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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN
STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES

ANSUMANA DARBOE

157 Pages

This is a study of African students in community colleges. A qualitative study was conducted during the summer and fall semesters of 2020 to collect data from a sample of African students in two community colleges in the mid-west region of the United States. The study provided an in-depth look at the study participants, their journey to the colleges, expectations, hopes, and needs they brought with them to two-year institutions. This study also explores students' feelings about their experiences in the campuses and how those experiences impact their academic advancements as well as their socio-cultural adjustment.

Theoretically, Bohman's international student community college decision-making model as well as Hofstede's cultural dimension theory are the guiding frameworks for this research. Qualitative data collected from eight study participants was analyzed and discussed using thematic analysis technique. Specifically, three main themes emerged that revealed the peculiarity of the journey and experiences of the students in the community colleges, offering insights for institutions engaged in recruiting and hosting African students.

KEYWORDS: Internationalization, International students, African students, Community colleges, United States

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN
STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES

ANSUMANA DARBOE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration and Foundations

ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

2021

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STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN THE UNITED STATES

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A. D.

CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
TABLES	vii
FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
Background of the Study	1
Problem Statement	3
Purpose Statement	4
Research Questions	4
Definitions of Key Terms	5
Conceptual Framework	5
Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model	5
Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory	6
Delimitations and Limitations	7
Significance of the Study	8
Summary	9
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Demographics of International Students	11
Social and Cultural Experiences of International Students	14
Academic Matters of International Students	18
Economic Perspective of International Students	20
Immigration Matters of International Students	23

International Students at Community Colleges	26
Problems in International Student Education	27
Classroom Exclusion of International Students	28
Lack of Recognition of Unique Student Needs	34
A Needed Study	36
Theoretical Framework	38
Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model	38
World Culture Theory	38
Push-pull Theory	39
Cognitive Decision Theory	39
Hofstede’s Cultural Dimension Theory	44
Power Distance	45
Individualism versus Collectivism	45
Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)	46
Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)	46
Long- versus Short-Term Orientation	46
Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR)	47
Summary	48
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES	49
Research Design	49
Participants, Sampling, and Setting	50
Ethical Considerations	51
Instrumentation	52

Data Collection Procedure	53
Reflexivity and Positionality	54
Validity and Reliability	56
Data Analysis Technique	57
Summary	59
CHAPTER IV: Results	60
Participants	61
Study Site	62
Participant Profiles	63
Participant 1	63
Participant 2	64
Participant 3	64
Participant 4	65
Participant 5	65
Participant 6	65
Participant 7	66
Participant 8	66
Data Collection	66
Data Analysis	67
RQ 1. What Motivates African Students to Study in Community Colleges?	68
Limited Access to Colleges	69
Low Quality Training/Education	71
Congested Classrooms	73

Limited Educational Resources	74
Low Employment Prospects	76
Hopes	78
High Value of U.S Education	79
Program Availability	81
Diverse Student Body	83
Supportive School Officials	84
Complicated Admission Processes	86
RQ 2. What are the Experiences of African Students in Community Colleges?	90
Academic Alienation	91
Changed Classrooms	92
Inappropriate Classroom Conduct	94
Complex Interactions with Domestic Students	96
Different Writing Standards	98
Unusual Relationships with Professors	99
Transfer Experiences	101
Academic Advising	103
Socio-cultural Adjustment	104
Welcoming Campuses	106
Supportive African Student Community	108
Involvement on Campus	110
Acceptance of All	112
Ignored by Domestic Students	114

No Financial Aid	116
Affordability of Tuition Fees	117
No Jobs	118
RQ 3. In What Ways can Community Colleges Support the Unique Needs of African Students?	122
Academic Assistance	122
More Help from Instructors	124
Training on Using Classroom Technology	124
Provision of Reliable Transportation Service	127
Provision of Campus Housing	128
Assistance during Initial Transition	129
Conclusion	131
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	132
Findings	133
Limitations	143
Future Research	144
REFERENCES	145
APPENDIX A: DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES INITIAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	155
APPENDIX B: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	157

TABLES

Table	Page
1. Summary of Research Participants' Profiles	61

FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Graphical Representation of Research Participants	63

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

According to the Institute for International Education (IIE), over one million international students are studying in colleges and universities in the United States. The Institute's 2017 Open Doors report highlights that a vast majority of the international student population comes from China, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia. However, an increasing number of African students are also choosing to study in the United States. As of 2017, nearly 40,000 African international students were studying in the United States (Open Doors, 2017). This number includes 3,562 from Central Africa, 9,093 from East Africa, 6,429 from Southern Africa, and 20,395 from West Africa (Open Doors, 2017). Historically, African students have long been part of American higher education. One of the earliest works that document the presence of African students in colleges and universities in the United States is a 1961 publication entitled *Survey of the African student, his achievements, and his problem*. In this survey, Davis, Hanson, and Burnor (1961) reported more than 50 African students studying at Lincoln University in Missouri in the 1890s. Since then, more students from Africa continue to arrive in the United States to pursue higher education in various colleges and universities.

Traditionally, most international students, including those from Africa, choose to attend four-year institutions. However, recent data shows more African students choosing to attend community colleges. This is not surprising, in that, there has been an overall increase in the number of international students enrolling in community colleges. As of 2018, the number of international students at US community colleges reached 94,562, up from 86,778 in 2012 (Open Doors, 2017). Interestingly, minimal studies explore the experiences of this student population in two-year colleges. Amidst the dearth in literature and growing African student enrollment, this

study investigates the experiences and motivations of African students to study in the United States, by specifically examining their choice of community colleges over other institution types. In other words, the study will explore the experiences as well as the factors that draw African students to community colleges in the United States.

Community colleges are institutions of higher education, where the highest degree awarded is the associate degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). These colleges are generally known to offer the first two years of a four-year university degree, at an affordable cost, leading to the award of an associate degree. A more specific function of community colleges is to strengthen the local workforce of the communities they serve. As Cohen and Brawer (2003) observe, “the social reason that contributes to the rise of the community college is the need for trained workers to operate the nation's expanding industries” (p. 1). It is for these reasons that some scholars hold the view that international education is not the domain of community colleges (Treat & Hagedorn, 2013). However, growing international enrollment in two-year colleges inspired some scholars to describe community colleges as the new “alternative” for international education, owed to the rising cost of tuition at four-year colleges (Bevis & Lucas, 2010). It is estimated that the percentage of international students at community colleges now stands at 8.6 percent of the total international enrollments in the United States (Open Doors, 2017). Thus, a study to understand why a particular international student group, in this case, African international students, opts for community colleges and their experiences in those institutions becomes essential for educators as well as educational institutions that are involved in recruiting students from overseas.

Problem Statement

African students are an integral part of higher education as the student population from the continent continues to have an increasing presence in academic institutions in the United States. The Institute for International Education (IIE) publishes data on international students in the United States. In its 2018 report, the Institute shows an increase in the population of students from Sub-Saharan Africa alone, from 1.8 percent of all higher education enrollment in 2012 to 4.6 percent in 2018 (Open Doors, 2018). This significant increase in enrollment percentage demonstrates that a good number of African students are choosing to study in the United States, yet only a handful of studies explore overall experience of these students in higher education institutions (Inyama et al., 2016; Ezeofor & Lent, 2014; Caldwell & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016; Msengi & Msengi, 2010). Interestingly, most of these available studies specifically focused on four-year institutions with less attention to two-year institutions. This is understandable since more than 86% of all international students in the United States are enrolled in four-year institutions (Open Doors, 2017). While research on international students, particularly, African students at four-year institutions is relevant in providing valuable information about their experiences in some of the country's largest institutions, comparatively, little research exists on the international student population in two-year institutions or community colleges (e.g., Bohman, 2010; Bohman, 2014; Jennings, 2017; Anayah & Kuk, 2015).

However, these highlighted studies broadly address all groups of international students with less emphasis on the national or regional backgrounds of the students. In essence, there is a dearth in the literature regarding African international students in community colleges, particularly, studies that explore the factors that motivate the students to attend the two-year institutions and their experiences on the campuses. Consequently, the lack of enough literature

on African students has led to a limited understanding of the unique needs of this student population, including their journey to community colleges in the United States and ways the schools can support them. This is problematic because educators do not have enough knowledge of the unique circumstances of the African student population, which directly affects the level of academic and social support available for this student group.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to highlight the unique experiences of African international students and explore their motivation to study in community colleges in the United States. Being an African international student comes with academic and socio-cultural challenges. As such, this study will highlight pertinent information about this group and such facts will be useful for educational institutions and practitioners in addressing the unique needs and supporting African students in community colleges. Additionally, this study will add to the growing body of literature on international students, particularly, the African student population in community colleges, given their sustained increase and the need to support the students to succeed in their educational journey in the two-year institutions in the US.

Research Questions

The study is guided by three key research questions that will help examine the factors that motivate African international students to choose to attend community colleges over other institutional types, e.g., four-year institutions.

1. What factors motivate African students to enroll in community colleges?
2. What are the experiences of African students in community colleges?
3. In what ways can two-year institutions support and address the unique needs of African students?

Definitions of Key Terms

International student: “A student enrolled at an institution of higher education, who is not a US citizen, an immigrant (permanent resident) or a refugee” (Bista & Foster, 2015, p. xxxiii)

Community College: An institution of higher education, where the highest degree awarded is the associated degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2003).

Internationalization: “Policies and programs undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individual departments to deal with globalization” (Altbach, 2010, p. 23).

Globalization: “The broad economic, technological, and scientific trends that directly affect higher education and are largely inevitable to the contemporary world” (Altbach, 2010, p. 23).

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by two conceptual frameworks: the Bohman international student community college decision model and the Hofstede’s cultural dimension theory.

Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model

This conceptual framework, developed by Bohman (2010), combines three theoretical lenses as a framework: cognitive decision-making theory, world culture theory, and push-pull theory (Bohman, 2014). Specifically, the Bohman community college decision model categorizes four distinctive steps with questions that international students consider as they decide to enroll in a college.

Step one (1) of Bolman’s framework represents the preliminary stage of the decision-making process during which students decide whether to study abroad. At step two (2), students consider a country to study in. These first two steps of the model define students’ perception of their home and overseas countries, which relates to the push-pull factors that make them decide

to study overseas (Bohman, 2014). At step three (3) of the decision model, students choose an institution type before narrowing the selection down to a specific school in the final step.

According to Bolman (2014), the school selection process in the final part of the framework focuses on a variety of factors including cost, school location, transfer possibilities as well as institutional support available to students.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is used in identifying the differences in cultural characteristics between different countries (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2016). The theory relies on six specific “indicators” which show a country’s dominant perception of each of the six dimensions, notably; “power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence” (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2016, p.19). Researchers have used this theory mainly to investigate cultural differences in various settings, including education. In one of those studies, researchers examine how cultural dimensions influence the “self-ownership” of international students (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2016, p. 29). In other words, the framework allows researchers to investigate how cultural dimensions of the country of origin of a person influence their experience of the learning community.

Utilizing a combination of these two conceptual frameworks for this study will be helpful in unique ways. Primarily, the Bohman international student community college decision model as a framework will not only help in understanding the factors that motivate African international students to study in the United States, but it will also help reveal the main reasons why the students choose to attend community colleges as opposed to other institutional types, e.g., four-year institutions. Also, the Hofstede's cultural theory will be useful in exploring how cultural dimensions influence the experience of African students in community colleges. In other words,

the theory is useful in examining how students from a different culture experience their new learning environment. Essentially, these two theories complement each other as one would help in exploring the journey of African students while the other will help in examining their experiences.

Delimitations and Limitations

The delimitation of this study is that the research focuses only on African students in community colleges in the United States. Therefore, the study does not focus on African students in other types of educational institutions, such as four-year colleges and universities. Similarly, while the literature review focuses on international students in general, the study left out students from other parts of the world attending the two-year institutions.

One of the main limitations of this research pertains to the sample size. The sample size may be limited because the sampling method purposely targets African international students enrolled in community colleges. Another limitation grew from the timing of this research because of the trending political rhetoric about immigration. As Bista (2018) notes, current government policies and the continually changing visa regulations create a hostile environment for some international students. Therefore, even though respondents are expected to express their honest opinion during interviews, there are chances that some respondents may not be entirely truthful due to their visa status and potential self-implication.

Moreover, as this study is specific to international students from Africa in community colleges, the findings of this study may not be generalized for all international students. Equally, this study cannot be generalized to African students in other academic institutions in the United States.

Significance of the Study

International student education is one of the critical industries of importance to higher education as well as the economy of the United States. Hegarty (2014) observes that the students are not only a significant component of campus diversity but serve as a source of revenue for the continued survival of many academic programs in colleges and universities as they contribute more than US\$21 billion to higher education institutions (Hegarty, 2014). The crucial importance of having international students on campuses were the reason for strong reactions from higher education leaders when recent reports emerged, showing a decline in international student admissions. One notable reaction came from Dr. Angel Cabrera, president of George Mason University. In his widely published article, *Make America welcoming to international students again*, President Cabrera states, “It is urgent that our public discourse reflects our tradition of collaboration and global engagement. We must reassure the world that our universities remain open to the rest of the world and eager to engage with the best minds, wherever they may come from” (Cabrera, 2018. para.5).

Essentially, United States higher education embraced international students not only as a source of revenue but also an opportunity for academic institutions to shape future global leaders. Thus, a study to highlight and underline the experience of African international students and how they are not just an addition to the student body, but rather a vibrant part of school campuses, becomes essential. As Hegarty (2014) puts it, “international students are gradually contributing to the reshaping of both academic disciplines and entire universities” (p. 244). In anticipation of the increase in the growth of the African international student population, research on the topic, particularly, on their college choice and experiences is an important step towards developing a context through which institutions can market their campuses and their

academic programs to prospective international students in Africa. Importantly, the research will provide an insight into the expectations of African students, allowing institutions and education professionals to develop improved ways of addressing the unique needs of the student group.

Summary

This chapter is an introduction to the study of African international in community colleges. Specifically, the growth in the number of international students, including those from Africa and their contribution to diversity as well as the financial strength of institutions, is highlighted. In addition, the Bohman international student community college decision model, as well as Hofstede's cultural theory, has been highlighted as the conceptual frameworks for this study. The chapter also highlights the key research questions and definitions of key terms frequently used in the study. The problem statement, purpose statement, delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study are also included in this first chapter. The subsequent sections of this study are organized as follows.

Chapter 2 is the literature review section. The review covers the literature on not only African students but the international student population in the US with an added focus on scholarly works on the student population in community colleges. Chapter 3 is the methodology section that highlights the research design of this study. Specifically, qualitative research as the design for this study is discussed. The research setting in two Midwestern community colleges, as well as participant selection methods, is also discussed in the chapter. Also included in Chapter 3 is a discussion of the data collection method, ethical considerations, reciprocity, and my assumptions in this study. Most important, my positionality as an African student conducting this study is highlighted in Chapter 3. The chapter concludes with discussions on validity and reliability, as well as the data analysis

technique utilized in the study. Chapter 4 includes the findings of the study, and finally, the summary of findings, conclusion, and recommendations are discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the broad literature on the international student population in the United States (US) as well as a discussion of the literature on the student population in community colleges in the US. Additionally, this chapter provides a review of the problems in international student education which are highlighted in the literature.

Scholarly works on international students in the US can be clustered into five broad conversations: the demographics of the students, social and cultural experiences, academic matters, economic dimension, and immigration matters. These clusters form the central part of the discussion in this chapter.

Demographics of International Students

The discussions on the demographics of international students, also known as foreign students, focus on the definitions of an international student, their major countries of origin, their preferred institution types, and their reasons for choosing to study in the US. To begin with, the question of who an international student is has been debated as different scholars offer different definitions. For example, Banks and Bhandari (2012) offered the definition used by UNESCO, which considers an international student as “a student who is studying in a foreign country of which they are not a permanent resident” (p.13). This definition characterizes the students based purely on nationality status. Other scholars, for instance, Bista and Foster (2016) cite the official definition by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), noting that “an international student is anyone who is enrolled at an institution of higher education, who is not a U.S. citizen, an immigrant (permanent resident) or a refugee” (p. xxxiii). This definition, which is primarily used in the United States, provides a more detailed portrayal of the students by

identifying them not only by nationality but also by educational institution levels (Bista & Foster, 2016).

Although these two definitions suggest flexibility in defining an international student, it is correct to summarize that international students move from their home countries to pursue education in another country (Banks & Bhandari, 2012; Bista & Foster, 2016). While it is evident that international students in the United States come from almost all parts of the world, Bevis and Lucas (2007) highlight that the United States was not historically the preferred study abroad destination because of the earlier popularity and perceived prestige of European universities. However, the authors note giant strides by the United States, especially, the rise of organizations, including the Institute for International Education (IIE) as well as programs such as the Fulbright Educational Exchange Program which led to the expansion of international student education in the country (Bevis & Lucas, 2007, p.102). The international student population in the United States exceeds “1 million”, increasing from only “25,000” in the 1950s (Glass et al., 2015, p.1). Students from Asia dominate the international student population, with Chinese and Indians comprising the largest number of international students in the United States (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). International students are found in various institution types across the United States, including four-year universities and two-year community colleges (Glass, Wongtrirat & Buus, 2015). Although international students traditionally choose to attend four-year universities, the new enrollment trend shows a good number of the student population choosing to attend community colleges (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Total international enrollment at community colleges is estimated at 94,562 (Open Doors, 2018). Irrespective of the institution type attended, international students are attracted to courses in science and technology (Bevis & Lucas, 2007).

Various factors draw international students to the United States. Goodman and Gutierrez (2011) use the phrase “drivers of mobility,” referring to a set of factors that attract international students to the United States (p. 93). The availability of various institution types, as well as the size of US higher education, facilitates the enrollment of large numbers of international students (Goodman & Gutierrez, 2011). Similarly, “incentives” in the forms of sponsorships through programs such as the Fulbright as well as employment prospects after graduation attract international students to the United States (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Goodman & Gutierrez, 2011). Essentially, the discussion of the demographics of international students focuses on the different definitions of international students as well as the significant presence of the student group in the United States. With a variety of college types to choose from, the students are mostly in four-year institutions, but there is a new wave of international students choosing community colleges.

Theoretically, globalization and internationalization are underlining concepts that explain the movements of students from different parts of the world to the United States. Altbach (2010) defines globalization as “the realities shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new informational and communication technology.” (p.7). In education, Altbach (2010) describes the “international knowledge network,” showing that globalization facilitates the exchange of knowledge between people in different parts of the world (p. 7). Internationalization and globalization are sometimes used interchangeably. However, Altbach (2010) makes a distinction between the two, explaining that internationalization refers to “policies and programs,” which are created by organizations as they readjust to new ways of dealing with the rest of the world (p. 7). Some of the specific ways educational institutions respond to globalization are by opening their campus to international students and making efforts to bring international perspectives in teaching content (Altbach, 2010). The discussions of the increasing enrollment of international

students in the United States, as explained through the lenses of globalization and internationalization, provide an understanding of how the two concepts facilitate mass international student enrollment. Specifically, the present global environment with advances in technology is bridging distances, making it possible for a student to move at ease from far away destinations to be in the United States (Altbach, 2010). Similarly, internationalization has motivated institutions to craft strategies and embark on initiatives geared toward recruiting more international students in order to keep up with changes occurring in the field of education.

Social and Cultural Experiences of International Students

The social and cultural experiences of international students are also discussed in the literature. These experiences include culture shock, hostilities against the students, social integration programs, and reverse culture shock of international students.

In general, international students are thrilled about the opportunity to study in the United States. Nevertheless, the students face culture shock as they adjust to life and the different ways of doing things (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Gebhard, 2013). Cultural shock for international students occurs as a result of “adaptation difficulties” in their new environment (Gebhard, 2013, p. 55). The students undergo cultural adjustment as they struggle with weather conditions, social life, and practical ways of doing things in the United States (Gebhard, 2013). For example, food is a major cultural adjustment issue for international students because their familiar and preferred food options are not available on campuses (Alaakam, 2016). Some international students may require certain food types because of “religion,” and the unavailability of those food items affects their dietary practice (Alakaam, 2016, p.103). Similarly, the students face culture shock in their interaction with their peers on campus due to differences in culture (Gebhard, 2013). Some

international students can quickly “adapt,” while others who are unsuccessful in adapting to the new social settings are mostly “homesick,” and “depressed” (Gebhard, 2013, p.63).

In addition, international students face hostile environments, including discrimination and harassment in the United States (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Bista & Dagley, 2016; Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). Unfair treatment against international students includes the subtle ways in which the students are denied campus jobs, as well as the refusals of some property owners to rent apartments to the students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Equally, international students feel sidelined because some domestic students are reluctant to work with them in the same groups for classwork and to socialize with them outside of class (Gebhard, 2013). International students also face harassment because of their race and religion. In particular, the women among Muslim international students are profiled because of the way they dress (Glass et al., 2015).

International students also face physical acts of discrimination and harassment as their cars have been sprayed “Go back home” by neighbors (Glass et al., 2015, p. 96). Interestingly, the discrimination and harassment of international students is a double standard, in that, students from the “West,” meaning other western countries, face less discrimination compared to other international students (Glass et al., 2015, p. 95). Meanwhile, some discriminatory acts toward international students have made it to courts for litigation. For example, Bista and Dagley (2016) indicate that the court cases of international students mostly pertain to academic and visa issues but have underlining harassment and discrimination claims. Yet, the authors observe that courts “do not hold” most of the cases brought by international students as a result of the limited evidence to support the claims of discrimination (p. 298). In other words, most cases of harassment and discrimination against international students have been dismissed by the courts (Bista & Dagley, 2016).

