three percent of public school students enrolled in grades one through twelve are children of color. Furthermore, it is predicted that by the year 2020, sixty percent of school age-children in the United States will be children of color.

Prior to 1965, United States immigration laws favored migrations of people from Europe. Today, immigrants continue to arrive from Europe, but over eighty percent of today's immigrants to the U.S. are from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Significantly, recent immigrants have been more diverse in their cultural, educational, and ethnic backgrounds (Banks & Banks, 2010; Portes & Rumbart, 2006; Ungar, 1995). Latinos are the largest and fastest growing CLEED population. According to Child Trends (2010), forty percent of the US immigrant population is from Mexico, twenty-three percent from Asia, twelve percent from Central and South America (excluding Mexico) ten percent from Caribbean nations, ten percent from Europe, three percent from Africa and two percent others.

Neito (2000) argues that immigration is not a phenomenon of the past, as some would like to believe. Neito insists that:

> It begins anew every day that planes land, ships reach our shores, and people on foot make their way to our borders… many of the students in our schools who themselves are not immigrants have parents or grandparents who are. Not just a nation of past immigrants, often romantically portrayed, the United States is a nation of immigrants even today. (Neito, 2000, p.3)

Neito and Bode (2008) added, "For the most part, new immigrants, particularly those from Latin America, Asia, and Africa, are neither warmly welcome nor given easy access to the resources in the United States" (Neito & Bode, 2008, p.7). Scholars such as Books (2007), Olsen (2008), and Traore and Lukens (2006) also noted discriminatory treatment of some groups in their studies.

America has become more and more diverse in the twenty-first century. Hence, the mold of "one size suits all" has to be discarded. The faces and voices of American school children are changing. It is imperative that all Americans appreciate and embrace a culturally pluralistic approach to diversity - one in which every person is valued for his or her uniqueness and individuality.

The Center for Immigrant Studies (2003) reported that in March 2002, there were 33.1 million foreign-born people living in the U.S.A. Within the next seven years, this population increased by over 4.8 million. The Migration Policy Institute (2010) reported that in 2009 over 37.9 million foreign-born people resided in the United States. This represented 12.5% of the total United States population of 308.1 million, as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2009. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that within the next fifty years, the population of the United States will rise to over 400 million due to current immigration trends (Center for Immigrant Studies, 2003; Migration Policy Institute, 2009).

Growth in the foreign-born U.S. population has resulted in increased cultural and language diversity. Over 300 different languages are spoken in the U.S. today, with about 18 percent of the current U.S. population speaking non-English languages at

home (Chen, 2003; Modern Language Association, 2010; Migration Policy Institute, 2010). Many regions in the U.S. have experienced a rapid growth of foreign-born populations. The top five states ranking in high foreign-born populations are California, New York, Texas, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois (Migration Policy Institute, 2010).

Theories of Assimilation and Acculturation

According to Darboe (2003), the push-pull factors of international migration result in constant global demographic changes. Immigrants are pushed from their countries by poor economic conditions, political persecution, or unrest, and are pulled to other countries in search of better economic opportunities, safety, or freedom. Adaptation as it relates to immigrants can be categorized as assimilation or acculturation.

In his classic work entitled *Assimilation in American life: The role of race, religion, and national origins,* Gordon (1964) described three theories of assimilation that he referred to as the "Anglo-Conformity theory," the "Melting Pot theory" and the "Cultural Pluralism theory." Gordon (ibid) described the "Anglo-Conformity theory" as completely denouncing all of the immigrants' ancestral culture in favor of the behavior and value of the Anglo-Saxon core group. The "Melting Pot theory" supports a merger of the Anglo-Saxon group with other immigrant groups and blending of the various cultures to form a new American. The "Cultural Pluralism theory" postulates that each group preserves their unique cultures as they integrate into the American society.

According to Gordon (1964), "assimilation is a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experiences and history, are incorporated with them in a common life" (p. 62). Gordon explained that in the U.S., an immigrant assimilates by acquiring specific language and social practices, and can participate in the dominant culture without experiencing societal, political, and economic prejudices. Gordon does not make a very clear distinction between assimilation and acculturation, as some social scientists do.

According to Goyol (2006),"The theory of acculturation focuses on understanding the adaptation processes and cultural changes of minority groups as they experience first-hand contact with the dominant culture" (p. 2). Goyol (2006) explained that even though originally acculturation was defined as a " process of cultural changes that occurred at a group level… today it is also recognized as attitudinal and behavioral changes in an individual whose cultural group is mutually experiencing acculturation"(ibid, p.2).

According to Berry (2005) acculturation has been happening for thousands of years. However, Berry (2005) states, "Contemporary interest in research on acculturation grew out of concern for the effect of European domination of indigenous people. Later, it focused on how immigrants changed following their entry and settlement into receiving societies. More recently, much of the work has been involved with how ethno-cultural groups relate to each other and change as a result of their attempts to live together in cultural pluralistic societies"(p.700). Berry further

elaborates that an immigrant's ability to successfully acculturate depends their "attitude" and "behavior" towards intercultural encounters (Berry, 2005, p.704).

One widely quoted study on acculturation was done by Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits (1936). These scholars state their definition of acculturation as: "Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original patterns of either or both groups"(p.149). Redfield et al (1936) further indicated that during the *integration* of traits from the new cultures into the pattern of the existing culture, *conflict* may be produced within a culture by the acceptance of new traits at various intervals (151).

There are many models of acculturation (e.g. Berry, 1983; Gordon, 1964; Goyol, 2006; Pang, 2005). One of the most popular models is the Bidirectional Acculturation Model (Berry, 1983) that proposes that an immigrant's psychological adjustment to a new culture can occur in four different ways; integration, assimilation, rejection, and deculturation. Goyol (2006) explained that integration relates to an immigrant's desire to fully belong to the dominant culture, whereas assimilation refers to an immigrant's concept of acculturation into the dominant culture at the negative expense of his native culture. Rejection occurs when an immigrant rejects the culture of the new host country and maintains his own cultural practices. Finally, deculturation occurs when the immigrant realizes that neither the dominant culture nor his native culture is undesirable. This individual now feels free to live a non-conforming lifestyle.

For many decades, the United States was described as a "melting pot" population. The concept was, immigrants who newly arrived in the United States were eager to have their origins striped away as they blended into the dominant American culture and thus smoothly melted or blended in, becoming a part of the overall Americanized culture. The belief was these immigrants were hoping to be fully accepted into the new host country. However, while this was relatively easy for European Americans, it was more problematic for other ethnic groups (Santos, 2002).

As a result, in the 1960s various ethnic groups began to desire and celebrate their unique heritage. Thus, with a new sense of pride, some immigrants wanted to be distinctly identified by their national origins. Hence, Asian American, African American, and Hispanic or Latino became common identifiers. Today, many scholars refer to the United States' diversity as a "salad bowl" or a "patchwork quilt." Santos (2002) described the patchwork quilt model as "a constantly changing and growing fabric made up of peoples who, while remaining unique, work together like the pieces of a quilt to form a complex but united whole" (Santos, 2002, p. 39). Others refer to this model as cultural pluralism.

Adaptation, Assimilation, and Acculturation of Immigrants in the U. S.

Adaptation of immigrants in a new host country is impacted by the following; demographic and social characteristics of the immigrant, the psychological state of the immigrant, and the type of reception he or she receives from the host country (Esquivel, Oades-Sese, & Jarvis, 2010; Imungi, 2008). In his research on the adaptations of

Liberian immigrant students in a U.S. urban high school, De Gourville (2002) found that Liberian immigrant students experienced many challenges in adapting to the culture and expectations of their U.S. high school. De Gourville (2002) argued that language and literacy were essential to the Liberian immigrant students' academic and social successes, and that the Western concept of literacy was limited to the acquisition of reading, writing, and content knowledge in a cultural neutral context. This directly lead to the lack of development of the immigrants' literacy levels.

In a study of twenty-seven adult female Liberian immigrants living in Michigan, Imungi (2008) found that limited proficiency of spoken English, single female head -of -the household status, low social economic status, poor perceptions of personal health, and pre-migration trauma had an effect on the acculturation experiences of these new immigrants. This concurs with studies by Takeuchi, Alegria, Jackson, et al (2007) that found age at migration, time spent in the host country, gender, socioeconomic status, religion, social support systems, health, language proficiency, and pre-migration experiences had significant impacts on an immigrant's acculturation experiences in a new host country.

In his book on Liberians living in the U.S., Chicoine (1997) studied one family's (the Miller family) escape from the brutal Liberian civil war, temporarily staying in a neighboring country, the Ivory Coast as refugees, and finally their resettlement and adjustment to life in the United States. The Millers arrived in Houston, Texas in 1992. They later met and interviewed with Mr. Chicoine in 1995 and 1996.

The Millers vividly described their war experiences in Liberia, including enduring the disappearance of their eldest son and the death of their last child before they fled the bloody civil war in Liberia. In describing the death of their one year old child from hunger and sickness, they stated, "We were looking at her. She was in our hands when she took her last breath. There was nothing we could do" (Chicoine, 1997, p. 25). How tragic it is to have a child die helplessly in the arms of the parents as other siblings looked on! One can only wonder how this traumatic experience, along with other war traumas, impacted the other Miller children that survived the war, and were resettled in the U.S.

Mr. and Mrs. Miller described other terrifying experiences as they escaped from Monrovia, Liberia to seek refuge in a neighboring country. Mr. Miller indicated that as they passed through the various checkpoints set up by rebel soldiers, child soldiers were seen with guns in their hands. He stated, "Ten, twelve year-olds holding guns. They were the most dangerous ones, the most feared. The first thing they would ask you were your tribe… They searched you… That was not an easy process" (Chicoine, 1997, p. 29). Chicoine indicated that many of the soldiers at the various check points the Millers encountered were young boys carrying automatic rifles (AK-47s) that could fire as many as thirty bullets with one pull of the trigger.

Once the Millers arrived in Danane, Ivory Coast, they had to register with the United Nations to receive a monthly ration of food. Their school-age children enrolled in schools set up by Liberian refugees living in that camp. The Millers were later resettled in Houston, Texas by a United States refugee agency.

Initially, the Millers had some adjustment problems in Houston. They disliked the lack of a community life style. Mr. Miller stated, "In Liberia, we had a kind of communal life. Everyone cared about the welfare of others… It's not like that here" (Chicoine, 1997, p. 38). The Miller family expressed to the researcher that they feared for their safety in the United States as well, since the resettlement agency placed them in an apartment complex located near a major freeway that was riddled with crime.

The Millers' four children had some adjustment problems in their new schools. They did not feel accepted in their new school environments. Mr. Miller shared, "There was always fighting on the school bus and in the neighborhood"(p.40). His son explained, "It was because we spoke differently and acted differently"(p.40). The Miller children were determined to overcome those challenges, which they did after three to four years in the United States. They later shared that they no longer had problems, and had begun to enjoy friendships with children of diverse backgrounds, "My friends don't care where I am from. I've got friends of every color. I don't care where they are from," one of the Miller sons explained (Chicoine, 1997, p. 40).

Studies have revealed that "invisibility" of a group inhibits the immigrant students' academic and social success (e.g. Books, 2007; De Gourville, 2002; Ghong et al., 2007). De Gourville (2002) also found low teacher expectations, placement of some of the Liberian immigrant students in English as a second language (ESL) centers was inappropriate, and that social inequality and tension existed between the Liberian immigrant students and African American students. These phenomena were also observed in research conducted by Traore (2006), and Traore and Lukens (2006).

In their book *This isn't the America that I thought I'd find: African students in the urban U.S. high school,* Traore and Lukens (2006) explained that some of the African immigrant youths experienced "invisibility" and ridicule. The authors also described the social conflicts and tension that existed between African immigrant students and African American students in one U.S. urban school. These students focused on what separated them rather than the common heritage that they shared. The authors discussed distorted media images of Africa and limited knowledge of African history or culture as sources of discomfort for the African Americans. African immigrant students that tried to identify with African American youths were reported to be copying some of the less positive aspects of African American culture in order to feel accepted by their peers. Traore and Lukens (2006) indicated that fights were common among the two groups, especially among African immigrant youths from war-torn countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone. These children tended to exhibit very aggressive or depressive behaviors.

Sue Books (2007) used "invisibility" as a paradoxical term to describe the educational experiences of many immigrants and other marginalized children and youth in the United States. Ironically, these children's diversity, strengths, and vulnerabilities are often ignored in U.S. schools. Books (2007) stated, "schools are saturated with practices of discrimination, privilege, and hierarchy, marketed as modes of promoting excellence" (Books, 2007 p. x). Books further argued that these "invisible children" are socially devalued and underserved, because their needs are not a priority to U.S. schools or society. These children experience derogatory, stereotypical treatments, and also

receive relatively little attention from scholars in the field of education, nor writers in the popular press.

In their article on the educational experiences of African immigrant students in the United States, Ghong et al. (2007) asserted that African immigrant students that experience invisibility often fall through educational cracks or are placed in inappropriate educational settings. These scholars emphasized that it is critical that all U.S. educators employ culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) to effectively educate this group, as well as all students in today's culturally pluralistic society.

Ghong et al. (2007) explained that an immigrant's child's language is embodied into his culture and self identity. Language is used to affirm, negotiate, assert, and express one's emotion. Therefore, it is emotionally disturbing when an African immigrant child is dismissed or ridicule because of their accent. These scholars stated, "Some African children have been termed less intelligent because of their accents. In fact, some students have been placed in special education because of their accents" (Ghong et al., 2007, p. 66). Arthur (2000) and Saah (unpublished manuscript in progress) also found this to be true in their interviews with new African immigrant parents and youths in the United States.

Ghong et al. (2007) admonished educators to become cognizant of the marked distinctions between African immigrant students born in Africa and African American students born and raised in the United States. These researchers explained that even though there are phenotypic resemblances between the two groups:

African immigrant students do face psychological and social problems in their

schools. They may feel a sense of loss, anxiety, a sense of being a non-person,

and trying to adapt to being separated from families and former communities.

Other cultural differences are found in the styles of greetings, concepts of eye

contact, and different concepts of time. These differences bring much conflict at

home as immigrant parents try to maintain family values and internalize the new

concepts with their children. (p. 62)

These types of internal or generational conflicts among immigrants were also

reported by other scholars (e.g. Miamen, 2002; Pang, 2005; Saah, unpublished

manuscript in progress). Arthur (2000) describes some Africans as "acculturated but not

assimilated" (p. 3). These Africans engage the host society selectively, confining their

activities to carefully constructed zones. Arthur identifies these zones as educational or

economical, both of which are essential for the Africans' survival in the new host

country.

According to Alidou (2000) most African students in the past adopted

assimilation strategies and blended into the U.S. student population. The author

attributed this success to congeniality between African upper-class English speakers, of

which many of the African students were members, and that of American middle-class

culture. Other African students in the past performed well academically because they

were usually very bright students who had earned scholarships to study abroad. Alidou

explained;

Currently, assimilation is problematic because cultural, economic, and educational diversity is increasing among new immigrants from Africa. There are immigrants from non-English speaking countries and immigrants from non-formal or very limited formal education. Black students coming from this second group of immigrants seem to experience more problems adapting and integrating into the U.S. schools and mainstream culture because of classism, historical racism, and prejudices that prevail in American society. (Alidou, 2000, p. 102)

Saurez-Orozco and Saurez-Orozco (2001) describe this phenomenon of structural inequalities found in U.S. society as, "American apartheid… implicated in the creation of a cultural ethos of ambivalence, pessimism, and despair" (p. 40). Other scholars describe this as institutional or instructional racism (Larke, Webb-Johnson, & Rochon, 1999).

Arthur (2000) explained that although African immigrants recognize the impact of racial stratification in the United States, "The immigrant approaches the black and white racial divide with extreme caution… disengaged, distanced, and reluctant…" (Arthur, 2000, p. 4). Africans and other immigrants within the lower U.S. social economic status, and those with limited education, may be unable to fully understand the U.S's. unspoken social practices (De Gourville, 2002; Erickson, 2010; Olsen, 2008). These immigrants are the ones that experience the most acculturation difficulties.

Acculturation of Immigrant Children

According to Goyol (2006), many immigrants experience cultural shock when they arrive in the United States. Many endure treatments and attitudes of Americans quite different from what they experienced or expected before leaving their native lands. Americans seem more caring once they are foreigners in another country.

Chun, Organista, and Marin (2003) indicated that immigrants who enter the United States at a young age acculturate faster than older immigrants. Additionally, the new immigrant's proficiency of English or ability to learn English is directly proportional to his or her acculturation rate. Thirdly, the longer an immigrant resides in the United States, the more acculturated he or she is likely to be.

According to Gong, Takeuchi, Agbayani-Stewart and Tacata (2003), "The age at which a person immigrates to the United States has the potential to be a powerful force in understanding social and cultural change" (p. 191). The authors argue that a younger immigrant child typically has more opportunities to interact with social groups and institutions in the new host country than do older immigrants, thereby enabling them to acquire new languages, attitudes, and social practices of the host country at a faster rate. They identified "speaking English" as the strongest acculturation measurement, because it is a strong indicator of how immigrants can "negotiate every day transactions" in the United States (Gong et al., 2003, p. 191).

Unfortunately, negative attention is often given to new immigrant children and their families. According to Saurez-Orozco and Saurez-Orozco (2001), one common misconception is that immigrant children are not acculturating in the United States

because they are not learning English. These scholars indicate that immigrant children are learning English faster than ever before, but unfortunately, they are rapidly losing their native languages. These researchers argued that "the link between learning English and 'acculturation' rests on a superficial and reductionistic assumption that speaking English equal acculturation. Simply speaking English does not make one an American" (2001, p. 40).

Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, and Todorova (2010) further identified two broad realms of culture: instrumental culture and expressive culture. Instrumental culture is identified as the competencies, skills and social behaviors that are required to successfully adopt and contribute to a new society. Expressive culture refers to one's perspective on worldviews, values, and interpersonal relations that generate meaning and self-identity.

Immigrant parents acknowledge that their children need to acquire new skills to successfully acculturate into their new country. Many immigrant parents encourage their children to cultivate the "instrumental" aspects of culture in the new setting, but are hesitant for their children to experience full exposure to the "expressive" aspects of culture (Pang, 2005; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010; Zhou, 1997).

Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, and Todorova, (2010) argue that acculturation should not be superficially defined as acquiring linguistic skills and job skills, but instead should be defined as being inclusive of world views, realm of values and interpersonal relations. They insist that when immigrant children lose their expressive culture and fully adopt American expressive culture, social cohesion is weakened,

parental authority is challenged and these immigrant children's interpersonal relations suffer.

In conclusion, as repeatedly indicated by researchers, students benefit academically, psychologically, and socially when their culture is affirmed, cultivated, and celebrated. Students should be taught skills that equip them to easily adopt or navigate among diverse cultural practices or expectations. Saurez-Orozco and Saurez-Orozco state, "There are social, economic, cognitive and aesthetic advantages to being able to transverse cultural spaces. Immigrant children are poised to maximize that unique advantage" (Saurez-Orozco & Saurez-Orozco, 2001, pg. 40).

Immigrant parents welcome United States educational training and influences that their children acquire. However, many immigrant parents resist American mannerisms and cultural values. Some immigrant children have learned to negotiate both worlds successfully. Students that have not mastered these skills often experience rejection at school and at home (Dunn-Marcos et al., 2005; Traore, 2006; Traore & Lukens, 2006; Zhou, 1997).

A Closer Look at the Stages of Acculturation and Assimilation

According to Facundo, Nuittal, and Walton (1994), the stage of acculturation of an immigrant child and his or her family is a crucial factor to be considered. Immigrant children who have just entered the United States face challenges that are different from those immigrants that have resided in the United States for a longer period of time. Several theories of acculturation have been developed that delineate the different stages of acculturation. The Minority Identity Development model (MID) of Atkinson,

Mortem, and Sue (1989) is one of the best known theories, and it postulates five stages of development; conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and synergetic articulation and awareness. Each stage focuses on four factors; attitudes towards self, towards others of the same ethnic group, towards different minority groups, and towards the dominant group.

In the conformity stage, one experiences deprecating attitudes towards one's self and others from the same minority group, and also has a heightened appreciation of the dominant group (Atkinson, Mortem, & Sue, 1989). At this stage, an immigrant tries to emulate the customs of their new country. This is when the immigrant child attempts to speak, dress, and act like mainstream American youths.

In the dissonance stage, the immigrant exhibits conflicting feelings towards all groups. This is when the immigrant child experiences rejection from peers, and parental disapproval of new exhibited attitudes. The resistance and immersion stage is characterized by self-appreciation of one's own ethnic group. The introspection stage is characterized by the immigrants' evaluation of their self-appreciation, their own ethnocentrism and deprecation of the dominant group. The final stage, synergetic articulation and awareness, demonstrates immigrant self-appreciation, as well as approval of one's own ethnic group, other minority groups, and selective dominant group appreciation (Atkinson, Mortem, & Sue, 1989).

A second acculturation theory postulated by Jalali and Boyce (1980) identifies the following stages; a) isolation and alienation from the new culture, b) denigrating and rejecting the old culture regarding dress styles, habits, changes in values, etc., c) conflict

within the family system, and d) integration into the new culture coinciding with preservation of one's own family values. Immigrants in America experience many forms and degrees of acculturative experiences based on the immigrants' demographics, mode of migration, and the reception they receive in the host country.

Academic Achievement Issues

"School was a site of conflict, name calling, teasing, and reinforcement of stereotypes and misperceptions"
(Traore & Lukens, 2006, p. 12).

The cultural difference theory and the secondary cultural difference theory (Ogbu, 1974) propose that disparities between the majority and minority cultural norms create conflicts in educational institutions that can result in poor academic performances for students of color. The differences between home, school, and social values, along with differing language and learning styles, are linked to poor academic performances..

In her book, *Other people's children: Cultural conflict in the classroom,* Lisa Delpit (2006) cautioned educators to evaluate their own racial and cultural biases as they attempt to educate children of different cultural, ethnic, racial, or economic backgrounds from themselves. Delpit stated, "We educators set out to teach, but how can we reach the worlds of others when we don't even know that they exist?" (Delpit, 2006, p. xxiv).

Delpit described the bias and ignorance that some educators take into the educational systems as they try to educate other people's children about whom they are

essentially ignorant. Delpit stated, "It is the result of coming face-to face with the teachers, the psychologists, the school administrators who look at 'other people's children' and see damaged and dangerous caricatures of the vulnerable and impressionable beings before them" (Delpit, 2006, p. xxiii).

Delpit argued:

I have come to understand that power plays a critical role in our society and in our educational system. The worldviews of those with privileged positions are taken as the only reality, while the worldviews of those less powerful are dismissed as inconsequential. Indeed, in the educational institutions of this country, the possibilities for poor people and people of color to define themselves, to determine the self each should be, involve a power that lies outside of the self. It is others who determine how they should act, how they are to be judged. When one "we"gets to determine standards for all "wes," then some "wes" are in trouble!" (Delpit, 2006, p. xxv)

The works of several other scholars, such as Banks and Banks (2010), Books (2007), Grant and Sleeter (2010), Pang (2005), and Traore (2006), also describe the effects of discrimination and racism in U.S. society, concurring with Delpit's premise. According to Pang (2005), culture shapes how one views and interprets the world. Some students come to school with different perceptions and values because of their home orientations. Pang stated, "Children of color may experience cultural clashes when what they are taught at home is in conflict with what they are learning at school" (Pang, 2005. p. 55). Pang argued that history textbooks should incorporate histories of

the many diverse people whom make up the American population. For example, Native Americans, the original and indigenous inhabitants of America, do not view U.S. history as it is traditionally portrayed in U.S. history texts. Pang credits the works of Ronald Takaki, John Hope Franklin, and others who have made significant recent contributions to our knowledge of U.S. histories. Pang argued that these scholars' works need to be included in today's textbooks.

Other information that should be included in formal U.S. curriculum is the integration of African histories and culture. Pang explained:

Teachers need knowledge of one of the most powerful trading civilizations in Western Africa between 1300 and 1600 A.D., the Songhoy culture. Our history has roots in the Songhoy civilization. Many people were enslaved through the early trans-Sahara Arab slave trade before the existence of the classical West African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhoy. The Songhoy civilization was an advanced culture in which peace and prosperity flourished for hundreds of years. At that time Europe was in the Dark Ages. (Pang 2005, p. 386)

Thus, this type of knowledge will empower African American and African immigrant students and give them a sense of pride that their ancestors were also powerful, intelligent people worth learning about and celebrating. Igoa (2007) stated that "nothing is more painful for a child than the feeling of nonexistence. If the immigrant child must succeed in the tasks of learning…They need to feel that they are valued and understood" (Igoa, 2007, p. 118).

This premise has been repeatedly advocated for by many multicultural scholars and educators. Scholars that promote multicultural theories argue that when students' cultures are valued and incorporated in culturally responsive pedagogy, all students achieve academically (e.g. Banks & Banks 2010; Gay, 2010; Igoa, 2007; Larke, Webb-Johnson, & Carter, 1996; Neito & Bode, 2008; Pang, 2005). Thus, these goals of making students feel visible, affirmed and appreciated should guide educational institutions if they plan to produce students fully equipped for the twenty-first century.

Problems with Current Instructional Methods

Research has shown that a high correlation exists between educators' cultural sensitivity, experience, and knowledge of other students' cultural backgrounds, and the academic performances of their students. The more culturally sensitive educators are, the more successful they have been with diverse students (Larke, Webb-Johnson & Carter, 1996). According to Siccone (1995), students in classrooms that give no recognition to other cultures besides the majority White culture are likely to "feel isolated and inferior". He inferred that experiences of "psychic dis-equilibrium" are created for some minorities when classroom teachers portray Americans as being only of European descent (ibid, 1995, p.xv).

An imbalance between teachers' and students' backgrounds can be a source of intercultural tension due to the discrepancy of the values, teaching and learning styles of the Whites and those of others (Larke, Webb-Johnson, & Rochon, 1999; Neito & Bode,

2008). Lack of culturally relevant pedagogy usually works to the academic and social advantage of White students and to the disadvantage of students of color.

Pang (2005) argues that educators who erroneously fail to take into account their students' cultures have limited knowledge of immigrant students' acculturation stages. These educators do not understand that assimilation processes can negatively impact a student's self-identity and cause the student to relinquish valuable traditional languages and/or cultures. Pang further stresses the need for educators to employ multicultural pedagogy that is relevant and meaningful to students. Incorporating multicultural practices will result in a paradigm shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered orientation (Pang, 2005).

According to Neito and Bode (2008), schools and society play a role in creating low self-esteem in children. These scholars argue that children do not develop poor self-concepts on their own, but rather they are the results of policies and practices of schools and a society that respects and affirms some groups while devaluing and rejecting others. Neito and Bode (2008) state, "… Some teachers bear responsibility for having low expectations because they are racist and elitist with their interactions with students and parents, thus providing educational environments that discourage many students from learning"(p. 6). Neito and Bode (2008) further recommend that the history of all racial groups be made visible by making it part of the curriculum, instruction, and educational processes.