Meanwhile, social support in the form of integration programs and the lack of that for international students are discussed in the literature with some authors highlighting specific examples of programs offered in colleges and universities (Deardorff, 2009; Glass et al., 2015). Some of these programs are confined on campuses, while other programs extend to the local communities. Examples of common integration programs in schools include language and cultural clubs, international friendship programs, and pairing international students with a local family in the local community (Deardorff, 2009). However, there is a lack of integration programs for international students, with some schools providing programs that have not been effective in supporting the integration of international students (Glass et al., 2015). Strategies are suggested through which schools can develop social support programs for international students by involving key stakeholders, including the community and international students themselves, in creating stronger socialization programs (Glass et al., 2015). The involvement of international students in creating integration programs is a way of embracing the students, and it also shows that schools value the input of international students (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018).

Interestingly, international students who successfully integrate in the United States, experience “reentry shock” after they return to their countries (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Gebhard, 2013, p.115). Reverse culture shock is another phase of the cultural adaptation process emanating from the changed perceptions that the students have of their own cultures as well as the way their communities view them and their new ways of socialization (Gebhard, 2013). Bevis and Lucas (2007) cite a study on the experiences of a group of returnee Indian students which finds that most of the students faced reverse culture shock and were "depressed" because of the "crowd conditions" and, in some cases, the lack of social amenities they had in the United States (p.189). Similarly, some returnees experience alienation in their communities because of

the perception that their assimilation in the United States has caused a weakening of their identities (Gebhard, 2013). The author explains how a student who returned to her native Russia was considered an “outsider” because she spoke Russian with a blend of English (p.153). Notwithstanding, resources are available to help international students deal with readjustment issues when they return home. For instance, Rhodes, Cox, and Ebner (2009) explain the Project for Learning in the United States (PLUS), an online resource site housed at the Center for Global Education at Loyola Marymount University, offering transition support to international students and supporting them with strategies to overcome “reentry issues” when they return to their countries (Rhodes, Cox & Ebner 2009, p. 127).

Theoretically, the social and cultural experiences of international students have been explained from acculturation perspectives. Acculturation is the changes that occur as a result of the “interaction between two or more cultures” (Jindal-Snape & Reinties, 2016, p.4). This means that new social ways are created when one culture meets another. Acculturation is used in explaining that international students, coming with different cultures, will experience new ways of doing things in the United States, leading to their adjustment (Jindal-Snape & Reinties, 2016). In a nutshell, scholarly works on the social and cultural experiences of international students highlight how the students are faced with culture shock and hostile environments within and outside of school campuses as schools help them with social support programs to integrate. Yet, international students continue to face reverse culture shock when they return to their countries. Fortunately, support exists to help the students with reentry issues they face in their countries. The next section discusses the academic matters of international students.

Academic Matters of International Students

The literature on the academic matters of international students highlights the classroom educational experiences of the students, focusing on language proficiency, academic transition, as well as English as Second Language (ESL) programs.

Beginning with the school application stage, international students are forewarned that English is the language of instruction in colleges and universities in the United States, and the students are expected to exhibit proficiency in English (Lipson, 2014; Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). For instance, Lipson (2014) stressed the importance of competency in English by highlighting that new students coming to American universities should be prepared that all classroom activities, including communication, are conducted in English. Equally, the international admission process requires students to demonstrate language proficiency by submitting evidence of obtaining a passing grade in English language tests (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). While the importance of language proficiency is emphasized in some tests, there are observations about the way language proficiency test is used in determining the admission of international students to colleges and universities. For instance, Hoekje and Stevens (2018) argue that most proficiency tests are conducted by profit-making institutions, and there are concerns about not only the way the test is conducted, but also how a single test score carries a lot of weight in making admission decisions (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). Interestingly, some groups of international students are exempted from taking the English language proficiency tests. Those exempted include students from other English-speaking countries, as well as those from countries with “British colonial education systems” (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018, p.35).

In transitioning to classrooms, international students believe that they are adequately prepared for classrooms and education in the United States because of passing all requirements

to be admitted. However, upon arrival, the students struggle to meet classroom expectations as the learning methods in most of their countries differ from classroom practices in the United States (Dorset, 2017). Unfortunately, some educators view international students from a “deficit” perspective because the students speak limited English and hardly participate in class discussions (Hoekje & Stevens, p. 170). Typically, international students expect a traditional lecture style in highly formal classroom settings. Yet, they become exposed to the “relatively informality” of American classrooms (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018. p. 157). Although faculty often has a limited role in student recruitment, Hoekje and Stevens (2018) argue that teaching staff is in a better position to support the academic transition of international students in balancing these expectations with academic realities in college classrooms in the United States. Essentially, there are new classroom traditions that international students navigate and often with limited support as they transition to higher education institution (Dorset, 2017).

Among the international student population in the United States are those with limited English, and another large group of the students who exhibit some fluency in spoken English language but lack the level of fluency needed for academic work (Andrade, Evans & Hartshorn, 2016). Based on these diverse language backgrounds, programs exist to support English language development for international students (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). One popular program that supports the language development of international students is the English as a Second Language (ESL), also known as Intensive English Language (ISL) programs (Andrade, Evans & Hartshorn, 2016). Language programs support international students to develop specific skills, including “listening, speaking, reading and writing” (Andrade, Evans & Hartshorn, 2016, p. 190). Apart from the English language development programs, academic support for

international students exists in other campus departments, including libraries, writing centers, academic advisors, as well as from instructors (Gebhard, 2013).

In summary, the literature on the academic matters of international students in the United States discusses how the students bring different language backgrounds and different classroom experiences to colleges and universities. Because of the different language orientations, programs and services exist to support the language development of international students, albeit the limitations of some existing programs. The next section discusses the economic dimension of international students in the United States.

Economic Perspective of International Students

The literature on the economic matters of international students focuses on the economic conditions in sending countries, financial motivations for recruiting international students as well as financial assistance, and the employment of international students.

Economic conditions are one of the most significant components for international students deciding to study in the United States (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). Goodman & Gutierrez (2011) highlight two angles linking economic factors and international students' decision to study abroad. From one angle, a developing middle class in countries such as China allows more families to afford education for their children in the United States. In a contrasting view, a rising population in countries that lack enough higher education institutions pushes the students to look towards the United States for access to education (Goodman & Gutierrez, 2011). Additionally, international students from developing countries are attracted to the United States because of the perception of a strong economy, which symbolizes prospects of employment after graduation (Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011). To sum up the two economic arguments, a booming economy, on the one hand, allows parents to send their children overseas to study. On the other

hand, poor economic conditions force students to look for education overseas where there are prospects of employment for graduates.

Moreover, international student education is a huge business, and authors have highlighted the financial motives that drive institutions to recruit large groups of international students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Bhandari & Blumenthal, 2011; Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). For instance, Bhandari and Blumenthal (2011) highlight that international students bring more than US\$17.7 to the economy, making higher education the “fifth-biggest service in the U.S. export sector (p.1). The contribution of international students to the economy has since increased tremendously, and by the 2014-2015 academic year, their contribution to the economy rose to more than US\$30 billion (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018; Jameson & Loper, 2017). The amount of money involved in international student education is motivating schools to recruit students from overseas by creating recruitment strategies to attract more international students (Jameson & Loper, 2017).

More recently, the lack of state and federal funding for universities is causing schools to aggressively recruit international students (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). The authors argue that “budget cuts” in higher education is pushing universities to admit international students in order to capture “sticker price” payments of this student group (p. 4). In other words, domestic financial constraints are pushing schools to look for solutions that include international student recruitment. Similarly, international students are sought after because of predictions in the decline of American high school graduation numbers, which could potentially affect domestic student enrollment in colleges and universities (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). The authors cite a *2016 Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education* report, which projects a decline in the graduation rate of white high school students by “14 percent across the U.S. through 2030” (p.

4). This finding presents another financial angle for which reason schools are going after international students so that they can fill the empty spaces that could be left vacant by the low admission of domestic students.

Also, because international students are expected to be full-paying students, they do not qualify for federal programs, including financial aid. Nonetheless, the students qualify for other forms of financial assistance within and outside campuses (Goodman & Gutterrez, 2011; Lipson, 2014). The reason for the lack of financial aid for international students is that the program is paid by taxes from the people of the United States, and as such, it should benefit the payees instead of international students (Lipson, 2014). Funding opportunities for international students are available through employment as graduate assistants in the case of graduate students as well as external scholarships across all levels of education. The Fulbright Program, for example, supports several international students and scholars (Goodman & Gutterrez, 2011). Other scholarship programs for international students include the Gilman International Scholarship, The Boren Scholarship, and The Language Flagship Program (Goodman & Guttierrez, 2011, p.98).

On employment, the hiring of international students must follow strict visa regulations (Lipson, 2014). While some companies want to employ international students with certain skills, they are faced with legal constraints and concern in some quarters that international students take jobs away from residents (McFadden & Seerdorff, 2016). Although international students do not qualify for federal work-study programs, they can work part-time on campus and are eligible for full-time employment during semester breaks (Lipson, 2014; McFadden & Seerdorff, 2016). Further, international students who complete their education in the United States are eligible to participate in an employment program called Optional Practical Training, otherwise known as

the OPT program (Goodman & Gutierrez, 2011; McFadden & Seerdorff, 2016). The OPT program gives international students a one-year visa extension allowing them to work in a field related to the degree they earned in a United States college or university (Goodman & Gutierrez, 2011). Recently, there are policy changes in the OPT program, giving more visa extensions to students who graduate with degrees in science and technology fields (McFadden & Seerdorff, 2016). However, there are arguments that the employment rules which extend post-graduation visa for students allow more foreign nationals with high skills to remain in the United States, thus sustaining “brain drain” and depriving the home countries of the students of valuable talents of their citizens (Bevis & Lucas, 2007).

In short, the literature on the economic dimension of international students looks at how economic conditions motivate the movement of students from one country to another. These discussions portray the existence of push and pull factors, which explain that the lack of opportunities in a country can push students out, and the incentives provided by another country pull them in (Goodman & Gutierrez, 2011). The factors discussed, for example, employment and scholarships, are some of the influences that draw international students to the United States. The next section is the discussion of the literature on immigration matters of international students.

Immigration Matters of International Students

Two key points dominate the discussion on immigration matters of international students. Specifically, this section analyzes what the literature offers on student visas and the monitoring of international students in the United States.

First, in order to be in the United States, prospective international students need an approved visa. Lipson (2014) describes the intricate process of getting a student visa which starts

with a student receiving an admission offer from an accredited school in the United States and then making an appointment for a visa interview at a U.S. embassy or consulate abroad. Two major types of visas are issued to international students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). The “F-1” visa is issued to full-time students, while a “J-1” visa is issued to short exchange students and is usually valid for not more than a semester (Bevis and Lucas, 2007; McFadden & Seerdorff, 2016, p.39). Recently, there have been controversies surrounding the tightened regulations on the issuance of United States visas. Hoekje and Stevens (2018) highlight how some “xenophobic rhetoric” at the level of the political leadership and as well as policies to ban citizens of certain countries from entering the United States may affect the number of international students coming to the country (p. 6). Although the authors observe that it was too early to determine how this ban will affect international enrolment figures, data from the Institute for International Education shows a decline in the number of students from some of the countries affected by the ban, including Iran (Open Doors, 2018).

During their period of studies in the United States, international students are strictly monitored at the schools they are attending. The Student Exchange and Visitor Program (SEVP) is a database that serves as a tool to monitor international students for the government of the United States (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; McFadden & Seedorff, 2016). Public concerns stemming from the rise of terrorism and potential student involvement has led to strict monitoring of international students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). In its current form, the SEVP program requires schools to update the electronic system with students admitted and registered for classes and to spontaneously update the system when any changes occur in the enrolment status of any international student (McFadden & Seedorff, 2016). In essence, the system tracks international

students from visa issuance to enrolment and establishing their whereabouts after graduation (Bevis & Lucas, 2007).

However, schools have expressed how the system is not user-friendly with instances of frequent malfunctioning (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Other concerns are that the task of monitoring the students, which is placed on international education offices, is a burden and has made the officers pay limited attention to supporting international students (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). Yet, the federal government has made it mandatory for schools enrolling international students to participate in the SEVP program or risk losing accreditation to admit international students (McFadden & Seedorff, 2016). In summary, what authors discuss on the immigration matters of international students is that every student admitted to a school in the United States must be found eligible to be issued a visa at a U.S. embassy abroad. With different visa categories available, F-1 and J-1 are the common visa categories issued to international students. Also, at every phase of the academic journey of international students, they are monitored by the government through the SEVP program. This section concludes the overview of the broad literature of international students in the United States. Succinctly, the review highlights five dimensions, including the demographics of the students, academic matters, social and cultural experiences, economic dimensions, as well as the immigration matters of the students. The associated theories, including globalization, internationalization, and acculturation, are used in the literature to explain the movement of international students to the United States as well as their experiences. The next section is a review of the literature on international students specifically at community colleges.

International Students at Community Colleges

Community colleges, sometimes called junior colleges or technical colleges, are the gateway to higher education for many, including international students. According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), community colleges are institutions of higher education where the highest degree awarded is the associate degree. In general, they are known to provide the first two years of a four-year university degree program at affordable cost, leading to an associate degree (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). This means that students can earn associate degrees from community colleges or they can alternatively transfer course credits to count towards a degree at a four-year college or university. In addition to awarding the associate degree, most community colleges have a deep local focus as the colleges have been linked to strengthening the local workforce. As Cohen and Brawer (2003) note, “the social reason that contribute to the rise of the community colleges is the need for trained workers to operate the nations expanding industries” (p. 1). Typically, public community colleges are funded through property taxes (Thelin, 2013). This makes most community colleges open-access institutions for individuals from different backgrounds, including international students.

Records show an unprecedented increase of international students studying in the United States in community colleges. According to the Institute for International Education (IIE), international students’ population in associate (community) colleges stands at 96,472 students (IIE, 2017). These students came from far and wide, and across continents but among the top countries of origin of international students are China (32.5%), India (17.3%), South Korea (5.4%), and Saudi Arabia (4.9%). Many community colleges actively seek international students, but scholars have divergent views regarding the role of community colleges in international student education. One view held that international education is not a domain of community college. Treat and

Hagedorn (2013) highlighted that the traditional role of community colleges is to serve the educational needs of the local community in student transfers, career, and technical education as well as offering developmental courses to local students. The authors noted that these colleges were “renamed ‘community’ in lieu of ‘junior’ to specifically highlight the college's role in serving the needs of the local community” (p. 5).

Other scholars supported international student education at community colleges based on the demand for increasing campus diversity, prestige and, most importantly, to increase the revenue of the colleges. With unpredictable funding from government, community colleges have been going after international students. According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), international students contribute US\$37 billion to the U.S economy (MPI, 2017). Anayah and Kuk (2015) pointed out that community colleges alone get about US\$2 billion from international students every year. In essence, the involvement of community colleges in international student education has been a culmination of several factors, making it necessary for the institutions to tap into this growing education sector.

In summary, from the broad review of the key themes in topic of international students discuss in this previous section, this section highlights the literature on the student population in community colleges, focusing on describing what two year institutions are, and their involvement in international student education. The next section is a discussion of the problems in international student education.

Problems in International Student Education

Review of the literature on the topic of international students in the United States reveals three main problems. The first problem is that international students are excluded in classrooms due to the lack of multinational perspectives in course contents. Second, limited opportunities

exist to support the social and cultural integration of international students, and third, there is a lack of recognition of the unique needs of different nationalities within the international student population. This section discusses these three identified problems, leading to the need to study the experiences of African students in community colleges.

Classroom Exclusion of International Students

In the book chapter, *International Students Classroom Exclusion in U.S. Higher Education*, Valdez (2016) shows evidence that practices occur in classrooms that promote the “exclusion” of international students (p.35). Through a review of several published studies on international students, the author investigates the perception of the students about “classroom inclusiveness” in colleges and universities in the United States (p. 52). Overall, the findings of the study show that several practices, including the lack of attention to international viewpoints, contribute to the seclusion of international students in classrooms (Valdez, 2016). Similarly, an *Inside Higher Ed* survey involving 600 international students in 23 higher education institutions asked the students about the changes they would like to see from their professors. The majority of the respondents indicate that they want their instructors to understand their learning perspective and to provide “non-U.S. examples in course contents” (Redden, 2017, para. 2). Arguably, these studies demonstrate that international students feel less sense of belonging in college classrooms. The classroom exclusion of international students is sustained by the lack of international content in classrooms, as well as the limited attention that is given to the prior learning backgrounds of the students (Lee, 2019; Valdez, 2016).

When teaching contents, including concepts and examples used in classrooms, are unfamiliar to international students, it prevents the students from learning and understanding the materials the same way as domestic students (Valdez, 2016). Further, the lack of familiar

learning content in classrooms affects the classroom participation of international students, causing the wide concern that international students do not engage in class (Valdez, 2016). For instance, Valdez (2016) referenced a classroom observation study that explores why a Chinese student kept to herself and rarely participated in any classroom activities. The study finds that the classroom environments which are characterized by unfamiliar topics have led to her isolation, and she feels that a “deficient identity” was attributed to her as a result of her non-participation in classroom activities (p. 38).

The availability of international perspectives to classrooms is beneficial for both American and international students as scholars have shown that diverse contents benefit the two groups in classrooms (Lou, 2016). Yet, most curricula content fail to demonstrate that important elements of cross-cultural learning as some curricula are designed in ways that do not capture diverse perspectives, denying the learning community of valuable perspectives from international students (Glass et al., 2015). In other words, the lack of international perspectives puts international students at a disadvantage, in that, it limits their understanding as well as their contributions to the learning community (Valdez, 2016). However, both international students and local students benefit when international perspectives are presented in the class, as it increases the participation of international students and allows domestic students to understand topics from a different perspective (Glass et al. 2015; Lou, 2016). Essentially, inequities are sustained through the lack of international content as it affects how quickly a student can learn and understand the learning content.

Another practice that sustains inequities in the classroom is the indifference towards the learning practices that take place in other parts of the world. Valdez (2016) refers to this as "other educational norms," showing that there are educational traditions in other countries which

are slightly different from the educational norm in the United States (p. 35). This means that teaching and learning in other countries occur in ways that are uniquely different from how education takes place in classrooms in the United States. Lee (2019) highlights that the predominant learning style in US classrooms is critical learning which is achieved through group works, discussions, and debate of ideas. Yet, the author highlights that the “norms for speaking in classrooms” favors domestic students more than international students (Lee, 2019, p.11). In other words, the ways of learning that rely too much on verbal arguments put international students, most of whom had limited English at a disadvantage (Lee, 2019).

In contrast to the teaching norms in the United States, the traditional lecture model in which lecturers do most of the talking while students listen still occurs in other countries (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018; Glass et al., 2015). In this form of lecture, participation is not an important element as students are only expected to pay attention to what is being said by lecturers and take notes to study. This form of lectures is illustrated by Glass et al. (2015) in the personal narrative of an international student describing his past learning tradition as follows: “When you have a lecture, you just sit in your chair, and you copy everything on the board, and then you have to memorize it”. The student went further to compare the differences between that learning tradition and what occurs in U.S. classrooms, stating that “but now, in the U.S., it is not enough. I need to read, and sometimes, I say that is my opinion” (p. 20). This means that although international students’ past learning traditions differ from the practice in the U.S., the students appreciate the exposure to new ways of learning that challenge them to think critically (Glass et al., 2015). Therefore, understanding these differences in learning and teaching styles allow educators to support international students to become part of classrooms. However, inequities in the classroom are sustained when the differences in learning traditions are not recognized. In

summary, scholars highlight how the lack of teaching practices that rarely includes international perspectives as well as the less regard to the different learning backgrounds is problematic in classrooms for international students.

Another problem of international students is the social alienation of the students on campuses. A study published by *the Journal of International & Intercultural Communication* reports that almost 40% of international students have no friends among domestic students (Garies, 2012). In the study entitled *Intercultural Friendship: Effects of Home and Host Region*, researchers utilized interview data from more than 450 international students in several colleges and universities across three regions in the United States, through an online survey, which specifically asked the students about the “number of close American friends” as well as the “satisfaction” and the “quality” of those friendships they make (Garies, 2012, p. 316). Put simply, the researcher wanted to know whether international students had friends among American-born students and whether they were content with the friendships. A key highlight of this study is that although international students express the desire to build friendships with domestic students, most of them have not found many friends as they would like (Garies, 2012). The study finds that “38.11 percent” had no friends, “16.96 percent” had only one friend, “17.84 percent” had two friends, and “27.09 percent” has three or more friends (p. 318).

The *Inside Higher Ed.* published an article referencing this study with the headline “*Friendless in America,*” to draw the attention of colleges and universities to the problem of lack of social interaction between domestic and international students (Jaschik, 2012). These publications show that international students in colleges and universities in the U.S. are socially alienated. Interestingly, schools have recruitment plans that allow them to bring thousands of international students, yet, limited opportunities are created to facilitate the socialization that is

needed to support the social integration of the students (Gebhard, 2013; Glass et al., 2015). In fact, the social alienation of international students has long been identified by educationists, which led to the founding of the first International Houses to welcome international students and scholars (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). In other words, the social alienation of international students is sustained by the lack of adequate social integration programs and the limited interaction between domestic and international students.