The Use of Narratives in the Field of Education

"Increasingly, in fields such as law, education, ethnic studies, and feminist studies, story has gained credence as an appropriate methodology for transmitting the richness and complexity of cultural and social phenomena" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. xvi).

Each person has a story to tell. Liberian immigrants can express life experiences through narratives and personal stories. Narrative interviews allow the participants to express their particular life experiences in an naturalistic manner. Narrative analysis has become more and more prevalent in educational research because it contextualizes and personalizes participants' voices and experiences.

Schwandt (2007) indicated that "a personal experience story relates the teller to some significant episode, event, or personal experience, and a personal history and reconstruction of a life is a more encompassing and involved account" (Schwandt, 2007, p. 201). Several other scholars support story telling as a means of effective communication (Alidou, 2000; Ladson Billings, 2009).

Traditionally, Liberians value oral histories and storytelling. They can spend hours narrating an event and experiences if you are willing to listen. They become somewhat leery and suspicious if you constantly interrupt them with specific questions or inquiries. They then begin to feel that they are under scrutiny or investigation. However, endless stories or detailed accounts of their experiences overflow naturally, once a speaker is given an audience with attentive ears. It's from this vintage point that I selected a narrative approach to conduct my research.

Ladson-Billings (2009) states, "Increasingly, in fields such as law, education, ethnic studies, and feminist studies, story has gained credence as an appropriate methodology for transmitting the richness and complexity of cultural and social phenomena."(p.xvi) I have employed the technique of "story telling" to convey the rich experiences of the Liberian immigrant youths involved in this study.

This dissertation is written from three perspectives; that of an African scholar and researcher, that of a public school teacher and counselor, and that of an African woman, mother, and community leader. Thus, this dissertation offers a combination of scholarly research and stories through data. The participants are the primary sources used in this study. Chapter III details the methods used to collect and analyze data.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to illuminate the voices and acculturation experiences of Liberian immigrant youths in an urban area of the United States. Specifically, I sought to identify home, school, and community experiences. Data were collected from primary sources by interviewing four Liberian immigrant youths between the ages of 18 to 22 years. These youths were all born in Liberia, formerly attended schools in Liberia or other African countries before immigrating to the United States, and have all attended at least three years of high school in the U.S.A. Additionally, all of the participants have lived in the United States for less than ten years.

In this chapter, I provide a summary of the two pilot studies done as means of assessing issues impacting the education of African immigrant students in the United States. The findings of these pilot studies helped me to design and fine tune the focus of this in-depth research. This chapter also provides information on the research methodology and procedures employed for participant selection, data collection, and data analyses. The chapter concludes by addressing validity issues.

For the purpose of my dissertation, I opted to focus on the acculturation experiences of four Liberian immigrant youths or young adults (age range 18–22 years) and to capture their own voices or perceptions, instead of those of their parents. This population was selected because older youths are much more able to reflect on their

prior experiences and to conduct a comparative analysis of their old and new countries and to clearly articulate their experiences in both countries or any other transitional countries they may have resided in before immigrating to the United States. I was particularly interested in discovering how these youth acculturated to their new host country as they adjusted to home, school, and community settings. I have captured the voices of these participants by using and their own words to relate their stories.

Design of the Study

A qualitative research approach, also known as naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was selected to study Liberian immigrant youths' acculturation processes in the United States through their accounts of school, home, and community experiences. The following research questions guided this study:

1) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe school experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

2) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe home experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

3) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe community experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

Merriam (2009) states that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences that they have in the world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). According to Merriam (2009), qualitative research has distinct characteristics. The

primary focus of the qualitative researcher is to understand the studied phenomenon from the participant's perspective, also known as holding an emic or insider's perspective.

Secondly, the researcher becomes a human instrument through which collected data are analyzed, interpreted, and contextualized while employing techniques to minimize or control subjectivity. Merriam stresses that "data are mediated through this human instrument, the researcher, rather than through some inanimate inventory, questionnaire, or computer" (Merriam, 2001, p.7).

Most qualitative research also employs field work of some sort. This enables the researcher to observe the studied phenomenon in natural settings, to closely interact with the participants, and to build rapport (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton 2002). Building trust and rapport are very critical in effectively communicating with Liberians. This enables them to open up and candidly share their experiences with another person. This cultural practice will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

Leedy and Ormrod (2001) explained that qualitative researchers focus on understanding the participant's "perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation" (p. 153). As such, this study's approach was to discover what it is like for participants to experience adaptation to U.S. culture. Leedy and Ormrod (2001) state that:

> In some cases the researcher has had personal experiences with the phenomenon
>
> in question and wants to gain a better understanding of the experiences of others.

By looking at multiple perspectives on the same situation, the researcher can

then make some generalizations of what something is like from an insider's

perspective. (p. 153)

As a Liberian immigrant myself, I have lived in the environment under study and

observed countless numbers of other Liberian and African immigrants adjust to the

environment of U.S. culture and educational institutions.

A qualitative researcher tries to penetrate the conceptual world of participants in

order to gain an understanding of how they construct meaning from their daily lives.

The participants are required to reflect on lived experiences and recollect events,

feelings, and perceptions. Their reflection is retrospective of past experiences. One's

perceptions and realities are inherently tied to their states of consciousness. Holstein

and Gubrium (2005) stated:

The relation between perception and its objects is not passive. Rather, human

consciousness actively constitutes objects of experience. Consciousness, in other

words, is always consciousness-of-something. It does not stand alone, over and

above experience, more or less immaculately perceiving and conceiving objects

and events, but, instead, exists always already. (Denzin & Lincoln , 2005, p.

484).

The participant's viewpoint, called the emic perspective, is typically obtained

through open conversations and via observation of participants in a natural setting. The

researcher's perspective, which is also very critical in qualitative research, is identified

as the etic perspective (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2009; Patton, 2002). Thus, the qualitative

researcher aims to provide both emic and etic perspectives whilst keeping a close check on one's own personal subjectivity in order to make valid conceptual and theoretical analyses of the data provided by participants.

Additionally, qualitative inquiries predominately utilize an inductive research approach that "builds abstractions, concepts, hypothesis, or theories rather than testing existing theory" (Merriam, 2001, p. 7). Finally, qualitative studies are reported in dense, richly descriptive formats in order to bring out the fullness of the participants' stories. The participants' own words, and sometimes pictures, are used to describe the researcher's understandings of the studied phenomenon.

Population and Sample

Four purposefully selected Liberian immigrant youths, aged 18 to 22 years who attended public high schools in the United States within the past three years, were involved in this qualitative research. The students in this study were typical of some ethnic and linguistic groups in Liberia. The purpose of the study was to identify home, school, and community acculturation experiences of these Liberian immigrant youths. The study captured the voices, perceptions, and realities of some Liberian immigrant youths who are contending with profound changes associated with moving to a new country, such as culture shock, disorientation, linguistic changes, and the loss of previous relationships, and who are possibly victims of horrific war traumas.

For the purpose of this study, Liberian immigrant parents and youths are defined as Liberians who were born and lived in Liberia before immigrating to the U.S., and who have resided in the United States for less than ten years. Liberian immigrant youth

in this study had the following characteristics; their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years. They were born and lived in Liberia, formerly attended some type of school in Africa before emigrating to the United States, and they have resided in the United States for less than ten years. In order to meet selection criteria, they needed to currently attend or have graduated from a United States public high school within the past three years, and participants needed to have either entered the United States as visitors, immigrants, or refugees.

Sampling

A purposeful (or purposive) sampling method was used to select key participants rather than random sampling. Purposeful sampling ensures that participants who have experienced the phenomenon under consideration are selected in order to provide the researcher with richly descriptive data during the study (Merriam, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Patton (1990) explains that in order for the researcher to fully understand, discover, or gain insight into the phenomenon under investigation, a sample giving maximum insight must be purposefully selected. Hence, Patton stresses that the rationale and strength of purposeful sampling relies on the selection of information-rich participants.

Merriam (2009) identifies seven types of purposeful samplings; typical, unique, maximum variation, convenience, snowball, chain, and network. I selected the snowball technique, which involved asking people or participants to refer me to other participants who would provide information-rich views (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999;

Merriam, 2009). Hence, instead of interviewing randomly selected recent Liberian immigrants, I sought out those individuals that would make excellent participants. These individuals will provide emic perspectives (insider viewpoints) similar to those of many other recent Liberian immigrants.

Selection criteria must also be established prior to beginning purposeful sampling. Some researchers refer to this as criterion-based selection, in which qualifying traits important to the studies are first listed or defined before the researcher begins the quest for participants to fit the criteria (Merriam, 2009). The pre-established criteria for selecting information-rich participants for this study were; participants had to be recent Liberian immigrant youths or young adults who were born in Liberia by parents who were Liberian citizens. They all had to have begun some type of formal education in an African nation, and have "developed a clear sense of identity rooted in their national origin prior to their migration to the United States" (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010, p. 6). Additionally, all participants needed to have lived in the United States for less than ten years. Finally, all participants must have had some educational experiences in public schools in the United States and be currently attending or recently graduated within the last three years.

Four Liberian immigrant youth or young adults - two females and two males - between the ages of 18 to 22 years agreed to participate in the study. This age group was selected because older youth are much more able to reflect on their prior experiences and conduct a comparative analysis of their old and new countries, and clearly articulate their experiences in both countries. Each participant was assigned a

pseudonym. Actual names of schools, school districts, neighborhoods, as well as the city and state, have been changed to protect the privacy of the participants.

Instrumentation

In qualitative studies, the researcher becomes a human instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) through which the data are filtered. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described the human instrument as one who " builds upon his or her tacit knowledge as much as, if not more than, propositional knowledge and uses methods that are appropriate to humanly implemented inquiry: interviews, observations, document analysis …" (p. 187). Hence, as a human instrument, I have applied these skills.

Interview Protocol

An open-ended question format was used to guide the interview process. The over-arching question was posed to determine home, school, and community acculturation experiences. In the interview protocol or survey instrument (see Appendix A). In all, participants were asked to respond to 27 questions. These questions were all developed by the researcher. Since this is a qualitative study, probing was done to further understand phenomena unfolding during the interview. Hence, there were variations in the exact wording and number of questions posed to each participant.

The interviews and observations of body movement, pauses, hesitation, or emphasis, made during interviews, served as the primary source of direct information received from the participants. The interview protocol was developed following two pilot studies on Liberian and other African immigrants in the United States, conducting

a review of related literature, and based on my own experiences and knowledge gleaned from working with Liberians and other Africans in the U.S.

Procedures

I applied for and received approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct the investigation. An informed consent form (See Appendix E) was obtained from each participant prior to conducting the actual interview. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study and who was conducting the study. Consent to audio-tape record the interview was also requested, and all participants agreed to this request. The interview protocol used in this study consisted of three main subsets related to the Liberian immigrants' acculturation experiences. They were *experiences* in school, at *home,* and in the larger *community*. I began with a list of open-ended questions to guide the interview. Each question was addressed by each participant, and I allowed other concerns to emerge during the interviews. I also took notes during the interviews.

Data Collection

Data were obtained by audio-tape recording the responses of participants during the interviews and through note taking. Data were collected by in-depth, open ended questions during structured and semi-structured face-to-face interviews or telephone interviews, during which the events, beliefs, and perceptions of the participants were detailed. I used both informal and structured interviews. Additionally, some interviews occurred in a conversational dialogue format.

Alidou (2000) and Ladson-Billings (2009) stressed the importance of conversations or dialogues as critical aspects of African and African American cultures and expressions. Ladson-Billings (1994) argues that dialogue creates equal relationships between researcher and participants when one "talks with" rather than "talks to" the participants. Ladson-Billings (2009) further stated:

> Dialogue implies talk between two subjects, not the speech of subject and objects. It is a humanizing speech, one that challenges and resists domination… The give and take of dialogue makes struggling together for meaning a powerful experience in self-definition and self-discovery. (p. 190)

Hence, by talking with my research participants instead of firing interview questions at them, I was able to probe deeper and obtain a richer in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. This technique proved both very necessary and powerful with the Liberian immigrant youths who agreed to participate in this research project.

Data Analyses

Data were analyzed during the early phases of the study while it was still being collected, by using the constant comparative method. This helped control the voluminous data typically associated with qualitative research. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, line by line, and the data were stored on a computer. Then, the constant comparative method was used to analyze the data. In constant comparative analysis, the body of data as a whole is constantly perused in order to identify emergent

themes. According to Merriam (2009), the researcher begins with some information from an interview, field notes, or document and compares it with some information from another set of data. These comparisons may lead to emerging categories that are then compared to each other and to other data. Comparisons are constantly and continuously made within and between levels of categories to formulate concepts and theories.

During comparison, concept maps were developed from emerging trends. Merriam (2009) maintains that the best way to handle data in qualitative research is to simultaneously analyze data simultaneous to ongoing data collection. Merriam cautions that without ongoing analysis, the data can be unfocused, repetitious, overwhelming, and voluminous, making data analysis challenging, "Data that have been analyzed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating*"* (Merriam, 2001, p. 162).

Some strategies that I used during constant comparative data analysis were: reformulation of interview questions to obtain richer data, constantly reviewing my notes, and following specific leads (Burgan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 2009). Data saturation was reached when no more new trends arose from ongoing interviews (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Merriam, 2009).

Narrative Analysis

Since an objective of this study was to give voice to the silenced opinions of Liberian immigrant youths in the United States, narrative analysis was well suited as a methodology to accomplish this task. For the purpose of this study, emphases were placed on constructing understandings of the Liberian immigrant youths' acculturation

experiences, particularly their home, school, and community adjustment experiences. My aim was to identify and describe the subjective acculturation experiences of four Liberian immigrant youths. Narrative analysis was used to bring out the rich voices of the participants in the form story telling. Narrative analysis has become more and more prevalent in educational research because it contextualizes and personalizes participants' voices and experiences.

According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), the qualitative researcher may want readers to fully experience the participants' story firsthand, by letting the "readers hear their informants - permitting readers to hear the exact words (and occasionally, the paralinguistic cues, the lapses, pauses, stops, starts, reformulations) of the informants" (2005, p. 209). This allows the participants to speak for themselves, providing a much richer account of the information presented. Narrative inquiry is a powerful tool in advancing social changes. Chase states that:

> A narrative may be oral or written or may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview, or a naturally occurring conversation. In any of these situations, a narrative may be (a) a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters, such as an encounter with a friend, boss, or doctor; (b) an extended story about a significant aspect of one's life such as schooling, marriage, divorce, childbirth, an illness, a trauma, or participation in a war or social movement; (c) a narrative of one's entire life, from birth to present (2005, p. 652).

For these many reasons, narrative inquiry is the best methodology to employ for this study because my main objective was to capture the voices and stories of a marginalized population of Liberian immigrant youths in the U.S. Guba and Lincoln state, "Telling the stories of marginalized people can help create a public space requiring others to hear what they do not want to hear" (2005, p. 642).

There is a need for educators and policy makers to hear the voices and stories of African immigrant students in America. According to Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber, 1998 :

People are storytellers by nature. Stories provide coherent and continuity to one's experience and have a central role in our communication with others… One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality. In other words, narratives provide us with access to people's identity and personality. (1998, p. 7)

Lieblich et al. contend that, "Stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events, yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, in addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these remembered facts"(1998, p. 8). The authors relate that "by studying and interpreting self-narratives, the researcher can access not only individual identity and its systems of meaning but also the teller's culture and social world" (ibid, p. 9).

Merriam describes narrative analysis as a research technique that investigates the experiences of participants through stories. Merriam explains, "emphasis is on the stories people tell and how these stories are communicated by the language used to tell the stories" (Merriam, 2009, p. 202). Riessman (2007) described four popular methods for analyzing stories. They are; thematic, visual, structural, or dialogic performances. I chose to use the thematic approach in this study.

In their book on narrative research, Lieblich et al. (1998) suggested the following steps be used in developing stories when using a holistic-content approach:

1. Read the material several times until a pattern emerges… Read carefully, empathetically, and with an opened mind.

2. Put your initial and global impression of the case in writing. Note exceptions to the general impression as well as unusual features of the story such as contractions or unfinished descriptions.

3. Decide on special foci of content or themes that you want to follow in the story as it evolves from beginning to end.

4. Using colored markers, mark the various themes in the story, reading separately and repeatedly for each one.

5. Keep track of your result in several ways: Follow each theme throughout the story and note your conclusion (Lieblich et al., 1998, pp. 62-63).

Thus, I constantly compared data as I collected them after each interview, and was therefore, able to begin identifying emerging themes within the data at an early stage of the investigation. After data collection was completed, I then read and reread each of

the four participants' data holistically in order to get a fuller picture of each participant's story. I made three copies of each participant's transcribed data. I then took highlighters and markers and color-coded similar themes amongst the participants' data. For instance, all four of the individuals described unfavorable experiences with African American students in their schools. Hence, all references to that particular theme were colored-coded yellow, across the corpus of the four participants' data. The same pattern occurred for the topic of ESL placement (though for varying lengths of time) of the Liberian immigrant students in their school settings. Hence, I coded all the data on ESL class attendance green across all four participants' data sets. In cases where a participant had other experiences not shared with the others, but in which I identified an emerging theme based on their acculturation experience, I coded those experiences differently and linked references of those experiences together in building that participant's life story. Those were some the themes that I extracted and discuss in my interpretations. Hence some themes were common amongst all four participants, while others were individualized or shared amongst only two or three of the participants. In this way, each participant's unique acculturation experiences were shared in their stories, and were also compared and contrasted with the other three participants' stories.

In addition to the constant comparative method, I used the thematic narrative analysis approach to develop the data into vignettes of stories told in the participant's own voices. This was accomplished by rereading clean copies of each participant's transcript several times again. I then went through and highlighted, circled, and linked participant's statements to formulate a continuous story focusing on their school, home,

and community experiences. In some instances, I cut and pasted chucks of statements together, and reorganized these statements to create a flow of related information. The vignettes provided an even more powerful account of the immigrant youths' experiences told in their own voices.

Lieblich et al. state:

Working with narrative materials requires dialogical listening to three voices (at least): the voice of the narrator, as represented by the tape or the text; the theoretical framework, which provides the concept and tools for the interpretation; the reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self-awareness of the decision process of drawing conclusions from the material. In the process of such a study, the listener or reader of a life story enters an interactive process with the narrative and becomes sensitive to its narrator's voice and meanings. (1998, p. 10).

In order to accomplish this task, I had to constantly set aside my own prejudices, viewpoints and assumptions in order to remain objective and able to fully recognize the participants' viewpoints (Merriam, 2009; Peshkin, 1988). Reflexivity is also critical during this type of research. This is the process of the researcher critically reflecting on the self as a human instrument (Guba, & Lincoln, 1981). It is a subjective assessment of the researcher's position, thoughts, interpretations, and constant consciousness of the self as a researcher and how one's own lens impacts interpretation.

Validity

Data were validated by member checks accomplished by providing the

participants with copies of the actual transcriptions of their interviews, as well as my

interpretations of them. This was done in an effort to obtain accurate feedback on my

perceptions regarding their responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gall, Gall, & Borg,

2009; Merriam, 2009). Where there were discrepancies in the participants' stories and

my reporting or interpretations, corrections were made. This process is elaborated upon

below in the discussion of member checks.

Trustworthiness

Building trustworthiness in qualitative research is critical. According to Lincoln

and Guba (1985) there are four essential criteria for building trustworthiness. They are;

credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is obtained by

prolonged engagement with the culture or phenomenon under investigation, persistent

observation, and triangulation of the data. According to Erlandson and colleagues,"If

intellectual inquiry is to have an impact on human knowledge, either by adding to the

overall knowledge or by solving a particular problem, it must be guaranteed some

measure of credibility"(Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 28). It is imperative that credibility is

established with the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed techniques and

strategies for establishing credibility. These techniques are prolonged engagement,

persistent observation, triangulation, adequate referential materials, peer debriefing, and

member checks.

In order for the researcher to avoid distorted contexts, biases, and uncommon or unusual occurrences, the researcher must spend sufficient time with the culture or individuals in order to understand the participants' interpretations (Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The two previous pilot studies, conducted over the course of the past nine years, my daily interactions with Liberian immigrants, some of my personal experiences with the accounts referenced by the research participants, and repeated interviews with the Liberian immigrant youths in this study provided me prolonged engagement with the Liberian immigrants. My challenge was in trying to remain professionally detached and in keeping my subjectivity in-check so that I reported the participants' own realities or voices without tinting interpretations with my own biases. The same circumstances applied regarding my ability to obtain credibility through persistent observations. Additionally, by consistently pursuing interpretations through the constant comparative method of analysis, I was able to develop relevant, in-depth interpretations (Erlandson et al., 1993).

Member checks are another essential technique used to establish credibility. During member checking, data, categories, interpretations, and conclusions derived from the study are presented to or shared with the participants in order for the participants to verify that the researcher's reconstructions adequately represent the participant's realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The Liberian immigrants in my study benefited from member checks in order to provide them with opportunities to correct errors and misinterpretations, provide more clarity and information where needed, and evaluate the overall reports of their perspectives or understandings of the phenomena.

Hence, all four of the Liberian immigrant youth in this study received a copy of the interview transcripts for review, clarification, and suggestions.

Transferability refers to the degree to which findings can be applied to other situations. Unlike research conducted under a positivist paradigm, which allows generalizations across populations from carefully selected and randomized samplings of a given population, the qualitative researcher's aim is not to generalize. According to Erlandson and colleagues, "no true generalization is really possible; all observations are defined by the specific context in which they occur"(Erlandson et al., 1993, p. 32). The thick description that is generated in qualitative inquiry, and in narrative analysis in particular, makes the findings applicable to other very similar contexts. However the burden of transferability lies on those who chose to apply it to a new context, since findings and interpretations are highly individualized and context specific (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability is another measure employed by qualitative scholars to establish trustworthiness. This contrasts with the positivist paradigm, where reliability and validity are defined by the ability to replicate results, given repeated applications of the same instruments under the same conditions, and assuming a slight margin of error, and where there is no tolerance for shifts in realities. In naturalistic inquiries, on the other hand, allowances are made for participants' realities shifts. Subsequently, the qualitative researcher seeks traceable variances that can be attributed to reality shifts or better insights by the participants, and takes all of these considerations into account when establishing dependability criteria. In addition, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest

identifying "overlaps" of data as another means of establishing dependability (p. 317).

Therefore, during the investigation I established dependability by examining the data

for overlaps and variances**.**

The Pilot Studies

Two pilot studies were done, in 2002 and 2005, in order to address concerns

expressed by African immigrant parents in the United States, and to assess the

adjustment of African immigrant youth in an urban area of a major metropolitan area in

the southwestern United States (Saah, unpublished manuscript in progress). The first

study (pilot study #1) involved 17 African immigrant participants from six different

African nations, including Ghana, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Liberia, Cameroon, and the

Ivory Coast. This was a preliminary study to assess the issues of concerns for African

immigrant parents and students. Parental concerns were; disproportionate

recommendations for placement of their children in Special Education (SPED) classes,

behavioral adjustment classes (BAC), and English as Second Language (ESL) classes

even though some of these students spoke and read perfectly grammatical English.

Other concerns of the parents were that U.S. public schools were wrongfully labeling

their children as mentally retarded, slow learners, learning disabled, emotionally

disturbed, or as belonging to other socially stigmatized educational categories.

Additionally, parents were gravely concerned that their children were exhibiting

inappropriate behaviors at home that they felt were too "Americanized" or down-right

rude and disrespectful, according to the parent's ethnic cultures. There were also

concerns about intense intergenerational disharmonies in the homes where grandparents, parents, and youths co-habited. Reportedly, some grandparents were extremely displeased with parents who tried to embrace some American expressive cultures in order to fit in and raise their children in a new culture.

The predominant concerns among youth participants of Pilot Study #1 were excessive ridicule of their accents, bullying, teasing of their clothes or hairstyles, and unfair treatments from teachers and some administrators. Several youths complained about not being recognized or affirmed in class when they raised their hands to participate in class discussions. They reported that some teachers would not acknowledge their correct responses, but once another American student repeated their responses, the teachers would loudly acknowledge those responses and affirm those students. Sue Books (2007) referred to this kind of treatment as "invisibility of the immigrant child."

The second pilot study (Pilot Study #2) was done as a qualitative research class project during the course of my doctoral studies. In the second pilot study, I focused exclusively on participants from Liberia, one of the five African nations studied in the first pilot study. I selected Liberia because I myself am a Liberian immigrant who has close-up and first-hand knowledge or experience with what some of the previous participants had encountered. I felt that my unique positionality as an "insider," my professional knowledge, along with a newly acquired understanding of the techniques of qualitative research would afford me with the necessary skills to conduct a richly descriptive study.

In this second pilot study, I selected only five participants in order to provide a more in-depth study of some of the emergent themes from Pilot Study #1. Three Liberian immigrant participants from Pilot Study #1 were asked to participate in Pilot Study #2, along with two new Liberian immigrant participants. All participants were Liberian immigrant parents with children in United States public schools and all resided in the same southwestern state. During the study, one of the initial three Liberian immigrant participants requested to withdraw from the study after multiple interviews and discussions with me during the two studies over a period of three years. She later disclosed to me that she felt "too vulnerable" and had shared too many personal and painful experiences with me over those three years, and that she didn't want such information revealed in a research study for public viewing. This participant knew that I was a certified counselor and an educator who had taught for several years in U.S. public schools and also in Liberia. She had contacted me on numerous occasions to vent her frustrations with her child's U.S. public school experiences and her child's newly acquired negative American expressive culture. Many of our discussions were held during the pilot studies, with more occurring during our frequent associations at Liberian social gatherings. Nonetheless, ethical protocol prevents me from using the very rich and fertile data I had obtained from her during these many interviews and interactions.

Three major themes emerged during Pilot Study #2, each of which was held in common for all four participants. They were; language concerns, inappropriate educational placements of Liberian immigrant students, and assimilation/acculturation

concerns. The barrier of language was *not* learning a new language (English is already Liberians' first language), but making themselves understood because of their accents. Language became an issue of assimilation since the Liberian immigrants must learn to speak English as Americans do in order to avoid being viewed as different from the norm. Inappropriate educational placement was a secondary finding to the language issue and was an issue of injustice. Assimilation concerns included parent's perceptions of their children's adjustment in school, at home, and in the larger community.

CHAPTER IV

THE PARTICIPANTS' VOICES

In this chapter, the reader is given information regarding the acculturation experiences of four Liberian immigrant youths. Four participants provided the primary data for this investigation. Each participant's actual words are used to relate their stories in an effort to provide the reader with a familiarity and understanding of their individual lenses. Ample use is made of direct quotes from interviews so that the reader can hear the participants' words verbatim. According to Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach and Zilber (1998):

> People are storytellers by nature. Stories provide coherence and continuity to one's experience and have a central role in our communication with others… One of the clearest channels for learning about the inner world is through verbal accounts and stories presented by individual narrators about their lives and their experienced reality. (p. 7)

The sharing of participants' views allows the reader to experience their personal acculturation experiences. In hearing their actual words, the participants' voices come alive. The original linguistic features, such as Liberian-style English and repetitions of salient story lines are left intact so that the reader gains a better understanding of the participants.