Integration programs, including International Houses, still exist in several institutions, yet, schools are not making optimal use of the facilities because of the lack of thoughtful plans to support the integration of international students (Bevis & Lucas, 2007; Glass et al., 2015). Thus, the lack of solid practices to support the integration of international students has undesirable consequences, including depression among the student population (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). Also, in most schools, rather than a holistic approach, social integration for international students is organized in isolation, making the activities look solely international in an environment where domestic students are not enthusiastic about interacting with international students (Gebhard, 2013). In other words, integration activities that do not involve local students will only leave international students to interact with each other, which bear very minimal effect on their social adjustment in the United States (Glass et al., 2015). Authors highlight that the lack of integration poses an adjustment challenge for international students, but also, schools lose a significant opportunity to make a memorable impression on their future international alumni (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018). Similarly, interactions between domestic and international students on college campuses are very limited (Bethal, Szabo, & Ward, 2016; Jaschik, 2012). Bethal, Szabo, and Ward (2016) stressed the limited interaction between domestic and international students using

the phrase “parallel lives” to demonstrate that the lack of significant engagement and friendships between the two student groups (p. 22).

Quite often, the lack of interaction between domestic and international students is blamed on international students’ limited knowledge of “social language,” referring to the ways of informal communications in the form of idioms and slangs (Hoekje & Stevens, 2018, p.115). Although international students may be able to speak and write in English for academic purposes, they lack social language skills that are needed to have casual conversations and make friends (Glass et al., 2015). Unfortunately, there are no programs for “social communications,” which could help international students to build skills in informal language to relate well with domestic students (Glass et al., 2015, p.53). In other words, international students lack knowledge of the context of certain words or phrases used in daily communication and programs are not available in schools that would help them understand those metaphors in communication (Glass et al., 2015).

In short, research shows that international students face social alienation in colleges and universities as they do not succeed in building friendships with domestic students. With the lack of coordinated planning and support for international students, domestic students are not included in integration initiatives. Still, international students’ limited knowledge of social communication arguably has made it difficult for them to socialize with Americans. Yet, there are no programs to help the students build such social communication skills. The next section is the discussion of the limited recognition of the unique student needs of the different groups in the international student population.

Lack of Recognition of Unique Student Needs

The international student population in the United States is a diverse group representing different countries and cultures from around the world. Glass, Wongitriat, and Buus (2015) used the term “heterogeneous” to describe the differences in social orientation and the diversity of educational experiences among international students (p.19). These differences are also an indication that the issues encountered by the student group vary, making their individual experiences to be unique based on regional and sometimes, country backgrounds. As an example, Glass et al. (2015) pointed out that students from White-dominated countries where English is spoken have different experiences in classrooms and are more welcomed by local communities compared to other international students. Garies (2012) also notes that it is easier for students from European cultures to make friends compared to other groups of international students. As such, international students from different countries and regions have experiences that are exclusive to them. However, in practice, there is limited recognition of these unique differences and needs as the international student population is almost treated as one group. In particular, Africans among the international student population have unique experiences of higher education in the United States. Currently, more than 40,000 African students are studying in colleges and universities in the United States (Open Doors, 2018). Nigeria, one of the African countries, has made it to the list of top 20 countries that sends international students to the United States (Open Doors, 2018). Africa has one of the highest "outbound" student mobility rates, and the United States hosts “20 percent” of all African students studying outside the continent (Kishun, 2011, p. 147). In other words, there are large numbers of African students studying in colleges and universities outside the continent, and the United States is a preferred destination

for many African students (Kishum, 2011). However, the experiences of African students, including the adjustment challenges they face in the United States remain unexplored.

African students are in more unusual situations than other international students in the United States because of the complex history of slavery and injustices against black people in America (Bevis & Lucas, 2007). In other words, the history of oppression of black people affects African international students more than any other international student group. Glass, Wongtriat and Buus (2015) write that African students in the United States are the “unwitting victims” of racial injustice and discrimination (p. 96). Unfortunately, the experiences of African students remain largely undocumented as very limited studies explore how African students are faring in higher education institutions in the United States.

The problem is that the lack of enough literature on African students has led to a limited understanding of the unique needs of this student population, including their journey and experiences in colleges and universities in the United States. Luckily, a handful of recent studies explore the experience of African students in colleges and universities (Inyama et al. 2016; Ezeofor & Lent, 2014; Caldwell & Hyams-Ssekasi, 2016; Msengi & Msengi, 2010). However, most of these studies specifically focused on four-year institutions. I argue that the lack of enough knowledge on the unique circumstances of the African student population directly affects the level of academic and social support available for this student group as educators would not be able to create services that cater to their needs. Further, it is problematic to have a student group coming to schools in large numbers, and yet we know very little about them. As Hoekje and Stevens (2018) observe, the international student in the United States come with unique experiences, and institutions should distinguish the “complex” journey of the various groups in order to support them well (p. 33).

In summary, the literature shows that the problems in the educational practices of international students are related to their academic exclusion as the students encounter unfamiliar ways of learning as well as the absence of international content in courses. Similarly, the students are isolated because of limited interactions between domestic and international students. Largely, the problem of limited interaction between the two student groups is attributed to the absence of effective integration programs that would include the participation of both domestic and international students alike. Finally, because of the dearth in literature on the subject, very little is known about some student groups, particularly the Africans among the international student population. This affects the way institutions can provide services that are helpful for the students.

A Needed Study

The review of the literature on the broad topic of international students in colleges and universities in the United States reveals key aspects of the student demographics, their academic matters as well as the social and cultural experiences of the students. In addition, the economic dimensions of international students, as well as immigration matters, particularly visa issues, provide a wide area of discussions that help in identifying the problems of practice in international student education. With specific reference to international students in community colleges, the review suggests that international students' choice of community colleges over four-year institutions is mainly because the two-year colleges are more affordable. Additionally, community colleges provide transfer opportunities for students who could not have a direct route to their programs of choice at a four-year institution. Similarly, the need for a small learning environment where students enjoy more academic support from teachers and support staff draws

international students to community colleges, but importantly, the strong recruitment strategies at the community colleges have helped the institutions to attract more international students.

Given that the available literature is too broad, covering many perspectives at different settings, there is a need for a concise study that would examine international students at specific institution types. Also, since the literature focuses on both four-year colleges and two-year institutions, a narrower study focusing on only one institution type, for example, community colleges, will offer a detailed account of international student experiences in those institutions. While such research will provide valuable information of all international students in the two-year institutions, a more manageable study is needed to focus on specific groups of international students.

Thus, my study will examine the unique experiences of African international students by exploring their motivation to study in community colleges in the United States. Like other international students, African students in the United States are drawn to academic institutions for different reasons and they have unique academic and socio-cultural experiences of learning in college campuses. Personally, I was enrolled in a community college for financial reasons. When I needed to fulfill a pre-requisite, I was advised that it would be cheaper to take the class in a community college and transfer it. I wonder what reasons draw other African students to community colleges. While at the community college, I received great help in choosing the class that I needed. The advisors were also helpful and went extra mile by making calls to my school to confirm that my class would count. Overall, I had a good experience in the community college, and I wonder what the experiences of other African students are. These are the questions that plague me and inspired me to conduct this study. The next section discusses the theoretical framework for my research.

Theoretical Framework

The literature on international students is very broad and scholars have used several theoretical and conceptual frameworks in studies of the international students at both community colleges and four-year institutions. This research uses a combination of two specific frameworks as guiding theoretical frameworks to study African students in community colleges: (1) The Bohman international student community college decision model and (2) The Hofstede's cultural dimension theory.

Bohman International Student Community College Decision Model

In his seminal work, *Headed for the heartland: Decision making process of community college bound international students*, Bohman (2010) conceptualizes the Bohman international student community college decision model, which combines various theoretical frameworks as lenses to understand international students choice of community colleges in the United States. Specifically, the Bohman model combines cognitive decision-making theory, world culture theory, and push-pull theory as frameworks to study international students (Bohman, 2014).

World Culture Theory

World culture theory is derived from globalization theories. Bohman (2009) cites Roland Robertson's 1992 book, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*, in which the author discusses the process of globalization and the role of individuals and cultures in that dynamic process of changing globe. Robertson (1992), as cited by Bohman (2009), defines globalization as "a concept which refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (p. 53). In other words, globalization refers to the process of interaction of people across nations as well a large-scale convergence of business and ideas worldwide. Although globalization, in relation to the global market economy, is viewed in some

quarters as some form of domination and post-colonial tool domination, proponents of world culture theory are interested in the dynamics of relationships between people of different nations in an ever-increasing compacting global space (Albach, 2012).

Push-pull Theory

Push-pull theory is predominantly used in economics and migration studies, but the theory has become popular in education studies. While this theory may be defined and described in a myriad of forms depending on the context, a precise description of push-pull theory in education studies is offered by the Graduate Management Admission Council, the association of graduate schools around the world. Bohman (2009) cites the council's description of push-pull as "an uncontrolled, open process of natural flows of people where difficulties, such as poverty and unemployment in the home country may push people to other countries that have favorable conditions such as a high standard of living or job opportunities that pull them there" (p. 38). This means that unfavorable living conditions in a country are a potential force which makes individuals choose to migrate to another country where there are perceived chances of a better living. Simply put, push-pull factors determine the factors considered in the migration of people from one country to another.

Cognitive Decision Theory

As implied, the cognitive decision-making theory emphasizes the influence of human cognition in decision-making processes. Unlike other decision-making theories that depend on statistical models, the cognitive decision-making theory relies solely on the human mind in making a decision. Bohman (2010) outlines the sources an individual mind relies on to decide, stating that "the individual decision maker employs three sources in reaching a decision:

information, preferences, and knowledge” (p. 60). Essentially, these three sources allow an individual to undertake that mental process of making choices that address their current affairs.

Essentially, Bohman (2010) utilizes these three theories: push-pull theory, cognitive decision-making theory, and world culture theory to develop the Bohman international student community college decision making model. Developed from insights of a qualitative research on international community college students, the Bohman model is a multi-theoretical framework that captures key stages of the decision-making process of international students at community colleges in the United States (Bohman, 2010). As Bohman (2009) notes, “the model focuses on the factors international students often incorporate in their decision making leading to attending a community college”. Specifically, the Bohman community college decision model categorizes four distinctive steps with questions that international students consider as they decide to enroll in a college.

Step one (1) of Bohman’s framework represents the preliminary stage of the decision-making process during which students decide whether to study abroad. This is the stage where push-pull factors are considered as students make a choice between studying locally and studying abroad while analyzing how studying abroad could be meaningful for their lives. Bohman (2009) summarized the key factors at this phase of the decision process. The author states that, “students may be pushed out of their country because of limited access to higher education. Their test scores or grades may prevent them from continuing with higher education in their home country, essentially, pushing them abroad. On the other hand, the prospect of better opportunities by studying abroad may serve to pull students internationally” (p. 230). In other words, the lack of certain opportunities in their home country, coupled with the possibilities overseas, greatly influences the decision making of the students choosing to study abroad.

While college choice may not feature prominently at this first step of the decision-making model, other influences include family, particularly parents who will be paying as well as friends and classmates who studied abroad (Bohman, 2009). Effectively, as students weigh-in on the limitations of a getting higher education locally with the possibilities of studying abroad, family and friends become influences in the direction students may take based on cost as well as prior experiences. These influences move students to the next stage of the decision-making process as they consider a country to study in stage two.

At step two (2), students consider a specific country to study. The factors considered in this stage may be similar to those in the first step. However, students are deeply invested in identifying a country which matches their desire for higher education. Bohman (2009) observes that “personal and interpersonal perceptions” of a country are crucial at the stage of the decision making as the students consider how they perceive education and living in a particular country. Bohman (2009) added that United States often ranks high in the country selection of many students as he describes factors that make the U.S. attractive to students, noting that “one pulling influence is the view of the U.S. as a global culture center, and consequently students may see the U.S. as a more interesting destination. The reputation of the U.S.’s higher education system translates into better career prospects” (p. 232).

As this stage of the decision-making model relies both on personal feeling about a country as well as information available to the students about a country, recruitment efforts and the presence of college recruiters overseas become essential. As Bohman (2009) notes, “the strengths of these local contacts with connections to the students’ home country are significant as the international students go further into the process” (p. 232). Therefore, the first and second steps of the model may be similar, in that, students consider push-pull factors in both stages,

deciding between studying locally or studying abroad. At the same time, the students deeply investigate a country relying on personal reflections, perceived incentives as well as locally available information about overseas colleges and countries. With this information, the students move to the third phase of the decision making.

At step three (3) of the decision-making model, students choose an institution type, for example, a community college or a four-year institution. Effectively, this is the stage where students move from relying on internal factors to focusing on external factors as they have already decided to study abroad and have identified a country. The narrowing down of choices from country to institution or college type, whether a four-year college or a two-year community college, is dominated by the search for cost as well as entry requirements for colleges in the country of choice (Bohman 2009). While overseas, this practical stage of selecting a college is heavily dependent on local information available about colleges in a student's country of choice. Bohman (2009) outlines how this process is an enterprise in some countries. The author notes that "In East Asia and Western Europe where a wide-spread study abroad industry exists, students turn to private educational agencies for information. In emerging source countries without many commercial agencies, governmental organizations may play a more influential role. These expert sources, private, and governmental educational agencies do not only supply this information for the students, but they also make recommendations as well" (p. 234). This phase of the model exemplifies the crucial role of the recruitment agencies in the college selection process.

The final phase of the decision model is the step at which students select a school. At this stage of the decision making, students are attracted to a specific community college based on the distinctiveness of the college, including location, transfer opportunities, and degree programs

offered (Bohman, 2009). While many of these influences contribute to students' choice at this stage, Bohman (2009) noted two key factors that are highly useful at this stage, stating that "price and location are key to the international student's decision to attend a community college" (p. 236).

College officials and recruiters play a vital role at this stage as the students have already narrowed down their choice of college and began to make initial contacts with the school representative. During this initial contact, students get a taste of the college through the responsiveness of the college officials to inquiries as well as the clarity of information offered to guide students in the admission process.

In summary, the process of getting admissions to colleges in the United States is inarguably complicated for most international students, yet the Bohman international student community college decision model offers a unique way of understanding this intricate progression of prospective students from the first to the fourth phase of the model and ultimate enrolment in community colleges. Step one (1) of Bolman's framework represents the preliminary stage of the decision-making process during which students decide whether to study abroad. At step two (2), students consider a country to study. These first two steps of the model define the students' perception of their home and overseas countries, which relates to the push-pull factors that make them decide to study overseas. At step three (3) of the decision model, students choose an institution type before narrowing the selection down to a specific school in the final step. The school selection process in the final part of the framework focuses on a variety of factors including cost, school location, transfer possibilities as well as institutional support available to students.

The Bohman international student community college decision model is ideal for this research as it highlights the journey of international students to community colleges. African students as a part of the international students in community colleges may have similar experiences. More specifically, the Bohman international student community college decision model as a framework for this research will not only help in understanding the factors that motivate African international students to study in the United States, but it will also help reveal the main reasons why the students choose to attend community colleges as opposed to other institutional types, e.g., four-year institutions. However, understanding the full extent of human experiences in research may require the application of more than a single theoretical framework. Thus, Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is also used in this research as a framework to examine the experiences of African students during their sojourn in community college campuses.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

The Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is derived from the work of Dutch psychologist and renowned professor of international management in the Netherlands. In his work on cultural differences in the global space, Hofstede (1983) theorizes the cultural dimension theory as a framework to offer an understanding of cultures across nations and how individual interactions are shaped by the cultures of their countries of origin. Through an extensive research on IBM employees in more than 50 countries, Hofstede identified six key dimensions that differentiate one culture from another. These key dimensions, also known as indicators, include "power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence." (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010).

Power Distance

Also known as the Power Distance Indicator (PDI), power distance is an indicator that explains how members of a particular society interacts with those in authority, described through high power distance and low power distance (Yoo, 2014). High power distance cultures are generally characterized by complex and rigid hierarchies, a very centralized form of organization and a large gap between the leaders and those they led with high emphasis placed on respect for authority. In other words, leaders in countries with high power distance cultures are placed at a higher pedestal and are mostly the decision makers while others follow their directions. In contrast, countries and cultures with low power distance are characterized by loosely structured organizations where supervisors and employees are considered almost as equals. In effect, leaders in a low power distance culture are informal and decision making is decentralized, allowing inputs of others in the leading the organization.

In the application of the theory, when a country scores high on the PDI, it means a highly structured organization and a low score on the indicators means a less structured organization. Most developing countries, including Ghana, are examples of high PDI countries whereas countries such as the United States exemplify low PDI cultures.

Individualism versus Collectivism

The second indicator is individualism versus collectivism. This indicator analyzes the relationships that exist between individuals in a community, as well as their connection to the society. Key characteristics of the individualism as compared to collectivism indicator is that while high individualist cultures value privacy of individual life and encourages rewarding individual performance, low individualism cultures encourage group efforts with emphasis on collaboration among members of the group.

Masculinity versus Femininity (MAS)

This indicator assesses the allocation of power between men and women in a given society, specifically, measuring the masculinity and femininity of a culture. According to the theory, masculine societies are characterized by male domination, assertive of men and high emphasis of status and wealth. In contrast, feminine societies are characterized by overlapping roles between men and women in uniquely collaborative ways, with a strong focus on building relationships based on mutual agreements. In essence, high MAS score countries that exhibit a patriarchal and rigid hierarchy with men exhibiting toughness while low MAS score countries that display feminine societies where conversations are encouraged, and compromises are reached among members.

Uncertainty Avoidance Index (UAI)

This indicator is a measure of how particular societies can handle anxiety. This indicator is also measure through how high or low a society responds to uncertainty. Societies with a high uncertainty avoidance attempts to control and make life predictable to manage any unforeseen future circumstances. These societies have the tendency to be conservative and less open to new ideas and methods. On the opposite end are societies with low UAIs. These societies are characterized by openness, inclusivity and embracing of new ideas and innovations.

Long- versus Short-Term Orientation

Initially referred to as the pragmatic versus normative (PRA), this dimension refers to the realities and typical orientations displayed by people in each society. It is measured in terms of short- and long-term orientations. Specifically, societies with long-term orientations are more likely to be modest but very pragmatic as they are interested in learning and knowing more. In

short-term oriented cultures, people tend to display sets of principles which they are unwilling to compromise as they believe that those are the principles that make people to take them seriously.

Indulgence versus Restraint (IVR)

This sixth dimension is one of the newest additions to the theory. Societies with high IVR encourage individual liberties and values are placed on individual drive for fulfilment of life through enjoyment and fun. Societies with low IVSs tend to suppress individual liberties by regulating conduct and imposing rigid social and cultural norms that limit the ability to enjoy life as desired.

In essence, the Hofstede's cultural dimension theory provides a unique way of understanding cultures around the world. Through six key dimensions, the theory offers ways to study a people in a variety of settings, including in educational institutions. In international education research, the theory has been widely used in understanding various aspects of international student education. For example, learning behavior of students (Kang, 2016), student-teacher interactions (Yoo, 2014), online education (Gomez, Barberà , & Fernández, 2016), and higher education marketing (Tang, 2011; Pergelova, 2017). In essence, using the theory in education allows researchers to study differences in cultural characteristics between different countries and how those are exhibited in institutions (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2016). The theory relies on six specific "indicators" which show a country's dominant perception of each of the six dimensions, notably: "power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence" (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2016, p.19). Researchers have used this theory mainly to investigate cultural differences in various settings, including education. In one of those studies, researchers examine how cultural dimensions influence the "self-authorship" of international students (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2016, p. 29). In other words,

the framework allows researchers to investigate how cultural dimensions of the country of origin of a person influence their experiences of the learning community.

Summary

In summary, utilizing a combination of two conceptual frameworks, the Bohman international student community college decision model and the Hofstede's cultural theory for this study will be helpful in unique ways. Primarily, the Bohman international student community college decision model as a framework will not only help in understanding the factors that motivate African international students to study in the United States, but it will also help analyze the main factors as to the decision of the students to choose to attend community colleges as opposed to other institutional types, e.g., four-year institutions. Also, Hofstede's cultural theory will be useful in exploring how cultural dimensions influence the experiences of African students in community colleges. In other words, the theory is useful in examining how the students, coming from an entirely different culture experience their new learning environment. Essentially, these two theories complement each other as one helps in exploring the journey of African students while the other is useful in examining their experiences on campuses. The next chapter is the methodology section of this proposed research with a discussion on the research design and research methodology.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology and procedures used in this research. Specifically, this chapter highlights the qualitative research as the design for this study and the rationale for using this design over other research designs. This chapter also covers the participant selection method, as well as the research setting in two community colleges in the Midwest region of the United States. In addition, the data collection method, ethical considerations, reciprocity, and my assumptions in this study are highlighted in this chapter. Finally, I discuss my positionality as an African student conducting this study before I conclude the chapter with discussions on validity and reliability, as well as the data analysis technique utilized in the study.

Research Design

The research design for this study is qualitative research, using interviews and documents as methods of data collection. According to Creswell (2009), a qualitative research is “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Merriam (2009) also highlights that qualitative research helps in understanding and bringing out the experience of minority groups. Similarly, Creswell (2009) further posits that qualitative research design is “suitable for investigating topics where limited works exist.” (p. 4) Therefore, utilizing the qualitative research design is appropriate for a study of this nature because of the dearth in the literature on the topic of African students. Also, as this student body is a minority group in community colleges in the United States, a qualitative research design will offer African students the opportunity to tell their stories and share their experiences in community colleges.

Accordingly, the underlining philosophical worldview of the research is the social constructivist paradigm. According to Creswell (2009), social constructivists “hold the assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work” (p. 8). This means that a constructivist researcher depends on the understanding of research participants and their interpretation of their experiences. The social constructivist paradigm aligns with this research as it offers a way of studying the experiences of African students by allowing them to explain how they come to choose community colleges and what their experiences in the associate degree institutions are.

Participants, Sampling, and Setting

African students in community colleges are the participants of this study. Initially, 10-12 participants were proposed to be interviewed. However, a total of eight participants finally participated in the study. These study participants were selected through the purposeful sampling technique. According to Merriam (2009), utilizing purposeful sampling allows researchers to select “a sample from which the most can be learned” (p.12). This means that through a purposeful sampling, researchers can carefully select participants who can provide detailed information relevant for a study. Merriam (2009) further postulates that in purposeful sampling, “your first determining criteria are essential in choosing who is to be interviewed and what sites are to be observed” (p.12).

Accordingly, participants were selected from African students who have completed at least one semester in the selected community colleges in the US. This group is selected because they are in the formative year of their academic sojourn in community colleges in the US. Additionally, these targeted participants are particularly helpful in this research as they provide a

fresh recollection of their journey as well as how they are faring in their new learning communities.

Thus, a total of eight participants were recruited from two community colleges in the Midwest region of the United States. At the beginning of the study, participant recruitment letters were sent to the institutions to assist in the recruitment of participants. While the institutional letters provided limited respondents, participants were identified through informal contacts and with the help of the African Student Associations as well as the International Student Association. The formal and informal participant solicitation processes resulted in the identification of the eight combined participants from the two institutions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is central to the research process. As Creswell (2009) notes, “researchers need to protect their research participants; develop a trust with them; promote the integrity of research; guard against misconduct and impropriety that might reflect on their organizations or institutions; and cope with new, challenging problems” (p. 133). Creswell (2009) further highlights several ethical issues that researchers need to consider during research. As an example, the author cites “personal disclosure, authenticity, and credibility of the research report; the role of researchers in cross-cultural contexts; and issues of personal privacy through forms of Internet data collection” (p. 132). These are ethical implications that should be considered thoroughly in order to ensure the quality of the research.

I took series of steps to ensure that this research is conducted ethically. First, I secured the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and I strictly followed the ethical guidelines of research as recommended by the IRB and Illinois State University (ISU). Specifically, I ensured that all participants are treated with respect and dignity in accordance with stipulated guidelines

of human subject research. Although there were no imminent risks for participating in this study, I am aware that a study involving international students may be sensitive, in that, the students may be uncomfortable answering certain questions about their experiences due to their immigrant status as well as the current constant changing immigration dynamics. For this reason, information from the interviews, especially the personal identities of participants, are kept secure and confidential. Additionally, participants were not coerced to answer questions that they were not comfortable answering.

Instrumentation

In this research, two research protocols were used to obtain data from participants. The first method is the interview. According to Merriam (2009), an interview is “a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a study” (p. 87). This means that interviews take the form of direct exchanges between the researcher and participant(s) to discuss information on a topic. Castillo-Montoya (2016) also states that “interviews provide researchers with rich and detailed qualitative data for understanding participants’ experiences, how they describe those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences” (p. 811). As Merriam (2009) highlights, interviews are useful in many research types and for various sample sizes.

The second data collection method is the documentation review. Documents in a study refer “to a wide range of written, visual, digital and physical materials relevant to the study at hand” (Merriam, 2009, p.139). The documents used in research ranges from official government publications, personally written artifacts as well as videos and other visual documents (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the documentation reviewed include international student policies,

international admission handbooks, and documents published by the African students which are altogether relevant to this study.

In short, the applicability of interviews for different sample sizes and the ability to use the approach to obtain rich qualitative data from participants made it a preferred instrument in the data collection for this study. Although the documents were limited, reviewing the existing documents helped in highlighting policies and practices that support the information obtained through the interview. Therefore, utilizing a combination of interviews and document analysis provided a powerful way of capturing the perspectives of participants as well as written evidence.

Data Collection Procedure

The primary data collection for this research is the interview. According to Merriam (2009), “the most common form of interview is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another” (p. 89). Among the different types of interviews, the semi-structured interview was utilized in this study. In a semi-structured interview, “either all of the questions are more flexibly worded, or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Essentially, the semi-structured interview has both a structured section as well as an unstructured section which allows respondents to talk on broadly open-ended questions and at the same time be specific on some questions (Merriam, 2009). Initially, face-to-face interviews were proposed for all participants. However, with the pandemic and the closure of facilities on campus, only two interviews were conducted through face-to-face, and the remaining participants were interviewed virtually.

Consequently, the interview data were predominantly collected through online interviews lasting 45 to 60 minutes per participant, using a semi-structured format. Merriam (2009) suggests

three ways of collecting interview data, which include tape recording, taking notes, and video recording. In this study, the interviews were video-recorded, and I took notes during the interview sessions. This approach helped to ensure that all the information obtained from the interviews were accurate for transcribing and analysis.

Reflexivity and Positionality

According to Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, and Caricativo (2017), reflexivity is “the continuous process of reflection by researchers on their values ... and of recognizing, examining, and understanding how their social background, location, and assumptions affect their research practice” (p. 427). In other words, reflexivity provides researchers the opportunity to explore how their orientation shapes the research process as well as the outcome. I am aware that my positionality as an African student and my journey to the United States, as well as my experiences in higher education institutions, could potentially shape this research process and the findings of the study.

In 2011, the desire to pursue higher education forced me to leave my family and my social network in my home country, The Gambia. I moved to the United States for postgraduate education at a public university in Illinois. At the time, there was only one university in the Gambia serving a population of nearly two (2) million. Chances of getting admitted into any of the undergraduate programs at the University of The Gambia were very slim as preference was given to family members of government officials and influential citizens. Further, it is interesting to note that those who wish to pursue their education beyond a bachelor’s degree had only one option locally: a master’s program in African history. This situation forced many Gambians like me to seek further education abroad. This push factor is common in many countries and there is a

high chance that similar situations motivate some of my participants to leave their countries in pursuit of education in the United States.

One of the most important considerations for any student wishing to study abroad is choosing a country. Making this decision was relatively easy for me because I observed that Gambians who were educated in the United States were highly sought after on the job market. They occupy prestigious and highly rewarding positions in government and in the private sectors, including multinational corporations and banks. Naturally, the United States became my country of choice to study as I also planned to return home to secure one of those jobs as many forerunners had done. After settling on the US as the place of study, then came the decision to choose a college or university. This was more difficult than selecting a country. At the time, the most significant push factor was to get admitted to a recognized university whose degree would be valued and recognized in my home country for better employment prospects. Generally, choosing an institution depends largely on factors such as affordability and funding possibilities. Luckily for me, these criteria were met by the two four-year institutions that I gained admission as a graduate student.

I was a full-time student in a four-year college when I arrived in the U.S, and I did not have any experience of a community college until when I was asked to take an American politics class as a prerequisite for my public administration degree. After seeking advice, I was told to take the Introduction to American Politics course offered at Lincoln Land Community College (LLCC) and then transfer it to fulfill the requirement. While I was at LLCC, I shared classes with other international students who were admitted to different programs of study with the intention of also transferring to a four-year university. Among them were other African international

students who went to school in French and were enrolled in English as Second Language (ESL) courses.

This was when I first developed an interest in studying community colleges. At the institutional level, I had interacted with academic advisors who guided me on the process of getting my grade transferred to my University. Through these interactions, I saw firsthand the intensive support and guidance that international students receive at the community college. More than anything, this experience gave me an added perspective of higher education in the United States. Gradually, I was also becoming aware of the dissimilarities between a four-year university and a two-year college. For most people in America, the difference is obvious. However, coming from a country with no community college but only one four-year university, I naturally needed some enlightening to understand the distinction between a two-year community college and a four-year university.

In summary, it has been nine years since my arrival in the United States as an African international student, yet, the memories of my decision-making process and transition to US higher education are still alive. Equally, as I interact with other international students and hear their experiences, I develop a new-found spirit and appreciation for their adjustment with transitioning to US higher education. My passion for international student issues and my interest in the work of community colleges led me to this research.

Validity and Reliability

Validity means to authenticate the correctness of research findings by using several measures (Creswell, 2009). One measure that was employed in this research is member checking (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), reliability in qualitative studies directs that the researcher's approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects” (p. 190).

Therefore, two specific measures were utilized to address possible inconsistencies and verify the accuracy of the study findings.

First, I checked transcripts thoroughly for errors and mistakes to make sure scripts are accurate. Second, follow-up interviews were conducted with some participants. The purpose of the follow-up interview was to provide participants with an opportunity to verify that statements that were ascribed to them were accurate.

Reliability is related to the ways that research findings will be consistent (Merriam, 2009). Therefore, to ensure the reliability of this study, I ensured that my biases and subjectivities were managed in order to present the perspective of participants objectively. I was also guided by the understanding that the purpose of this research is to add knowledge to what is already known and being subjective could suppress the original voices of participants.

Data Analysis Technique

The purpose of data analysis in research is to interpret the data for meaning (Creswell, 2009). Creswell (2009) highlights that the data analysis process involves organizing the data noting that “it involves segmenting and taking apart the data (like Peeling back the layers of an onion) as well as putting it back together” (p. 245). In other words, data analysis is a method of assembling research data in ways that help in extracting useful information.

The data analysis technique for this research is the thematic analysis. The objective of using this data analysis technique is to look for relationships between interview and other data sources, including documents, for common patterns and themes to support the research (Norum, 2008). Specifically, the thematic analysis technique in this research follows the steps of data analysis proposed by Creswell (2009). The author highlights six steps of data analysis from the first phase of organizing raw data to the final step of interpreting the qualitative data for the

research, providing a comprehensive and interconnected way of analyzing interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2009).

The first step involves organizing data from all sources, including the interview, observation, and documents. Next, I read through the data to be familiar with the content in order to form an idea about the general information in the data. The third step involves coding. According to Maietta (2008), coding in qualitative research refers to “the process of generating ideas and concepts from raw data such as interview transcripts, field notes, archival materials, reports, newspaper articles, and art” (p. 2). Coding usually begins with an initial coding phase. Given (2008) notes that “during this initial stage of bringing order to and making sense of the data, a close line-by-line reading of the data is often suggested in a search to identify as many ideas and concepts as possible without concern for how they relate” (p.3). More specifically, *in vivo coding* was used in the coding of interview data. During the early process of generating codes, I reviewed each transcript in detail to generate initial codes from direct statements of participants. Then, I conducted an interpretation of the identified codes, relating them to the two theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

This process led to the identification of broad themes in the manuscript for discussion. Following the identification of key themes, I revisited the transcripts and documents to select quotes that support the individual themes. The fifth step involves how themes will be explained in the research narrative (Cresswell, 2009). At this stage, I conducted a detailed description of each key theme as well as the sub-themes by providing a rich illustration of each category with supporting paragraphs from the data. The final step involves interpreting the data. Creswell (2009) notes that “interpretation in qualitative research can take many forms; be adapted for different types of designs; and be flexible to convey personal, research-based, and action

meanings” (p. 249). In this final step of the research, I focused on interpreting the relationships between the finding of my study and what the existing literature offers on the experiences of African as well as international students in community colleges. This approach helped in confirming points of convergence in the literature as it also points to new directions for future studies.

Summary

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed discussion of the methodology of this study. The qualitative research design, with interviews and documentation as instruments for this study, has been discussed. In addition, the participant selection methods and ways of collecting data are also highlighted. Ethical considerations, reflexivity, and my positionality were central to the discussion in this chapter. The chapter ends with the discussion of the validity and reliability, as well as the data analysis technique utilized in the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

This chapter contains the results of the qualitative study of African students in community colleges. The study seeks to answer three primary research questions (RQ).

- RQ 1. What motivates African students to study in community colleges?
- RQ 2. What are the experiences of African students in community colleges?
- RQ 3. In what ways can community colleges support the unique needs of African students?

This chapter begins with a description of the sample population for the study with accompanying tables and graphs to provide summary descriptions and profiles of the eight (8) participating African students. Additionally, the processes applied to analyze the interview transcripts that allow uncovering of relevant codes and themes are also described in detail in this chapter. The presentation of findings in the chapter is organized in three sections, aligning with the three key research questions.

The first section addresses the first research question, discussing statements from participants about their motivations to study in community colleges. The second section highlights the experiences of the participants, exploring insights into their lives on campus as well as off-campus, particularly in the communities they live. The final section of this chapter highlights recommendations from participants regarding the ways institutional programs and services could be enhanced to meet the needs of African students in community colleges. In presenting the findings of the research, I also used relevant literature, connecting with the theoretical frameworks to amplify the voice of the participants with evidence on the scholarship of not only African students but also the larger international student population in two-year institutions.

Participants

A total of eight (8) participants were interviewed for this study. The participants are students on F-1 visa status enrolled as full-time students in different courses of studies, including accounting, computer science, psychology, and nursing in the community colleges. However, all participants are African students enrolled in the community college for at least a semester. Notwithstanding their similarities as students from the same region, the participants are at different levels of education in different programs of studies and in two different institutions, making their experiences slightly unique. For example, six (6) of the participants are in the second (2nd) year of their studies, while the remaining two (2) participants are in the first (1st) year of their studies (see Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of Research Participants' Profiles

Participant	Institution	Year in College
Participant 1	College A	2 nd Year
Participant 2	College A	2 nd Year
Participant 3	College B	2 nd Year
Participant 4	College B	2 nd Year
Participant 5	College A	2 nd Year
Participant 6	College B	1 st year
Participant 7	College B	2 nd Year
Participant 8	College A	1 st Year

Importantly, all the participants met the criteria described in the participant description which was highlighted in the previous chapter. One of the criteria described is that the student must be Africans on F1 status studying at the community college for at least a semester.

Appendix 1 is a summary description of participants, representing the minimum requirement for participation in this study as shown in chapter III.

Study Site

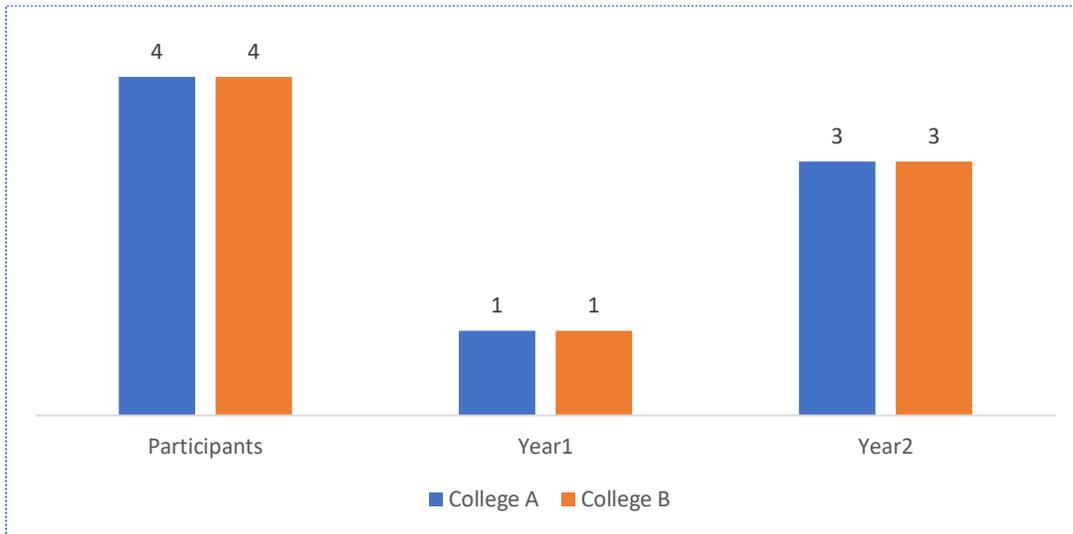
This study was conducted at two community colleges in the Midwest region of the United States. The first study site, College A, is a public institution that was founded in the 1960s, serving a student population of more than 6,000 in three campuses across the region. The school offers associate degree programs across different disciplines, including computer science, arts, and humanities. In addition, the college also offers non-degree courses, including English as Second Language (ESL), several job trainings programs, as well as developmental courses. A total of four (4) African students from this institution participated in this study. Given the small size of the institution and the limited number of African students, an additional institution was selected in order to sample more participants for this study.

The second study site, College B, was founded in the 1990s serving a student population of more than 4,500 in full credit courses with an additional 9,000 students enrolled in non-credit courses. Like College A, College B is also a public two-year institution located in the Midwest region of the United States. The school's admission brochure highlights that as of 2019, the institution hosted more than 400 international students from 52 different countries. Although the number of African students in this institution could not be established, this institution was selected in order to access more participants from the African student community who fit into these research criteria. The recruitment process led to the identification and participation of four

(4) additional study participants. Figure1 shows a graphical presentation of participants in this study.

Figure 1

Graphical Representation of Research Participants



Participant Profiles

Participant 1

Participant 1 is a Nursing student in College A who has been enrolled in the institution for two years. This interview took place during the semester in which he was completing his Associate degree in Nursing. The participant was in his thirties and had already completed a bachelor's degree in Public and Environmental Health in his native country in Africa before coming to the United States. The participant's educational experience in colleges in Africa and his stint in the community college puts him in a position to offer some comparative experiential knowledge. Although he speaks in a very calm voice, he is very direct in explaining and offering detailed responses about his experiences.

Participant 2

This participant is in the Associate of science program in College A. During the semester we conducted this interview, the participant had already completed his course requirement and had commenced his first semester in a four-year university, continuing his degree program. Although he is yet to graduate from the two-year program officially, the participant has started taking classes in the four-year university, which he said was possible due to an existing arrangement between the two schools. This participant, who is in his late twenties, has never attended college in Africa. According to him, he was engaged in a community organization after high school as he continued to apply for schools here in the United States. This participant is in a position of offering different perspectives because of his involvement on two campuses — a four-year institution and a two-year college. Throughout the interview, he spoke highly of education and life in the United States and attributed the reasons for him not enrolling in colleges and universities in his country to the lack of confidence he had in those institutions.

Participant 3

This participant is also studying science in College B. He has an interesting background because he had already completed a four-year degree in his native country. However, because he is from a French-speaking country and his degree was in French, he had to go through so many developmental courses, including ESL during his program. During the interview, the participant who is in his late twenties was very assertive in a tone of voice. He characterized his experience with frustrations with the transcript evaluation and testing and spent a long time studying in the community college albeit his degree and confidence in his English language proficiency. The participant has so far spent two years in the community college.

Participant 4

Participant 4 is a female student studying accounting in College B. Although she is only in the first semester of her second year in the community college, the participant has plans to transition to a four-year university. The participant is in her early twenties and never attended college while in her native country in Africa. After high school, the participant waited for about a year to obtain admission to a school in the United States. The participant is very reserved, and she spoke in a very soft tone of voice. Interviewing this participant was really interesting as she only responded to questions in very few phrases. Several follow-up questions were used to elicit more responses from her in order to get a detailed transcript for this study.

Participant 5

Participant 5 is also a female student enrolled in the computer science program in College A. At the time of the interview, she was in the second semester of her second year of studies in the community college. Unlike the other participants who intend to transfer to four-year colleges, this participant hopes to secure a job in the tech industry to gain work experience and then work on completing her bachelor's degree in a four-year university on a part-time basis. During the interviews, the participant willingly shared important details of her experiences, including sensitive social issues such as religion. The participant is soft-spoken, but she was very thorough in responding to questions during the interview sessions.

Participant 6

This participant is also a computer science student. The student is in the second semester of the first year of studies at College B. Straight from high school in Africa, the participant who is in her early twenties, was very calm during the interviews. She is one of the participants who is just exploring her options for the time being as she is not certain about whether to transfer or

get a job after completing her courses in the community college. Unlike the other participants who were working to pay for tuition, this participant is sponsored by her parents, who still live in Africa.

Participant 7

Participant 7 is another female student who attends College B. Although this student is admitted to a four-year program, she has spent a semester at the two-year college completing some prerequisite courses while taking classes towards a nursing degree program. This participant is in her early twenties, and she never attended college in her native country in Africa. The participant's goal is to subsequently get accepted into a medical school and become a medical doctor to practice in the United States.

Participant 8

As a computer science student in College A, this participant is in the second semester of his first year of studies in the community college. Before coming to the United States, the participant worked full-time in network security for a commercial bank in his country. With no college experience back in his country, the participant applied to several schools after high school. He finally got accepted into College A after four years and secured a visa to travel and study in the college. The participant's goal is to find a suitable job in the IT sector, computer networking in particular, and complete IT professional certification courses. Table 1 below is a summary of the profile of the participants.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was one-on-one interviews. These interviews conducted with the selected African students in the two community colleges served as the primary source of research data for this study. Additionally, college documents such as

admission brochures and web publications on international students as well as enrolment brochures served as supplementary data for this research. The documents were used to obtain pertinent information including numbers of international students. Data collection was done at the same time as the data analysis. The data collection took place over three semesters. Initially, the interviews were to be conducted in person; however, after two interviews, the COVID-19 pandemic erupted, and lockdowns were imposed, and this affected the conduct of the subsequent scheduled in-person interviews. The subsequent interviews were conducted online through Zoom.