In order to make meaning of the voluminous data collected through interviews and observations, I chose to organize the data in several ways. A brief biographical

description of each participant is given, followed by their own voices narrating their stories. In this chapter, I have deliberately quoted extensive passages from the interviews so that the reader is provided with a vignette that expresses the gist of the information that each participant shared with me. All names of participants, schools, school districts, neighborhoods, and states were changed to protect the privacy of the participants. Each participant has been assigned a pseudonym. References to other people or places were also assigned aliases. The vignettes are followed by a brief discussion and interpretive analysis through my personal lens as a researcher.

Doyor Williamson's Story

"If you come from another country, you must take ESL. They consider that you don't know English and that you were learning English for the first time… They look at you like you are stupid" (Doyor).

I have known Doyor Williamson, a twenty-one year old young man, for about six years. My first encounter with him was at one of the Liberian churches that I had visited. Doyor was one of the drummers. I had learned that he had recently arrived from the Ivory Coast as a Liberian refugee. I had just begun my outreach services to newly arrived Liberian refugees, and was eager to talk to new arrivals and to assess how they were adjusting to their new environments. Doyor presented himself as a refined and intelligent young man with many aspirations. He was neatly dressed, smiled often, and spoke of his plans to become a medical doctor. Hence, my first impression of Doyor Williamson was a very impressionable and lasting one.

Doyor had arrived in the U.S. with his aunt and several other family members. The resettlement agency that brought this group of immigrants had contacted a very large local church to assist them with helping this group during their initial adjustment period. It should be noted that Doyor was one of the fortunate refugees who received exceptional reception upon arrival in the new host country. I did not further interact with him or his family for some time, because I felt that they had plenty of assistance and guidance from other interested individuals and organizations. However, throughout the following years, I occasionally ran into Doyor at Liberian functions where he was often accompanied by his foster father.

At the onset of my study, I knew that Doyor met this study's participant selection criteria. I was able to reach Doyor by contacting another Liberian who knew Doyor's foster father. I obtained Doyor's foster dad's telephone number and was thereby able to contact Doyor. I decided to ask Doyor to take part in this study because I felt that he would not only be able to provide me with penetrating insights on the topic, but that he might also possibly be able to connect me with other participants. Thankfully, Doyor agreed to participate in the interviews. A vignette of Doyor Williamson's story, in his own voice, follows below.

School Experiences

"When I came here, I asked questions so I could know what to do. I did not want to waste my time. I wanted credit for what I did in school. I started school at the Mosaic Independent School District (MISD). I went to school by myself on the first day because my aunt had to work. I came to the States with my aunt and not my parents. My

aunt only went to the school to register me before I started school. She never met my teachers, principal, or other parents. She had to work. People from the Trinity Church went to PTA [Parent Teacher Association] meetings for me. They were the White church I sometimes attended with my aunt. They met my teachers. My aunt was too busy working to attend PTA meetings.

My first day of school was confusing, because of the constant changing of classes. I was in the ninth grade. People also looked at you as if you were crazy as you looked for your classes. We had to change after every period, and that was not easy. It was not that way in Liberia.

They put me in ESL1 [English as a Second Language, level one]. When you are from another country, they think you don't know English. I went there, and they were teaching me English. They sent me a Mexican boy to help me learn English, but he did not even know English, and he was trying to help me with English [laughed]. After a while, I told the teacher, 'I can't be in this class. All we are doing here is ABCs [preschool work]. This is retarded!' The teacher said that I had to remain there, and I said, 'No!' I went to see the counselor, and she said that I had to remain in ESL1. I said, 'No, I will not remain there.' I went to see my dean. I told the dean I did not want to learn ABCs, 'I already know English. I want to take IPC [Integrated Physics and Chemistry] science and high school English. They are only teaching me ABC stuff. I need *real* high school English, and other high school classes. I am not going back to ESL or however you all call it.' The dean said that they will have to test me in English, science, and math. She gave me some tests in her office and I passed. She gave me a

test to see if I could compose in English. What we speak, is not what we write. She gave me science, English and other tests, and I passed them all. Then they changed my schedule and classes to regular classes. I stayed one day in ESL1 and told them, 'I am not going back there.'

In Mosaic High School, the students hit on Africans. It was too bad. They used to make fun of my accent. For some reason, the Black Americans don't like African students. They did all kinds of bad stuff. I paid no attention. The kids said, 'Africans are stink!' They want to hit you and go. They were mostly Black American students that teased us. We had few White students in the entire school. You could hardly see them. I was not paying attention to race. The Hispanic children were okay, even though sometimes they bullied you, but the Blacks were really mean. There were lots of fights at school between Africans and African Americans, Hispanics and Blacks, and between gangs. I stayed in that school for two years and then moved to another school district to live with my foster dad. That school was ghetto! I am glad that I left it!

Once there was a fight, and the principal tried to stop it. They jumped on him and beat him badly. Fifteen cops had to come to the school. Many of the students were very rude and the teachers could not do anything to the students. The teachers could not control the students! That could never happen in Liberia. Students respect teachers in Liberia. If you messed up at school in Liberia, your parents will take the side of the teachers. So, we knew how to respect teachers and older people back home.

I did not cause problem in class. Most of my teachers loved me. I was in class every day. I was not causing problems. I remember that when I tried to join the soccer

team, the coach thought that I couldn't play because I was small. When he tested me, he saw I was good in soccer. So he put me on the team. I was the only Black student on the team. The coach liked me and tried to put me on varsity and junior varsity, while I was still in 9th grade. You had to make good grades to remain on the team, and my grades were good. I was the only Black student on the team. Many of the other Black students did not have good grades and could not play on the team, even though they wanted to play. I had some good friends. Basically all my friends were on the team, and not from the classroom. My friends were mostly Whites.

My English teacher was one of my favorite teachers because when I asked her questions she did not mind helping me. The other teachers had problems with me asking them for help. My other favorite teacher was my IPC teacher. Nobody could talk in her class or disrespect her. I liked how she taught. She explained well. Some students tried to skip her class, but didn't get away. She always stood at the door and greeted each one by their name. She made each student tell her hello individually as they entered her classroom. Everybody had to be attentive and had to do their work on time.

I did not like my BCIS [Business Computer Information System] teacher. I didn't ready know how to use the computer well. She only sat behind her desk and did not explain well. When I asked her for help, she did not want to help me. If you go to her for help, she will tell you to go to another student for help who understands. But the other students were busy trying to do their work and could not help you. Then, she would tell you to read the book if you ask her again. She just wouldn't help you. She will only send you to the book. I was failing in that class! I had used computers before,

but that computer program was difficult. It was bothering me. I wanted to play on the
soccer team. In order to play on the team, you had to pass in all your subjects from 70%
upwards. At the end of the semester, I went to another teacher's class. The other teacher
could explain well. She would use the projector, she would illustrate and show you how
to do the work, and help you until you understood it.

They did not put me in special education. They only put students in special
education if you fail all your classes. If you come from another country, you must take
ESL. They consider that you don't know English, and that you were learning English
for the first time. I did not repeat any classes! They did not give me my correct classes
originally. For instance, they did not put Geography on my schedule. I did it at the
community college during the summer because I did not want to be behind. I did not
want to be held back in the 12th grade to make up classes and credits. I wanted to
graduate on time. I had to pay for the Geography course by myself. I didn't mind.

Some of my friends, they were still in the ESL class. Some people come over
here without having attended classes back home. They put you in a class above where
you stopped at home. They look at you like you are stupid. Some of my Liberian friends
remained in ESL because they did not want to do hard work. They looked at the work
like rock. Others dropped out after a while. They couldn't cope!

After two years in MISD [Doyor's first school district], I moved to Breezewood
County Independent School District. Breezewood did not give me credit for all the
classes that I took at the previous school district. Hence I had to do English One and
Two."

U.S. Versus Liberian Educational Experiences

"We learned the hard way back home in Liberia. Too many notebooks! Too much energy needed to write notes from the blackboard back home. The teachers back home like to give essay questions during tests. Even when they give you true and false questions, they tell you that you must make the false questions true. They are not interested in you marking false when the answer is incorrect, but you must write a statement to make the false answer correct. You have to prove to the teachers back home that you know the correct answer. Here in the U.S., all you have to do is mark false or true. You don't have to prove to the teachers that you know the correct answers for the false ones.

Another thing, back home, students have to respect the teachers like you respect your parents. They [the teachers] are going to train you like your mom and dad. They can whip you when you act rude. Your parents will support the teacher for beating you when you act bad. Here, the students don't respect the teachers. When they [the teachers] call the mama, the mama wants to jump on the teacher to fight the teacher. This is stupid!

I like the grading system here. Here you see your report card and progress every six weeks. Back home, you may only see your report card once or twice the whole year. Then they tell you that you failed. Sometimes, you don't even know that you are failing until at the end of the year. Then you have to repeat the entire grade and not just the subjects that you failed in. Here, you only have to repeat the courses you failed in. Back home if you failed three subjects, you will have to repeat the whole grade again… the

whole year will have to be repeated. This doesn't make sense. You have to take the entire year and all subjects over. This makes no sense!

I don't like the discipline system here. The teachers don't discipline the students. The students don't respect the teachers. The students don't respect no one. The teacher only tells you to walk out if you are rude. This bothered me. I said, 'oh my God, This is no advantage.' Here, learning is easy. They have all the materials and books to make learning easy, but with no discipline, it's hard for many children to learn. For me, I don't like it, some people like it. The government also interferes with how parents should discipline their children. The discipline is poor, pretty much that's all I have to say about that.

Math was my most difficult subject. I think that it was me. I wasn't good in math. I passed it. I barely passed it. I don't really understand it. I asked questions, but some topics in math were hard for me - it was not the teachers. I was not 100 percent participating in all of my classes. I asked questions, and they explained it to me. Then I got it. Back home, you have to memorize all the formulas. You had to keep all of that in your head. Here, they provide the formulas and charts for you during tests. Back home, you had to memorize everything.

I attended Catholic Schools and Firestone School in Liberia. I was in the ninth grade when we left Liberia. I was in and out of school in the Ivory Coast. In the middle of school, sometimes, things will happen. My stay in Ivory Coast was not consecutive. I will come and go. I was just moving around. I think I was traumatized. I was worry about my parents while I was at school. When the tension was too high, we were afraid

that we were going to be separated from our families. That's why it was hard to concentrate during school time. We kept going back to Liberia when we heard that the fighting had stopped. I left Liberia after the last war to go to Ivory Coast and then here. I stayed in Ivory Coast and then came to the States."

Home Experiences

"I came to America with my aunt. We were very many that came with my aunt. My parents are still in Liberia. My daddy passed away a long times ago, my mom and sisters are in Liberia. It is a burden on me because I have to also send them money and things every now and then. I can't just run. Sometimes I just think of some of the crazy things I could do. I wonder what I need to do. I keep thinking, 'I need to do something, I need to do *something*!'

Just being in the United States is wonderful! Completing high school without payment was also wonderful. I used to live with my aunty. We were plenty in the house. The living conditions were not very good. The school that I was attending was not very good. I did not cause problems. It just was rough living in that apartment complex. Too much problems were around. I met Mr. Samuel, my foster dad, in the United States. He came into my life and took me as his own son. It was only God's work. Otherwise I don't know where I would be today. I am lucky that I am surrounded by people that give me good advice. Some of my teachers were… oh-so good. They gave me good advice.

I made some mistakes. I started having children while I was still in high school. Now I have two daughters, five and three -year old. I want opportunities to go back to

school. I am trying to go back to career school or college and study nursing. But, the children are pulling me back. I am taking care of my daughters financially. Sometimes their mothers piss me off. They have threatened to sue me for child support. I tell them to do whatever they want to do [speaking of the two different women he has children by, and the children's grandmothers]. I am trying to go to nursing school, but it is kind of tight on me. I took a student loan that I have to pay back, now that I am no longer in school.

I was planning to do nursing. I started off working in a plumbing store and began to like plumbing. I got interested in plumbing because I got familiar with the contents and developed an interest in plumbing. I then decided to go to school to get certified as a plumber.

I attended Lexar Institute for nine months. I started working after training, but got laid off after a few months. When I graduated, I was working with a plumbing company, but they laid me off. They said the business was not doing good. Now, no one is hiring. I had thought that the plumbing school was going to be really quick to give me training and hands-on experiences that will lead to a permanent job in a few months. It's not working.

I want an opportunity to go back to school. My tuition for the nine months plumbing training was $16,000. Now I have a big student loan to pay back and can't find a job in plumbing. No one is hiring. I should have studied something that would have given me a job today. I called the financial aid people and told them that I was not

working. They said that I could pay $25.00 per month which is only interest. I try my best to pay more than that. I pay whatever that I can. Now, I owe them about $7,000. For me, all I want now is to go to school to earn a degree in nursing. I have to get a good career. I have to do this all by myself. I have no one to help me. The job is not rolling like it used to. Sometimes, I find odd jobs to do. But there are not many jobs these days."

I chose to place Doyor's plumbing experiences and nursing school dilemma with his home experiences because they had a direct impact on his earning ability and his efforts to help support himself and his two daughters during these difficult times, even though he still lived with his foster father. He repeatedly expressed his regrets and frustrations regarding not being able to move forward or handle his financial responsibilities.

Community Experiences

"I've adjusted to the American culture and food. Even though I don't eat it much, I have gotten adjusted to it. I don't like fast food, I don't like McDonalds. All of those foods are not healthy. I eat pizza once in a while. Most of the time, I cook food for my household. I cook and I enjoy doing it. I love Liberian food! I don't have to wait or depend on anyone to cook for me.

I love to be identified as a Liberian or an African. I know some other people that are in denial of their heritage. My little cousins, for example, say they are from France. I tell them they need to be real. Probably where they go to school, people probably talk bad about Africans. They talk all sorts of bad things like: 'people don't wear clothes in

Africa… there are naked people everywhere, etc.' Maybe that's why my little cousins don't want to be identified as Africans. Even some grown people act that way. They don't want to identify with Africa, I don't know why. As for me, I love to wear Liberian clothes. I love wearing African clothes. I wear it everywhere. It doesn't matter because I am representing my country and Africa. I want people to know where I'm from. I wish I had more African clothes. I want people to know that I am coming from Africa. I love wearing Liberian clothes to Liberian gatherings and I love being around Africans. For those young people that don't like to be identified as Africans, I don't know where they are coming from. They need to learn to be proud of their heritage, and it's an individual difference.

I have not kept in touch with most of the African friends that I had. Most of my friends have left town or dropped out of school. When I was in Mosaic High School, it was the only time I saw African students. When I moved to Breezewood for school, there were hardly Black students, only Whites. I made friends with many of the White boys on my soccer team. Most of them later went out of state to college. When they come home over the summer, we go play soccer. Most Liberians that started with me in Mosaic High School dropped out of school. The only person that graduated was Helen's sister. Helen moved to another school district. Her sister graduated from high school. Everyone else that I knew dropped out. Originally it was tough on her but she managed to complete. Those that dropped out went to go find work.

It has been hard adjusting to life in America. I don't have a job. I have too many bills to pay. If you don't pay bills then you are locked out without compromise. I have

the children to support. It's not easy. Surely I want to go back home. I still want to go

back. I am home-sick. Here in America there are too many laws and it is easy to get in

trouble. If you are not careful, then it goes on your records. It's hard to get things off

your record. There are driving laws, jaywalking laws and other funny laws that get you

in trouble. But again, it is good, a good thing because it helps to make you careful.

Human beings as a whole don't like too many laws, just like me.

Some fond memories that I have of being in Africa… I miss going to fetch water

back home. Every Sunday we used to have games at the soccer field. When we played

on the field there were lots of spectators to cheer you on while playing games. We

played all sorts of games like soccer, we even played hopscotch. Yes, we used to play

all games. We didn't care if it was for girls or not. We also played the palm kernels

games. It is played by throwing palm kernels in the air and catching them.

Some experiences I had in Africa that I did not like… um… Let me think about

that. In the Ivory Coast, everyone had to have a card de' passé. You must have it at

checkpoints or you will be left behind. If you don't have it at the checkpoint, the

soldiers would intimidate you, make the bus leave you, and take your money, or give

you a cutlass to cut bushes. They didn't care where you got the money from.

Sometimes at the checkpoint, the car may leave you with all your things on the bus.

There were times people tried to trick the soldiers at the checkpoint and pretended that

they were not passengers on the bus. They would get off the bus just before the

checkpoint and let the bus go through to checkpoint without them. The plan was that

they would pass the checkpoint on foot just to act like they were walking and not

traveling on the bus. Once they passed the checkpoint by walking, they would then meet the bus on the other side, get back in the bus, and continue their journey. But many of the bus drivers and cowboys were bad and not honest. They would trick you. They would tell you that it is okay for you to get down before the checkpoint and walk across, and they would wait for you on the other side. But many times they would drive off with all your things on the bus. Some people used to lie to the police or run their mouths. They worked together to get you in trouble.

Sometimes, you may go in the bush to find food for your family. Some people or soldiers would cross in front of you take your food from you, your palm cabbage, and take all your things from you. They will take your cutlass and call you rebels; some people even lost their lives for trying to save their things or food. Once, I went in the bush with my uncle. He cut the palm nuts, and they took it from us. They watched him cut the palm nut and other things and then told him to leave it and go. I'm glad I don't have to deal with that any more. I'm glad I don't have to tote water or wood."

Brief Interpretation

Doyor's placement in an English as a Second Language class on his first day of school created tension between him and his teacher. He quickly recognized that this was an inappropriate placement for him because he could already speak and write in English. English *was* his first language! He got further frustrated when he was assigned a Mexican classmate to help him read and learn English. Doyor stated, "He [the Mexican student] did not even know English, and he was trying to help me with

English." Doyor told his teacher, "*This is retarded!* All we are doing here is ABCs [preschool work]. I can't be in this class."

Doyor refused to accept the status quo that many students of color accept, some even experiencing what I described as "psychological genocide" in my pilot study and in one of my group publications (Ibrahim, Standish, Larke, Sullivan, Saah, Meloncon, Ruthinger, et al., 2010). Doyor knew what he wanted from life and was a go-getter. He went to seek help from his guidance counselor and when she wouldn't help him, he went a step further to seek help from the dean. He took on the challenge of placement tests (that should have been given to him previously) and proved to the dean that he was academically capable of regular ninth grade classes. Unfortunately, many immigrant students of color don't have the tenacity to challenge institutional practices.

Doyor impressed me as a survivor with a fighter's spirit and the determination to strive against all odds. He is polite, but very assertive. He also comes across as being intelligent and a problem solver. Doyor stated, "When I came here, I asked questions so that I could know what to do. I did not want to waste my time. I wanted credit for what I did in school". Doyor wanted to be intellectually stimulated and to grow academically. He resisted what he knew was not right, and he was prepared to explore all options available to him.

Doyor's reception in his new host country seemed to have been more favorable than is experienced by some other immigrants. He had arrived as member of a large family group who were embraced by a large church with a predominantly White congregation. He stated that, "People from the Trinity Church went to PTA meeting for

me. They met my teachers. My aunt was too busy working to attend PTA meetings."

Research indicates that an immigrant's adaptation in a new host country is impacted by the demographic and social characteristics of the immigrant, the psychological state of the immigrant, and the host country's reception of him or her

 (Esquivel, Oades-Sese, & Jarvis, 2010).

Doyor further indicated that he felt blessed when he met his foster dad (a successful Liberian businessman), a man who took him into his home and treated him like his own son. Doyor was then able to move to an affluent neighborhood and attend a more academically challenging high school. Although his new school was in a predominantly White neighborhood, Doyor described his new school as good in contrast to his first school, which he called "ghetto." He seemed to have made friends easily with the White students. He described his good friends as being White, even though they have all since left the neighborhood to attend college.

Doyor appears to be very proud of his cultural heritage and identity. His appreciation and acceptance of his identity in his new host country is a strong indication that Doyor has had favorable acculturative experiences. He clearly accepts the American norms that he needs for adjustment, and rejects others. He has found a healthy balance. He stated that he does not like American food because most of the fast foods are not healthy. He enjoys cooking and eating his ethnic dishes. He also stressed that he loves to wear his cultural outfits as often as possible. He wishes that he had more Liberian clothes.

Doyor shared some unfavorable experiences that he had with African Americans in his first school. He stated:

The students hit on Africans. It was too bad. They used to make fun of my accent. For some reason, the Black Americans don't like African students. They did all kinds of bad stuff. I paid no attention. The kids said Africans are stink! They want to hit you and go. They were mostly Black American students that teased us… The Hispanic children were okay, even though sometimes they bullied you, but the Blacks were really mean. There were lots of fights at school between Africans and African Americans, Hispanics and Blacks, and between gangs… That school was ghetto!

Traore and Lukens (2006) have documented this type of tension between African American students and African students elsewhere. I interpret this type of relationship as the "oppressed becoming the oppressor." Such confrontations stem from fear and ignorance.

Doyor appears to have an appreciation for structure, good teaching, and academic challenges. He indicated that his favorite teachers were his English and IPC teachers because they interacted with the students and demonstrated that they cared. He referred to his IPC teacher as being strict, but good because she greeted each student at the door, interacted with the students, used the overhead projector, and gave students high quality handouts. This stands in contrast to his BCIS teacher, who only sat behind her desk and told him to read the book when he asked questions. Doyor had a low tolerance for mediocrity, and always seemed to pursue better options. He stated that he

dropped his BCIS teacher at the end of the semester and moved to a better teacher. He also indicated that some of his friends did not want to be challenged. They stayed in ESL and later dropped out of school. Doubtlessly, Doyor is a go-getter who knew what he wanted from school. He is smart, disciplined, and focused.

Doyor's decision to pay his own tuition for a course at a community college provides further evidence of his problem solving ability and wisdom. He stated:

> They did not give me my correct classes originally. For instance, they did not put Geography on my schedule. I did it at the community college during the summer because… I did not want to be held back in the 12th grade to make up classes and credits. I wanted to graduate on time. I had to pay for the Geography course by myself. I didn't mind.

Like most children growing up in low income households, Doyor indicated that his guardians were working. Therefore, surrogates or church members had to attend school meetings on his behalf. Doyor found means to motivate himself to succeed in school. He stated that because he loved sports and wanted to play soccer, he studied hard to keep his grades up. Passing grades in all subjects were some of the requirements to remain on the soccer team. Doyor successfully got on the soccer teams in both of his high schools and remained an active player until his high school graduation.

Doyor seems to have low tolerance for mediocrity. He stated that he didn't like his BCIS because the teacher was lazy and sat behind a desk and didn't answer questions when asked. She referred students to other students for help. Other students were busy doing their assignments and couldn't stop to explain the concepts. He stated

that too much frustration existed among the students. Doyor further indicated that he changed his BCIS teacher after the first semester, and that his next teacher was great. He got an A grade in her course. Doyor laments over not making the right career choices or going to the right college after high school. He is very proud of his African heritage, as is Pente, another participant in this study.

Pente Fofana's Story

"They called us, 'African Booty Scratcher' or just said 'African' in a mean and degrading way… I would just ignore them… Then one day I got fed up and almost hit her with my leg. I told her, 'don't mess with me' in a very stern voice" (Pente).

I had shared with Ma Tetea, one of the Liberian mothers in an apartment complex where several Liberians lived, that I wanted to meet and talk to a Liberian girl who was eighteen years old or older, lived in the apartment complex, and had already graduated from high school. Ma Tetea and I talked for a while then she said, "Martha's daughter… Martha daughter's finished school already. She now working at the mall." I asked her to please give me Martha's telephone number. She didn't have if but offered to take me to Martha's apartment. I was ecstatic! Ma Tetea hurriedly slipped on her sandals, wiped her face, tightened her lappa and said, "Let's go."

I followed her out of her apartment and we mazed through other apartment buildings to get to Martha's apartment. We climbed up two flights of steep stairs to get to Martha's apartment on the third floor. As we stood outside the door and knocked, I could smell the aroma of spicy goat soup and hear the cries of a baby through an opened

window adjacent to the door. On our second knock a voice from inside the apartment shouted, "That's who that?" Ma Tetea replied, "That's me Tetea. Open the door Martha. I bring stranger to talk to you."

After a few minutes, Martha opened the door and sweat poured down her dark face and neck. She smiled warmly and extended her hand to shake mine. The baby's cries seemed to have stopped once the cool breeze from outside entered the house and voices were heard. I introduced myself to Martha and told her that I wanted to talk to her oldest daughter who had finished school. She informed me that her daughter Pente had gone to work, but I should leave my telephone number and she would call me when she got home. I did, and sure enough, Pente called me on the next day. We were able to set up a suitable time to meet for the interviews**.**

My first meeting with Pente was fruitful. I was impressed by how courteous she was. She spoke in a soft but assertive voice. She was neatly dressed in ironed jeans and a t-shirt. Pente's hair was chemically altered, with long hair extensions added. She smiled often during our interviews, and carefully thought about each interview question before responding. Below is Pente's a vignette of Pente's story, as told in her own words.

School Experiences

"On my first day of school the agency took us to school with our parents to register. It was the resettlement agency that took all my brothers, sisters, parents, and me to school to register. That was the only time that my parents went to the school. I

remember that school had already begun and it was in November. I was in the seventh grade at Kraft Middle school.

We did not ride the school bus from our apartment. We had to ride the public transportation. The bus would take us a few blocks from the school and then we had to walk five to eight minutes to get to school.

Everything was okay at school. My English was fine. I did not have to stay back or repeat a class. I was put in ESL in middle school for two years. A few of us were very good in ESL. They tried to move us out of ESL, but they couldn't. So, we stayed in ESL classes through middle school. I don't think that my parents went to any PTO [Parent Teacher Organization] meetings. My parents had a lot of things going on with the little children and stuff. They had to also work. I understood, so I went to school meetings by myself.

I did not interact much with the other students in middle school. I tried to stay by myself and put my mind on what I went to school for. I focused on my school work and did not try to be popular. I am friendly and everyone knew me, but I took my time to make new friends. I kept my mind on what I was in school for. I wanted a good education. My friends were mostly other Liberian children from my apartment complex."

"My relationship with other kids? Oh my God! The kids were really mean. They said all kinds of mean things. They were mainly the Black American kids. The school hardly had White Americans, mostly Blacks and Hispanics. They called us, 'African Booty Scratcher' or just said 'African' in a mean and degrading way. When we talked,

they made fun of the way we talked or sounded. We were speaking English, but they would say, 'What are you speaking? Is that an African language?' They will call us as, 'Hey you African, African, African,' but not by your own name. They were really mean! They would walk behind us and make funny noises behind us such as 'punkya ka, punkya Ka.' I don't know what that meant. They asked questions such as, 'When you were in Africa, did you wear shoes? Did you all live in tree houses?' Or they would say, 'Your hair is ugly.'