Data Analysis

Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) suggest that data analysis should be conducted concurrently with data collection. With the large amount of qualitative study data generated from this study, I followed this suggestion by analyzing interview transcripts and documents gathered throughout the research. Specifically, in vivo coding was used in the coding of interview data. During the early process of generating codes, I began by reading each transcript in detail to generate initial codes from the direct statements of participants. Then, I conducted an interpretation of the identified codes, relating them to the two theoretical frameworks guiding this study.

Meanwhile, a thematic analysis was used as the method of analysis. Using the thematic analysis assisted in looking for relationships in codes from interview transcripts and other data sources for common patterns and themes to support the research, as Creswell (2009) posits. The cumulative process of generating initial codes as well as coding with relevance to the theoretical framework assisted in identifying consistent themes across all the documents. In the end, themes were developed to present vivid accounts of the individual student experiences as Africans in the

two-year community colleges. The sections that follow discuss the themes that emerged from the data analysis process.

RQ 1. What Motivates African Students to Study in Community Colleges?

This question explores the key factors that motivated the participants to choose to leave their countries in search of education in community colleges in the United States. Broadly, mentioned hope and frustration as they discussed factors that motivated them to study in community colleges in the US. First, they underlined their hope for a better education, higher paying jobs, and economic salvation as major motivating factors for their decision to study in the United States. The participants shared their feelings in statements of optimism, including perceptions of quality of education, prospects of employment that will earn them decent wages, and an avenue for the transformation of their lives through a community college education. Yet, as participants responded to specific interview questions on motivations to leave their countries, several of them voiced their frustrations about the conditions of their countries, especially the lack of employment and the quality of teaching in colleges and universities in their countries. Essentially, statements from participants about their motivations points to high quality educational programs, the quest for a new learning experience, the prospects of transferring to a four-year institution, as well as the potential of gaining employment and making a decent living in the United States

In particular, the overarching theme reveals that the biggest drive for participants' migration for international studies in the US is the hope for a better future as they attempt to escape domestic predicaments in their home countries. The predicaments included limited access to college, low quality of training, lack of educational resources, congested classrooms, and low employment prospects.

Limited Access to Colleges

Several participants highlighted that only a few opportunities exist for higher education in their countries of origin in Africa, thus leaving them with no choice but to leave and seek education in colleges in the United States. Two participants, specifically, captured the core of the points expressed by interviewees when they were asked what motivated them to study in community colleges in the United States. Participant 3 responded by painting a picture of access to higher education in his country in the following statement.

To give you an idea, there are more than thirty (30) million people in my country, and when you look at that population, many of them are young persons, and they want to have an education. And with the universities also, there are only 5 government universities...to get admissions in any of the government universities, you have to pass the university entrance exam, and then you can get a place in one of the universities based on your grade. That's why I say it's hard to get an education there.

The participant continued to highlight how the university entrance examination has limited access to schools in his country, particularly government-run institutions.

There are many people who do not cross this stage because the government makes sure that the cut-off mark is so high that only few will pass and get a place in the universities. In my case, I passed, but I was placed on the waiting list of one university, and I was supposed to start the next academic year, so other people who cannot wait or did not pass will either go to private universities, which are very expensive, or they have to leave the country just like I did.

Interestingly, the increasing population rate, which has contributed to the lack of access to colleges for the risen populations, has been discussed in prior research on African higher

education. For example, Banya and Elu (2001) observed that the legacies of colonial policies on education with limited higher educational institutions are still visible as large numbers of the population lack access to colleges. African nations struggle with limited financial resources since the 1960s to expand higher education. Unsurprisingly, the scarcity of resources for the independent nations caused a situation where it took some countries several years to prioritize higher education and build higher educational institutions. This is evident in the statements of Participant 2, who came from a country with very few public colleges and universities.

Before I left my country to come here, we had only two universities that are the public ones and the second one was even very new at that time and they didn't have the programs that most of the students wanted to study. And also, many of us are concerned about it, because it's a very new university and we don't know if they have all the approval and things like that, and it's not only that because they don't have many programs that students want to do, but also, I think the other thing is that some of us do not trust that it will go through because even the first university has those kinds of problems. Sometimes, they don't enough lecturers and things like that. Initially, my ambition was to study there, but because of these things, I just decided to look for schools here.

Although two other participants have mentioned the lack of schools pushing them to look abroad for education, the available literature suggests that the lack of schools in Africa has not been substantiated as a strong factor for students leaving the continent to study in other countries. Specifically, Materu (2007) argued that while tertiary education may be small and underdeveloped compared to basic and secondary education in some countries, institutions exist to serve high school graduates, albeit with some serious challenges, including funding and

quality assurance. Nonetheless, as some participants alluded to the limited number of schools in their countries leading to a lack of access to higher education, other participants admitted the existence of numerous colleges and universities in their countries. The students who acknowledged the existence of enough colleges in their countries also intimated that they were motivated to leave because of their perception of low-quality education. They also opted to avoid the competitive admission process in the few ‘good schools’ in their countries to get quality education in the United States through the community college route.

Low Quality Training/Education

The quality of training received in some colleges and universities, especially in private institutions, was a concern for some of the participants, and they would rather leave than settle for education in institutions of that nature in their countries. This is more specific for specialized courses in the medical field. The core of this point was captured in this statement by Participant 6.

I made up my mind very early to come here because the universities there are not good. There are some good ones but the others like the private schools, they just take your money, and you don’t learn anything. They don’t have books and no good libraries; it’s just a business, and when you are a student in there, you suffer again, so it’s not worth it, studying in ... That’s why I put all my energy into applying for schools here. Yes, it took a long time before I got my admissions and everything from the school here... I think it’s worth it. I am happy here; I am happy that I made it here.

Participant 7 was interested in the medical programs in some universities in her country. However, she was frustrated by the complicated admission process and had concerns with the

educational quality in those institutions, forcing her to change her direction and pursue training in the two-year college.

The truth is that there are schools in my country; in fact, many of them to choose from. Some are private-owned, and some are government-owned; some are cheap, and some are expensive, so it's up to you, the person where you want to go... I wanted to study medicine there, and one thing is that it's hard to get into good medical schools like we have here, and the thing is that I don't think they get good training. I have always wanted to be a doctor, so I want to have the best training wherever I can have it, and that's what I was trying. So, I was advised by a friend who is already a nurse here, to start from the community college here and then take science courses, and I will be able to get into a medical school. For me, that's all I am trying to do here.

The point raised by some participants regarding the quality of instruction in schools, as well as the proliferation of private colleges and universities in Africa, has been discussed in prior works (Banya 2001; Banya & Elu, 2001; Materu, 2007). In particular, the authors observed that while many countries may have enough universities, both private and public, the quality of teaching in the schools may be compromised due to the lack of qualified teaching staff as well as enrollment and fiscal challenges (Banya, 2001). Additionally, there has been a proliferation of higher education institutions offering various courses without proper oversight and quality assurances mechanisms (Banya, 2001; Materu, 2007). Essentially, as the lack of schools in some African countries is not substantiated, the issue of capacity and quality of learning in the institution is a relevant concern, and the participants in this study have highlighted similar concerns.

Congested Classrooms

Congestion of classrooms is another area highlighted by the participants as they narrated their reasons for leaving their home countries to seek US education. The participants highlighted that in addition to fewer people in colleges, most classrooms in some colleges and universities are hugely congested. Participant 1 who had attended some college in his country before coming to the US, described the classroom environments when he was enrolled in a public university back in Africa as follows:

When I started as a new student in the university back home, we were all enrolled in compulsory courses, which are like, the general, or let's say, the core courses everyone must take, regardless of what program you were doing. We were in the same class with people who were going to be teachers and other professions like Agriculture extension workers. In some of those classes, like basic Maths or English 101, there are usually more than 300 students in one class. You will be lucky when the class is held in a big classroom, like a big hall, but if not, some people who came late would have to stand in the back of the class the whole time during the lecture. So how can you learn anything in that type of class?

Participant 3 also stated how he feels lucky to be here because the classroom condition in his native country was unbearable and made learning difficult. He stated that:

I already got admission at one university back home, so now I will just say it's a blessing for me to be here because my friends who are studying there now tell me how they are struggling in class. They don't even have chairs and tables for all the students. In some of the big classes, there are hundreds of students in a class and the only way they learn is by going with recorders to class to record the lectures because most of them stand at the

back of the class the whole-time during class, and even that, some professors don't want to be recorded, so they have a difficult situation there. So, imagine I was also supposed to be in that situation... So, when I talk to them and tell them how classes are here, they all want to come.

In the words of other participants, some schools tend to rent event halls around campus to be used as classrooms. However, this is equally inconvenient for some students. Participant 8 shared his experience as follows:

I know some universities there that don't have spaces on their campuses, so they end up doing classes in community halls. I don't think you should call those places universities, because they don't even have anything... very small buildings and nothing, nothing else; how can you call that a college?

These three participants' discussion of congestions in classrooms connects with the existing realities that many schools in Africa have large numbers of students with limited infrastructure to accommodate all the students (Banya & Elu, 2001). The Association of African Universities (AAU) always publishes a listing of its member universities across the continent. As of 2019, there were over 396 universities registered with the association (AAU, 2019). A recent world bank report suggests that the population of Africa is more than one billion, and by the year 2050, half of the population will be less than 25 years old (World Bank, 2020). This emphasizes the point that fewer institutions with large numbers of students will create classroom congestions.

Limited Educational Resources

Participants highlighted the unavailability of educational materials such as books and technology in some schools in Africa as a contributory factor to their decision to leave their

countries in order to actualize their educational goals in community colleges in the United States. Participant 6 was almost done with his bachelor's degree in public health before coming to the United States to enroll as a nursing student in a community college. The participant explained how access to educational resources such as textbooks affected their education, explaining that:

We struggled hard there, especially when it comes to getting books. We had a library, but they don't have books at all for our department. Now, some departments have books, and the books are old, and some of them are very, very outdated in their universities in Europe and here. Like you cannot borrow books and keep them with you for long like you do here.

Participant 3 also corroborated this concern, lamenting the absence of books, especially books on specialized courses. Participant 3 stated the following:

Maybe, they have good ones for courses like sociology or others, but I know that for science students like us, we didn't have good books, so we only relied on lecturer presentations and notes. And even with the notes from lecturers, you have to print and photocopy, and none of that is available. You have to pay for it, so you have to go to the printing places around the campus and pay them to copy for you.

Participant 3 continued to highlight how students often face difficulties in accessing other educational resources, including lecture contents which are uploaded online by lectures.

Sometimes, the lecturers give us links for articles, but many students, including me, did not have our own computers, and you don't even want to try the computer laboratory at the school...It's always full, and there are not enough computers for everyone, so what they do is to allocate a maximum of an hour for each student, which, to me, is not enough to do all your research and reading on the computer.

Other participants corroborated this limitation of technology in the following statement, highlighting issues such as internet access and erratic power supply affecting the education of students in some colleges.

My friends who went there always complain to me about the things they are lacking.

There is no good internet, and there are always power problems, and to be honest, I think most of the colleges and universities there are no different from even... even high schools. They don't even have good books at all.

Low Employment Prospects

Almost all the participants in this study highlighted that they felt the need to leave Africa to study in the United States because of the limited employment opportunities for graduates in their home countries. The statement by Participant 6 captures the substance of the points expressed by the other participants, explaining the difficulties graduates face in finding professional jobs, which ultimately lead them to take up menial and low paying jobs in the streets of major cities. She stated:

Bachelor's degree is like a high school certificate. Even some gatemen, I am telling you now, some have bachelor's degrees, and they never do jobs that are related to what they studied. So, it's a waste of time to try to go to school when you know you will end up like that...For me as a female, I may be lucky to get a job as a waitress in a restaurant. What I am saying now is that it's hard to get jobs; jobs are not there when you graduate.

The low employment prospects were echoed by the participants from other countries as well. For example, Participant 4 also described unemployment in her country, where there are too many graduates with few professional positions. "There are just so many, too many people who have degrees, but the job market is not there. It's sad because after paying so much money

for education, now you have no job”. The participant continued to highlight how some employment decisions are made, which contribute to the lack of jobs. The participant stated:

Sometimes, the most important thing is that it’s not even your degree that gets you a good job over there, but it’s about your family connection. So, for me, it was not worth going through that hectic process of going to the university there when I know that the chance of getting a good job is not there. So, I would rather come here where I can get a little job even with my associate degree.

Meanwhile, other participants stated that even where decent jobs are available for graduates, the salaries paid are too low. Participant 1 had employment lined up as public health inspector for restaurants and hotels in his country but could not imagine living on the meager salary offered to graduates.

Everyone in our group has an automatic appointment as a public health officer, and we are already told the benefits we will get. We will get a motorbike for our movements, and they will fuel it daily, but our monthly salary is only like when you covert it, it is only about \$52.00. Imagine how long it will take me to save money to build a house or something. I cannot even get married because when I get married and have children, that salary will not be able to sustain us. That’s why, for me, when I look at the future of all of those things, I had to find ways to leave for better opportunities.

Participant 7 also highlighted a similar concern. She stated, “Imagine going through all these years, and they don’t pay you nothing. Some people’s salaries...if you convert it here, it’s less than \$100; yes, that’s their salary for a whole month.”

The circumstances surrounding unemployment and low wages in most African countries as reported by participants have been largely documented with the primary concern being the rising youthful college-going population with a shrinking labor market (Whitfield, 2017).

Moreover, the International Labor Organization (ILO), a body established by the United Nations for global employment matters, publishes data on employment trends throughout the world. Data on the economy of some major African countries reflects mixed unemployment numbers with the lowest of 1.8 percent for countries like Benin and high up to 54.4 percent in South Africa. Similarly, poverty among the employed youth in sub-Saharan Africa stands at a staggering 70 percent. This means that more than 64 million youth in Africa are living in poverty (ILO, 2016).

In summary, participants' discussion of their decision to migrate to the United States for education centers on the overarching theme of frustrations with domestic predicaments in their home countries. Limited access to higher education, the lack of quality training, especially in specialized fields, as well as the limited education resources available in schools to support learning were the sub-themes generated through the analysis. Additional sub-themes include congestions in classrooms and the low prospects of employments which demotivated participants from choosing to study in their home countries. Essentially, these themes and sub-themes, which highlight underlining circumstances in the students' native countries, push them to opt to study abroad in the hopes of gaining a better education and a brighter future in the United States through the community college system.

Hopes

Hope emerges as a major theme of the study as students shared their confidence in institutions in the United States, as well as their optimism about the education system. The

inspirations of the students are reflected in sub-themes, including the high value of U.S education, availability of a variety of programs, campus diversity, as well as having supportive school officials.

High Value of U.S Education

Several participants indicated that their desire to pursue higher education abroad in the United States was based on the perception that a degree in the United States carries more weight than the qualification they would earn in their countries. Participant 2 put it this way:

The thing that really made me choose to come here is that I know that the education I get here will carry more respect than what I will get in my country. And also, after I graduate, I can find a better job here, and my degree will be respected even when I decide to go back home, and people will not question it that much because they know it's from America.

The participants continued to state how degrees from some African countries are not recognized by schools and employers in the United States. He stated:

Just imagine some of my friends who had their degrees there, and when they come here, some schools don't accept their papers, and it's hard for them to get jobs that they wanted in their fields. But if it is the other way round, let's say I go back with the degree that I got here, I will be more respected, and I will be given jobs and big positions than many other people.

Two other participants highlighted similar points about the value of an education in the United States. Participant 7 also described her motivation to come to the United States in the following statement:

I knew that after I graduate here, I can do anything or I can, I can be anything, like they always say if you get an American education, anything is possible, and, for me, I believe it.

For Participant 7, coming to America for school represents success not only in education but also in personal and economic advancement. The participant stated:

To me, when you get a visa to come to America, that's it, you have made it or, at least, let me say that the signs are promising, and for me, so far, I have not regretted choosing to study here. Things are working well for me. I already got admission to another university, and I will transfer my courses and get my degree soon.

In essence, participants are hopeful that a degree from a college in the United States will put them at a higher pedestal both in social status and recognition as well as financial earning. It is not surprising that the United States receives a large quota of outbound African students (Kishum, 2011). Kishum (2011) indicates further that approximately 20% of all African students studying abroad are in colleges and universities in the United States.

Meanwhile, the participants have continued to advance more specific reasons for their motivation and choices to study in community colleges in the US. Although the two institutions in this study are not actively engaged in student recruitment by sending representatives to Africa, document analysis reveals key insights into how schools market their programs to students in Africa. College A produces a three-point admission brochure to attract international students. First, the College boasts of several programs for international students, with small classroom sizes of 20 in modern and well-equipped technology-supported classrooms with personal attention from instructors. The College also points students to their intensive English language program to support non-native speakers with free academic support such as tutoring, writing, and

citation assistance. Also, the College indicates its affordability as it highlights how tuition and fees at their colleges are a fraction of the charges at four-year colleges. Yet, the College also assures the students of assistance in transitioning from community college to four-year institutions. Nonetheless, data from participants reveal that the students were interested in studying at two-year institutions because of program availability, supportive international office, diversity of the student population, supportive student offices as well as the transfer potentials to four-year institutions with employment prospects after graduation.

Program Availability

The availability of various programs at community colleges in the United States is one of the key areas that appear in the data, with participants highlighting their attraction to the wide range of academic programs offered at two-year institutions. As Participant 6 stated, “I feel like I have more choices here.” For Participant 5, she was keen on coming to her college because, according to her, “Here, there is so much I can do; I can do different programs that will help me in my career.” However, Participant 5 captured the main points in the following statement:

When I first left high school, I was contemplating whether to do my bachelor’s there or not. I know about one good university thereand many of my friends would want go to the school, but I think it was best to find schools in Europe or America so that I can be exposed to many things. I can have the chance to do different courses. So right now, this college is perfect for me because it will help me to get accepted into many universities, whereas if it were just my high school certificate from Africa, those schools would not accept me.

Other participants explained their unsuccessful attempts at enrolling in some academic programs, including medicine, due to the large numbers of students interested in those programs

in their respective countries. Two participants captured the key points expressed by all the participants. As Participant 2 stated:

At the first time, before I started the public health program back in our country, I applied to medical school for the pre-med class, but I was not accepted even though my grades were good. It's just because they only take few students every year. So, they ended up telling me to do nursing or public health, and that's how I ended up doing that degree before coming over here.

The participant continued to highlight that attending the community college would allow him access to medical school in the United States. He stated: "I have not given up on my ambition to be a doctor, and I think now I have a chance to do it after I finish this Nursing program here." Participant 8 also wanted to do computer science in his native country. Although the program exists in some universities, he was discouraged by the lack of enough hands-on training due to the limited number of computers available in the school. He stated:

I was offered admission in computer science in one of our universities in our country but the problem is that my friend who goes there said there are not enough computers for their lab practices, and I didn't have a computer of my own at that time. So it was a problem for me to be learning about computer science when you wouldn't get the opportunity to touch the computer the way you want it, and you know computer knowledge is different from other courses; it's not only about that; you have to do practical things.

Thus, the participants' discussion on program availability suggests that some academic programs are not available or the institutions did not have the capacity to enroll all prospective

students. Notwithstanding, responses from students suggest that community colleges are just the beginning for them and a ladder to access other institutions.

Diverse Student Body

Some participants also highlighted that the diversity in the student population attracted them to the community colleges. According to Participant 4:

One of the things that I like about studying here is that I have a chance to meet so many people who have different cultures. I actually expected to see that because before I came, I used to check the college website and they wrote so many things about welcoming people from different countries. Even the pictures on the website, you see Blacks, Whites, and others. That alone made me like the school, and I told myself that this is going to be a good school for me, and it happened to be that way because when I look around, I see students from all over the world.

Notwithstanding the global experience of meeting students from various countries in this college, the participants were also encouraged by the few other African students that she found in the college, providing her the opportunity to interact with students from Africa as well as the students from other places. The Participant continued to state that:

I also see other African students here, from Togo, Ghana, Kenya, and other places, and then I am able to connect with them because we share some things in common. But I also want to experience something different. That's why I try to be friendly to African students and those that are not African students. Yes, sometimes, it's hard to interact with others who are not from the same culture as you, but I try, and through that, I am learning about other cultures, too.

Participant 6 also described how her college has a diverse student population in the following statement:

The good thing about this college is that you meet different people, and you know, they come from different countries, and that's good. Back home, everyone looks almost the same even though we have our local language differences and so many other differences that many people will not know...but here you get to see more differences because you see students who are White, Mexican, and others, and you see that you are all in the same school.

Accordingly, in describing their experiences of a diverse student body, participants were encouraged by students from other countries on their campuses. The opportunity to interact with other African students is important for the participants, as highlighted in their statements.

Supportive School Officials

The supportiveness and helpfulness of school officials, including the international student officers and the admission officers, during the application process and on-campus were referenced by participants in this study. In general, participants are impressed with the level of services they received from these officers. It is important to note that one of the colleges in this study does not have an established international office. However, both schools have staff assigned for international student matters, including the Designated School Official (DSO). Statements, including the following, have been attributed to the international office and the officers that attended to the student needs.

I also email or call them when I am in doubt about something. As you know, things keep changing for international students, and then I want to make sure I don't do anything that will affect me in the future. And sometimes, they also email us about new things, and

they always answer your questions when you ask them, and that's important to us so that we don't do anything that will affect our status. Sometimes also, if something is wrong with anything about your papers... they can... they call you about it (participant 5).

The participant was highlighting the role of the international office in advising students of new development with regard to visas and to guide students in maintaining their student visas. Participant 6 spoke of the welcoming environment of the international office at her institution.