When we first came here, we only used to wear our hair combed back in corn rows. When they started teasing my hair, I didn't know what to do with my hair. We had just come to America and I didn't have means [money] of changing my hair style. Later, I began to perm it and comb my hair like the other American girls. I did not want to be constantly teased.

The kids were very mean! Once there was a fight between an African boy and a whole bunch of African American boys. They beat the African boy up. A whole bunch of kids jumped in the fight. The teachers and principal didn't do anything about the fight because there were too many students involved.

I remember, in middle school, one big and fat Black American girl picked on us so much so that she got in a fight with my best friend Fatu. It started with the two of them and then some of her Black American friends jumped in. Then some of our Liberian friends jumped in to help my friend Fatu in the fight. It was some of her friends and some of our Liberian friends. They got in a big fight at the Cosmo bus stop and my friends beat her up good. The Black Americans were really mean

This same big Black American girl was always mean to me. We were in PE [physical education] class together. She would tell me that I am 'stink' and 'dirty.' When I was walking in the hallway, she would hit me on the back and start laughing, along with some of her other friends. I would keep walking, and they would continue walking behind me, hitting on me, and saying mean things. I would just ignore them. Then one day I got fed up and almost hit her with my leg. I told her, 'don't mess with me' in a very stern voice. I gave her some other strong warnings. Then she stopped bothering me. I found out that if you argued with them they will only laugh out more when you talked. It was better not to make confusion with them. If you don't want them to mess with you, you tell the teacher or handle it yourself.

When we went to high school, I was her tutor for calculus and government classes. This same big Black American girl that used to tease me in middle school needed my help. She needed my help then, and I didn't mind helping her."

"My relationship with my teachers was very good. I won't say that I had problems with any of my classes. You have to deal with people with respect. You have to present yourself with respect and in the manner you want people to treat you. I had very positive relationships my teachers. I did not have any discipline problems because I carried myself well. I was respectful to my teachers and knew why I was in school. I was in school to get an education. There was no need to be disrespectful.

One thing that I learned from my calculus teacher is, if you love what you are doing with a passion, you will be able to teach it well or impact other lives. This will help students learn better, because this will energize and excite students to want to

learn. My calculus teacher loved teaching calculus and this positive energy transferred to me.

Some of the teachers that I had did not like what they were doing. They only told us to read the book and do the assignments on our own. My physics teacher was like that. He only assigned work from the book. He did not like teaching physics, nor did he like being a teacher. He had no passion, and this rubbed off on the students. He turned me off. My calculus teacher loved math, hence everyone enjoyed her class and didn't want to leave her presence.

My calculus teacher was my favorite teacher because she made me feel that I could accomplish anything. Even though I may not have all the skills to do what I want to do, she made me feel that it was okay to try. She encouraged me to do my best, and attempt new things. Even if the lesson is hard, difficult, or not your favorite subject, she would make you to like it. But you will like it. Whatever you do, learn to do it with passion. That's why I did not like teachers who did not teach with passion.

I graduated in 2009. I was Class of '09. I will be starting college in next Spring. I want to study nursing. I have already been accepted in a nursing school. I want to be a RN [Registered Nurse]. I got accepted in the University of Goodland, but the tuition was too high. So I did not enroll. I am thinking about moving out of the states to live with my Aunty. I liked the place she lives so I am thinking about moving there. I have other family members living there."

"How do I compare school in America to schooling in Africa? Um… Back home, students are not rude to teachers. In Africa you cannot be late or they would beat

your fingernails. Here in the United States, the students get up in front of the class and disrespect the teacher in front of the whole class. Back home in Liberia the teachers like to give pop quizzes, and you had to take the quizzes. Back home we did not have calculators. We had to do math mentally or in our mind. When I came to America I didn't know how to use a calculator. I learned how to use a calculator here so that I could do math.

How did I dress? Well…The school I went to I did not have problems with what I wore. We had to wear a uniform. Everyone looked the same, the uniforms were the same. I don't know why the kids had to be mean and did not help. Why did they pick on new students? This is not right. My hair was really short. I left it as afro, or my mom would sometimes braid it straight down. The kids would be laughing. Later, I permed it and added weave."

Home and Community Experiences

"I speak Krahn and English. My favorite foods are Subway Sandwiches, African greens, and McDonalds. My suggestion for immigrant parents that just arrived with their children is parents should know that their children's education is the number one priority. Sometimes the parents are working and don't have time to go to the student's school. Some parents don't care, they don't pay much attention. They assume that everything is okay just by having their children in school. They don't check on the student's homework or progress. Parents need to be there every step of the way. I worry about my little brothers, I don't know how they're doing their homework, and there are no after-school programs.

You asked if I like wearing African clothes. Yes, I do like to wear African clothes but, I don't have lots of it. I wear it on UNHCR [United Nations High Commission for Refugees] refugee day, and I wear it to take pictures. I don't wear it to work or school. Because I don't think I have to wear it. I work at a department store and we have to wear all black and white. I work in the juniors/women's department."

"Would I wear African clothes to the movies or out with my friends at parties? Well, I really don't mind. I could wear it. I really don't have it to wear. I love my culture. I'm *always* proud to be an African. I am so proud to be an African. I never pretend to be an African American. I am so proud to be who I am. I have so much to be proud of. All of the things that I have gone through or my parents went through, I will never forget. The only time I felt kind of weird being identified as a Liberian was… Most of the Liberian girls in the apartment complex… Sometimes guys would blow their horn at them. Right away some of them would respond and guys would know you're a Liberian. They would blow their horn and ask, 'Are you Liberian? Are you an African? I know you are a Liberian.' This would make me mad because of the way some of the girls presented themselves. Some of the girls would jump in the cars with them and go with them. They need help. They have no respect for themselves. I am positive that they need help. Sometimes they need to go somewhere else to get their minds off parties or clubs. Or, they don't need to fight their friends for all the types of things that others have. Other people from other countries try to do something good with their lives.

My friends and I once formed a club to play kickball after school to take our minds off of other bad stuff and problems. Now that I am done with high school, I am very busy with work. I am also planning to move out of States soon. I will leave those girls, and I don't know how they are going to manage. They need someone to advise them. I know some of them want that help. They need that help. Maybe later on I'll be able to give them that help. This puts us down. They're beautiful girls that could use their lives for something good."

"What are some of my experiences in Africa?" Uhm… I've got to think about that… Well, when I was little, my mom had two boys and then me. Then my little sister came. At eight years old, I was cooking, taking care of my brothers and sisters, and sometimes going to the farm. I'm glad that I don't have to do it again. I remember when I was nine years old. I was staying home with my brothers and sister while my mom was on the farm. I had to cook, clean up, and take care of my brothers and sister even though I wanted to play with my friends. One day, I left everything and went to go play with my friends. I stayed for a long time playing with my friends. Someone had to come and call me because my little brother, the baby, had a lappa over his face. A woman had to come and take the lappa from over his face. She told me that if no one was around something bad could have happened to him. I felt very bad that I left my little brother. He could have gotten hurt. When I think of it now, I feel really bad. I don't have much fond memories of Liberia because I left Liberia when I was very young. We stayed in Ivory Coast for many years. I like that it's not too cold back home, and back home everyone knows each other. The children can play freely, education is good. I'd love to

go back and visit Liberia and see if I want to stay. I may visit and go back every once in a while. I've had wonderful experiences in the United States.

Brief Interpretation

Pente is a positive person in her outlook on life and in her relationship with others. She seems to have learned coping skills and have adjusted fairly well given the low socio-economic environment in which she lives. She referenced her appreciation of nurturing and supportive teachers and demonstrates forgiveness and care for others herself. For example, she referenced an instance in high school when she became a tutor to an African American girl that harassed her during middle school. Her ability to forgive and care for others made it easy for her to agree to help her former tormentor. Pente also demonstrated care and leadership skills when she formed an after-school sports club to positively occupy the free time of other immigrant girls in her neighborhood. She also laments not being able to provide continual support to these girls because of her current busy schedule and her plans to move to another state. She greatly fears that these girls will continue making wrong choices that will prove to be detrimental to their futures.

Pente seems to turn negative moments in her life into opportunities to learn valuable lessons. She regrets her decision at a tender age of neglecting her sibling and abandoning her responsibilities so that she could momentarily play as a typical child. Though her younger brother, who was in potential danger, did not get hurt, she regrets that carefree behavior and considers it a poor lapse of judgment.

Even though Pente could not attend college immediately after high school due to lack of finances and financial obligations to her family, Pente strategizes ways to eventually pursue her dream of attending college as soon as it is feasible. She worries about leaving her younger siblings when she moves, but feels that such move is essential for her progress.

Regina Tonia Tambakollie's Story

"I experienced two years of taunting, teasing, and bullying from students in my middle school. I didn't like it. I hated it. I began to hate school. I got tired of being teased as an African. I wanted to be an American. I wanted to fit in and to be accepted" (Regina).

During my study, I ran into Regina's dad at a local African store. As we chatted, I asked about his family. He told me some of the problems he had with his daughter Regina, who was no longer living with him. I asked him for her contact information so that I could reach her. He didn't have her telephone number, but he gave me the number of the home of one of her Liberian friends who might still be in touch with her. I called the friend and obtained a working number for Regina. I was able to contact Regina, who agreed to meet me at a Subway Restaurant in her neighborhood and interview with me. We later had two additional interviews over the phone, and met three weeks later in order for Regina to view my transcriptions of the interviews and to clarify some questions that I had for her.

Regina is a very attractive young lady who smiles easily and spoke in a very focused manner. She eagerly shared some aspects of her experiences; and yet, she

became completely silent when asked other questions. She evaded some issues and turned the conversations over to topics she felt more comfortable discussing. I had to constantly redirect the interviews and make inferences from her omissions.

Regina's mother still lives in Liberia and her parents were never married. Regina was born during the Liberian Civil War. Regina had spent the first twelve years of her life in Liberia and other neighboring countries, where her mother sought safety during the Liberian Civil War. She joined her father and his new family in the U.S.A. at the age of twelve when her dad, who was by then a resident of the U.S., filed papers for her relocation to America. She had originally lived with her dad, her stepmother, and younger siblings, but there were many frictions between Regina and her stepmother. Regina soon developed adjustment problems at school and at home. Regina was sent to live with other relatives. She was not willing to follow their home rules. Her behavioral problems at school escalated. She was then sent back to live with her dad and his family, but the relationship with her stepmother deteriorated further. Later, Regina decided to leave home. Provided below is a synopsis of Regina's story, as she expressed it to me.

School Experiences

"On my very first day of school in the United States, I felt weird. I felt like an outsider. I knew no one. Everyone was looking at me strange. Everyone was wondering, 'Who is she? Why does she talk that way?' I was in the seventh grade. That was almost six years ago. I was glad to be in a better environment and a safe environment. At least I did not have to worry about running from bullets and war rockets.

Some of my teachers were nice. They called on me in class and some would take time to explain well when I did not understand. Others would look at me as if to say, 'Why don't you understand this simple thing?' Math was my easiest subject because I had already learned most of the 7th grade Math in Liberia that they were now teaching me. Some of the other subjects were hard because I could hardly understand what the teachers were saying. They all spoke fast and sounded different. *The students and teachers all spoke with an accent*. It was hard to understand them at first. They sounded strange to me. I felt like an outcast. They were probably only talking to me because I wasn't from here… because I was not one of them.

They placed me in an ESL class because they couldn't understand me and *assumed* that I did not know English. *I already knew English! English is all that I speak.* They told me that I had to stay in ESL because I had an accent. Anyway, I only stayed in ESL for about one year.

Throughout middle school in the U.S., the students made fun of my accent or the way I dressed. They talked about my clothes or hair. They would constantly ask me to repeat what I said or ask me why did I speak that way. They would say, 'Where are you from? Why do you speak that way? Your accent is so deep. Do you speak English? What language are you speaking?' or say 'You have those nappy African hair.' The Blacks were the ones who talked a lot about my hair and clothes. I would just ignore them and keep moving or turn my back. After a while, it began to bother me. I began to get mad when they talked mean to me. I couldn't take it any longer. One time in middle school, I hit someone and got in trouble. The teacher sent me to the principal's office.

Another time, I got in trouble on the bus for fighting. The bus driver is dumb. He lied

on me. This kid on the bus kept messing with me, so I took care of him on the bus.

In high school, I changed many things. I changed the way I dressed, fixed my

hair, and the way I talked. I got used to the culture and was basically wearing what

everyone else was wearing. I wanted to fit in. That's the only way you don't get much

problems from the other kids if you fit in with the crowd. I told everyone that I was

from the U.S. and I was not from Africa. *I pretended to be an American until one*

teacher called my last name out in class. Then the kids started laughing. Otherwise, for

the rest of my stay in high school, I got by as an American until some teachers tried to

call my last name in class. The students then knew that I had an African name. Those

students who were not in my classes never knew the truth."

"Yes. I got in a fight with this African American girl. She took my stuff and was

saying all kinds of lies about me. She tried to start a fight in the cafeteria, but there were

too many teachers and APs [Assistant Principals] around. So the next day, when we got

in class, I was at the computer doing my work and she walked over to me and hit me in

the face. I jumped off the computer and slapped her right back in the face. She then

jumped on me and I punched her in the chest and ripped her blouse. We began to

struggle and pull on each other. The teacher came over to break up the fight, and got hit

in her chest. I think she got seriously hurt, because she was crying and had to leave

school for the rest of the day.

The AP came and took us to the office. I got suspended for three days. During

the suspension, the school called my dad and me to a meeting. They said that I couldn't

return to the school after the three days. They sent me to an alternative school for six weeks. I had to wear a uniform for those six weeks, and my dad had to take me to and from school. I hated that stupid uniform. The alternative school didn't do anything for me. After the six weeks, I still couldn't return to that school because the AP learned that my relatives had moved to a different zone and hence, I had to attend a new high school. They were anxious to get rid of me.

So, when I went to a different high school, I told all my classmates and friends that I was from Alabama. They believed me. I had already changed the way that I dressed, fixed my hair, and was talking like African Americans. No one in my new high school knew that I was from Africa… only when they called my last name.

But again, some of the other Black girls and I got in fights after school. They kept taking my stuff or talking mess about me. I once followed this Black girl to her neighborhood and beat her up after we got off the bus. I once beat a Black girl in the school bus. She kept messing with me and took my stuff. I got thrown off the bus, so I had to walk to school. I was always late and got tardy detentions. I have only been in the U.S. for about six years, but I know how to walk and to talk like an American. I now dress like them.

My choices of friends in high school were basically the wrong types of people to be around, but they were who I fitted in with. The choices they made were bad, such as getting in trouble with the teacher, being rude and disrespectful to adults and their peers. But, I chose to be with them because I had fun being with them and they accepted me. I knew they were a bad influence, but I felt accepted by them. Ain't no one messed with

me in high school again. They messed with other Africans, but not with me. If they tried to mess with me, I gave it right back to them. No one messes with me now."

Home and Community Experiences

"My mom is still in Africa. My dad is here in the United States, but I no longer live with him. My mom and I are close because I talk to her often. My dad and I are not close. We never were close. He never did take the time to get to know me or talk with me. He was always busy working. He only tried to discipline me when I got in trouble.

I know my guardians and other relatives noticed changes in my behavior. I chose to remain in my room at home to avoid tension. They were constantly advising me to make better choices and do the right thing. I listened at first, but then got tired of those rules. It was boring being at home and following all those rules. So, I started doing whatever I wanted to. I would intentionally disobey them and do all the fun stuff that I wanted to do in school or out of school. Then they would ground me. It didn't work. I would still disobey and do whatever I wanted to do.

Sometimes, I want to change, but it's hard. I would try for a few days, but it gets boring. I enjoy going out at night and sleeping out. It was too boring staying at home with my dad. He was gone most of the time anyway. My dad and I never got along. He was too strict and never did take the time out to know me. So, I just did whatever I wanted to do. My stepmother was just mean and ugly. I don't know what my dad saw in her to marry her. She is a witch.

I really want to change… I dropped out of regular high school. I was too far behind to be able to graduate this year with all of my other friends. All the children that

I was in school with will be graduating this year. The school told me that I still had lots of credits to make up because I was suspended too many days over the last three years and many of my grades were D's and F's. I am an adult now. I don't live with my dad anymore. I live with my friend. The school that she goes to expelled me two years ago. That's the school that I got into a big fight with this rude African American girl and our teacher got hurt when she tried to break us up.

I have it all figured out now. Now that I am eighteen, I don't need my parents' assistance in enrolling me in school. I can do it by myself. I am planning to attend an alternative school and get on an accelerated track to earn my high school credit. I don't want a GED [General Equivalency Diploma]. I know that I can still earn high school credit and graduate from high school. School work is not hard for me. I know I can do it. I make good grades when I put my head to my studies. I guess I have to learn to just forget about other messy people and take care of my business.

I have not been able to enroll in the alternative school in my school zone, because I ain't got no way to get there. I don't have a car to drive, and I ain't got anyone to take me every day. I am still working on how to figure that out. I know for sure that I don't want a GED. I will graduate. I have got to figure it out. I will change."

Brief Interpretation

Although Regina arrived in the United States at the young age of twelve, she quickly realized that her life could become better. She indicated that she was glad to be in a better and safer environment and no longer had to worry about running from bullets and war rockets. She was happy to exhale her fear of war and finally felt safe. Regina

indicated that she found the American accent to be strange. She stated that everyone at her school sounded different. Regina stated, "They all spoke fast and sounded different. The students and teachers all spoke with an accent. It was hard to understand them at first. They sounded strange to me." Hence, according to Regina they (the others) were the ones with the accent. Americans, in general, don't realize that the possession of an "accent" is relative to the listener, and that what sounds strange or normal depends upon the speech patterns with which the listener is accustomed.

Regina seemed to be overly concerned with what others were thinking about her. She appeared to be worried about others' perception of her. Regina stated, "Others would look at me as if to say, "Why don't you understand this simple thing? *I felt like an outcast.* They were probably only talking to me because I wasn't from here… because I was not one of them." Regina appeared to have poor self esteem. She makes one wonder, why would she feel like an outcast if no one actually called her an outcast?

During her first year in the United States, Regina described her teachers as nice and caring. She was happy to be called upon in class. Regina stated, "Some of my teachers were nice. They called on me in class and some would take time to explain well when I did not understand." She loved the positive visibility then and was glad when she was called on by teachers. She no longer felt invisible. Later, when Regina had experienced several bullying episodes and ridicule by her peers for being an African and for being different, Regina did not want to be called on by teachers. She stated that she pretended to be an African American and blended in with the crowd by changing her style of dress, her mannerisms, and the way she talked. She got by well

enough until teachers called out her last name, *"Tambakollie."* Then it became obvious to her classmates that she was African. Thus, Regina selected invisibility or shadowiness of her African heritage, because her ethnicity had created several negative situations, and she thereby felt rejected by her African American peers.

Ironically, it seems that the negative African American students who teased Regina the most were the very types of students she later chose to emulate. She became friends with them, and was doing things to please them. It appears that Regina knowingly made bad choices just to fit in. Her choices are similar to those of other youths who join gangs just to fit in and be accepted. This is a form of self sacrifice in order to survive harsh treatments from peers.

Perhaps Regina reasoned, if you can't beat them, join them. It seems like she sold her soul to them to become one of them, just to stop the teasing and taunting. She stated, "I now dress, talk, and act like them… I pretended to be an African American. I told many people that I was from Alabama."

Subsequently, it seems that problems that existed between Regina and the other Black girls were caused by them taking Regina's material things which she put high value on in order to be accepted by her peers. Additionally, Regina repeatedly stated that the other girls were "talking mess" about her. In other words, they were gossiping about her. Over time she got into fights over her property or over the girls' gossip rather than because of her accent. Regina appears to be experiencing self denial and lack of self actualization. Regina seems to be lost and confused, and unsure of her identity.

Mokatee Kpakana's Story

"The lesson was looking like rock to me. I never see the thing they was teaching me. I say to myself, 'what kinda thing so the people just talking about every day'? Me, I get tire sitting in class everyday. I naw know what thing they talking about. So, I move from school. I go look for work" (Mokatee).

Mokatee spoke in what we Liberians refer to as "raw Liberian English." This is a combination of Standard English mixed with broken English, grammatically incorrect English, along with Liberian slang and expressions. This type of English is often spoken by uneducated or partially educated Liberians. Often times, educated Liberians will talk in this fashion when they feel relaxed in the company of other Liberians. Hence, many Liberians can code-switch between Standard English and colloquial or informal Liberian English. We, Liberians are able to tell how well educated a Liberian is by assessing their ability to switch back and forth between Standard English and colloquial English. If an individual cannot navigate both methods well, that individual is either too raw (unpolished) or too stiffly qui (too polished).

Mokatee Kpakana was introduced to me by Doyor Williamson at Mokatee's apartment complex's basketball court. Doyor had previously resided at this apartment complex for a few years prior, before he moved in with his foster dad. Both young men had arrived in the U.S. in 2004 and were resettled in the same state. They both originally lived in this apartment complex and attended the same high school. However, Mokatee did not graduate from high school. Instead, he dropped out in the later part of 11th grade and went to seek a job.

Mokatee indicated that he knew me from the previous years that I had visited their apartment complex and conducted back-to-school orientation programs, distributed free backpacks and school supplies, or when I organized Christmas parties and distributed free new Christmas presents for refugees and other needy children in the neighborhood. I could not remember ever seeing him, because during each event I served about three hundred children from all over the world. This is a project that I had undertaken with a few Liberians and other volunteers to help ease the transitional period of African refugees in that area. The school supplies and Christmas presents were usually donated by us, other volunteers, Liberian churches, other churches, Liberian organizations, a few organizations, and other dedicated individuals. Our original focus was only to meet and assist Liberian refugees that were arriving in large numbers in 2003 and 2004. We would reserve a meeting room and inform the resettlement agencies that we would be at that location on certain days to meet with the refugees and give out free school supplies and Christmas presents after we interacted with them through orientations, social gatherings, or prayers. We would usually invite motivational speakers, and Santa on Christmas, to encourage these children to do well in school, obey rules, and set academic and career goals. We also helped out with issues they or their parents might have been dealing with. We sometimes had children from over seventeen different countries from the African, European, North and South America continents that we served. We turned no one in need away. Every year, God miraculously provided and multiplied what we started with. Therefore, I really couldn't recollect ever having met Mokatee over the years.

When Mokatee agreed to the interviews, I felt lucky! Usually, Liberians and other Africans are tight-lipped about sharing their personal experiences with total strangers. They don't see how research will have any immediate benefits to them. Hence, it would have taken some convincing or coaxing to get Mokatee to open up. Fortunately, the soil was fertile and he was willing to share his experiences with me.

He agreed to walk away from his friends on the basketball court and talk alone with me for about forty-five minutes for the first interview. We sat on a bench under a shady tree. I explained to him the reason I was conducting the interview and asked him to sign the consent form if he agreed to the interviews. I also asked him for permission to tape record our interview and take notes. He agreed. The interview was conducted in a semi-formal manner.

I used direct questions, leading questions, and probed while still maintaining a conversational feeling in our discussions. I changed or redirected the interview questions when I noticed that some topics were too sensitive for him. I studied the frequent mixed emotions he expressed through his words, facial expressions, and gestures with his hands. I purposefully refrained from asking direct questions about his experiences in Liberia during the Civil War or any traumatic experiences he may have experienced in Liberia or neighboring African countries.

The first interview's focus was schooling experiences, even though some issues of home and community were shared during the interview. After the first interview, we exchanged telephone numbers and agreed to meet in two weeks for the second interview. Two weeks later, he was busy with work and we couldn't find a suitable time

to meet. So we agreed to conduct the second interview over the phone when he could spare another forty-five minutes to an hour. This worked out well. During the second interviewed, I focused on home and community experiences. This interviewed lasted about fifty minutes. We agreed that I would keep in touch and call to schedule a third interview if needed. At that time I would also share my transcript of the first two interviews with him and get further clarifications. He agreed.

We met a week and a half after the second interview at his apartment complex. Once again, we moved to another quiet area near the apartment complex pool. We sat on a bench and I handed him transcripts of our first two interviews. He quickly handed them back to me, perhaps, because he had difficulties reading. I asked some questions to get a better picture of some points he had mentioned in previous interviews. I also probed some emerging trends further. Our third interview only lasted about thirty minutes. Then we slowly walked back to the basketball court where I met some of his friends. What follows below is Mokatee's story of his experiences of being an immigrant in the U.S., and he related them to me over the course of our interviews.

School Experiences

"I ain't go to school for long time because we were fighting in Liberia. First, I move from the interior and go to Monrovia because the killing was too much. Then, we stay in Monrovia dodging bullets for almost three years. We move from Monrovia and walk by line for many days. When we reached Sierra Leone, we were happy. We stay in Sierra Leone for some time before they started fighting there. I go to school in the refugee camp in Sierra Leone, but I was not serious too much. When it got rough in

Sierra Leone, we went back to Liberia. Then the fighting got too serious in Liberia, so then we followed some people to Ghana. We was just moving up and down until we come to the States.

I was happy to go to school on the first day. When I started school here, I had lots of problems because they put me in eighth grade instead of third grade. I didn't understand what they were teaching me. Most of the time I wasn't making the grades… just struggling along. They didn't understand me and I didn't understand them. They talked about my accent. Many students told me they didn't understand my accent. That kind of embarrassed me. Some teachers and students wanted to know if I was speaking English. They were surprised that I spoke English in Africa. The other children yelled and called me 'African.' They say African in a bad kind of way. They called me 'African Monkey.' They teased me all the time.

I stay away from them. They laughed when I talked, so I stopped talking. The teasing stopped when I stopped talking. I wanted to go home. At first, I didn't understand the American English. The teachers them was all talking too fast, fast. I nah know the people in my class. Me, I feel homesick. Even though my country was all chakala [messed up], I still wanted to go back home.

The lesson was too hard. The lesson was looking like rock to me. I never see the thing they was teaching me. I say to myself, 'what kinda thing do the people just talking about every day?' Me, I get tire sitting in class everyday. I naw know what thing they talking about.

Then they put me in a special class, but that ain't help me oh. Plenty times I get in trouble. Then they called my grampa and suspended me. When I go back to school I still couldn't read or write. So, I move from school. I go look for work.

I came to the States with my Grampa and my other relatives. I live with my Grampa. The papey is old now. When we was in school, the children kept teasing me and my other Liberian friend them. One day, I got tired and jumped two boys to fight. I flogged them good. The principal sent me home for three days. One time, I put one small pen knife in my sock and went to school because some big boys said that they were going to flog me after school. When we was in the cafeteria, the knife dropped from my sock and the assistant principal took it from me. They suspended me."

Home and Community Experiences

"When we was at home playing on the playground, one American boy jumped one pekin to fight. I say, they hurt the lil' boy bad kind of way. Me and my friend, we cornered the American boy on the court the next day and flogged him good. Then his big brothers said they were setting for us, but they never touched me again.

One time, some Black boys jumped on my lil' cousin to fight. They break his arm. They say he was too frisky. Then they say that he was loving to one of their girl friends. That one was not true. My cousin was lil' pekin that time. He ain't know no woman business. They hurt him bad kind of way. They break his arm and burst his mouth opened. The blood was everywhere. One oldma stopped the fight and drive them away. She called 911. Then all of us came running to see what thing happen. Me, I was too vex when I saw my cousin. We called my aunty and tell her what happen.

The ambulance took my cousin to the hospital. My aunty went there to see him. Ain't stay long self, then my Aunty said she was moving to Alabama with her three sons. She say she ain't like it here. The fighting was too much. We used to hurt each other bad kind of way. We used to fight almost every day. We fight at school or in the apartment complex. The American children, them was fussy too. Their Oldma them were wild, wild. Some time they would jump the other oldma from Africa to fight too.

I still live with my Grandpa. The papey is old now. He is always sick and going to the hospital. I work in a factory and send money home sontime' to my sisters them. They call me plenty and tell me the hard time too much in Liberia. So, when I get small thing in my hand, I think about them and send them small thing [small amount of money]. They nah never find our ma yet. Somebody tell us, they saw the soldier kill her, but I nah know if that one nah true. My own father died during the war in Liberia.

I don't wear African clothes because I nah bring some with me to America. The Papey never went to my school except for the time the principal call him to suspend me. He ain't know how to talk the American English, so he asked some other Liberians to go with him to the school to hear what thing the principal say. The papey nah go to school to learn book."

Brief Interpretation

Mokatee's educational experience in America has not been favorable because of the issues of his age and initial academic placement. He was much older than other third graders when he arrived in the United States. Hence, he was placed five classes above his actual academic proficiency. Even though Mokatee was barely functioning academically at the third grade level, he was placed in the eighth grade. Mokatee lacked the academic skills for his age. He could barely read up at the third grade level. He had traveled to another African country during the Liberian Civil War and missed several years of schooling. The school in the U.S. recommended ESL placement and later Special Education. Mokatee shared that he felt out of place, frustrated, and discouraged. He was traumatized by the war and had missed out on normal growing up experiences. His academic performance got worse over time. He began to hang out with the wrong crowd and lost his desire to continue with the challenges posed by school. He could not keep up, nor relate to all that was being taught in school. His level of frustration increased. He tried to stick with the system and tough it out, but after four years, he called it quits. He dropped out of school. Mokatee stated, "So, I move from school. I go look for work."

Summary

The school, home, and community acculturation experiences of each of the four Liberian immigrant youths were provided in this chapter, as told in their unique individual voices. After hearing significant portions of the each participant's interview transcriptions, the reader was provided with a brief interpretation of their stories. Table 4.1 below provides a synopsis of the Liberian youths' experiences. As indicated in Table 4.1, all four of the participants had some favorable and some unfavorable acculturation experiences. However, they differed significantly in how they handled or coped with conflicts, struggles, or challenges. Detailed analyses of their acculturation experiences are provided in Chapter V. In addition, their unique ways of handling adversities are described and elaborated upon in both Chapters V and VI.

Table 4.1. Synopsis of Participants' Acculturation Experiences

Participants	Doyor (male)	Pente (female)	Regina (female)	Mokatee (male)
Favorable Conditions or Experiences	Good reception in host country. Large church helped family. Later, taken into the home of a foster dad. Attended HS in an affluent neighborhood.	Positively influenced by two caring teachers. Motivated by teachers. Assistance from churches.	Had good family and community support, but rejected them. Lives in affluent neighborhood and attended MS & HS in recognized schools.	Happy to be in America and away from threats of war and insufficiency of basic life necessities.
Unfavorable Experiences	Initially placed in ESL. Bullying from AA and Hispanic students. Poor teachers and poor HS advising in first year.	Placed in ESL for two years. Teasing, taunting and bullying from AA students. Attended poor inner city schools. Lack of home-school collaboration.	Experienced excessive ridicule of accent and bullying. Several suspensions from school. Problems with parent, relatives, peers, and authoritative figures	Placed in ESL. Large academic gap. Experienced excessive ridicule of accent & bullying. Suspended from school several times for fighting. Seems unable to navigate new host culture successfully.
Coping Strategies	Resisted status quo, Pro-active, Seeks out help or solutions, Resilient. Researches, plans ahead, accepts responsibilities.	Resilient. Gravitated to positive influences. Started after-school recreational club for positive social interactions. Ignored teasing and forgave oppressors.	Gravitated to friends that accepted her. Fights and outbursts when couldn't control external stressors. Constantly sought others that affirmed and accepted her.	Poor coping skills. Quit difficult challenges readily. Fought to control bad situations. Gravitated to other Liberian immigrants.
Conflicts, Struggles, or Challenges	Wanted to progress academically, but feels pulled back by financial responsibilities. Can't find employment. Needs funds for college and career assistance.	Wanted to stay back and help other African immigrant girls avoid being victims of molesters, but must move on. Regrets inability to provide assistance for her younger siblings. Lacks finances and assistance with college and career.	Rejects self and heritage. Takes on a new persona. Struggles to become a person she is not. Idolizes other AA youths. Mentioned that others say she has dual personalities. Struggles to be who the Liberian community expects her to be.	Communication barriers. Inability to successfully adapt to American school environment. School lessons too difficult because of large academic gap. Gets easily frustrated.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF MAJOR THEMES

The purpose of this study was to identify the school, home and community acculturation experiences of Liberian immigrant youths in one urban area of the United States. During the guided interviews, participants discussed their personal experiences, which were shared in Chapter IV of this study. It is important to emphasize that the voices and perceptions of these Liberian immigrants youths interviewed in this study do not represent those of all Liberian immigrant youths in the United States. Some Liberian immigrant students have easily acculturated and have had very successful academic experiences in urban schools throughout the United States.

The guiding research topic was: How do Liberian immigrant youths describe their acculturation processes in the United States regarding their school, home, and community experiences? Three primary research questions that guided this study were;

1) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe school experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

2) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe home experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

3) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe community experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

Full accounts of each participant's acculturation experiences, in their own voices, were given in Chapter IV.

School Acculturation Experiences

The first research question asked, "How do Liberian immigrant youths describe school experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?" The themes that emerged after analyses of the participants' school acculturation experiences were; academic placement, accent insensitivity, conflicts with peers, quality of teachers, parental involvement, and high school dropout.

Academic Placement Issues

The major academic placement issues were; ESL (English as a Second Language) course requirements, and inappropriate grade placements, such as being placed in low-track classes or being placed in grade levels above the individual's academic abilities.

English as a Second Language Courses

All four of the participants spoke English. They were all educated in Liberia, an English-speaking African nation. English is the national language of Liberia. Additionally, they were all above primary grades when they entered the U.S.A. Hence, three of the participants already had a strong command of the English language before arriving in the United States. Even though three of them spoke English fluently and one spoke broken or colloquial English, they were all placed in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, totally disregarding the fact that English *was* their first language.

One Liberian immigrant youth, Doyor, described being tutored English by a Mexican student in his ESL class when the Mexican student could hardly speak English himself. Doyor stated:

They put me in ESL1. When you are from another country, they think you don't

know English. I went there and they were teaching me English. They sent me a

Mexican boy to help me learn English, but he did not even know English, and he

was trying to help me with English.

Likewise, Pente, a female participant stated:

My English was fine. I did not have to stay back or repeat a class. I was put in

ESL in middle school for two years. A few of us were very good in ESL. They

tried to move us out of ESL, but they couldn't. So, we stayed in ESL classes

through middle school.

Regina also had similar experiences at school. She stated:

They placed me in an ESL class because they couldn't understand me and

assumed that I did not know English. *I already knew English!* English is all that

I speak. They told me that I had to stay in ESL because I had an accent.

Anyway, I only stayed in ESL for about one year.

Placement in English as a Second Language classes seems to be prevalent

among schools that have a large percentage of immigrant students. Often these students

are non-English speakers; hence ESL placement is then appropriate. However, ESL

placement becomes problematic when English is the immigrant child's first and only

language. By degrading and rejecting a child's language on the basis that it sounds

different from the norm (due to having what is perceived of as an accent) is an indirect

way of telling the child that they are abnormal or not good enough. Secondly, students

who are placed in ESL classes are often not re-evaluated as often as they should be to

determine their language skills development. Furthermore, school districts often demonstrate low academic expectations of these students from the first day they enroll to the last day they exit those schools.

Inappropriate Grade Placements

Inappropriate academic placement was also common. The youths were either placed in several classes above their mastery level, inappropriately placed in English as a Second Language classes, lower level high school classes, or were not placed on appropriate level high school tracks.

Mokatee went from third to eighth grade when he came to the United States. Mokatee explained, "When I started school here, I had lots of problems because they put me in eighth grade instead of third grade. I didn't understand what they were teaching me. Most of the time I wasn't making the grades… just struggling along."

Placement in English as a Second Language classes, lower level high school classes, or not being placed on right high school tracks were typical problems for all of the participants. In Doyor's case, he was tracked into classes far below his ability level. He refused to stay in an ESL class when he was convinced that he knew English well enough to be taught in the regular classroom with other American students. He knew he was not being academically stimulated or challenged. Doyor stated:

After a while I told the teacher "I can't be in this class. All we are doing here is ABCs [preschool work]. *This is retarded!"* The teacher said that I had to remain there, and I said "No!" I went to see the counselor and she said that I had to remain in ESL1. I said, "No, I will not remain there." I went to see my dean. I

told the dean I did not want to learn ABCs, "I already know English. I want to take IPC Science and high school English. They are only teaching me ABC stuff. I need real high school English and other high school classes."

Doyor also described not being placed in some of his other classes when he should have been. For example, instead of taking geography in ninth or tenth grade as was required, he had to pay to take this course during the summer at a community college in order to graduate from high school in four years. He said that his initial high school academic advisor did not advise him well. Hence, he had to do whatever it took on his own initiative to accomplish his goals.

Conflicts with Classmates and Peers

The Liberian immigrant youths experienced several conflicts with their peers, such as bullying, teasing and name calling, accent insensitivity, and being the objects of physical aggression.

Bullying

Being bullied by other students because of their African identity was another experience held in common by the participants. Pente described instances when some of the students would follow her down the school hallway and bully her. Pente stated:

When I was walking in the hallway, she would hit me on the back and start laughing along with some of her other friends. I would keep walking, and they would continue walking behind me, hitting on me, and saying mean things. I would just ignore them.

The Liberian immigrant youths indicated that the other students hit them, jumped them to instigate fights, or called them degrading names such as "African Booty Scratchers," "African Monkey," or other deliberately demeaning terms. Peer abuse by hitting and pushing on the immigrant youths often caused the Liberian immigrant youths to become defensive, and to openly retaliate in some cases. This would often result in detentions, suspension, or strict disciplinary actions. The Liberian immigrant youths' manner of showing their displeasure by a defensive method made them visible, but in a negative manner. The participants reported that other immigrant youths refused to complain to teachers because of fear of retaliation from angry American students after school.

Name Calling and Teasing

Name calling and teasing by peers were also common concerns of the Liberian immigrant youths. Mokatee stated, "The other children yelled and called me 'African.' They say African in a bad kind of way. They called me 'African Monkey.' They teased me all the time." Pente shared similar difficulties:

Oh my God! The kids were really mean. They said all kinds of mean things. They were mainly the Black American kids… They would walk behind us and make funny noises behind us such as **"**punkya ka, punkya ka." I don't know what that meant. They asked questions such as, "When you were in Africa, did you wear shoes? Did you all live in tree houses?" Or they would say, "Your hair is ugly."

Accent Insensitivity

Accent insensitivity was a big issue among these immigrants. Some stated specific instances when they refused to talk because they were tired of being ridiculed when they spoke. All four participants described painful experiences with taunting of their accents, mostly by African American students. Pente stated, "When we talked, they make fun of the way we talked or sounded. We were speaking English, but they would say, 'What are you speaking? Is that an African language?'" Their peers would ask them questions just to hear them speak, and then laugh in their faces. Some of the immigrant youths learned to ignore the taunts and harassments. Others engaged in physical fights to arrest the teasing.

After getting in several fights with bullies at school, Mokatee, one of the male participants, decided not to talk much in class, or out of class, in order to avoid being teased by other students. Mokatee stated:

> They didn't understand me and I didn't understand them. They talked about my accent. Many students told me they didn't understand my accent. That kind of embarrassed me. Some teachers and students wanted to know if I was speaking English. They were surprised that I spoke English in Africa.

This kind of reaction from teachers and students indicate ignorance and lack of interest in African cultures and languages.

Regina shared that the constant teasing caused her to feel ashamed of her accent:

> Throughout middle school in the U.S., the students made fun of my accent or the way I dressed. They would constantly ask me to repeat what I said or ask me

why did I speak that way. They would say, "Where are you from?" "Why do you speak that way? Your accent is so deep? Do you speak English? What language are you speaking?" or "You have that nappy African hair."

Frequent Fights

Regina and Mokatee engaged in frequent fights as a means of venting their frustration. Doyor and Pente chose to ignore the bullies and instead gravitated towards friends that affirmed them. Pente indicated that she once almost kicked an African American girl who had repeatedly bullied her and harassed her. Pente instead chose to give that girl a very firm and serious warning. From her posture and tone, the African American girl realized that Pente was fed up. Pente rejoiced that the bullying stopped then. A few years later, Pente was asked to tutor that same girl in math and she was happy to oblige.

Physical violence between African immigrant youths and other African American students during school, after school, or in their neighborhoods was also either experienced by the participants, their relatives, or other African immigrant friends. This kind of tension between Africans and African American students was described extensively by Traore and Lukens (2006) in their book, *This isn't the America that I thought I'd find: African students in the urban US high school.*

Speaking about the teasing and other bad treatments she experienced, Regina stated, "The teacher sent me to the principal's office. Another time, I got in trouble on the bus for fighting… This kid on the bus kept messing with me, so I took care of him on the bus."

Regina elaborated:

> I got in a fight with this African American girl. She took my stuff and was
>
> saying all kinds of lies about me. She tried to start a fight in the cafeteria, but
>
> there were too many teachers and APs [Assistant Principal] around. So the next
>
> day, when we got in class, I was at the computer doing my work and she walked
>
> over to me and hit me in the face. I jumped off the computer and slapped her
>
> right back in the face. She then jumped on me and I punched her in the chest and
>
> ripped her blouse. We began to struggle and pull on each other. The teacher
>
> came over to break up the fight and got hit in her chest. I think she got seriously
>
> hurt, because she was crying and had to leave school for the rest of the day. The
>
> AP came and took us to the office. I got suspended for three days.

Mokatee related his own experiences with physical violence at school:

> When we was in school, the children kept teasing me and my other Liberian
>
> friend them. One day, I got tired and jumped two boys to fight. I flogged them
>
> good. The principal sent me home for three days. One time, I put one small pen
>
> knife in my sock and went to school because some big boys said that they were
>
> going to flog me after school. When we was in the cafeteria, the knife dropped
>
> from my sock and the assistant principal took it from me. They suspended me.

Pente confirmed:

> The kids were very mean! Once there was a fight between an African boy and a
>
> whole bunch of African American boys. They beat the African boy up. A whole

bunch of kids jumped in the fight. The teachers and principal didn't do anything about the fight because there were too many students involved.

Pente added:

I remember, in middle school, one big and fat Black American girl picked on us so much so that she got in a fight with my best friend Fatu. It started with the two of them and then some of her Black American friends jumped in. Then some of our Liberian friends jumped in to help my friend Fatu in the fight. It was some of her friends and some of our Liberian friends. They got in a big fight at the Cosmo bus stop and my friends beat her up good. The Black Americans were really mean.

Style of Dress

Style of dress was also a major concern amongst the Liberian immigrant youths.

Regina stated that:

The Blacks were the ones who talked a lot about my hair and clothes. I would just ignore them and keep moving or turn my back. After a while, it began to bother me. I began to get mad when they talked mean to me. I couldn't take it any longer. One time in middle school, I hit someone and got in trouble.

Some of the participants felt compelled to change the clothes they wore, and/or to change how they styled their hair. Pente originally wore her hair braided back, but had to change that hairstyle. The two female participants, Regina and Pente, resorted to chemically treating (perming) their hair and wearing attached hair extensions in order to blend in with the African American females at school. All four participants stated that it

was easier to change their outward appearance in order to blend in whilst at school. This helped reduce the amount of teasing or bullying and the negative visibility they received.

Quality of Teachers

Poor teachers in the low performing schools that Doyor, Pente, and Mokatee attended were also an unfortunate reality that they held in common. The Liberian immigrant youths described some of their teachers as, uncaring, unwilling to answer questions, just sitting behind their desks, directing the immigrant students to ask other students for help, and to read the book to find the answers to their own questions. Pente stated:

> Some of the teachers that I had did not like what they were doing. They only told us to read the book and do the assignments on our own. My physics teacher was like that. He only assigned work from the book. He did not like teaching physics, nor did he like being a teacher. He had no passion, and this rubbed off on the students. He turned me off.

Doyor, one of the three participants that attended low performing schools, eventually moved out of that school district to attend school in an affluent neighborhood when he was adopted by a foster dad. Two of the Liberian immigrant youths, Pente and Doyor were fortunate to have a few *"star teachers"* (Haberman, 1995) that were very instrumental in motivating them and helping them complete high school. Doyor and Pente are the only two participants in this study that have successfully graduated from

high school. Pente described her star teacher as her calculus teacher. Pente fondly
stated:

>My calculus teacher loved math. Hence, everyone enjoyed her class and didn't
>want to leave her presence. My calculus teacher was my favorite teacher
>because she made me feel that I could accomplish anything. Even though I may
>not have all the skills to do what I want to do, she made me feel that it was okay
>to try. She encouraged me to do my best, and attempt new things.

Pente further stated:

>One thing that I learned from my calculus teacher is, if you love what you are
>doing with a passion, you will be able to teach it well or impact other lives. This
>will help students learn better, because this will energize and excite students to
>want to learn. My calculus teacher loved teaching calculus and this positive
>energy transferred to me.

Parental Involvement at School

The degree of parental involvement differed amongst the participants. Pente
stated that her parents did not attend meetings or school functions, but they provided
financially for the family while she was in school. Pente stated:

>On my first day of school the agency took us to school with our parents to
>register. It was the resettlement agency that took all my brothers, sisters, parents,
>and me to school to register. That was the only time that my parents went to the
>school.

Pente continued:

> I don't think that my parents went to any PTO [Parents Teachers Organization]
> meetings. My parents had a lot of things going on with the little children and
> stuff. They had to also work. I understood, so I went to school meetings by
> myself.

Mokatee's grandfather, who was his guardian, was illiterate. Hence, he did not attend school meetings or functions. However, his grandfather had to go to the school accompanied by other adult immigrants when Mokatee got into fights, or was suspended for taking a knife to school for protection. Nevertheless, his grandfather provided financially for him until Mokatee quit school to seek employment.

Doyor stated that his aunt was not much involved with his schooling, but did provide guardianship of him. Doyor also indicated that his aunt did not go to his school for meetings or functions, but some White church members did when the family initially arrived in the U.S. Later, when he moved to his foster dad's home, Doyor did not state how involved his foster dad was with his education, but was glad that his foster dad provided shelter for him in a good environment.

Regina, however, had a dad that attended school meetings regularly and frequently when Regina began to get in repeated fights and classroom disturbances. Although it appeared that Regina's dad valued home-school collaboration, he seemed unable to provide his daughter with the type of specific acculturation needs that she lacked which were mainly handling negative peer pressures.

High School Drop Outs

The pressures of dealing with all of the negative factors in school sometimes results in Liberian immigrant youths dropping out of school. This was the case among half of the participants in the present study, as well as many of their immigrant peers. Doyor stated:

Most Liberians that started with me in Mosaic High School dropped out of school. The only person that graduated was Helen's sister. Helen moved to another school district. Her sister graduated from high school. Everyone else that I knew dropped out. Mokatee was one of the participants who dropped out.

Mokatee explained:

When I started school here, I had lots of problems because they put me in eighth grade instead of third grade. I didn't understand what they were teaching me. Most of the time I wasn't making the grades… just struggling along. Then they put me in a special class, but that ain't help me oh. Plenty times I get in trouble. Then they called my grampa and suspended me. When I go back to school I still couldn't read or write. So, I move from school. I go look for work.

Regina dropped out of school as well. Regina stated:

I dropped out of regular high school. I was too far behind to be able to graduate this year with all of my other friends. All the children that I was in school with will be graduating this year. The school told me that I still had lots of credits to make up because I was suspended too many days over the last three years and

many of my grades were D's and F's. I am an adult now. I don't live with my

dad anymore. I live with my friend.

The participants' school acculturation experiences held several similarities as discussed

above. These participants' acculturation experiences in the United States were further

impacted by their experiences at home and in the larger community.

Home Acculturation Experiences

The second research question asked, "How do Liberian immigrant youths

describe home experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?" The themes

that emerged during analyses of the data were: guardian/ youth relationship, bad

choices, struggles, and financial burdens.

Guardian/Youth Relationships

Regarding familial relationships, the two Liberian immigrant youths (Pente and

Doyor) who successfully completed high school both had favorable relationships with

their parents or guardians. The two immigrant youths (Regina and Mokatee) that

dropped out of high school either had poor relationships with their parents and

guardians or no relationship at all.

Regina reported that she had frequent problems with her dad and stepmother,

and that she did not get along with her dad, or her stepmother. She felt that her dad was

too busy with his life and other family members, and did not really take the time to get

to know her personally. Regina stated:

My dad and I never got along. My dad and I are not close… He was gone most of the time anyway. He was too strict and never did take the time out to know me. So, I just did whatever I wanted to do. My stepmother was just mean and ugly. I don't know what my dad saw in her to marry her. She is a witch.

Regina also indicated that when she lived with her relatives, there was also tension in the home because she did not want to listen to their constant advices. Regina stated, "They were constantly advising me to make better choices and do the right thing. I listened at first, but then got tired of those rules. ... So, I started doing whatever I wanted to. I would intentionally disobey them …" Regina eventually got sent back to live with her dad. Later, Regina rejected her dad's love and left his home to live with friends, although her dad was capable and willing to provide good shelter for her.

Mokatee did not elaborate much on his relationship with his grandfather, with whom he resided. He stated, "I still live with my Grandpa. The papey is old now. He is always sick and going to the hospital." Mokatee was uncertain of the whereabouts of his biological parents following the Liberian Civil War. He speculated that they both may have been killed.

In describing her relationship with her parents, Pente stated, "It is fine. I don't have any issues with my parents." Pente appeared to be an obedient child who also helped her parents out with her younger siblings. After her high school graduation, Pente also assisted her parents financially at home.

Doyor initially lived with his aunt and many other relatives who arrived in the United States with him. They lived in a crime-infested neighborhood, and he initially

attended an underachieving inner city school. He indicated that his aunt did not attend PTO meetings or other school functions because she had to work. He was later adopted by a Liberian businessman and moved to an affluent neighborhood. His foster dad was caring and loving towards him. Doyor feels really blessed. He explained:

> I used to live with my aunty. We were plenty in the house. The living conditions were not very good. The school that I was attending was not very good. I did not cause problems. It just was rough living in that apartment complex. Too much problems were around. I met Mr. Samuel, my foster dad, in the United States. He came into my life and took me as his own son. It was only God's works. Otherwise I don't know where I would be today. I am lucky that I am surrounded by people that give me good advice.

Doyor indicated that he did not have any problems at home. He enjoyed cooking Liberian dishes and eating rich Liberia food.

Bad Choices

Regina related to me that she did not fit in at school, that she was bored and isolated at home, and that she became increasingly rebellious in her community interactions. She explained:

> So, I started doing whatever I wanted to. I would intentionally disobey them and do all the fun stuff that I wanted to do in school or out of school. Then they would ground me, it didn't work. I would still disobey and do whatever I wanted to do.

Regina indicated that she wants to change, but that it is difficult. She would try for a few days, but it would get boring. She enjoys going out and doing as she pleases. When a student, she knowingly made bad choices in a misguided attempt to experience a sense of freedom from the rules. She was fully aware of the negative consequences, but after weighing her options, she chose to temporarily have fun and forget about the obvious long-term repercussions.

Struggles

Regina struggled with making the right choices and changing. She stated, "Sometimes, I want to change, but it's hard. I would try for a few days, but it gets boring." A few minutes later during the interview, she interjected, "I really want to change… I dropped out of regular high school. I was too far behind to be able to graduate this year with all of my other friends."

"I have it all figured out now. …I am planning to attend an alternative school and get on an accelerated track to earn my high school credit. I don't want a GED." A few minutes later, she interjected again, "I have not been able to enroll in the alternative school in my school zone, because I ain't got no way to get there. I don't have a car to drive, and I ain't got anyone to take me every day." Finally, she stated with affirmation, "I am still working on how to figure that out. I know for sure that I don't want a GED. I will graduate. I have got to figure it out. I will change."

Doyor also struggled with not being able to find a sustainable job to meet all of his financial responsibilities. Doyor stated. "For me, all I want now is to go to school to earn a degree in nursing. I have to get a good career. I have to do this all by myself. I

have no one to help me." Doyor repeatedly provided examples of how he overcame struggles and obstacles. He is very likely to find a favorable solution in the future, as he has developed many coping skills already in his life.

Financial Burdens

Doyor shared that he made some mistakes by having children early in life. He has two daughters under six years old, each born to a different former girlfriend. Although his daughters live with their respective mothers and grandmothers, Doyor has a financial responsibility to care for his daughters. Thus, those responsibilities influenced his decision to pursue plumbing as a viable and stable career to earn money for his parental duties. Ideally, a plumbing career would also have enabled him to send money home to his mother and other siblings who are still living in Liberia.

Doyor described the financial burden he has to provide for his mother and siblings who are still in Africa. Doyor stated, "It is a burden on me because I have to also send them money and things every now and then." Doyor also has the financial responsibility of providing funds for his two daughters. He stated, "The children are pulling me back. I am taking care of my daughters financially. Sometimes their mothers piss me off. They have threatened to sue me for child support."

He elaborated:

> I took student loan that I have to pay back, now that I am no longer in school. My tuition for the nine months plumbing training was $16,000. Now I have a big student loan to pay back and can't find a job in plumbing. No one is hiring. I should have studied something that would have given me a job today.

Mokatee stated;

I work in a factory and send money home sontime' to my sisters them. They

call me plenty and tell me the hard time too much in Liberia. So, when I get

small thing in my hand, I think about them and send them small thing [small

amount of money].

Doyor stated, "I have to do this all by myself. I have no one to help me. The job

is not rolling like it used to." Although, Doyor regrets his decision for his career choice

and other unfavorable choices that he has made, he still forges forward with creative

ideas to overcome adverse situations.

Community Acculturation Experiences

The third research question asked, "How do Liberian immigrant youths describe

community experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?" Some

community acculturation themes that emerged during data analysis were; cultural

adjustment, identity, clothing, friendships, fighting, religion, employment, and careers.