In their office, everyone feels welcomed. They have all the flag of different countries and I am always happy to see the flag of my country there. They are always nice when you go to see them for anything .They even have free coffee and they have another area where you can just sit and relax, and we normally go and anytime you go, there you meet a new person. I like to go there a lot because of that.

The participant further spoke of the international office in her school as one of the offices where she feels valued. She stated: "I am always comfortable there. I don't know the right way to describe it, maybe, I just... I can just say that I feel safe and I feel appreciated when I am in their office". In the words of Participant 3, "The staff members are very friendly, and when you need something, they help you with it; if they cannot do it, they will tell you." Participant 2 summarily captured the essence of the points expressed by participants regarding student relationships with the international offices. He stated:

I visit the international student office almost every other day because I like to know what's new on campus and what they have for us. They are really nice and helpful. Sometimes, I email them, and they are very quick to respond. Because I like to stay on top of things about international students, I don't want to miss information, especially about new immigration rules or forms to fill out, and the international office is the place

to get that information. One thing here is that if you don't stay on top of things as international students, some new changes may come and if you don't know and act on it in time, you can easily have problems with your visa, and I don't want to take any risk, so that's why I am always approaching them, and they are also willing anytime to help with things like renewing our I-20s.

Basically, participants highlighted the diversity of the program, small classrooms sizes as well as prospects of employment as the factors that attracted them to community colleges in the United States. Other participants shared stories of their admission process regarding the helpfulness of admission officials as well as the supportive international student office staff who dedicatedly communicated with the students prior to their arrival and help facilitate their transition through series of orientations on arrival.

With regard to the process of getting admissions from the schools, the students described how they were primarily referred to the schools through their friends and family members, and they had different admission experiences. Most of the participants indicated that the admissions process was very hectic, involving too much paperwork and correspondence between the schools and the student. On some occasions, students must go through agents and pay huge sums of money to help them apply for schools. However, few of the participants find the process very straightforward, making it easy for students from Africa to apply and get admitted to schools. This section includes what the participants stated about their admission processes.

Complicated Admission Processes

Many of the participants lamented about their difficulties in securing admissions from schools while in Africa. The difficulties stemmed from the long duration of correspondence between the schools and the university admission officials to the submission of several

documents and paying of fees, coupled with rigorous scrutiny during visa interviews at the US consulates. Reflecting on her experience, Participant 4 stated:

When I found out this school on the internet through one of my friends, I immediately applied on their website and I was asked to upload all kinds of documents. Those documents were my high school transcript, my birth certificate and also my motivational essay. They also wanted to see a bank statement from my family before I could be accepted. Later, I got another email that I need to send the originals of those documents by mailing them but the bank statement should come directly from the bank to them (the school).

According to Participant 4, although the admissions process is difficult, it was not as tough as the visa interview. She stated:

I don't know about other students, but my own visa interview was a nightmare, and I almost gave up because I have been going for the interview for three times. Every time I go, they will tell me to provide something else... The problem at first was that I went with a copy of high school certificate but they asked for the original, so I went to my school to collect the original. When I came back for the second time, they said my bank statement was not up to date, so my uncle had to go to the bank to update the bank statement, and I brought it back with me for my third interview. Even with all those documents, I was questioned for more than thirty minutes about things like, what I know about the schools, why I want to go and study in the US, and what I am going to do when I graduate.

Participant 4 is not alone in the difficulties she experiences during the admission process and securing a visa to come and study in the US. Her story relates to Participant 5, who had to try admission at three different schools over three years before settling for her current college.

I first applied to ... college in New York because my brother was living there. The school accepted me, and they wanted me to pay a deposit of \$2,000 before they would mail my I-20. After paying that and receiving all the documents, I was rejected (visa), and I wasn't given any reason. I was just given a rejection letter which didn't even explain anything as to why I was rejected. The letter only said something like your visa application is not approved at this time. So, after that, we started the process of getting my deposit back from that school, and I applied to another school in Texas, but they did not accept me. Later, I applied to this school, and I was accepted. In fact, luckily for me, I was not asked to pay any deposit. I only paid the school application fee, and then the other fee was for my visa.

The admissions process is even more challenging, especially for students from French-speaking African countries. Participant 3 shared his admission experience in the following statement:

People like me who study in French, our system is very different. So, for me, even though I have a bachelor's degree, it's not important here, so I have to start afresh. And before you can get a visa, you have to pay some people to help you find a school and then apply that for you. It's a lot of money and they don't assure you of getting a visa. They will tell you: "We can help you get a school, and about the visa, that's up to you and the U.S. embassy."

The participant was explaining the process of having to go through agents abroad for placements in schools in the United States. The participant highlighted that even after securing admission and the visa, several prerequisite courses are prescribed for French students.

When I first came, they made me take a test for writing, reading, and math, and I think I did good, but they still made me take some more English and math classes. I can understand about the English aspect because I know my English is not very perfect, but the math should be waived for me and many other courses because of my bachelor's degree, but they didn't waive anything for me.

Interestingly, other students had straightforward admission experiences and fewer difficulties in securing a student visa. For example, Participant 1 stated:

For me, the process was really easy. I did it all by myself. The school had a portal, so you create an account there and then you answer the questions about the program you want to study, and you send them a bank statement. There was no application fee or nothing like that for the school. In less than a month, I received an email that was I accepted and I started preparing for my interview. My visa interview was less than ten minutes. The lady just looked through my documents and asked me what school I was going to study in; I told her the name of the school and she asked what program of study. I told her and she looked at my documents again and then she kept my passport and gave me a receipt to come for my visa in two days. Maybe, I was lucky, but coming to this college was very easy for me.

Participant 2 also explained a seemingly straight admission forward process. He stated:

One of my friends had already done it before and he was guiding me to do things and sometimes, I will send him my documents and he will submit for me at the admission

office. So, it didn't take that much time because everything they wanted, I sent to my friend and he would take it to their office. When my I-20 came, I went for my interview. I don't even remember what they asked me, but I really know that it was very short. I was given the visa that very day.

Meanwhile, documentation gathered from the admission process of both colleges can be summarized in five key steps. Step one: international students send in application materials and supporting documents for review. When students are accepted, they will move to the second step, where the school sends them an English language placement test to be taken through a testing agency overseas. Third step: the students are sent an acceptance letter with immigration form I-20. With the acceptance and the I-20, the students schedule a visa interview appointment at the US consulate in their countries as step four. Finally, once the visa is approved, the student makes travel plans to come to the college as step five. In short, while the process of admission as laid out by the colleges seems straightforward, a majority of the participants lamented difficulties in the admission process as a result of having to submit missing documents, paying agents but facing visa rejections, etc. However, some participants had an easy admission process even though the numbers in this category are telling.

The next section addresses the second research question, which seeks to explore the experiences of the students on their campuses.

RQ 2. What are the Experiences of African Students in Community Colleges?

This section discusses what the participants highlighted about their learning experiences in community colleges both within and outside of classrooms in the US. Participants narrated stories and shared personal experiences that promote or hinder their education in the two-year

institution. These responses were coded into categories forming two key broad themes under academic alienation as well as socio-cultural isolation.

Academic Alienation

A major theme that runs through most of the academic experiences of the students is academic alienation as students struggle to keep up with the academic environments of their colleges. Data from school documents reveal key aspects of schools' focus to help students throughout their entire academic experience. For example, the international student admissions brochure for College A highlights some points that may be attractive to international students. These include “Free academic support such as tutoring, a writing center, a research and citations lab.” College B also has listed on the international student section of its website that the college supports students in areas such as transfer support for a smooth transition to four-year colleges, small classrooms of 20 students or less, and intensive academic English program to help students succeed. Both colleges also highlight the availability of adequate learning resources for the students, including classrooms well-equipped with technology. In essence, the schools have used some of these catchy points, suggesting that the institutions are positioned to be effective in the education of students, especially those from overseas.

Meanwhile, participants in this study have explained how their academic experiences in these two-year colleges are characterized by alienation. Some of the sub-themes revealed in the data include navigating unusual classroom settings, experiencing inappropriate classroom conducts, encountering difficult relationships with local students, and experiencing strange student-lecturer interaction.

Changed Classrooms

Almost all the participants highlighted how they experience an unusual environment in classrooms in the community colleges in the United States. These differences exist in both interactions and structure of the classrooms, as well as engagements among the students and faculty. Participant 8 captured his experiences in the following statement:

To be honest, the classrooms were intimidating to me at first. Look at it this way—my typical classroom is about 100 people who have the same color as me, and most of my teachers since primary school are people who look like me but here, I am in a classroom where I am sometimes the only person from Africa, and I speak with a thick accent. And again, the classroom was looking very organized with nice furniture, and computers, and projectors for lectures, so for the first time, it was hard to be comfortable in my classes.

The high focus on the use of technology in classrooms is another point of discussion for participants as they compare their current classroom settings to their personal experiences of the limited use of technology in classrooms back in Africa. Participant 4 stated that,

It's totally different because back in Africa, the use of technology in the classroom is kind of limited because we don't have something like what we call the blackboard; we don't have it in Africa. Mostly, teachers just come in, they teach us, and everything is in a manual or hard copy; that's what we use in Africa. So, when we got here, it was really difficult because everything was online; you have to do everything on your own.

Another participant echoed similar concerns about the use of technology as he also compared technology in his classes here to what existed in his country. Participant 7 stated:

The technology stuff is totally different compared to Africa. It's like, it's totally different because that's the reason always when you come here, you have to learn things all over

again. Sometimes, it's difficult, but for me, I like learning new things especially computers, so it was mostly okay for me. It is always difficult for you before you get used to the system. It takes time because the way we learn in Africa and the way things are set around this part of the world are totally different.

Participant 2 was equally amazed at the level of technology used in classrooms. "I will say, you cannot compare it with any school I know of in our country, because they have a lot of resources compared to us there. Technology here is advanced; there are computers everywhere, and you can access them and stuff like that".

Erratic student attendance has also been highlighted by some participants as one of the commonest experiences of African students in their classrooms in these community colleges.

Participant 7 observed in this statement:

One of the first things I notice in most of my classes here is that they don't take attendance or send a paper around for people to write their names unlike what we used to do in our classes back home. Here, sometimes there are only few people in the class and then when the time for exams comes or when there is a test going on, you see a lot of students in the class and then you tend to ask whether all these students are in this class. It looks like attendance does not matter to some of them; they just want to do the test and exams.

Thus, although the students are excited to be in new classrooms in community colleges, the physical appearance of classrooms is intimidating. The erratic attendance of American college students is unusual to the participants.

Inappropriate Classroom Conduct

Several participants are appalled by the conduct of some of their colleagues in classrooms, including their dress code, eating habits in class, and their use of personal communication devices during class sessions. Participants highlighted how some of those ways of dressing would not be accepted in colleges in their home countries in Africa. In particular, Participant 3 summarily highlights the perception of college and how students should dress:

In my country, if you are going to a university, it means that you have at least made it to a certain level of success in your education, and it's a sign of a good future and people look up to you, so you dress really nice when you leave your house going to the school. So with that mindset, when I came here and saw that people are mostly dressing like they are going to the gym or something, I was very confused about that situation, and even like some of those things some people wear here will not be accepted. Some teachers will not let you come into their classrooms with your shorts on in my country, but here you see people coming in shorts even ladies wearing things that expose their bodies. I don't know much about the culture here but in my country, even your parents will not allow you to come out like that, especially ladies. Sometimes, even if nobody tells you when you look at your peers wearing nice things and even neck ties, you will adjust, but here that's not the case. Most people don't wear nice things to class.

Participant 1 also shares how he feels about the way some students dress to class, especially the younger students. He stated:

The way some young students come to class here is sometimes unimaginable. I always dress professionally because I am not that young like many of them, but I can tell you that some just throw anything to cover them: some people's shirts are not ironed, some

come in singlets, and very short things for some ladies. It's just not how I think students should dress to class, so that really is one thing that shocked me in some of my classes.

Participant 6 also has observed that most students dress very casually when coming to attend classes. She stated:

As a college or university student in my country, you cannot dress anyhow and come to class but here, I see people dress very differently. Some wear things like they are going to party and others wears things that are at least decent but I can say that many people come to most of my classes dressed in ways that are not accepted. I know that I am not going to wear some of those short things even if I am going to a party. Especially when it's hot... but I guess that is what they feel comfortable to wear.

Interestingly, other participants have found themselves sidelined because of the way they dress. For example, a female who wears loose clothes and wears a hijab for religious reasons highlights how she frequently gets unusual stares and is often sidelined in class because of the way she dressed. Participant 5 stated:

Sometimes, when I go to class and sits somewhere, nobody wants to come and sit next to me. I remember this one time in our class when there were not enough chairs but there was an empty chair by my table but this one student who came late refused to sit next to me. I even told her she could sit at my table, but she ignored me and then went outside to collect a chair from another classroom to sit on. And look, she didn't even use a table; she placed her stuff on her lap. At first, incidents like that bothered me, but now I am used to them, and I only interact with students who are comfortable with me and how I dress. Of course, even during group work time, some don't want to be in the same group with me, but I am no longer worried about that.

Another unusual classroom concern for some participants is the high usage of personal communication devices, including cell phones, by students during class sessions. Participants observed that almost every student comes to class with their cellphones and continues to use them during lectures. Participant 6 stated:

I see people on their phones the entire time of the class and the lecturers don't say anything to them. Maybe, they are using the phones to write notes or I don't know what, but that is disrespectful and I know that back in my country even if you have to use your telephone in class, maybe, you have to hide so that the lecturer would not see you, else you will be sent out of the class. Here, some people's phone will ring in class and they will go out to answer the call and then come back... Hey, if you do that in my country, when you go out of the class to answer your phone, they will never allow you to come back to that class.

Participant 2 also explained other unusual classroom experiences, such as students eating in class. He stated that:

I see students eating in the classroom while classes are going on, something we cannot do in Africa at all. When the teachers are talking, you are expected to give them your full attention; you cannot be doing anything else, or they will say you are disrespecting them, and you could be sent out of the class.

In essence, participants are shocked by what they considered inappropriate conduct, such as inappropriate dress code, uncontrolled usage of cellphones in class, and eating in classrooms.

Complex Interactions with Domestic Students

Participants in this study have highlighted complex and complicated relationships with domestic students in classrooms. In general, participants' experiences of interactions with local

students differ significantly, yet, many of them consistently referenced that they have limited interaction and collaborations with local students in classrooms. Participant 4 stated that:

I can say that for me and many of my colleagues, our relationship is kind of limited because a majority of the students on this campus are not African students... but the truth is that they are not open to us, and we don't also try to engage them mostly. One thing is that when you try to ask them questions or you stop them to ask them stuff that you are wondering about, they are always nice and they will come to your aid but apart from that, they are not that socializing with us and sometimes, they don't even want to be in the same group with us for group work.

Participant 4 also discussed her experiences with local students, which she considered to be strange. She highlights that:

There are some students that I know from my classes, one day I will talk to them in class, the next day we meet again, it's like we don't even know each other. What bothers me most about some of these students is that when they see you, they will not even greet you, but when they need something, they will be like, "Can I borrow this?" So, some of us don't do things like that, and I guess that is why we cannot really get along that well.

Participant 7 also shared similar experiences regarding her interaction with domestic students. She stated that:

The thing that I don't understand about some students is that somebody will sit next to you and they'll not even say a word to you, but when they need something from you, they will ask, "Can I have this?" In our culture, that's rude. When you come and meet people, or you find them at a place, you have to greet them first before you ask them for

something. I am not saying all of them, but most of the students do not greet, and when you greet them sometimes, no one responds to you.

While these participants explained their unusual relationships with domestic students, others have also explained their very cordial relationship with local students, especially when it comes to group assignments. Some had explained successful collaborations with local students especially in science courses. Participant 3, for example, stated that:

When I was doing my biology class, we have labs so we always do our work in the group. I didn't have any problem working with other American students. I am always lucky to be in good groups with really nice guys and in some of my groups they usually allow me to present our work on behalf of the group to the class. So, for me, I had good interactions with them in class even though they are not like my friends after school, that's okay because I am here for education.

While some participants described having difficult relationships with domestic students, others indicated they had cordial relationships leading to the establishment of strong bonds of friendships.

Different Writing Standards

Another theme that was highlighted was the differences in writing standards and referencing, their accents when they are called to speak in class, and how their colleagues and sometimes the professors struggle to understand them in the classrooms. Participant 3 stated:

It was like all the students were put at the same level. The instructor they give their lecture. Of course, we have questions. I think one of the problems that I can say is our accent being different. Like in a reading classroom, when you read, sometimes, they'll ask you to repeat your words, saying, "What did you say?" because they don't get it.

Some of them are not used to our accent but everything was okay. There was no big problem. It's a different setting of the way you write.

He added, “Basically, I like to present during work and talk for the group because I think it is one way that will help me improve my English, but some students cannot always understand my English, you know.” Participant 2 stated that,

When you are enrolled in the course, it takes a little bit of time for the lecturers to get familiar with you to know you, and see the style that you write, how you read and stuff like that. Some of them will be understanding, but some of them won't, honestly. But the fact that they will let you go through the writing classes and then your reading classes for you to get to their level helps a lot. But that's one area that was very challenging, especially when it comes to these main two subjects, English.

Albeit these new experiences, a majority of the participants indicated that they found resources on campus that helped them adjust to the new academic environment in community colleges. These resources include the library and writing centers, as well as the support of instructors.

Unusual Relationships with Professors

The relationships between students and professors were also discussed in the interviews, with participants explaining how they found the unusual and informal relationship between students and faculty in classrooms. Participant 3 stated that:

In Africa, we don't call elderly people by their name, especially someone who is your teacher. You have to call them Mr. so and so (their surname) but here on the first day of one of my classes, the instructor said we can call her Tina—that's her first name. That

was so strange to me so I could never call her by that name, but other people called her by that name, which I think is not right.

Participant 7 also observed a similar thing with students calling lecturers by their first names, and she thinks that is disrespectful. She states:

This is something that was a little bit shocking for me because I couldn't imagine that a student can call the teacher by the first name. One day, we were having a class discussion and one of the students stood up and said, "Shut up!" to the teacher. And they didn't even take it seriously. I asked myself, "What is going on here?"

Participant 4 also shared a similar experience about being uncomfortable addressing the instructors by their first name even though most of her colleagues are very informal with their instructors. She stated:

And the other biggest difference that I noticed was also the way we address lecturers. Here, we call them by their name. Back home, we do not. We don't call them by name. We call them mister or teacher or doctor or something, but here you just call somebody by their first name, which I really found... I can't still do that. It's very informal. I can't still do that. I cannot look at an elderly person and call him Mary or John. No, it's very, very difficult... For me, it feels disrespectful. I know it's the cultural difference, but still it feels disrespectful.

Even though addressing instructors by their first name is not an issue for many academics, instructors who received their training from other academic cultures abroad frown at the informal relationship between students and their lecturers. According to Participant 5,

One of our instructors who came from Peru always had problems with the way students behaved in class. He always complained. He would keep telling the students, “if you were in my country, you would not behave like this.”

Participant 7 also added:

Sometimes, students will be using their phones in class, and other people making groups and just making funny noises or chattering at the back. The professors don't do anything about it except sometimes they will say, “Please, guys, let's concentrate.” So, the way I see it, everybody feels like they are free to do whatever they feel like and they don't care even whether a lecturer is in class or not.

Participant 2 stated this about instructors in community colleges:

Lecturers here are very informal, and we are coming from Africa where our setup over there is very formal. You cannot call your teacher by their names. You have to say, Mr. and something. But over here, they don't like that. So, they just say, “Call me by my name; I am ...”. So that was a huge, huge difference. Up till now, I'm not comfortable calling my teachers by their names. And I just try but, yes, I am really trying to get into that normalcy.

Transfer Experiences

Transfer from community colleges also emerged as a theme during the interviews as some of the participants had successfully transferred from the community college to a four-year college. Participant 1 stated that,

When I was there, I was really focused on what I wanted to do. I wanted to transfer to a university and luckily, the school also organizes transfer days and they bring other universities around the state and our neighboring states to come and tell us students about

their universities... to give people an idea of what kind of program, what kind of activities they have in their universities. That engagement helped because it was through that I found a school.

Participants also expressed how events such as transfer days and the interactions with officials from four-year universities helped them navigate the transition process, eventually leading them to successfully transfer to four-year colleges. Participant 1 continued to state that:

Imagine coming from Africa with little knowledge about other schools here, but then when you come to transfer day events, you see many school representatives and you can talk to them and take their information. It really helps you decide what you are going to do next. For me, I am making the best use of things like that here and when I graduate, I am going to continue to one of the schools I found here... It's so many of them; maybe, more than 20 schools even.

Participant 2, a student from the Gambia, stated how helpful the school authorities were during the process of transferring. He said,

Interestingly, they were having some partnerships with a four-year college which was 100 miles away from the city where I was. There was a four-year college, but that city was even smaller than the city where we were. So, they had a campus in our own college where they open their doors to students who have plans of having a four-year college over there. So, you can even start taking your classes in our own campus for their program.

However, not all transfers to four-year colleges were smooth. Some participants expressed the frustrations they encountered in trying to navigate the process of transferring from community colleges to four-year institutions. Participant 3 stated the following:

One thing that is frustrating me here is that, I want to be done and move to another university for my bachelor's, but I have no guidance, nothing! You see, any time I go to my advisor about my classes, they keep making me take more classes than I think I need. So now I am doing it myself and I have started contacting schools that will accept me.

Academic Advising

Few participants raised concerns about academic advising. While many of them commended the advising services as helpful because the advisors are always available, others argue that their advisors did not really understand them and thus, were unhelpful in addressing some of their specific academic needs. Participant 3 stated:

For me, an advisor is somebody who knows how to explain to you and tell you what to do. But when you go to the advisors here, they will ask you what you want. After telling them all you want, they will now tell you to decide for yourself because they cannot decide for you. Some of these are things you don't know; it's new to you because it's a new system. You always have questions to ask but they'll tell you that there is nothing they can decide for you. You have to decide for yourself. You see what I mean?

Although the Participant was not impressed with the advice he received after meeting his advisors, he admits that they were available when you needed them.

Probably, I had a bad conception of what advisor means, but for me, somebody who is there to give you advice is the one who will show you what to do. They are definitely there whenever you go to meet them, but it's very, very hard for me to get them to help me and tell me what I should do in my situation.

Other students also had issues with the advising received as they discussed how they lacked quality and consistent advising towards their academic progress. Participant 2 states:

I remember I talked to one of the advisors and she went to pull out my transcript. She said I had three classes to finish here. I was happy. I said to myself that next semester I was going to take the three classes and I would be done. And then, after I was done taking those three classes, I went there again. I was applying for graduation and they said, no, you have another class to take. That's very, very frustrating. Today, they tell you this and tomorrow they tell you something different.

Thus, the highlight of the participants' experiences in community colleges is characterized by estranged classrooms, from classroom resources to student-student relationships and interactions, as well as appearance in class, some of which the participants found to be unusual. It is important to note that African students' experience of unusual classrooms for African students in community colleges is not surprising as prior studies have documented the unfamiliarity of international students with classrooms in the United States as well as their exclusions due to the strange environment (Dorset, 2017; Hoekje & Stevens, 2018; Valdez, 2016). The students highlighted concerns with the English language as they navigate the process of writing in approved styles, with some expecting some form of leniency in grading. Lipson (2014) emphasized that prospective international students should be prepared to engage in learning in English as it is the language of instruction in classrooms in the United States. Also, transferring to four-year colleges and the defective advising, in some cases, received by the students towards that goal were also areas highlighted by participants. The next section discusses what participants highlight about their socio-cultural experiences.

Socio-cultural Adjustment

Aside from the uncommon academic aspect of college experience, African students in community colleges interact with local students outside of classrooms. Equally, the students

engage in social activities and sometimes relate with members of the communities they live. Data from the interviews with the students reveal that they mostly experience different situations relating to their interaction and adjustment on campuses.

It is important to note that both College A and College B have comprehensive international student handbooks which detail, among other things, how students are supported, particularly on integration on campus as well as acclimatization in the United States. For example, College A states that their student population of over 5,000 students comes from more than 30 different countries, which shows the diversity of the student population. College B also indicates more than 20 associations and clubs where students are welcome to make friends and build leadership skills.

While these documentations explicitly highlight the intentions and efforts of these colleges on supporting international students and helping them with ways of adjusting in the United States, the African students in this study expressed mixed opinions as to their actual socio-cultural experiences both on campus and elsewhere in the community. Several themes and sub-themes were uncovered as some participants expressed fulfilled social lives at the colleges, particularly the sense of a strong community, respect for others, and tolerance for diversity in the institutions. However, other participants described experiences of being sidelined on campus, particularly by domestic students. The next section presents the data from participants revealing their socio-cultural experiences, including their perceptions of a welcoming environment, supportive African student community, tolerance, community integration support, and involvement in recreation as well as the less association with domestic students.

Welcoming Campuses

When asked about their social experiences in their colleges, some participants highlighted that they feel welcomed in community colleges and have found a community through which they built strong social connections. Participant 8 explained that he had a good impression of the college campus from the first day he arrived. He stated,

When I arrived, I didn't know anyone here and on my first day, I was dropped off by another friend who lives in town and I was trying to go the admission office. I asked this one student, who was going towards a different direction, but he turned around and took me to the admission office. I was very impressed that someone will do that for me.

The Participant continued to highlight that first experience matters as it allows new students to make friends and build connections with others.

So for me, that first encounter on my first day tells me that the people are very welcoming here and from then, I also started to be friendly and make so many friends. All I can say is that the people are nice to me and I feel part of the college.

Participant 2 explained his experiences by comparing them with the environment of the four-year college he has recently transferred to.

I feel good there because I made so many friends and even the administrator, they know me. Many people know me and they know my name ... yes, the college is way smaller than where I am but regardless of that, I feel really good at the college and I had good memories and so many friends who are more like family now. Just that togetherness and almost knowing everyone, that's important for me and I never have that experience anywhere else.

Interestingly, the students did not only experience supportive social relationships only on campus; some students had strong social support outside of campus. Participant 2 stated:

In town also, I have a family that's very friendly to me. I knew them through the school, but they are like my parents here. Not just me but many other African students have people in the community that support them. Some of them are even African families that have lived here permanently and even American families, too.

The participant also highlights in some specific ways how some individuals in the community support them as students, including help with groceries.

In the church also, when we tell them we are students, they will ask us if we need anything, and they help us with groceries and things like bags and other small, small things. During holidays like Christmas, they send us gifts, a lot of stuff. It's really nice to have people like that.

Participant 3 explained how his college became home for him because of the welcoming environment and social connections he made at the institution. He stated:

The thing about this school is, almost everybody is from here and sometimes, they know each other from high school. So, when you interact with one person, you also know more people through them. So, it's like everybody knew everybody and I like that about this place. Even when I go to my sisters in Seattle for holidays, it's busy there but I still miss this place.

Although statements from these participants suggest that some students find the community colleges welcoming of African students, the literature on the experiences of the international student community in the institutions seems to suggest mixed experiences as prior studies questioned whether international students do really fit in community colleges (Garcia,

2019). The author's concerns stem from the fact that two-year institutions may not have all the structures, including adequate staff to support international students.

While Participants 2 and 8 narrated their experiences of finding a welcoming community and establishing strong ties across various student groups, individual families, and the church in the community, other participants' sense of community is derived solely from their association with other African students.

Supportive African Student Community

Support from other African is pointed out in the discussions in the data. Specifically, the participants highlight that they found community as Africans through personal relations and the student organizations they became involved within the community college community. This point is particularly captured by Participant 4. She stated,

My fellow African students are always there for me. Even though we are from different countries, we have so many things in common ... Like me, I come from West Africa and others are from East Africa and other places, and we have our little differences but still, we have many things in common, so I am more comfortable around them. We created our own small group. Sometimes, we attend the same classes, and we hang out on weekend. My roommate is also African ... yes, you know, it's good to have people around you who understand you and when you are going through some difficulties, they can help you and be there for you.

The participants highlight that the nature of the colleges with a limited number of African students forced them to establish strong ties among themselves and be recognized by other students.

We have our clique, so to speak. Meaning, we were relating to each other more than other students, and some students notice that too. But we also had some African students who were having roommates who were non-Africans as well. So that shows us they had some good relationship there. But for me, my roommates were all Africans, and we are all part of the same ASA (African Students Association) and we do many things together.

Similar statements were made by other participants including Participant 5 in the following statement:

I feel no difference between me and other African students; I am one of them. And also, we open up to help each other with information that concerns purely African students. For example, where to get help with housing or food banks for students, and we invite each other to parties and stuff like that, because it's like we are all African and we know how life is here, so we try to help each other.

The Participant continued to highlight how these associations are beneficial to African students as such associations help them access support and information that other students may not be able to assist with.

You know, some students may not be willing to give that information, or they may not even know about them, for example immigration issues. Because when you first come to the country, the first thing that you want to know as an F-1 student is what the do's and don'ts of your status are and if you don't go to the right people or the right group, you will not get some of that information.

Other participants made similar comments about being associated with other African students and, in particular, the African student associations. Participant 6 made the following statement:

As an F-1 student, you don't want to jeopardize your status. And it's only the senior African students who have been here before you that can give you that insight, not other students. So, I think to be more associated with other African students happen just naturally. It's just natural that anywhere you go, one thing you want to look at is where you get accepted without you having to force your way.

Involvement on Campus

Participants highlighted fulfilling experiences as they narrated opportunities to participate in other forms of integration programs such as international student festivals, field trips, and sporting activities. Participant 6 remarked,

I also participate in many activities organized by the international office. They have so many events for us. One time, we went to the Zoo and we also went to the state capital and there, we also saw the Lincoln library and all the Lincoln staff there. They are really fun. I like going to places like that so that I can enrich my American story. They also do the international festival too and there is food from different countries. I like that event too, also because it is open to all international students and even American students.

Another participant, Participant 8 who says he plays soccer for the school team likes the opportunities to participate in soccer events as things that are fulfilling for him and allows him to build relationships with students from different countries. He stated:

A social thing for me is soccer if you consider that social life... I play soccer for the school team. My friends are from all over, and some international students like me. They are not all Africans though; I have Mexican and Brazilians friends and we all share... we have football in common, soccer, as they call it here. Even if the team is not playing, we do our own games and we play every weekend. We will go to the park and play with

other teams; sometimes, when it's cold, we play indoors. For me, that was all I do. I am just happy that they gave me this opportunity.

However, other participants discussed their involvement in campus activities but mainly within the limits of the activities of the African student's association, as explained in this statement from Participant 5.

When I came here, the first association I was interested in was the African Student Association because this is the club I think I can meet people and make immediate connections. I feel like with other African students, you share some of the same norms, cultural values with, and you feel they are easier to associate with than others, even though I am open to involving in other activities as well... so I didn't hesitate to join the African Student Association, and I didn't regret it because I immediately made very good friends.

Nonetheless, other participants have highlighted how they are active members of the campus community through participation in the campus community and making friends from both the African student community and non-African students. As Participant 2 stated:

One thing for me is that I was engaged in many activities on campus. I was part of the forensic speech team for the college, which was also a program that gives some kind of scholarship, I mean, partial scholarship. So, I got in and my coach was one of my lecturers and she encouraged me to join the team. When I joined, we were making speeches, practicing, and competing in various places. And I did that for the one year and one semester that I was there. I was also part of the CAPA organization as well.

Another participant also explained being part of the initiators to form and register a new student organization in his college. As Participant 3 stated, "I was one of those who created the

French club here and it's open to everybody and some lecturers also attend our French classes every week.”

However, Participant 3, who is a non-traditional student, said he had a positive relationship with people of his age who are attending classes at College A. He stated that, Personally, I came here as a mature student. I did not come here as a teenager. So, that makes a big difference for me. Because most of the people I interacted with are people who already have their families, like people who have jobs, and they are in the college to finish a class or two. Our relationship is not like we are drinking buddies; we are not the party type people, but it's like we are responsible people, and we support each other. We call each other on the phone, even those who have already finished school or moved away from here. Most of them are Americans.

Acceptance of All

Another aspect of community college that augments the experiences of international students is the way they support and respect the religious diversity of African students. For example, Participant 2 explained how the school supported them as a small group of African Muslim students together with other Muslim international students to be given the space to practice their religion and get financial support for their association to implement its planned activities. He stated,

I feel that the school gave us the opportunity to stay who we are as Muslims. We get some money to organize iftar during Ramadan, and during Eid celebration, some of my friends and I will make food and invite everybody. Some lecturers and other staff members will also come and celebrate with us. We were less than 20 Muslim students, but our programs had in attendance by close to 50 people. They like our food and the way

we dress; it's always colorful, blended with a lot of varieties because we have African Muslims, Indians, and some people from Saudi Arabia but we are all mostly international students.

The participant added how the support from the school allows them space to perform certain religious rituals. "I also remembered during one Eid celebration. The school provided us with a van to take us to the Eid praying grounds. That is a very good thing, and we appreciate things like that for this school."

Another participant explained how she got involved in religious activities on campus through a group called international student friendship, comprising both local and international students, which paved the way for her to maintain her spiritual obligations at the same time providing an avenue for her to interact with people of her faith. Participant 6 stated,

In my second semester here, I found out about the international student friendship. It's basically a group, a fellowship group and we have Americans there, Whites, Blacks, and Mexicans, and we meet every Friday evening to worship together, pray for ourselves and our families and remind each other the teaching of the gospel. You know my father is a pastor back home and I was raised going to church almost every day. So, this group really helped me to maintain some of those values and even with social interaction because I always looked forward to going there every Friday to cool down from the week's studies and the whole reading stress. We have snacks there; we laugh and have fun too.

Other participants discussed their involvement on campus within the context of community integration programs, in particular, the host family program.

I was also attached to one family in the community, and they used to come to pick me up on weekends that I am free to do my grocery shopping and we will have lunch at their

house before they drop me off. They also invited me for holidays like Thanksgiving and Christmas. They were an elderly White couple, and they were very helpful to me. I appreciate getting to know them through the school and I am still in contact with them. They are basically my parents here.

While most participants had positive experiences of what they considered a strong sense of community, other participants share stories of unpleasant encounters, including being sidelined by some domestic students.

Ignored by Domestic Students

Some African students explained that they have been sidelined and ignored by other students. For example, Participant 4 stated that,

The thing is that I don't interact with other students and I don't normally attend any of their programs because I feel left out when I go to school programs. Sometimes, you meet others you share the same class with at events, but they act like they don't know you, so I normally don't have anyone to talk with, so I decided not to attend any of the programs. I am telling you that this did not happen to only me, even my roommates would share similar experiences when they go to some school events.

Participant 6 also explained her experience of feeling sidelined when she attended a scholarship luncheon on campus.

One semester, I was awarded a scholarship, I think it was about US\$300 and I was invited to the luncheon with many others. They had few people make speeches and then when we were going to eat, the turnout was low, so after the speeches, they were just talking with one another but no one approached me or said anything to me. Even though I was invited, I didn't feel that they wanted me there, so I just grabbed a plate, scooped

some food from the buffet table, and left. Sometimes, you are invited to events but when you go there, they ignore you.

As these participants characterize their social experiences, it is obvious that their interactions with each other and how they experience the learning community vary. However, they shared similar experiences especially with regard to the limited interaction with domestic students as well as the closed bonds they formed among themselves as African students. This is not surprising as the isolation of international students as well as their limited interaction has been documented in prior studies (Deardorff, 2009; Slantcheva-Durst, 2019).

Other discussions that emanated from the interview data related to finance. The analysis of the documentation on finance of international students in community colleges is dominated by discussing of the financial burden faced by international students as well as the affordability of tuition fees in community colleges. For example, both colleges in this study highlight on their websites and recruitment brochures the relative affordability of education in community colleges compared to other institution types. Nonetheless, African students who participated in this research have highlighted the lack of access to financial opportunities such as financial aid to support them with paying their tuition and other fees. While most of the participants highlighted limited access to finance to fund their education, some participants discussed having employment in colleges as tutors or cafeteria workers, which helped them with money for tuition and other fees. The following section analyzes statements from participants about the burden they experience due to the lack of financial aid and affordability of education in community colleges.

No Financial Aid

Almost all the participants in this study indicated that they had not received any form of financial aid from the school except for some merit-based scholarships. With the lack of financial aid, the students highlight ways they pay for schools, including doing any job they come across. Participant 6 stated that,

I didn't get any financial aid assistance because you have to be a green card holder or you have to be a citizen and I didn't have all of those because I am just an international student, and I didn't qualify for assistance. I am only qualified for academic scholarships, which is open for everybody based on academic performance. There is no discrimination in that one, so any student can apply whether you are from here the US or not.

However, the Participant was quick to add that education in the community college was comparatively cheaper, making it possible for him to pay for himself.

But again, it was cheap. A credit was like 90 bucks. So, if you take like 10 credit hours, that's around 900, plus all the fees. So, in a semester, you would just spend around 2,500, 2,800 bucks. So, it was not expensive. In my first semester, I paid out of pocket. I did same in the next semesters after I started working. I used whatever I got from my tax returns to pay the school fees.

Similarly, Participant 2 also explained the financial challenges he faced while in college and his ways of paying school fees through campus employment and credit card loans.

Finance was one big challenge for me. For me, how I paid my tuition was that I used one credit card that I used to pay with and also, I was working at the same time. What happened was that on campus, they have a few jobs, but the few jobs that were there, we were competing for them because it was a small community so you cannot get more

hours, but the little hours that you get, whatever money you make out of it, you use it again to pay for our tuition fees because the scholarships were not that many, even the ones that we got was just very minimal.

Affordability of Tuition Fees

The affordability of fees in community colleges is also highlighted by the participants in this study. Specifically, participants have made statements suggesting the affordability of tuition and their ability to pay for themselves, sometimes without family support or scholarships. This point is captured in the statement by Participant 2.

Now, I want to say this, even though scholarship is not easy to come by at community colleges, it's way cheaper there than if you had to go straight to a four-year college. The little scholarship and the work that you do, that combined, because of lower fees, you could afford to pay for yourself.

The participant further highlights the different means through which students pay their tuition in college, including working as tutors, borrowing money from credit card companies, and working in other departments such as food services. Participant 6 shared similar points on her ability to pay for the school with less help from her family.

I have two brothers here who help me with my tuition fees but sometimes, they don't send me any money for a whole semester, and I will do small jobs here and pay it on my own. This one semester, I was working for the library and all the money they paid me every month, I paid back straight to the school for my tuition.

Participant 8 also made statements related to the affordability of fees in his college, stating how he would not be able to go school if he has gone to other types of schools. He stated.

I know many people who come from Africa to go to school here and they don't end up not going to school or they drop out and now I understand why... the thing is, most of them choose schools that have big names, and they are expensive. For me, I know that I don't have anybody to pay for me, so I am lucky that I chose this college because if not, I would also drop out.

The participant continued to highlight the affordability of tuition to the extent that he is able to pay for school and still send some money for his family in Africa.

The name America is very big; when you are here, people back home expect you to do things for them, for you to send them money. Even though I am a student, I know my family is struggling so when I pay school fees from my tutoring job, I also send some money for them. I have another job at an international food store where I also get some money.

While some of these participants secured jobs that allowed them to pay for college, others had difficulties in getting jobs as students.

No Jobs

Participants expressed how they struggle to get employment as African students in community colleges. The students are mostly concerned with employment restrictions that affect international students in general. Participant 8 expressed his frustrations from the difficulties of getting a job on campus. He vented, "There are no jobs for us here! They don't hire us".

However, a more contextual explanation on the issues of lack of employment was provided by Participant 3. He stated:

The rules are very difficult for us. We were not allowed to work more than 20 hours. And most of us can only work on the campus and sometimes, you don't even have enough

hours that you want to work because there are so many student workers and this place is small.

The participant was explaining regulations pertaining to the employment of international students. These restrictions are not necessarily imposed by schools but by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Further explaining the employment restrictions, the Participant added that restrictions on student employment affect their ability to pay for school.

How can you give us visas to come and study here and we are not allowed to work like we want it? Imagine young kids like 16, 17 years old, Americans, they have two jobs and they still have extra time to come to class. What about us who are way older, and we are also paying for ourselves? This thing to me is the biggest problem because without jobs, some of us cannot pay the school fees.

Participant 4 explained that she was a tutor, and even though there are more hours she can work, the policy does not allow international students to work the same hours as the local students.

I was a tutor on campus and there are always demands for tutoring services especially in my area... I tutor in math... but I am only scheduled for like for around maybe a maximum of 2 hours every day. Always, every week, my hours total is more than 15 hours and I really need more than that so that I can pay the school fees and also pay some of my loans.

In addition, some participants discussed how the lack of jobs affected their ability to earn income and send abroad to their families. This, according to some participants, affected their concentration on studies.

They want us to come and focus on school here, that's why they don't allow us to have too many jobs, but our families back home are depending on us. If we don't have money to send to them, we will be disturbed. Like me, my sisters are always calling me because they want me to help them with school fees and other things.

The participant also explained how family pressure and the absence of work to address those demands could lead some students to completely abandon their education.

These are the things that make some students drop out from school and go to work in big cities. Some of my friends in New York were convincing me to go there and work because here, it's small and there are not so many businesses here for international students. You know, that's another disadvantage here—you don't have jobs that students can do and make extra money like in big cities.

However, other students were able to get over those restrictions by enrolling in special employment programs. Participant 1, a nursing student, explained how his participation in a specialized program helped him work for more hours. He stated that,

I was enrolled in one program; the program is CPT (Curricular Practical Training). That is, if you are training on something, it gives you the chance to work in that field even if the work is outside campus. Because I was in the nursing program and I also have my CNA license, I was able to work in the hospital for 20 hours and I got 10-15 hours from my campus job.

As the participants discussed their financial frustrations, it stands out that the lack of financial aid for African students has caused a huge burden on the students as they had to work for several hours to pay for tuition. In addition, they are equally unsatisfied by the lack of employment as well as the employment restrictions that apply to their visa status.

Essentially, the participants highlighted mixed reactions as they explained their social experience on community college campuses. Some students expressed profound appreciation for the support system, including friendships made and community support. Others expressed strong displeasure in ways they are sidelined which restricted their social interaction, particularly with domestic students on campus. In general, international students experienced social isolation and being sidelined on community college campuses as well as the limited capacity of some two-year colleges to accommodate international students (Garcia, 2019; Deardorff, 2009; Slantcheva-Durst, 2019). Additionally, students face financial constraints and burdens, including the lack of financial aid and limited jobs. Though under difficult circumstances, many participants afford to pay college tuition in their institutions. However, the social discontentment of students in community college campuses is not surprising as prior studies have highlighted the limited capacity of most community colleges to accommodate international students. Concerns of some of these scholars emanate from the fact that the primary role of community colleges is to provide education and skills training for local students and that international education is unconventional for community colleges (Treat & Hagedorn, 2013).