Cultural Adjustment

Regarding cultural adjustment, Doyor stated:

I've adjusted to the American culture and food. Even though I don't eat it much,

I have gotten adjusted to it. I don't like fast food, I don't like McDonalds. All of

those foods are not healthy. I eat pizza once in a while. Most of the time, I cook

food for my household. I cook and I enjoy doing it. I love Liberian food! I don't

have to wait or depend on anyone to cook for me.

He also shared that he has several American friends and that he enjoys life in the United States.

Regina attempted to adjust by disassociating herself from other Africans and pretending to be an American. Regina stated:

I changed the way I dressed, fixed my hair, and the way I talked. I got used to the culture and was basically wearing what everyone else was wearing. I wanted to fit in. That's the only way you don't get much problems… from the other kids, if you fit in with the crowd. I told everyone that I was from the U.S. and I was not from Africa. I pretended to be an American.

Identity

The participants handled identity issues in differing manners. For example, Doyor stated:

I love to be identified as a Liberian or an African. I know some other people that are in denial of their heritage. My little cousins, for example, say they are from France. I tell them they need to be real." Even some grown people act that way. They don't want to identify with Africa. I don't know why. As for me, I love to wear Liberian clothes. I love wearing African clothes. I wear it everywhere. It doesn't matter, because I am representing my country and Africa. I want people to know where I'm from. For those young people that don't like to be identified as Africans, I don't know where they are coming from. They need to learn to be proud of their heritage, and it's an individual difference.

Pente stated:

> I love my culture. I'm *always* proud to be an African. I am so proud to be an
> African. I never pretend to be an African. I am so proud to be who I am. I have
> so much to be proud of. All of the things that I have gone through or my parents
> went through, I will never forget.

Doyor and Pente's approaches to acculturation indicate that they are comfortable and proud of their African heritage. This stands in stark contrast to Regina's method of adjusting to life in America. Regina seems to have felt that in order to adapt to life in the U.S., she must renounce and eradicate all traces of her cultural background.

Clothing

The participants' choice of dress also reflected differing approaches to dealing with their African identities. For example, Doyor stated, "I wish I had more African clothes. I want people to know that I am coming from Africa. I love wearing Liberian clothes to Liberian gatherings and I love being around Africans." Pente explained:

> I do like to wear African clothes but I don't have lots of it. I really don't mind. I
> could wear it. I really don't have it to wear. I wear it on UNHCR [United
> Nations High Commission for Refugees] refugee day, and I wear it to take
> pictures. I don't wear it to work or school. Because I don't think I have to wear
> it. I work at a department store and we have to wear all black and white.

In contrast, Mokatee related, "I don't wear African clothes because I nah bring some with me to America." Regina indicated that she does not like to wear African clothes because she doesn't want to be identified as an African. In school she went out of her

way to blend in, and her clothes and hairstyle were deliberately altered in an effort to appear American-born.

Friendships

I wanted to know more about acculturation experiences in the communities in which the participants lived, and whether they had support networks that assisted their transitions. Regarding friendships, Doyor stated:

> I have not kept in touch with most of the African friends that I had. Most of my friends have left town or dropped out of school. When I was in Mosaic High School, it was the only time I saw African students. When I moved to Breezewood for school, there were hardly Black students, only Whites. I made friends with many of the White boys on my soccer team. Most of them later went out of state to college. When they come home over the summer, we go play soccer.

Pente, on the other hand, played with other immigrants. She stated, "My friends and I once formed a club to play kickball after school to take our minds off of other bad stuff and problems." Pente further shared that in school she focused on the work at hand and basically did not attempt to seek out friendships. For companionship, Pente cultivated relationships with other immigrants in her community, "I did not interact much with the other students in middle school... My friends were mostly other Liberian children from my apartment complex."

Tension and Fights

There were numerous accounts of tension and fights between the immigrants and other American youths. These were not restricted to the school buildings. The participants constantly had to deal with taunting and look out for their personal safety in their neighborhoods as well. For example, Mokatee shared an account of a time that he was attacked at a playground near his home. In this instance, Mokatee not only stood his ground, but the next day he beat up his tormentor so badly that this particular boy never assaulted him again. Mokatee also told me of a time when African American boys in the community seriously harmed his cousin. This relative suffered a broken arm and damage to his mouth, and had to be taken to a hospital in an ambulance. For Mokatee, the threat of physical violence was a constant presence in his life, whether at school or in his community, "The fighting was too much. We used to hurt each other bad kind of way. We used to fight almost every day. We fight at school or in the apartment complex."

In Regina's case, she got into frequent fights in school, resulting in suspensions. But even en route to school or after school in the community at large, she refused to be tormented. She related:

> But again, some of the other Black girls and I got in fights after school. They kept taking my stuff or talking mess about me. I once followed this Black girl to her neighborhood and beat her up after we got off the bus. I once beat a Black girl in the school bus. She kept messing with me and took my stuff. I got thrown off the bus, so I had to walk to school.

Employment

The acculturation processes in the community became more pronounced for those participants who dropped out of school. Entering the work force at young ages, as immigrants, and lacking high school diplomas proved problematic. Doyor lamented that despite his getting training as a plumber, his employment has been sporadic:

 I started working after training, but got laid off after a few months. It has been hard adjusting to life in America. I don't have a job. I have too many bills to pay. If you don't pay bills then you are locked out without compromise. I have the children to support. It's not easy. The job is not rolling like it used to. Sometimes, I find odd jobs to do. But there are not many jobs these days.

Pente and Mokatee were able to find employment even though they only earned minimum wages. Pente stated, "I am very busy with work… I work at a department store." Mokatee shared that he has been able to financially assist his relatives in Liberia despite having a meager income, "I work in a factory and send money home sontime' to my sisters them. They call me plenty and tell me the hard time too much in Liberia. Hence, he was pleased that he was making some valuable contributions to others in need. He smiled and puffed up his chest as he shared this information with me.

Careers

Probably because of these negative acculturation experiences as members of the U.S. workforce, some of the participants have realized that in order for them to achieve the "American dream" they will need to acquire skills or training that better equip them for more gainful employment. For example, Doyor trained in what he thought was a

promising field, but to his disappointment he has not been able to find steady work in plumbing:

> I attended Lexar Institute for nine months. When I graduated, I was working with a plumbing company, but they laid me off. They said the business was not doing good. Now, no one is hiring. I had thought that the plumbing school was going to be really quick to give me training and hands on experiences that will lead to a permanent job in a few months. It's not working.

Doyor further stated that after reconsidering his options, he would like to enter a field with more reliable job opportunities:

> I want an opportunity to go back to school. I should have studied something that would have given me a job today. I have to get a good career. I have to do this all by myself. I have no one to help me.

> Doyor laments the fact that he made an error in judgment in choosing a career in plumbing. He currently has his sights set on becoming a Registered Nurse some day, a field which is currently in high demand and which is predicted to only expand in the future. If he can manage to acquire the necessary credentials, Doyor's future should hold steady employment.

> Pente has similar ambitions. Thus far, Pente has felt that she is ready for college and she has taken steps towards enrolling in a Registered Nursing program, but she currently lacks the funds to matriculate:

I will be starting college next spring. I want to study nursing. I have already been accepted in a nursing school. I want to be a RN. I got accepted in the University of Goodland, but the tuition was too high. So I did not enroll.

Regina stated that she still plans to pursue a high school diploma through an alternative school. Regina explained:

I am planning to attend an alternative school and get on an accelerated track to earn my high school credit. I don't want a GED. I know that I can still earn high school credit and graduate from high school. School work is not hard for me. I know I can do it. I make good grades when I put my head to my studies. It's just that I can't take shit from nobody. I guess I have to learn to just forget about other messy people and take care of my business.

Religion

As one participant attempted to navigate life in the U.S. and in his community, he sometimes found support from a local church. Doyor related that members of Trinity Church helped with his relocation efforts when he moved to the United States, and that church members acted as translators when his guardian needed to interact with school personnel. He maintains a positive outlook, and stated that he felt blessed to be living in America. For other participants, religion did not seem to play a key role in their lives. Regina mentioned that she used to attend church when she lived with her dad or other relatives. But no longer does, even though she plans to attend church again someday. Pente shared that she often works on Sundays, hence she does not go to church currently. Pente stated, "Right now, I won't lie. I don't go to church now, too many

things are happening. I'm working every Sunday, no chance to go to church". Mokatee did not indicate his religious practices.

Interpretations: Conflicts and Resiliency

Conflicts

Even though there were several emergent themes that surfaced during data analysis of the four Liberian immigrant youths' school, home, and community acculturation experiences as discussed previously, there seemed to be yet one larger, overarching theme. This overarching theme was *conflict*. There were *external* and *internal* conflicts in the school, home, and community settings. Redfield et al (1936) indicated that during the *integration* of traits from the new cultures into the pattern of the existing culture, *conflict* may be produced within a culture by the acceptance of new traits at various intervals (p.151).

All four of the Liberian immigrant youths dealt with external conflicts such as bullying, teasing, accent ridicule, fighting, rejection by peers, and inappropriate educational placements. In addition to the external conflicts, they dealt with some type of internal conflicts, such as wanting to please others, issues with self esteem, self identity, ethnic identity, cultural identity, self acceptance, self sacrifice, self rejection, or having difficulty making critical choices.

Pang (2005) argues that educators who erroneously fail to take into account their students' cultures have limited knowledge of immigrant students' acculturation stages. These educators do not understand that assimilation processes can negatively impact a

student's self-identity and cause the student to relinquish valuable traditional languages and/or cultures. Pang further stresses the need for educators to employ multicultural pedagogy that is relevant and meaningful to students. Incorporating multicultural practices will result in a paradigm shift from a teacher-centered to a student-centered orientation (Pang, 2005).

According to Neito and Bode (2011) and Siccone (1995) schools and society play a role in creating low self-esteem in children. These scholars argue that children do not develop poor self-concepts on their own, but rather they are the results of policies and practices of schools and a society that respects and affirms some groups while devaluing and rejecting others. Neito and Bode (2011) further recommend that the history of all racial groups be made visible by making it part of the curriculum, instruction, and educational practices.

An immigrant youth's cultural identity is very crucial in their acculturation processes. Phinney, Berry, Vedder, and Liebkind, (2006), state, "Cultural identity can be thought of as an aspect of acculturation that focuses on immigrants' sense of self rather than on their behaviors and attitudes following immigration. Conceptually, it includes both ethnic identity and national identity"(p.71). These researchers indicated that most acculturation literature have focused on adults although there are some limited recent research experiences on the acculturation experiences of immigrant youths. An immigrant's cultural identity entails a sense of belonging to a particular cultural group or two, and the "feelings associated with group membership"(Phinney et al, 2006, p.76). The development of identity is very important for youths. This process is impacted by

the youths' family, community, and other exposures. Disharmony in the immigrant's cultural identity could be a major source of stress and conflicts (Berry et al, 1987,Berry et al, 2006).
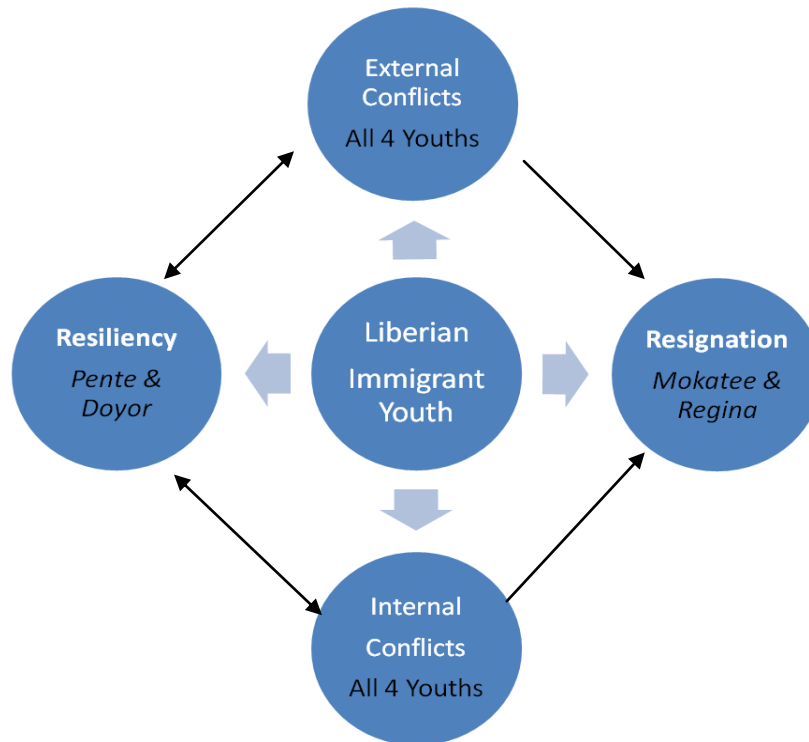
Figure 5.1 Concept Map of Conflict as an Overarching Theme

  The Liberian immigrant youths' acculturation experiences were significantly impacted by *conflicts*. Even though the Liberian immigrant youths held common experiences of conflicts, their methods of handling conflicts differed immensely. The Liberian immigrant youths that possessed strong *resiliency* qualities seemed to have handled external and internal conflicts better than the immigrant youths that lacked resiliency qualities. Figure 5.1 illustrates that all four Liberian immigrant youths experienced both external and internal conflicts. Pente and Doyor exhibited *resiliency* in

handling internal and external conflicts, while Regina and Mokatee succumbed to the external and internal conflicts and resigned.

Resiliency

Doyor and Pente were also the only two participants who constantly demonstrated resiliency in adverse situations. They both sought positive avenues to overcome challenges. They did not accept negative situations as hopeless conditions. They were avid problem solvers and resisted negative alternatives. They exemplified creativity and were proactive in tackling obstacles.

Doyor had low tolerance for mediocrity and always seemed to pursue better options. He stated that he dropped his BCIS teacher at the end of the first semester with her and moved to a better teacher's classroom. He also indicated that some of his friends did not want to be challenged. They stayed in ESL courses because they were easier than the regular curriculum, and they later dropped out of school. Doubtlessly, Doyor is a go-getter, and he knew what he wanted out of school. He is smart, disciplined, and focused.

Doyor's decision to pay his own tuition for a course at a community college, further supports his problem solving ability and wisdom. He stated, "I did not want to be held back in the 12th grade to make up classes and credits. I wanted to graduate on time. I had to pay for the geography course by myself. I didn't mind."

Pente started an after-school club to keep girls occupied and off the streets. She was disturbed when Liberian immigrant girls would get in the cars of unknown older men that drove by seeking pleasure with young women whom they presumed to be

naïve or of loose moral standards. She also demonstrated her caring nature by continuously advising other immigrant girls to focus on their academics and make better choices. In addition, Pente helped her parents in nurturing her younger siblings.

Doyor and Pente, possessed resiliency characteristics such as social competency, problem solving abilities, autonomy, sense of purpose and future, and creativity (Benard, 1991; 2004). As a result, Doyor and Pente were the only two participants who constantly demonstrated resiliency in adverse situations. In addition, they possessed the ability to forgive oppressors, a trait that has been found to be important for good psychological health. They both sought positive avenues to overcome challenges. They did not accept negative situations as hopeless conditions. They were avid problem solvers and resisted negative alternatives. They were proactive and creative.

Doyor had a low tolerance for mediocrity and always seemed to pursue better options. He stated that he dropped his BCIS teacher at the end of the semester and insisted that he be allowed to move to a better teacher's classroom. He also indicated that some of his friends did not want to be academically challenged. They stayed in ESL classes, and later dropped out of school. Doubtlessly, Doyor is a go-getter. He knew what he wanted. He is smart, disciplined, and focused.

Doyor's decision to pay his own tuition for a required course at a community college further supports his problem-solving ability and wisdom. He stated:

> They did not give me my correct classes originally. For instance, they did not
> put geography on my schedule. I did it at the community college during the

summer because… I did not want to be held back in the 12th grade to make up

classes and credits. I wanted to graduate on time. I had to pay for the geography

course by myself. I didn't mind.

Both Doyor and Pente exhibited resiliency throughout their high school years

and continued to exhibit those traits as young adults. Benard (1991, 1997) described

resiliency as a set of qualities that facilitate adaptation even in the face of challenges

and adversity. Benard (1991) indicated that individuals who demonstrate resiliency

possess the following qualities or traits; autonomy, problem solving abilities, a strong

sense of purpose, and social competence.

Doyor and Pente's social competency traits enabled them to find and keep

healthy relationships with some of their peers and significant adults in their lives. They

both possessed a sense of humor and had the ability to positively influence others. Pente

exhibited the abilities to empathize and forgive when she willingly agreed to tutor a

student in high school who had bullied her throughout middle school.

Problem-solving skills enable one to be proactive, to plan, to be resourceful in

seeking help from others, and to think critically, creatively, and reflectively. Doyor

demonstrated excellent problem-solving skills when he planned for his first day of

school by riding his bike to the school before school started in order to get acquainted

with his route, asking people in his neighborhood about the school, and by recognizing

discriminatory school practices. He also went against the status quo to fight for his

educational rights. He thought critically about the limitations of been placed in ESL

classes and sought the help of decision makers to get him out of that setting. He was

driven by a strong sense of purpose and the realization that he wanted something better. Doyor's proactive skills were also demonstrated when he made the decision to attend summer classes at a community college to obtain credit for a required geography class that was omitted from his schedule.

Benard (1991) explained that problem-solving skills require possessing a critical consciousness, which is a reflective awareness of the structures of oppression in society or institutions. It appears that Doyor and Pente were cognizant of institutional and societal racism that permeated their schools and environments. They found creative ways to change what they could, positively accept what they couldn't change, and remain hopeful for better opportunities in the future.

Additionally, Doyor and Pente possessed autonomy, which is characterized by having a strong sense of identity and worth, and the abilities to act independently, to resist negative messages about one's self, and to detach or disengage from dysfunctional environments and circumstances (Benard, 1997). Although they disliked the teasing, ridicule, and harassment from their peers about their accents, grooming, and African traits, they did not allow these to degrade their self worth or self images. Doyor and Pente both indicated that they were very proud of their identity and cultural heritage and they both exhibited healthy self-esteem. They both wore African attire proudly and enjoyed ethnic food and attending African gatherings and social events. They selectively disengaged themselves from dysfunctional individuals and situations and gravitated to favorable people and environments.

The final characteristic of resiliency described by Benard (1991) is having a sense of purpose and future. Characteristics of individuals possessing a sense of purpose are achievement motivation, educational aspirations, hopefulness, healthy expectations, and persistence. Pente and Doyor both indicated plans for a brighter future and had taken appropriate steps in that direction. They both had applied to nursing schools and were now finding means to raise funds for college. Doyor had initially obtained certification in plumbing. This later proved not to be as lucrative as he had projected, perhaps due to the poor housing market, less demands for plumbers, or due to the current U.S. economic situation. In any case, he used his problem-solving abilities to seek another promising career in the field of nursing.

Werner and Smith (1992) explained that having some form of healthy relationship with an adult is an essential requirement for struggling youths. Having a positive role model - be it a parent, another adult, or teacher - helps foster resiliency in youths. Both Doyor and Pente mentioned that their favorite teachers inspired them and motivated them. Pente also indicated that she was very grateful for the sacrifices that her parents had made for her. Doyor shared his deep admiration for his foster dad, who had demonstrated his unconditional love for him, often making personal sacrifices for Doyor so that he could foster his success.

In contrast to Pente and Doyor's resiliency qualities, Regina and Mokatee demonstrated resignation. They initially tried to fight the injustices, the social stratification system they encountered at school, and constant external and internal conflicts. Later, it seems that Regina decided that if she could not be successful as an

African, then she would pass herself off as a U.S.-born African American. She gave up her identity. She also became combative, frequently engaging in physical confrontations with other students. Mokatee instead decide to throw in the towel and remove himself from all tensions, pressures, and frustrations. He let these adversities get the better of him, and eventually dropped out of high school

Mokatee's educational experience in America has not been favorable because of the discrepancy of his age and initial academic placement. Academically, he had been educated up to the third grade level. However, he was much older than other third graders when he arrived in the United States. Hence, he was placed five classes above his grade and academic abilities. Even though Mokatee was barely functioning academically at the third grade level, he was placed in the eighth grade. Mokatee lacked the academic skills for his age. He had traveled to various African countries during the Liberian Civil War and missed several years of schooling. The school in the United States recommended ESL placement and later Special Education for Mokatee. Mokatee shared that he felt out of place, frustrated, and discouraged. His academic performance got worse over time. He lost his desire to continue his studies. He could not keep up, nor relate to all that was being taught. He tried to stick with the system and tough it out, but after four years he quit school. He was traumatized by the war, and had missed out on important childhood experiences. Mokatee stated, "So, I move from school. I go look for work."

Regina demonstrated resignation when she ceased resisting her American peers. She succumbed to the peer pressure. She appeared to have several internal conflicts

with self identity, self esteem, and ethnic identity. It appears that she could no longer resist the dominant forces that seemed to constantly bombard her in school and in her neighborhood. Hence, she took on the identity of an African American youth. She dressed like an African American youth, hung around them, and acted like them. She claimed that she was an African American from Alabama.

The tension and conflicts that exist between Africans and African American Americans in some inner cities schools have been documented by other scholars (e.g., Chicoine, 1997; Shepard, 2005; Traore, 2004; Traore & Lukens, 2006). Traore (2004) explained that repercussions of the African slave trade have continued to undermine the self-esteem and identity development of African American students in the U.S. This has resulted in miscommunications and misunderstanding between African immigrant students and African American students. Traore explained that:

> Tragically, it has resulted into the "un-African" values of independence and a disempowering self-abnegation that many African American children embody. The African students will absorb the stereotypes, myths, and misperceptions about Africa that are available to them in school and through the media… They will feel the shame of the accents, the shame of the jungle stereotypes, and the shame of the savage image without having the solace of having a comfortable environment in which to continue to live and practice their African values and cherish their African heritage. (2004, p. 366)

This sense of ethnic and cultural shame described by Traore was experienced by all four of the participants of this study.

Regina also experienced rejection by some American peers that did not welcome her in their space. In addition, Regina experienced rejections by other older and younger Liberian immigrants because of her adoption of particular expressive aspects of American culture. Hence she was torn between the pressures of several external conflicts as well as her own internal wars with issues of self worth, self esteem and self identity that raged inside her as she tried fit into her new culture.

Many Liberian and other African immigrant students in U.S. public schools experience difficulties in assimilating initially. Some adapt, eventually blending in well with other Americans, while others are victimized by the American school culture. Some have been asked to deny their origins, while others have been known to willingly give up their cultural identities and take on another personality, as in the case of Regina in this study. The very group that ridiculed her and rejected her is the same group she gave up her heritage or self identity to emulate. She did that just to become accepted by her oppressors.

Summary

The participants of this study had differing acculturation experiences in their schools, homes and communities. For example, Doyor and Pente related that they enjoy wearing Liberian clothing and interacting with other immigrants at community functions or in their neighborhoods. They are both proud of their heritage, and feel no need to renounce their backgrounds in order to live in the United States. In contrast, Mokatee was unable to bring traditional clothes with him when he settled here, and

Regina stated that she would not even consider wearing such clothes, as they would make her stand out as being different. Regina went so far as to chemically process her hair in an effort to fit in, and tried to pass herself off as a transfer student from Alabama. Doyor related that he had relatives who also denied their African backgrounds:

> My little cousins, for example, say they are from France. I tell them they need to be real. Probably where they go to school people probably talk bad about Africans. They talk all sorts of bad things like, "people don't wear clothes in Africa… there are naked people everywhere, etc." Maybe that's why my little cousins don't want to be identified as Africans. Even some grown people act that way. They don't want to identify with Africa

Although the participants approached life in the United States in varying manners, they each held some experiences in common. Each told me that they had to endure ridicule of their accent. Misappropriate placement at school was another mutually shared experience. Even though English was the participants' first language, they were typically placed in ESL classes. In Mokatee's case, he was placed in an age-appropriate grade level, but he did not come to the United States with the educational background or skills needed to function at U.S. grade level. Mokatee was thoroughly disconnected from school, and eventually dropped out. Doyor was offended when he was held back and placed in courses which taught him nothing. He had to present his case before various school officials and take placement tests before he was transferred into appropriate classes, all of which he did on his own initiative.

Bullying was a constant threat, both at school and in the participants' communities. Despite the fact that many schools in the United States have adopted zero-tolerance policies for bullying, hazing, and harassment, the participants found that too often school personnel would not intervene on their behalf. In Regina's case, she decided to fight back. This resulted in her receiving strict disciplinary measures. Mokatee also refused to be passive in the face of such threats. Physical violence seemed to be an embedded part of his reality.

One participant, Pente, responded to the pressures of life in the U.S. in a different, more positive manner. Concerned that her friends or other immigrant girls in her community faced too many negative influences, she used her creativity and problem solving skills to form and after-school kickball organization for girls.

Pente took the initiative to form what she felt was a much-needed after-school sports club to keep young Liberian girls positively occupied and off the streets in her neighborhood. Pente stated, "My friends and I once formed a club to play kickball after school to take our minds off of other bad stuff and problems." Pente indicated that she was disturbed by the choices some of the girls were making. She was particularly concerned that some girls would willingly drive off with strange men:

> This would make me mad because of the way some of the girls presented themselves. Some of the girls would jump in the cars with them and go with them. They need help. They have no respect for themselves. I am positive that they need help. Sometimes they need to go somewhere else to get their minds off parties or clubs. Or, they don't need to fight their friends for all the types of

things that others have. Other people from other countries try to do something good with their lives.

She noted that her club was an effective way to engage the girls in sports, team-building, and positive social bonding. During these sporting events, she often advised the girls regarding the importance of developing their personal senses of self worth and self appreciation.

Many young immigrants tend to take on other identifiers rather to endure constant ridicule from their peers. This seems to be a common practice among those who lack the self assurance to stand up for what they value. The U.S. media, and school systems, make it difficult for students from Africa to proudly and positively self-identify due to the degrading images that typically portray Africa and the people in its many nations. Although Africa has numerous skyscrapers and millionaires, those images are hidden from the world based on the careful selection of images of starvation and poverty that abound in television and print and dominate the mainstream media.

Even though there were several emergent themes that surfaced during data analysis of the four Liberian immigrant youths' school, home, and community acculturation experiences, conflict seemed to be a common thread or overarching theme. There were external and internal conflicts in the school, home, and community settings. All four of these Liberian immigrant youths dealt with external conflicts such as bullying, teasing, accent ridicule, fighting, rejection by peers, in appropriate educational placement issues. In addition to the external conflicts, they dealt with some type of internal conflicts, such as wanting to please others, issues with self esteem, self

identity, ethnic identity, self acceptance, self sacrificing, self rejection, or having difficulty making critical choices. Even though they held these experiences in common, their methods of handling conflicts differed immensely. The two Liberian immigrant youths (Doyor and Pente) that possessed strong resiliency qualities seemed to have handled external and internal conflicts better than the immigrant youths that lacked resiliency qualities. Those with strong resiliency qualities seem to have more favorable acculturation experiences and were able to successfully graduate from high schools with definite plans to pursue college. Those that lack strong resiliency qualities (Regina and Mokatee) quit school and succumbed to the status quo.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"They put me in ESL1.They sent me a Mexican boy to help me learn English. After a while, I told the teacher, 'I can't be in this class. All we are doing here is ABC [preschool work]. This is retarded!'... I said, 'No!' I went to see my dean. I told the dean I did not want to learn ABCs, 'I already know English... I want to take IPC science and high school English… I am not going back to ESL or however you all call it!'"
(voice of Doyor, a Liberian immigrant youth in this study)

The purpose of this study was to identify school, home, and community acculturation experiences of Liberian immigrant youths in one urban area of the United States. I examined and interpreted how such youths described their life experiences in their new host country, the United States. More specifically, the study aimed to capture the perceptions and the realities of four participants, Liberian youth who are contending with profound changes associated with moving to a new country, such as culture shock, disorientation, linguistic challenges, and the loss of previous relationships. Their lived experiences uniquely qualified them to present their views and perceptions regarding the sociopolitical, linguistic, and cultural differences between Africa and the United States.

Recognizing that my participants had multiple realities, I selected to use qualitative research methodologies in an attempt to understand their unique experiences. I made conscious efforts throughout this study to constantly assess my own subjectivity. Due to the nature of qualitative research, I was the instrument through which the data were filtered and processed. Additionally, considering my active role in the Liberian

community in the city under investigation, I had a lot of in-depth personal knowledge of many of the experiences the participants described during their interviews. Therefore, it was paramount that I made frequent and regular checks of my own subjectivity as a researcher (Peshkin, 1988).

I began this qualitative study with the following three research questions;

1) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe school experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

2) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe home experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

3) How do Liberian immigrant youths describe community experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?

For the purpose of this study, I focused on the acculturation experiences of four Liberian immigrant youths in an effort to capture their particular voices and perceptions. All four of my participants were Liberian immigrants between the ages of 18 and 22 years old that were born in Liberia, formerly attended schools in Liberia before immigrating to the U.S.A., have attended at least three years of high school in the United States, and have lived in the United States for less than ten years. This population was selected because older youths are much more able to reflect on their prior experiences and conduct a comparative analysis of their old and new countries, and are more capable of clearly articulating their experiences in both countries and/or any other transitional countries they may have resided in before immigrating to the United States. My interest was in finding out how these youths adapted in the United

States, their new host country, as they adjusted to school, home, and community settings. In Chapters IV and V, I captured the unique voices of each participant, and used their own words to relate their stories to the reader.

Discussion

The findings of this study were consistent with some of the results of my two previously conducted pilot studies (see appendix). In addition, some of the findings were concurred with findings discovered by other researchers on Liberian and African immigrant students in the U.S. (e.g., Chicoine, 1997; De Gourville, 2002; Ghong, 2007; Good, 1999; Shepard, 2005; Traore, 2004; 2006, and Traore and Lukens, 2006).

Immigrant children and the children of immigrant parents have contributed to a rapid growth in the U.S. child population since the 1980s (Portes & Rumbuat, 2006; Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2010; Stritikus & Varghese, 2010). This influx of immigrants has resulted in increased ethnic and racial diversity among U.S. school-aged children. Some of these immigrant children have successfully acculturated to the U.S. educational system and are doing well. However, there is one group of children that continue to struggle and remain "invisible"- students from Africa, and those from Liberia in particular. Even though Liberians bear many phenotypic resemblances to African Americans, Liberians' cultural and linguistic backgrounds diverge from the aforementioned group. Some of these students are not able to achieve academic success in the United States (Ghong, Saah, Larke, & Webb- Johnson, 2007; Traore & Lukens, 2006). There are an estimated 350,000 Liberians living in the United

States, according to the Liberian Embassy in Washington, DC. (Liberian Embassy in Washington, DC., personal communication, May 7, 2010).

This study on Liberian youths in the United States is important because a knowledge and understanding of Liberian youths' acculturation experiences can be a valuable tool for educators, counselors, parents, mental health professionals, social workers, and criminal justice professionals in working with this population and other immigrant youth with similar predicaments. Liberian immigrants are unique because unlike other African nations, Liberia was established by freed slaves from America. Thus, English is Liberians' national language, and consequently, this population does not need to be placed in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes or bilingual education classes when they immigrate to the United States. Additionally, because Liberia and the United States have historically held a strong, positive relationship with each other, Liberian immigrants should in theory be among the easiest of African nationalities to acculturate to life in America. However, this has not proven to be the case for many Liberian immigrants to the United States.

According to some scholars, Africans and other immigrants within the lower U.S. social-economic status rungs, and those with limited educations, may be unable to fully understand the U.S.' unspoken social practices (De Gourville, 2002; Erickson, 2010; Olsen, 2008). These immigrants are the ones that experience the most acculturation difficulties. Chun, Organista, and Marin (2003) indicated that immigrants who enter the United States at a young age acculturate faster than older immigrants. Although this may be true in many instances, ethnicity, previous academic foundations, and social

economic statuses of immigrants also play very determinant roles on their acculturation successes or failures.

For instance, although Mokatee, one of the youths in this study, arrived in the U.S. as a youth, several other factors inhibited his acculturation success. He lacked strong academic foundations because of missed schooling, and spoke a colloquial form of English. Goyol (2006) and other scholars argue that the new immigrant's proficiency of English or ability to learn English is directly proportional to his or her acculturation rate. However, this did not hold true with Regina. Regina had a strong mastery of English, yet still had difficulty acculturating due to some apparent emotional and psychological issues.

Thirdly, scholars such as Goyol (2006) and Gong, Takeuchi, Agbayani-Stewart and Tacata (2003), indicate that the longer an immigrant resides in the United States, the more acculturated he or she is likely to be. Gong, Takeuchi, Agbayani-Stewart and Tacata state, "The age at which a person immigrates to the United States has the potential to be a powerful force in understanding social and cultural change" (2003, p. 191). These authors argue that young immigrant children typically have numerous opportunities to interact with social groups and institutions in the new host country thereby enabling them to acquire new languages, attitudes, and social practices of the host country. Although, this may hold true for other immigrant groups, Liberian and other African immigrant youths who encounter tremendous discriminations may never experience favorable interactions with other social groups or institutions.

Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, and Todorova (2010) identified two broad realms of culture: instrumental culture and expressive culture. Instrumental culture is identified as the competencies, skills and social behaviors that are required to successfully adopt and contribute to a new society. Expressive culture refers to one's perspective on worldviews, values, and interpersonal relations that generate meaning and self-identity. Doyor and Pente seem to have acquired the American instrumental culture better than Regina and Mokatee. This fact, coupled with their resiliency characteristics, resulted in their successful completions of high school. All four participants demonstrated U.S. expressive culture in their unique ways, as revealed in Chapters IV and V.

Research Question One

The first research question asked, "How do Liberian immigrant youths describe school experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?" The school experiences that emerged during data analyses were; ESL placement, inappropriate academic placements, accent ridicule and accent insensitivity, name calling and bullying, frequent fights, an abundance of poor teachers, attending poor inner city schools, lack of parental involvement, dress style conflicts, and dropping out of high school.

The four participants in this study all experienced a lack of appreciation of their English accents. All four of the participants spoke English. They were all educated in Liberia, an English-speaking African nation. English is the national language of Liberia. Additionally, they were all above primary grades when they entered the U.S.A. Hence,

three of the participants already had a strong command of the English language before arriving in the United States. Even though, three of them spoke English fluently and one spoke broken or colloquial English, they were all placed in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes, totally disregarding the fact that English *was already* their first language.

One Liberian immigrant youth, Doyor, described being tutored English by a Mexican student in his ESL class when the Mexican student could hardly speak English himself. Though Doyor was able to get himself out of ESL, he was unable to get himself enrolled in a required geography class at his high school. He stated that he had to attend community college, at his own expense, to get his full high school credits and thereby graduate on time.

Regina also indicated that she was placed in an ESL class because her teachers couldn't understand her and assumed that she did not know English. Regina stated, "I already knew English! *English is all that I speak*. They told me that I had to stay in ESL because I had an accent."

Placement in English as a Second Language classes seems to be prevalent among schools that have a large percentage of immigrant students. Often these students are non-English speakers; hence ESL placement is then appropriate. However, ESL placement becomes problematic when English is the immigrant child's first and only language. By degrading and rejecting a child's language on the basis that it sounds different from the norm is an indirect way of telling the child that they are not good enough. Secondly, students who are placed in ESL classes are often not re-evaluated to

determine their language skills. Furthermore, school districts often demonstrate low expectations of these students from the first day they enroll to the day they exit those schools.

Accent insensitivity was a big issue among the immigrants. Some stated specific instances when they refused to talk because they were tired of being ridiculed when they spoke. All four participants described painful experiences with taunting of their accents, primarily by African American students. For instance, Pente stated, "When we talked, they made fun of the way we talked or sounded. We were speaking English, but they would say, 'What are you speaking? Is that an African language?" Their peers would ask them questions just to hear them speak, and then they would laugh out in the participants' faces.

Regina shared that throughout her years of attending middle school in the U.S., the students made fun of her accent or of the way she dressed. Her classmates would constantly ask her to repeat what she said, or ask her why she spoke with an accent. Regina gave the following as examples of the types of comments students would make, "They would say, 'Where are you from?' 'Why do you speak that way? Your accent is so deep? Do you speak English? What language are you speaking?' or 'You have that nappy African hair.'" Such remarks would make Regina angry and cause her to feel ashamed of her heritage.

Language issues, accent ridicules, or ESL placement were also common in studies done by other scholars (e.g., Alidou, 2000; Ghong, 2007; Good, 1999; Miamen, 2002; Shepard, 2005). According to Alidou (2000), linguistic and cultural biases are

prevalent in large societies. Linguiscism is experienced through school language policies and other unfavorable reactions to a foreign accent. When schools refuse to acknowledge the varieties of English that exist in America and globally, linguiscism prevails. Three of participants in this study, Doyor, Mokatee, and Regina, spoke English well. However, all four of the participants referred to their accents being a major source of ridicule by their peers. Alidou (2000) contends that immigrant students that come from English- speaking countries are particularly affected by linguiscism when their particular English dialect is devalued. She further stressed that some immigrant students have experienced academic delays in American schools because of institutional intolerance towards these students' particular English dialects.

Inappropriate academic placement was also commonly experienced by the participants. One youth was placed several classes above his mastery level (Mokatee jumped from the third to the eighth grade when he moved to the United States). Mokatee explained:

> When I started school here, I had lots of problems because they put me in eighth grade instead of third grade. I didn't understand what they were teaching me. Most of the time I wasn't making the grades… just struggling along.

Being bullied and called derogatory names by other students because of their African identity was also experienced by each of the participants. Pente described instances when some of the students would follow her down the school hallway and bully her. The Liberian immigrant youths indicated that the other students hit them,

jumped on them to instigate fights, and called them degrading names such as "African Booty Scratchers," or "African Monkey."

Peer abuse by hitting and pushing on immigrant youths often caused the Liberian immigrant youths to become defensive, and to openly retaliate in some cases. This would often result in detentions, suspension, or strict disciplinary actions. The Liberian immigrant youths' manner of showing their displeasure by a defensive method made them visible, but in a negative manner. The participants reported that other immigrant youths refused to complain to teachers because of fear of retaliation from angry American students after school.

Some of the immigrant youths learned to ignore the taunts and harassment. Others engaged in physical fights in an effort to arrest the teasing. Regina and Mokatee frequently engaged in fights as a means of venting their frustrations. Doyor and Pente chose to ignore the bullies and to instead gravitate to friends who affirmed them.

Physical confrontations between Liberian immigrant youths and African American students during school, after school, and in the participants' neighborhoods were either experienced by the participants themselves, their relatives, or other African immigrant friends. This kind of tension between Africans and African American students was described extensively by Traore and Lukens (2006) in their book, *This isn't the America that I thought I'd find: African students in the urban U.S. high school.*

Speaking about the teasing and other bad treatments she experienced, Regina stated, "After a while, it began to bother me. I began to get mad when they talked mean

to me. I couldn't take it any longer." Pente described a fight that occurred between a group of Liberian immigrants and African American girls:

> I remember, in middle school, one big and fat Black American girl picked on us so much so that she got in a fight with my best friend Fatu. It started with the two of them and then some of her Black American friends jumped in. Then some of our Liberian friends jumped in to help my friend Fatu in the fight. It was some of her friends and some of our Liberian friends.

These reports of *frequent fighting, teasing, bullying* and *ridicule* were common amongst the participants or their other Liberian friends. This has also been documented in studies of Liberians and other African immigrants done by other scholars such as De Gourville (2002), Shepard (2005), Chicoine (1997), Traore (2004), and Traore and Lukens (2006). All four participants experienced rejection and bullying, in particular at the hands of African American students.

Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, and Todorova (2010) explain that relationships are "critical" to the immigrant youth. These authors stated ,"Moreover, they [the immigrant youth] learn about their new society, not only from official lessons, lessons, field trips, but also from the "hidden curriculum" related to cultural idioms and code-lessons often learned with and from peers and friends (p.3). Thefore, Liberian immigrant youth need to socialize and develop healthy relations with other students , especially American students in order to learn the "hidden curriculum." In this study, Pente and Mokatee friends were mostly Liberians and other African immigrants, because they were the ones that accepted them. However, Pente's ability to observe the

hidden norms and experiences with nuturing teachers enabled her to still acculturate well, eventhough she did not enjoy the friendships of American peers.

Saurez-Orozco, Saurez-Orozco, and Todorova (2010) state, " It is the their interactions with peers, teachers, and school staff that newly arrived immigrant youth will experiment with new identities and learn to calibrate their ambitions. Some will find nourishment for their dreams, while others will have their hopes crushed" (p 3). It is by favorable interactions and formation of healthy relationships with members in the new host country that immigrant youth will begin to positively transform their lives as they acculturate.

Traore (2004) attributes the tension and misunderstanding that exists between African and African American students to a colonialist representation of history, and not to racism. Like Doyor, Regina, Pente, and Mokatee, the students in Traore's study experienced negative schooling experiences, name calling, lack of interest from some of their peers and teachers, and negative stereotypes perpetually portrayed in the media.

In her study of a group of recently arrived African students from eight different countries in the continent of Africa, including Liberia, Traore (2004) found that schooling in America for many African students has not been favorable. Traore reported frequent fights and tension between the two groups. Traore explained the following paradox regarding the many of the African students she studied and observed at an urban high school in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She explained that:

> They seemed to be visibly content with an otherwise tense situation, almost
>
> placid about the way they were being treated by their American peers. However,

underneath their calm exteriors, there often stirred a potent mixture of hurt,

anger, disappointment, and disillusionment all arising from their current

schooling experiences. (2004, p. 349)

Traore elaborated:

The colonial mentality that degraded Africa and Africans for hundreds of years

thrives in their schools, neighborhoods, and in the media… Their dreams of

getting a quality education are not being realized. The students struggle with a

lack of respect and low expectations and hope to find to find ways to promote a

more positive image of Africa and Africans. (2004, p. 348)

During their studies, Traore (2004) and Traore and Lukens (2006) provided

African and African American students an opportunity to come together in a healthy

environment and learn about the continent of Africa and the diverse histories of its

various nations. The students confronted stereotypes, received a more accurate

knowledge of their shared history, languages and cultures, and the students acquired

undistorted information about each group. This opportunity resulted in a heightened

appreciation between the two groups, thereby creating connections between the African

and African American students.

Traore (2004) therefore recommends that more of these purposeful educational

sessions be provided for groups of African and African American students. It is

imperative that African immigrant students and African American students experience

enlightenment opportunities, increased positive engagements, and that they be given

more accurate accounts of African histories and the history of slavery in the U.S. in

order to foster quality interactions and positive educational experiences between the two groups.

Style of dress was also a major concern amongst the Liberian immigrant youths. They all felt driven to change the type of clothes they wore, and to change how they styled their hair. The two female participants, Regina and Pente, resorted to chemically treating (perming) their hair and/or wearing hair extensions in order to blend in with African American female peers. All four participants stated that it was easier to change their outward appearance in order to blend in whilst at school. This helped reduce the amount of teasing or bullying.

The degree of parental involvement differed amongst the participants. Pente stated that her parents did not attend meetings or school functions, but they provided financially for the family while she was in school. Her parents had a lot of responsibilities with her younger siblings and they also had to work. Pente indicated that she understood that her parents were very busy, and she therefore went to school meetings by herself. Mokatee's grandfather was his guardian and he was illiterate. Hence he did not attend school meetings or functions. However, his grandfather had to go to the school accompanied by other adult immigrants when Mokatee got into fights, or when Mokatee was suspended for taking a knife to school for protection. Nevertheless, his grandfather provided financially for him until Mokatee quit school to seek employment.

Doyor stated that his aunt was not very involved with his schooling, but did provide guardianship for him. Doyor also indicated that his aunt did not go his school

for meetings or functions, but some White church members did when the family initially arrived in the U.S. Regina, however, had a dad who attended school meetings regularly and frequently when Regina began to get in repeated fights and classroom disturbances. Although it appeared that Regina's dad valued home-school collaboration, he seemed unable to provide his daughter with the type of specific acculturation needs that she lacked, in particular how to handle negative peer pressures.

An abundance of poor-quality teachers in the low performing schools that Doyor, Pente, and Mokatee attended were also common. The Liberian immigrant youths described some of their teachers as; uncaring, unwilling to answer questions, just sitting behind their desks, directing the immigrant students to ask other students for help instead of taking the time to assist them themselves, or directing them to read the book to find the answers to their own questions

Two of the Liberian immigrant youths, Pente and Doyor, were fortunate to have a few star teachers (Haberman, 1995) that were instrumental in motivating them and helping them to complete high school. Doyor and Pente are the only two participants of this study to have successfully graduated from high school. Pente described her star teacher as her calculus teacher.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked, "How do Liberian immigrant youths describe home experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?" The home experiences that emerged during data analyses were; guardian/youth relationships, finances, regrets, and resiliency.

All participants seemed wary of discussing their relationships with their parents or guardians in depth. Perhaps this was due to the fact that, as young adults, they are now at an age where they are independently making most of their own decisions, and therefore the participants no longer see their parent's or guardian's roles as being as significant as they were when the youths were minors. The participants were more anxious to talk about their experiences at school or in the community. Regina was the only one that elaborated on her relationship with her dad or on her situation at home.

This was a bit surprising for me. In my two pilot studies, in which I interviewed both parents and students, all participants seemed eager to share their home experiences. One parent even went so far as to express her dilemma with generational gaps. This person stated that there was tension between her child and the child's grandparent due to fact that the child was rapidly acculturating, and the mother felt that the child was taking on too many attributes of American expressive culture. In the present investigation, however, I did not interview parents or guardians to get their views on how their children were acculturating. I am optimistic that had I gone that route, I would have learned more about the Liberian immigrant youths' home acculturation experiences.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked, "How do Liberian immigrant youths describe community experiences that influenced their acculturation processes?" The community experiences that emerged during data analyses were; cultural adjustment, clothing, identity, tension/fights, friendships, careers, and employment.

The Liberian immigrant youths' acculturation experiences were further formulated into one major overarching theme that emerged during this study. This was conflict. There were external conflicts and internal conflicts. The immigrant youths (Doyor and Pente) that possessed resiliency qualities seemed to have handled conflicts better than the two (Regina and Mokatee) that lacked strong resiliency qualities. These latter two individuals appeared to have resigned or succumbed to the numerous external and internal conflicts that they experienced.

Pente's and Doyor's resiliency characteristics helped them successfully acculturate to life in the United States. Pente's and Doyor's resiliency qualities such as creativity, problem solving skills, seeking out wise counsel, the ability to forgive, and the ability to focus and plan for a better future helped them deal with internal and external conflicts.

In contrast, Mokatee and Regina each lacked skills for handling excessive external and internal problems. Mokatee's solution was to quit school and remove himself from the source of these external stressors. Regina caved in to the external stressors, which were primarily caused by African American students. Her resolution was to change her outward appearance in an effort to blend in, or to deny her true identity as an African. Though Regina still deals with numerous internal conflicts, she indicated that she currently feels happier now that she has the external pressures under her control.

Discussion

Studies have revealed that "invisibility" of a group inhibits the immigrant students' academic and social success (Books, 2007 & Igoa, 1995, 2007). Books (2007) used "invisibility" as a paradoxical term to describe the educational experiences of many immigrants and other marginalized children and youth in the United States. Ironically, these children's diversity, strengths, and vulnerabilities are often ignored in U.S. schools. Books (2007) stated, "Schools are saturated with practices of discrimination, privilege, and hierarchy, marketed as modes of promoting excellence" (Books, 2007 p. x). Books further argued that these "invisible children" are socially devalued and underserved, because their needs are not a priority to U.S. schools or society. These children experience derogatory, stereotypical treatments, and also receive relatively little attention from scholars in the field of education, nor writers in the popular press.

In their article on the educational experiences of African immigrant students in the United States, Ghong et al. (2007) asserted that African immigrant students that experience invisibility often fall through educational cracks or are placed in inappropriate educational settings. These scholars emphasized that it is critical that all U.S. educators employ culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2010) to effectively educate this group, as well as all students in today's culturally pluralistic society.

Igoa (1995 & 2007) successfully utilized arts as a means of developing her immigrant students' literacy skills, and as means of self and ethnic expression. As a result of this practice, the immigrant art work became admired by American students

and other educator. These children began to experience positive visibility, increased self esteem, pride in their ethnic identities, and rapid acceleration in their academic progress.

Unfortunately, Regina did not experience this type of favorable experiences that Igoa's students enjoyed. As a result, Regina's true identity was a "shadow" as she tried to take on other identities in order to experience some favorable "visibility." Regina's hunger for visibility can be compared to some students in today's classrooms who choose to "act out" in order to get some sort of attention from the teachers. These students are often ignored in class by teachers and successful students. Hence, they select negative attention instead of no attention at all.

In order to reduce accent ridicule, some immigrant youths have been reported to learn to code-switch their speech and manner of expression when speaking to American peers and educators (De Gourville, 2002). These students chose this strategy due to their negative linguistic experiences with their peers and educators. De Gourville (2002) refers to this practice as an "upward adjustment" of the immigrant's speech. De Gourville (2002 states, "By modifying their speech "upward," the Liberian accommodationist group acknowledged the hegemony of the principle ideological sign (i.e. Standard American English) as well as the strategic importance of wielding it as a language of access. Other Liberian students, however, believe that by doing so, will compromise their cultural identities as Africans"(p. 227). However, Doyor indicated that he enjoyed friendships with mostly White males on his team. He did not indicate whether he code-switched when communicating with these White males, but from my

interaction with Doyor during the interviews, he repeatedly demonstrated code-switching in his conversations with me. I too used code swithching in my conversations when I interviewed Doyor. Most Liberians view the ability to code-switch as an indication of intelligence or academic abilities. However, unlike the other Liberian immigrant students in De Gourville's (2002) study, Doyor explicately stated that he was proud to be identified as an African. Hence, Doyor did not view code-switching as an indication of compromising his African identity.Regina also demonstrated code-switching during our interviews. However, Regina chose to only speak as an American in school and hide her African identitity. Mokatee lacked the ability to code switched because he had not yet mastered Standard English.

Some Liberians and other immigrants have described the experience of shame and embrassment when they were ridiculed for their accents (Alidou, 2000; Chicoine,1997;De Gourville,2002; Ghong et al, 2007; and Shepard, 2005). Others have resulted to stop speaking and chose silence as a means of avoiding ridicule of their accent (Alidou,2000, & De Gourville, 2002). De Gourville (2002) describes this as "culture of silence" a term used by Freire (2000) as a coping mechanism used by the oppressed. In this study, Mokatee indicated that he chose to stop speaking in class to avoid the teasing.

Ghong et al. (2007) explained that an immigrant's child's language is embodied into his culture and self identity. Language is used to affirm, negotiate, assert, and express one's emotion. Therefore, it is emotionally disturbing when an African immigrant child is dismissed or ridicule because of their accent.

These scholars also stated, "Some African children have been termed less intelligent because of their accents. In fact, some students have been placed in special education because of their accents" (Ghong et al., 2007, p. 66). Arthur (2000) and my pilot study also found this to be true in interviews with new African immigrant parents and youths in the United States. Furthermore, in this study, Mokatee indicated that his teachers recommended placement in special education classes.

De Gourviville (2002) and Ghong et al.(2007), also found low teacher expectations, placement of some of the Liberian immigrant students in English as a second language (ESL) centers was inappropriate, and that social inequality and tension existed between the Liberian immigrant students and African American students. These phenomena were also observed in research conducted by Traore (2006), and Traore and Lukens (2006) and Shepard (2005).

Participants' Recommendations

The Liberian immigrant youths in this study were asked to make some helpful recommendations to U.S. educators, parents of new Liberian immigrant students, and new Liberian immigrant students that might facilitate acculturation of new immigrants from Africa. Below are some of the recommendations made by Doyor, Regina, Mokatee, and Pente.

To Immigrant Parents

The Liberian immigrant youths felt that it was important for their parents and other immigrant parents to be accurately informed about the immigrant youths'

adjustment problems, and learn the differences between the old and new cultures. Therefore, they recommended:

1. Teach your child about their background, to accept himself for who he is, and to stand up for what he believes. Do not allow him to give in to peer pressures.

2. Parents should go to the school and talk to the teachers to see how their children are doing. Don't just wait until they are in trouble. Be proactive.

3. Parents should sit and talk with their children at home to find out what's going on at school. Keep the lines of communication open between parents and children.

4. Parents should be more lenient and understanding. The strict rules that they grew up with in Africa may not be fully applicable here. Understand the American culture and adapt to some of the changes in rearing children, especially when the child is being resistant to the strict rules at home. Somehow, parents could re-assess and renegotiate the rules.

5. Even though parents discipline and rear children out of love, African parents must realize that this is a new environment with different cultural values.

6. Parents have to advise their children to avoid being influenced by bad friends.

7. Parents should advise their kids that they have a lot of opportunities here. Make use of them. Opportunity comes but once, so make the best of the opportunities here.

8. Parents should try to help their kids fit in to their new environments, especially in the schools. They need to provide the kids with what they need,

and some of what they want, in order for the children to fit in with their peers and avoid being teased and bullied by peers.

To Immigrant Students

The Liberian immigrant youths felt that it was important for other immigrant students to be accurately informed about the immigrant youths' adjustment problems. They recommend interventions from older, seasoned immigrant youths, and admonish newer immigrant students to adhere to some valuable suggestions the deemed necessary. Therefore, they recommended:

1. Older immigrant students should befriend new immigrant students and help them adjust well.

2. Older immigrant students should mentor and advise newer immigrant students on what to expect and how to cope.

3. Newer immigrant students should ignore the teasing and also inform teachers and counselors about these incidents.

4. Newer immigrant students should realize that older immigrant students from their country will understand their adjustment issues better. They would understand why immigrant parents are stricter, why American students tease them about their accents and dress codes, etc.

5. Immigrant students should be just as respectful, focused, and studious at school as they are trained to behave at home.

6. Immigrant students need to know that they represent themselves, their families, and their countries. Their decisions and actions impact many others.

7. Immigrant students should join a public library, participate in youth programs,

and rent audio and visual books, videos, etc. and learn about US cultures.

8. Immigrant youth should visit appropriate online sites such as You –tube and

other internet sites to keep up with American evolving culture.

9. Immigrant youths should develop friendship with Americans that have good

moral values.

To Teachers, School Counselors, and Other Educators

The Liberian immigrant youths also felt that it was imperative that educators be

accurately informed about the immigrant youths' adjustment problems in other to

effectively meet educational needs of all students. They recommend that educators

reduce cultural ignorance in the classroom and on the school grounds, purposefully

encourage information and dialogues about cultural, and that educators should increase

their own knowledge of all the diverse cultures their student bring to school.

Therefore, the Liberian immigrant youths recommended:

1. Teachers must know that some students from a third world country may have

only stopped their educations in the third or fourth grade even though they may

be fourteen years old when they come here. These students are sometimes

placed in ninth grade because of their age, but this grade may not be their

academic ability level.

2. "Immigrant students may not know the lesson because you were never taught

it. They may be lacking the foundation. Some students have missed school or

skipped grades. These children are not dumb! Even these same teachers will

look like they are dumb if someone asks them something that they have never learned." Hence, teachers need to know the unique needs of each immigrant student.

3. Teachers should be aware of the tendency of other kids to tease new children, especially those who do not speak exactly like the others.

4. Teachers should intervene and stop students from teasing and bullying.

5. Educators should conduct group sessions so that students get to know each other better.

6. Educators should help to reduce ignorance. All students should be educated about other cultures around the world, especially cultures of students in their own school or classrooms. Students should be fully taught about students from various cultures.

7. Educators should help students make better judgments. Students should not base their assumptions on the outward appearance of others. They should be able to see the inner qualities of others, and not just focus on external features.

8. Educators should call parents immediately when they see inappropriate behavior in class.

9. The school counselor should talk to other students about accepting diversity.

10. Counselors should encourage new students to stop by their offices or they should check on the new students periodically to see how they are adjusting.

To Other American Students

The Liberian immigrant youths felt that it was important for other American students to be accurately informed about the immigrant youths' adjustment problems. They encouraged American students to appreciate diversity, learn about other cultures, and stop the bullying. Therefore, they recommended:

1. Don't tease and bully. Get to know new students for who they are.

2. Don't judge students by what you see. Get to know them personally as individuals.

3. Learn more about other cultures. Reduce ignorance of other cultures.

4. Appreciate diversity.

Implications for Educational Practices

In many aspects the acculturation experiences of Liberian immigrant youths are similar to other immigrant youths. All immigrant youths must navigate cultural, social, and language barriers they encounter in a new country. However, White immigrant youths are reported to have experienced more favorable acculturation experiences than Black immigrants, especially those from Africa because of bias media representation of Africa. In comparison to other immigrant groups, the numbers of African immigrant students in the United States is significantly small. Nevertheless, educators need to become adept in educating *all* students, especially those from Africa.

Today's educators encounter students from diverse cultural backgrounds in their classrooms and they must be able to competently serve all students. The more

knowledgeable educators and students are of diverse cultures, the more effective their interactions with each other and with immigrant students. Enhanced knowledge can result in a heightened appreciation of and respect for cultural differences. Below are some recommendations to help foster more positive relationships between educators, immigrant students, and other students;

➢ Educators should increase their knowledge of students' cultural norms.

➢ Educators should attempt to eliminate bias in the classroom and make immigrant students feel welcome in order for maximum learning to occur.

➢ Educators should help the immigrant student feel a part of the class.

➢ Educators should exhibit patience when the immigrant student speaks and make efforts to understand the student without asking if the student is speaking English.

➢ When necessary, educators should inquire from parents about students' cultures in an attempt to better interact with immigrant students.

➢ Educators should be aware that some immigrant students need a phonetic awareness class instead of English as a Second Language class.

➢ Educators need to be more open minded and avoid stereotyping and stigmatizing of immigrant students.

➢ Educators need to be more culturally sensitive, learn norms, language nuances, names, educational backgrounds of and other pertinent information regarding their immigrant students.

➤ Educators should actively seek professional development in multicultural education courses and learn how to provide safe and supportive environments for culturally, linguistically, ethnically, economically diverse students.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Presented below are recommendations for future research avenues which may expand upon the information obtained in the present study and make further contributions to the literature.

1. This study was conducted with two male and two female Liberian immigrant youths between the ages of 18 and 22 years old. It would be beneficial to replicate this study using the voices of each participant's parents or guardians, some of their teachers, and other immigrants that are acquainted with them. This would give a more holistic understanding of the immigrant's acculturation experiences.

2. Using a quantitative approach with a larger group of Liberian youths would also be beneficial in determining how prevalent or pervasive the research findings are.

3. A longitudinal study that examine pre and post interventions of successful acculturation strategies with younger Liberian immigrant students and their families would significantly contribute to the limited literature on Liberian immigrants in the United States.

Conclusion

Many immigrant youths are suffering silently. There is a need for intervention and increased in-services for educators working with immigrant youths in today's United States urban classrooms. The researcher hopes that educators and policy makers will deepen their understanding of the educational phenomena experienced by some immigrant students in American public schools and become empowered to reform educational practices.

Additionally, there is a need for increased community awareness and involvement in the acculturation processes of immigrant youths. Church, community, and other social organizations with which immigrant youths or their families are affiliated need to become more cognizant and involved in helping immigrant families successfully adapt to their new country. With increased community interventions and assistance, immigrant youths can more easily adapt to American culture and achieve academic success.

Immigrant families need to be made aware of the fact that the so-called "American dream" that many of them envisioned before arriving in the U.S. is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve due to the economic challenges the country is currently facing. Take, for example, the case of Doyor, a participant in this study who invested his time and money to train as a plumber, under the belief that this line of work would provide upward mobility in a promising career field. He later realized that plumbing jobs are hard to come by because of stagnation in the U.S. housing market.

With the drastic drop in home values and fewer new homes being constructed, Doyor unfortunately discovered that the demand for plumbers is lower than he had anticipated.

Economic hardships exist for millions of Americans today. This reality makes it even harder for new immigrants to overcome economic barriers and climb the ladder of financial and social success. As a result, many immigrant families from Liberia and other African nations are now returning to Africa, with unfulfilled U.S. dreams.

Given the small number of participants in this study, it was not my intention to make generalizations about all Liberian immigrant youths in the United States. My objective was to examine the data and themes that emerged during this study and provide insight into the voices and acculturation experiences of the particular Liberian immigrant youths participating in this investigation. Although this study's focus was limited to Liberian immigrants living in the U.S., the findings could be applied to other immigrants whose cultures differ significantly from American or European norms, and whose indigenous languages and cultures need affirmation in U.S. classrooms. There is valuable knowledge to be gained from attending to the acculturation experiences of the participants of this study. It is my sincere hope that the information derived from this research will further the conversation and lead to the more effective education of African immigrant students in the United States of America.

Reflections /Postscript

As a researcher, I found it very difficult to remain distant from my participants in this study. I have a background in quantitative research as a former biomedical researcher more accustomed to quantifying incidences and prevalence of or mortality

rates for tropical diseases in Liberia. As a medical researcher, it was standard procedure to use multiple instruments to collect and analyze data, but I was never an instrument myself. Even my methods of selecting population samples for quantitative study were totally different. I could, and was expected to, conduct research without getting emotionally involved with the subjects.

However, this qualitative research experience was totally different. The focus of my investigation was not subjects, but participants. I naturally became interested and emotionally invested in my participants. I empathized with them and felt an array of feelings as I immersed myself in their experiences. I struggled to remain objective during this study. My subjectivity had to be constantly examined throughout the study. Becoming an instrument in order to give voice to and paint a picture of the participants' lives required that I make in-depth connections with them. This was a totally new method of investigation for me that was at times disturbing. At various times during this study, I wanted to take on the role of an activist, a psychological healer, or a philanthropist.

Data analysis was also challenging. I felt that these participants had so much to share that it would be unjust if I did not make clear the full implications of their plights. However, as the researcher, I had to make sense of it all and describe details in such a way that readers would understand the phenomenon under investigation. I could not just neutrally report data as simple facts: I had to make clear my interpretations of the importance of what I was told by the participants. This required that I become ensconced in their stories, and identifying emergent trends. This process took more out

of me than conducting five quantitative studies with hundreds of subjects, but in the end, I was proud of the outcome and final product.

I am also a Liberian immigrant; one familiar with many of the issues raised by my research participants during conversations and observations. However, having resided in the United States for over seventeen years, all three of my daughters were born in America. My children have not faced the discriminatory experiences that the participants shared. However, because of my active involvement in our Liberian community here in the U.S., I seize every opportunity that I am given to build other immigrants' self-esteem and knowledge. Some Liberians that I know are eager to talk to me because they are aware of my educational and counseling background. They are usually seeking answers, needing directions, needing to confide in someone, or just vent their frustrations and get things off their chests.

This happened during one of my interviews during my pilot study. An entire set of interviewee data had to be eliminated, even though I felt that it was my richest and most informative interview. This participant had asked to withdraw from the study after we had discussed some sensitive issues regarding her relationship with her only daughter. This individual also knew that I had a counseling background. She wanted to seek advice and guidance, as well as have someone listen to her problems. Once she had done this, however, she felt too vulnerable to let the information that she had shared go on paper. I was tempted to coerce her to allow me to use her story because it was so compelling, but professionally I knew better. I just couldn't use this portion of data

obtained during my pilot study, regardless of the fact that I knew this individual's story

needed to be heard by a larger audience.

As I contemplated her reasons for retracting her experiences, it became

apparent that some Africans do not perceive that academic research might directly

benefit their current situations. This became even clearer as I recalled the many

instances when other Liberians I approached had turned down my requests to participate

in biographical collection of their civil war experiences. Many Africans view research

as a long-term process that offers little in the way of helping them with their present day

dilemmas.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

1. Think back to your very *first day* of school at your urban school in the southwestern United States. How was it for you on that very first day in your new school? Probe…

- How long ago was that?

- Did your parent accompany you to school on the first day?

- What was your reaction on the first day in a U.S. school?

- What problems or issues concerned you on that first day, if any?

- Tell me about any positive feelings and encouragement you experienced?

- Tell me about the teacher's and other students reception of you.

2. What was it like about *a month after you started* school here at your urban school in the southwestern United States? Probe…

- teachers

- language

- lessons

- discipline

- friends

- age

3. What was it like for your parents to interact with the school? Probe…

- teachers

- principals

- other parents (PTO)

- problems and how were they dealt with

4. How did you adjust during *the rest* of your schooling years at this urban school?

- teachers

- grades

- discipline

- referrals

- dress

- language

- friends

- length of time at this urban school in the southwestern United States

5. What are some other concerns that you or your parents had about your

educational experiences at this school in the United States? Probe…

- accent

- bullying

- post war traumas

- culture shock

- changes in behavior

- choice of friends

- other assimilation and/or acculturation issues

6. We know that there is an over representation of Blacks and other students of color placed in Special Education. Tell me what experiences you had with referrals or placement into Special Education, if any?

7. What are some suggestions and recommendations that you have to help improve the transitions of new Liberian immigrant students into public schools like yours in the United States?

       - for immigrant parents

       - for teachers

       - for school counselors

       - for American students

       - for immigrant students

8. Tell me about other issues that impacted your educational experiences here in the United States? Can you elaborate on any regrets you might have?

9. What do you believe can be done in the classroom to enhance your understanding of what is being taught?

10. What could have been done to make you feel appreciated and a part of the class?

11. Tell me about some of your favorite teachers and why were they your favorites?

12. What other languages do you speak besides English?

13. How did you acquire your proficiency in this language?

14. How did this second language benefit you in school?

15. What are three suggestions you can make to Liberian immigrant parents, students, and teachers to help make the transition of new immigrant students into United States schools easier?

16. Tell me about your relationships with your parents, other relatives, and other Liberians. Probe. . .

17. Tell me about the type of food you like and the type of music you enjoy listening to.

18. Tell me how often you wear Liberian clothes. Do you enjoy wearing these outfits?

19. Tell me about Liberian gatherings you attend. How do you feel at these gatherings?

20. Tell me about your religion. How often do you fellowship with other believers?

21. Tell me about your Liberian, American, and/or other nationalities of friends.

22. Tell me about some difficulties you have had living in America.

23. Do you ever think about going back home to Liberia? Why or why not?

24. What are some fond memories that you have of Liberia and other African countries?

25. What are some experiences you had in Africa that you are glad you don't have to deal with in America?

26. What type of profession do you plan to pursue, and why?

27. What are your plans for college?

APPENDIX B

PHOTO INTERPRETATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCES

Figure 1.
Doyor has climbed several barriers and has dealt with many challenges in his young life. He has survived the Liberian Civil War, survived abuses at numerous military checkpoints in Africa, and survived life in refugee camps in Africa. Even after arrival in the United States, "the promised land," he continued to face various obstacles; ESL classes, incorrect academic placement, finding ways to get on the football team despite his small size, and maintaining passing grades in order to remain on the team. He has learned to ignore bullies and now gravitates toward peers who offer positive influences, mostly other immigrants or White teammates. He has remained resilient during his acculturation process in the United States. **(Photography by: Dalychia Saah)**

Figure 2.
Pente struggles with her desire to travel to another state where she anticipates favorable opportunities for college and a job. She fears the unknown, but has heard that there are better opportunities ahead. This situation reminds her of when she and her family traveled from a refugee camp in Africa to the United States. Even though they did not know anyone in the United States, they were optimistic that whatever lay ahead had to be better than their circumstances at the time. **(Photography by: Dalychia Saah)**

Figure 3.
Pente worries about leaving her younger siblings behind. She also worries that her young immigrant friends whom she has mentored and positively impacted would become easy prey for sex predators that roam her neighborhood.
(Photography by: Dalychia Saah)

Figure 4.
Shadowy Regina.
Regina struggles with self-identity issues in her new country. She has been rejected by African American peers because she is an African immigrant. She has taken on the persona of an African American female and denies all links to her African heritage. She sometimes appears to be sad and confused. **(Photography by: Dalychia Saah)**

Figure 5.
Shadowy Regina
Regina feels rejected and dejected. Her future does not appear promising, although she stated that she feels she is equipped to handle what the future holds. She has already experienced many dark days of rejection: rejection by her father because she is not living up to his expectations, and rejection from relatives because she refuses to behave like a "respectable Liberian girl. She was initially rejected by African American classmates because she looked, dressed, and spoke differently from them. Regina's solution was to give up her own identity as a Liberian and to take on a new fake identity in order to be accepted by her American peers. As a result, she sacrificed family ties and potential relationships with other Liberian immigrants.
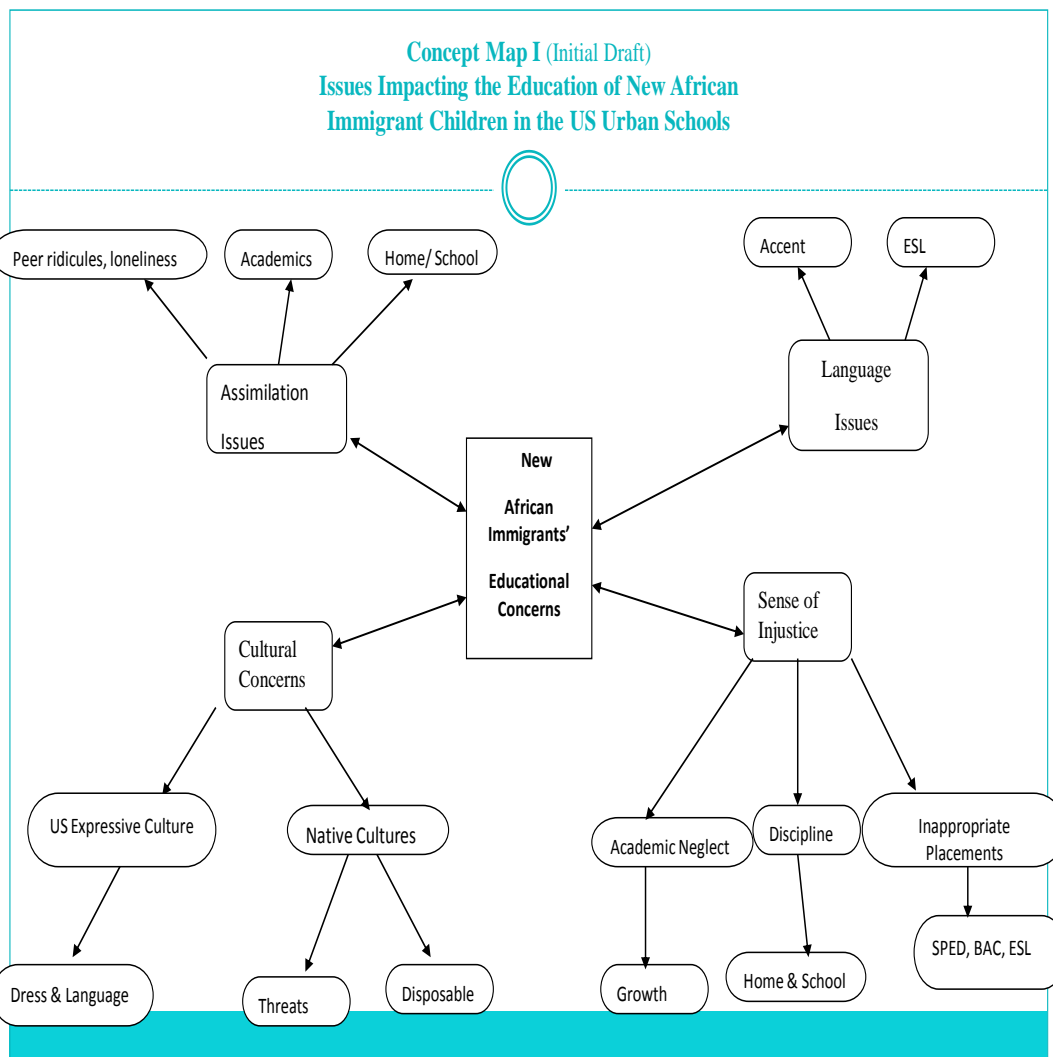**(Photography by: Dalychia Saah)**

Figure 6.
Mokatee tried to change his outward appearance and personality in an effort to blend in with his American peers. After several failed attempts and rejections, he resigned. He dropped out of high school and sought employment. **(Photography by: Dalychia Saah)**

APPENDIX C

CONCEPT MAP OF PILOT STUDY II

Concept Map I (Initial Draft)
Issues Impacting the Education of New African
Immigrant Children in the US Urban Schools

Peer ridicules, loneliness

Academics

Home/ School

Accent

ESL

Assimilation Issues

Language Issues

New African Immigrants' Educational Concerns

Cultural Concerns

Sense of Injustice

US Expressive Culture

Native Cultures

Academic Neglect

Discipline

Inappropriate Placements

Dress & Language

Threats

Disposable

Growth

Home & School

SPED, BAC, ESL

Pilot Study II: Issues Impacting the Education of New African Immigrant
Children in U.S. Urban Schools
Concept Map I (Initial Draft)

APPENDIX D

CONDENSED CONCEPT MAP II OF PILOT STUDY II
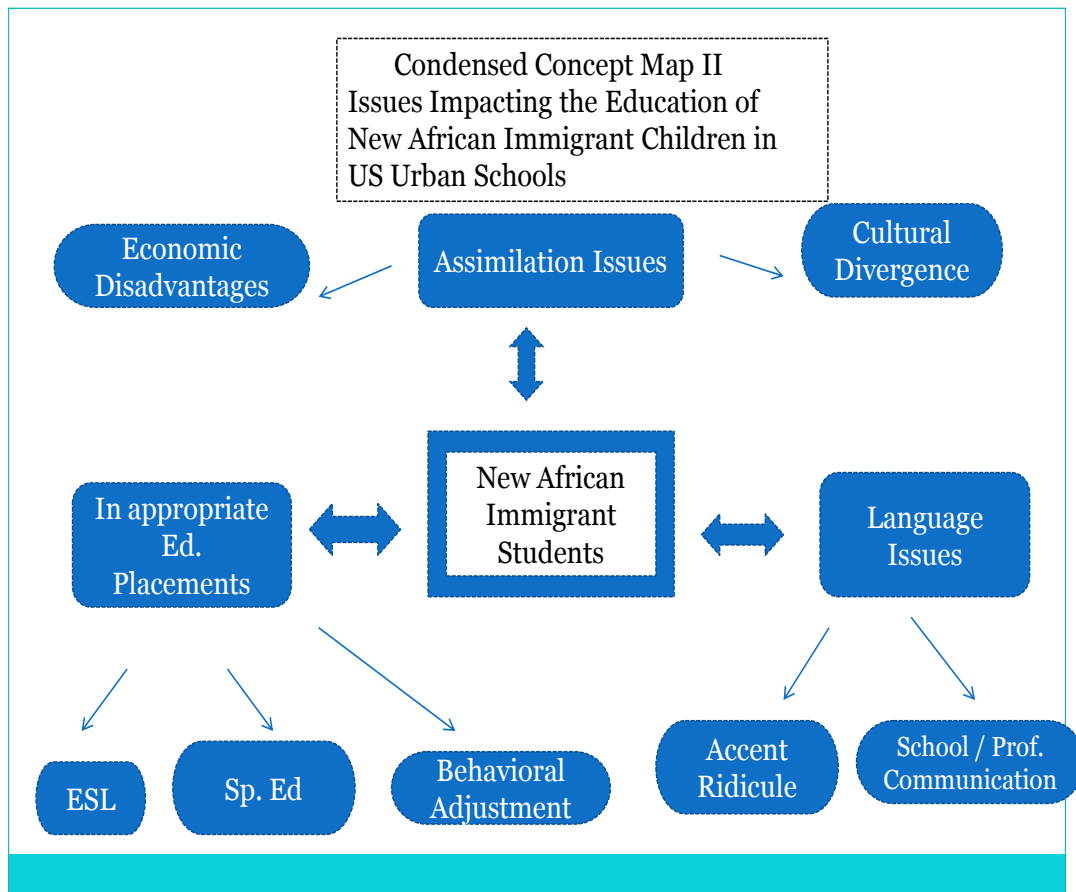
Pilot Study II.

Condensed Concept Map II: Issues Impacting the Education of New African

Immigrant Children in U.S. Urban Schools

Pilot Study II

Language, assimilation issues, and inappropriate educational placements were common concerns among the participants. The participants felt that if educators were more aware, more sensitive, and more appreciative of their diversity, new African immigrant students would be more successful in schools in United States.

Name calling and teasing by peers were also common concerns of both African immigrant parents and students. Peer abuse in the form of hitting and pushing on immigrant children often caused the participants to become defensive and, in some cases, to openly retaliate. This would often result in them receiving detentions or strict discipline actions. The African immigrant's manner of showing their displeasure by a defensive method made them visible, but in a negative manner. Other immigrants refused to complain to teachers because of fear of retaliation from angry American students after school.

All four of the new African immigrants interviewed in this study referred to language issues. They all mentioned that they or their children were ridiculed when they spoke. Furthermore, three of the interviewees spoke of the schools recommending ESL placement for their students. In each of these cases the parents consented to the assignment.

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Introduction

The purpose of this form is to provide you with information that may affect your decision regarding whether or not to participate in a research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying the acculturation experiences of Liberian immigrant youths who attended public schools in the United States. The information provided will eventually become data for a dissertation. The purpose of this study is to identify school, home, and community acculturation experiences of Liberian immigrant youths in the United States. You were selected to be a possible participant because you were born in Liberia, formerly attended school in Liberia before immigrating to United States, attended at least three years of high school in United States, and attended high school within the last two years.

What will I be asked to do?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an interview that may last up to forty-five minutes. You may be asked to participate in a second interview, provide school records, or be asked to read your interview transcription at a later time. With your consent, your interviews may be audio recorded.

What are the risks involved in this study?

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life. There are no physical risks associated with participation in the study.

What are the possible benefits of this study?

You will receive no monetary compensation for participating in this study. However, information gathered may help improve the future educational experiences of other Liberian immigrant students in public schools.

Do I have to participate?

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate, and you may chose to withdraw from the study at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University, or with the researcher, being affected.

Who will know about my participation in this research study?

This study is confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published.

Research records will be stored securely and only the primary investigator will have access to the records.

If you choose to participate in this study, you may be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely and only the primary investigator will have access to the recordings. Any recordings will be kept for three years, at which point they will be erased.

Whom do I contact with questions about the research?
If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Lychene Wolo Saah at lychene@yahoo.com, or call me on my cell phone at 832.891.4043.

Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?
This research study has been reviewed by the Human Subjects Protection Program and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University. For research-related problems, or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact these offices at (979) 458-4067 or via email at irb@tamu.edu.

Signature
Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the informed consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study.

_____   I agree to be audio recorded.
_____   I do not want to be audio recorded.

Signature of Participant: _____   **Date:**

Printed Name: _____   **Date:**

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____   **Date:**

Printed Name: Lychene N. Wolo Saah   **Date:**

VITA

Lychene N. Wolo Saah
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Education:
Ph.D.   Curriculum & Instruction, Texas A&M University, 2011(*honors)*
M.A.   Guidance & Counseling, Prairie View A&M University, 2001 (*honors 4.0 GPA)*
M.S.   Medical Parasitology, University of London, United Kingdom, 1989 (*honors*)
B.S**.**   Biology, University of Liberia, West Africa, 1986

Publications:

Ghong, M., Saah, L., Larke, P., & Webb-Johnson, G. (2007). Teach my child, too: Immigrant parents and multicultural educators sharing culturally responsive teaching tips. *Journal of Praxis in Multicultural Education 2*(1), 60-68.

Ibrahim, E., Standish, H., Larke, P., Sullivan, E., Coston, W., Meloncon, B., Ruthinger, G., Saah, L**.,** & Lea, J. (2010). The voices of seven doctoral students: Journeys toward becoming multicultural teacher educators. *National Forum of Multicultural Issues Journal (7),* 1, 1-19.

Selected Conference Presentations:

Larke, P., Saah, L, Reuthinger, G., Ibrahim, E., Sullivan, E., Standish, H., Coston, W., & Meloncon, B. (2003, November). *Increasing the number of multicultural education teacher educators: A response from seven doctoral students*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Multicultural Education, Seattle, WA.
Larke, P., Carter, N., Alidou, H., Saah, L., Meloncon, B., Willis, J., Vasquez, C., Jones, C. Reider, R., Hawkins, T., Albert, G., & Grigsby, B. (2003, January). *The Aldine cohort: Responding to the shortage of professors of color in teacher education.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, New Orleans, LA.

Professional Affiliations:
National Association of Multicultural Education; Texas National Association of Multicultural Education; Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society in Education; Sisters of the Academy; College of West Africa Alumni Association;
Chi Sigma Iota Counseling, Academic, and Professional Honor Society International;