Having already addressed the first research question, which identified motivations of African students in community colleges, including the predicaments faced in their home countries as well as their hopes in community colleges in the United States, the next section addresses the final research question, which investigates the ways schools can support African students.

RQ 3. In What Ways can Community Colleges Support the Unique Needs of African Students?

This final research question highlights the voice of the participants on their suggestion of ways in which colleges could be enhanced so that African students may have the optimum experiences during their sojourn at the two-year institutions. While a majority of these recommendations from participants are already things that community colleges are doing, the data from participants reveal important information on ways in which existing services such as the library, housing, advising, and financial support could be expanded to accommodate the needs of the African students. The themes revealed from the participants includes academic assistance, more help from instructors, training on using technology, as well as the provision of reliable transportation, accommodation and assistance during their first year in the colleges.

Academic Assistance

Participants have expressed overall satisfaction with some of the academic support available to the students, specifically through the educational resources such as the library and writing center. Nonetheless, some participants have offered suggestions on ways academic programs and resources could be improved to meet their needs. One of those is the library services and library hours specifically. Participant 4 stated:

My problem is with the library. The library closes too early and sometimes on weekends like Sundays it's not open. And on Sunday is mostly when some of our assignments are supposed to be submitted.

Similar statements were shared by Participant 8 who feels strongly that the library should not close at all, stating that "I think the library should be open for us any time of the day."

However, Participant 4 was quick to mention the helpfulness of the library staff, especially in finding books and assisting students with finding articles they need for their courses. He stated, “But to be honest, you always have people who are available to help you to do your research; when you cannot find what you want, they will help you find it.”(Participant 4). Participant 3 also made statements about the academic assistance he was offered at the writing center, especially to improve his writing and citations.

I was helped by the tutor to do correct references because that’s something I didn’t do before and here you have to follow that strictly and sometimes, they deduct marks if you don’t follow them. So, I used to go to the writing center, and they would help me. That helped me a lot because I was even one of the best in writing in my class.

However, the participant wished there were more tutors available to help struggling international students, citing a limited number of tutors and the turnaround time to get scheduled with a writing tutor.

The only thing there now is that you have to have an appointment and sometimes, the whole week is booked so if you have a short time for your assignment, they will not be able to look it over for you. So, if they have more people there, so that they can provide more help for the students, it will be good for many of us because this system is new to us and we need a lot of help from them.

In essence, as the Participant expressed appreciation for the work of academic support units such as the library and writing centers, their recommendations, including extending library opening hours, as well as recruitment of more staff at the writing centers, are thought to be ways through which students can optimally utilize these valuable educational services on campus.

More Help from Instructors

In discussing their experiences in classrooms, the participants highlighted the role of their instructors in helping them feel comfortable in classrooms to adjust to the new ways of learning, including accessing course contents online. In their statements, some participants have identified ways they can get more help from their instructors. As one participant succinctly put it, “Most of these things in class are new to us, so they should help us and give us training on how to use them to do our assignments and how to send them online and things like that (Participant 8).”

Training on Using Classroom Technology

The use of technology also emerged as a theme, with participants recommending training on using technology in the class. Participant 5 stated,

I think they need to improve with the technology level. For students who are coming from other communities, they need more help technologically to get afloat.

The participant explained how he personally had issues when he did not have a computer. It became a problem for him to understand how to access materials and upload assignments.

It took me sometime to understand everything because you have to go to the class website online to do quiz sometimes and you also have to search for articles, and I didn't have my own computer that time so things were difficult for me and I could not do all my work. So sometimes they need to understand our situation.

Narrating his earlier experience, Participant 5 shared concerns about the general preparedness of newly arriving students and that lecturers should help them adjust by giving them more time to acquaint themselves with their new classroom.

I have a personal problem during our first test because when I opened it and I started answering questions, the thing was not moving after I answered the first question and

time was going, and I didn't know what was wrong with it. It was later that I realized that I should click next so that I see the other questions. I didn't get a good mark in that test because... so it's not fair to us and that's why they need to explain these technological literacies to us before we take the test.

Another participant also brought in her personal experiences of how one instructor was helpful to her, suggesting that those could be ways other instructors can support new students in their classes.

In my case, I have problem with speaking in class and this lecturer observed that every time I came to class, I don't say anything until end of the class. So, one day after class, he asked me where I was from and I told him I am an African student and he asked me where in Africa I was from. So, we started talking and he told me that if you need anything or have any questions, you can come to my office or email me. That's just how everything started, and I became very comfortable in his class. I sometimes go to his office before class, and he will explain things to me.

Meanwhile, other participants expressed problems regarding communication and how that could be minimized. Specifically, participants explained that some instructors spoke too fast for them, and they struggled to understand them. As Participant 3 stated, "one thing is that some of the lecturers here talk very fast and you have to listen well. If not, you will not understand anything". The participant suggests that teachers should have an understanding of the different levels of English language competencies in the class, stating that "some of us have French backgrounds and English is not our native language, so they should understand that so that we can also understand them well in class" (Participant 3).

The participant also raised concerns with the grading system, arguing that students, including those from Africa whose native language is not English, should not be penalized or get marks deducted on their papers because of grammatical errors.

The lecturers should take it easy with us because English is not our native language. I cannot say all, but I can say almost all... they always deduct marks for grammar and things like that and for me, I don't think they should do that. It's because of our language background, that is why we have those problems.

Another participant also offered suggestions for schools to prepare faculty on ways of helping international students. Participant 5 states in the following statement:

I think if most the instructors here know ahead of time about the number of students coming from other parts of the world and the fact that our system is different from the system here, I think they will be able to prepare for us and help us more. This is the way they can know their students individually and ask them what their problems are, because you can have students in the classrooms who are shy, and they can't talk to teachers even if they don't understand.

Thus, in recommending more support from instructors, the participants highlighted that they need more training on using online classroom tools. Similarly, the participants asked for time to acclimatize to their new digital learning environment before conducting a test. Also, it is the recommendation that lecturers should receive information and training to understand the students' backgrounds as non-native English speakers and exercise leniency in dealing with them, particularly in grading.

Provision of Reliable Transportation Service

Transportation to and from college campuses is a concern that a majority of the participants raised. This is a concern for almost all the students as both Colleges A and B did not have accommodation facilities for students. Nonetheless, one of the schools had arrangements with landlords of apartments near campus as they provide information to newly arriving students. However, some participants expressed frustration with the limited bus service available from the college to the community, especially during the weekends. The students particularly highlighted that the transportation constraints had affected their attendance at events hosted on campus, especially on weekends and evenings. Thus, they recommended transportation services for the students.

I think one of the services that we really need is a transportation service because when international students come here, that is one of the biggest challenges they experience because most of them don't drive back home and they don't have a car. And there is a possibility that they may not be able to afford a car until after their program. So those are some of the challenges that they experience.

Cognizant of these transportation issues, the Participant gave some examples of how schools can help with the transportation constraints. The participant stated,

At least if there is a transportation service that is secure under the school, you can easily access it. Even if it means you have to pay a token to access that service, I think that will be very helpful and it will make our learning even better.

Other participants expressed how the unavailability of transportation services affects their plans to be in school and be productive. This core of this point is captured by Participant 3 in the following statement:

There are times that I would like to go to the school to be able to access some things that I cannot get access to at home, or I may like to go to the library to be productive and avoid just lying in bed, but because of the transportation issues, you are forced to stay home. And when you are at home, you might be lazy to do whatever you want to do. So, it affects you either directly or indirectly. So, I think that area is very important.

Provision of Campus Housing

Since most community colleges, including these two research sites, do not offer campus housing, the participants in this research have recommended the provision of on-campus housing at cheaper rates, at least for international students. This is what Participant 5 offers as a recommendation on housing for African students.

Most of us prefer to stay on campus because we are here to learn, and dormitories are the best place for students. Besides, when you stay off-campus, you end up spending so much money on transportation to school on a daily basis and sometimes, you miss activities because of lack of transport. So for me, it's best if they have a dormitory where students, especially international students can stay, and I think that is where we will be safe because the school has their own police and we will not miss any activities.

Participant 2 also shared a similar perspective regarding accommodation for international students. The Participant stated:

I know that most students, when they come over, they don't stay on campus for a few reasons. One, it is much more expensive than to stay in the community. I think that is very interesting because we are here for school and it looks like the community understands our situation better because houses are cheaper for us.

Participant 2 also mentions the importance of having a place where students can worship on campus. He stated that:

At the time when we started at the college, there was no place for Muslim students to pray. You see them pray in the library corners, or empty classrooms, or sneaking here and there. So, if the college can recognize other students' religions and at least provide a room for them for their worship, that would be a big encouragement for students who are coming in because that would bring them together and they will have their religious network.

Assistance during Initial Transition

During the interviews, most students highlighted how it was a struggle for them to transition when they arrived. Some of them offered ways that colleges can assist students during this crucial year of their academic journey. Participant 3 captured the main points expressed by the participants.

The first few months are always difficult because you don't know many people yet and you are basically alone, and you are trying to figure out things by yourself. The school can really help with guidance on that, although they give you so much information on flyers and things like that, but sometimes it's good for you to sit with someone for them to explain things to you. But usually, you don't get that.

There is also a discussion of schools providing mentors for newly arriving international students. This point, as expressed by Participant 8, will help students with a smooth integration on campus.

For me, many of the things I knew now are because of the friends that I met here. So, maybe, the school can kind of formalize that and use some of the older international students as guides or mentors for new international students.

Thus, research question 3 seeks to understand how schools can better support the needs of African students. Among the issues highlighted by participants include difficulties in adjusting to new classrooms as well as interactions with fellow students and engaging in the learning community. In this regard, the students asked for support in key areas, including training on using classroom technologies, provision of transportation services, availability of campus housing, and also assistance during the initial transition of newly arriving students from Africa. The literature on campus service for international students in community colleges depicts a strong relationship between campus services and international student success as well as their belonging on campuses. In particular, Lau, Garza, & Garcia (2019) examine the use of campus services such as computer labs, advising, and tutoring transfer credit assistance by international students in community colleges. Utilizing the community College Survey of Student Engagement, the study reveals that the sense of belonging of the students is largely impacted by the relationships they established with peers and instructors as well as their affiliations with student organizations. Key findings of the study suggest that the most often used services on campus are related to academic services, suggesting that international students are concerned with their academic performance in the colleges. Importantly, it shows that the African students in this study may have similar concerns as other international students with regard to campus services for students.

Conclusion

This chapter contains the results of the research and the processes used in analyzing the study data. The data was categorized and discussed in sections, backed with the literature to amplify the voices of participants, allowing for a deeper understanding of motivations as well as experiences of the participating students in the two selected community colleges. All the participants were African students, and the interview questions were carefully structured to help understand their journey to the two-year institutions as well as their experiences on the campuses.

The careful coding of the data, specifically in vivo coding as well as the thematic analysis as the method of analysis, led to the unearthing of three key themes. (1) African students were motivated to study in the community colleges because of the lack of opportunities in their country and the prospects of advancement in the United States. (2) African students find themselves in unfamiliar settings, often hindering their academic and social integration as they navigate education in two-year colleges, and finally (3) the students believe that improvements to existing resources on campuses could help enhance their education in two-year colleges. These three main themes will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study examines the motivations of African students who attend community colleges and their experiences in the two-year institutions in the United States. Through the qualitative research method, the study seeks to highlight the journey of African students into community colleges and explore how they are faring in the institutions. Theoretically, the Bohman international student community college decision model and Hofstede cultural theory were utilized as conceptual lenses for this study. Specifically, this study sought to answer three key research questions. First, what motivates African students to study in community colleges? Second, what are the experiences of African students in community colleges? And third, in what ways can community colleges support the unique needs of African students?

The primary data collection method was interviewing with study participants, and supplementary data was obtained from school documents including websites and international admission brochures of the two institutions where the study participants attended. Precisely, data was collected through interviews with eight (8) participants from two community colleges in the Midwest region of the United States. The participants are African students who came to the United States on F1 visas. This visa type is purposely issued to individuals traveling to the United States for the sole objective of pursuing higher education in a recognized academic institution. During the data collection process, interviews were conducted with participants, lasting for about forty (40) minutes leading to rich qualitative data and detailed insights into the international students' community college experience.

This chapter includes a discussion of the major findings from this research qualitative research, highlighting the connections of the findings of this study with scholarship on international students in community colleges. Additionally, this chapter includes discussions

underlining connection and consistency of the findings with the Bohman's international student community college decision making model as well as the Hofstede's cultural theory.

Importantly, this chapter highlights the implications of this study on student recruitment initiatives as well as the practice of supporting international students and African students in particular on community college campuses. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the study, with highlights on areas for future research focusing on African students in two-year colleges.

Findings

African students in community colleges are a unique student population. Although a part of the larger international student population, African students have unique learning as well as social needs which school authorities can support to help them succeed. As pointed out in Research Question (RQ) 1, the predicaments in the home countries of participants, including limited access to education and low economic incentives, push some of the international students to study abroad. Also, the students are motivated to study in community colleges in the United States because of the perceived variety in program and quality of education. In addition, for the students, there is the potentials of transitioning to four-year colleges as well as obtaining opportunities of employment after graduation.

In relation to RQ 2, the experiences of the students were explored. The finding show that students have a complex college experience both in academic and socio-cultural aspects. While some students have good relationships with local students and formed communities with other students, including fellow African students, others have unwelcomed experiences as they experience being sidelined, making them feel like outsiders in the academic community.

The participants expressed their desires in the form of recommendations on how schools can best serve them. These suggestions contained in response to RQ 3 include the expansion of campus services, notably, accommodation and transportation services as well as academic assistance.

Cumulatively, the results of this study generated three major areas related to African students' experiences in community colleges. (1) African students are motivated to study in the community colleges because of the lack of opportunities in their home countries and the prospects of advancement in the United States. (2) African students find themselves in unfamiliar settings, often hindering their academic and social integration as they navigate education in two-year colleges, and finally, (3) the students believe that improvement to existing resources on campuses could help enhance their education in two-year colleges. In the section below, I discuss these key findings by providing context in relation to the literature as it relates to African students in community colleges. Evidently, very limited research exists on African students in community colleges. Thus, findings of this study are reviewed against prior research on the international students in community colleges in general. Students are motivated to study in community colleges because of the absence of opportunities and the desire to make a better living through gainful employment after graduation.

1. The first key finding of this study is that African students are motivated to attend community colleges due to the lack of opportunities in their home countries and the desire to make a better living through gainful employment after graduation in the United States.

The study reveals push and pull factors involved in the decision making of African students in community colleges. The push factors are the unfavorable factors that force students

to leave their countries while the pull factors are the incentives that draw African students to the United States and community colleges. Specifically, the students are motivated to study in two-year college due to the lack of opportunities for further education, coupled with limited economic opportunities in their home countries. Additionally, the prospects of quality education as well as the potentials of gaining meaningful employment after graduation in community colleges contribute to the students' decision making. This finding connects to prior research on community college students.

In particular, Cohen and Brawer (2003) discuss a 1986 survey that asked students their primary reasons for attending a community college. The study finds that “35% of the students were seeking transfer, 34 percent job entry skills, 16 jobs upgrading and 15% job upgrading” (p. 534). This data was referenced to the general student population of community colleges without any specific mentioned on international students, particularly those from Africa. However, participants in this study have mentioned their intention of entering community colleges to be able to transfer to competitive programs in four-year colleges and at the same time provide them the potentials for employment. Thus, transferring to four-year colleges and gaining employment through a community college education are not only attributed to domestic students but also international students including those from Africa. Fischer (2011) suggests that international students who may lack the requirements for admissions in a four-year university choose to enroll in community colleges where they take preparatory courses for entry into four-year institutions. In fact, some schools have structured programs that help international students in transitioning from community colleges to four-year institutions (Fischer, 2011).

Another cardinal attraction of the students to community colleges was the issue of high cost of other colleges compared to community colleges. Prior studies (Bailey, Jaggars & Jenkins,

2015; Denning 2017) documented the high cost of higher education and community colleges as alternatives for students seeking affordable education. In particular, Bailey, Jaggars and Jenkins (2015) argued that the rising cost of higher education in the United States is a growing barrier to attracting international students. However, the authors note that community colleges' mission of providing open access allows the institutions to keep cost at a minimum which attracts many international students. Equally, Denning (2017) examines tuition at different institution types and concludes that college tuition at community colleges is cheaper than other post-secondary institutions. The author highlights that "in 2010–2011 academic year, average annual community college tuition was \$2,439, while average tuition at public four-year institutions was \$7,136, with private four-year institutions being even more costly at \$22,771" (Denning, 2017, p. 63). This shows that community colleges are more affordable, placing the institutions at a competitive advantage to attract international students. Although research suggests that community colleges are relatively cheaper compared to other colleges, the study finds that African students, while being able to afford the fees, encounter financial obstacles as they strive to earn a degree in the community colleges. While some students lamented the limited access to government funded scholarships and financial aid, some others earn scholarships through sports and academic achievements. Nonetheless a majority of African students in US institutions are self-paying. Though some admitted to struggling to afford the cost, the cost of education in community college was not a major concern for the students as they are able to pick up jobs albeit menial and limited hours to fund and advance their education in the two-year colleges.

Analyzing these findings through the lens of the Bohman International Student Community College Decision model provides ways of understanding the intricacies in the movement of prospective students from Africa to community colleges in the United States.

While all of the four tenets of the decision-making model are relevant in this analysis as they point out the processes, activities, and considerations involved in the students decision to study in community colleges, specifically, steps one and two of the model explain the student perception of their home and overseas countries, which relates to the push and pull factors that make them decide to study overseas. Step one, for example outlines the unfavorable factors including lack of enough educational opportunities that pushes students out of their countries while step two highlights the incentives available in the schools and the United States in general that attracts students (Bohamn, 2009) Essentially, the first finding of this research suggests that motivations for students' choice of two-year colleges in the United States are dictated by internal and external pressures related to the characteristics of learning as well as the economies of their countries of origin compared to the United States. In particular, the students are attracted to the vast educational opportunities in the United States and the desire to make a better living through gainful employment after graduation. This finding is relevant and situated in the literature, particularly, in the discussions of the general international student body in community colleges in the United States.

2. Second, African students find themselves in unfamiliar settings, often hindering their academic and social integration as they navigate education in two-year colleges.

The findings from this study also revealed that unfamiliar settings and environments often hinder the academic and social integration of African students in community colleges. The students experience alienation in the classrooms due to differences in their previous learning as well as cultural orientation which affects interactions with their peers and professors. Consequently, the students with limited social interaction with domestic students find solace among themselves or with other international students. In essence, this research reveals that

African students experience inextricable academic and socio-cultural circumstances, including difficulties in adjusting to the new educational setting and social life. Although some students feel that community colleges are welcoming to and accepting of the differences that African students bring to the campus, many who feel sidelined by local students and less involved in campus activities create an active support system and find solace among themselves as African students and with other international students. With other findings centering on financial stress, this study finds that limited funding for African students in community colleges has led many to thrive through menial jobs on campus and support from family members.

These findings explained above are consistent with prior research on the academic as well as the socio-cultural experiences of the larger international student body in community colleges. Socio-culturally, there is enough documentation about the alienation of international students in community colleges (Hagedorn & Lee, 2005; Garcia, 2019). The students have been described as the “neglected minority” owing to the lack of attention school officials in community colleges devote to international students. Garcia (2019) questioned whether international students really “belong” to community colleges as the author digs into growing enrolment trends, analyzing the campus services that exist to support international students in the two-year colleges. In a nutshell, the author argued that community colleges do not have the adequate infrastructure and resources to support international students. While few of the participants in this study highlight some connections they built on campus, a majority of the African students in this study feel isolated in the community colleges as very few activities are created to cater for their social wellbeing. A study by Slantcheva-Durst (2019) examines the campus involvement of international students at community colleges through a focus group study of more than twenty students. Among key findings of the study is that the students feel hugely

detached from their campuses (Slantcheva-Durst, 2019). In other words, international students at community colleges are disconnected from their campuses, meaning that the students do not have a strong sense of belonging in their schools.

Academically, some of the major concerns for international students in community colleges include the use and competency in English language (Slantcheva-Durst & Knaggs, 2019); academic advising (Zhang, 2016), as well as socio-academic integration (García, Garza, & Yeaton-Hromada, 2019). Mainly, the students are excited about the opportunity to learn English language [because] student participation in class as well as involvement on campus depends largely on their English language competencies (Slantcheva-Durst & Knaggs, 2019). With many international students possessing limited knowledge of the educational norms in the United States, they turn to academic advisors for guidance. Research suggests that successful advising with international students greatly depends on the understanding of the student background (Zhang, 2016). Yet, socio-academic integration was recognized as a significant [factor] to the students' sense of belonging to classrooms (García, Garza, & Yeaton-Hromada, 2019).

In essence, this research, finding students to be engulfed in strange setting affecting their academic and social advancement in the colleges, is corroborated by the literature and prior students showing students limitations in the two-year colleges as a result of English language competencies, and how they feel sidelined in classrooms. Interestingly, the social experience of participants is relevant to Hofstede's Cultural Dimension theory used in this research. The theory outlines six dimensions, including, power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long term orientation, and indulgence to understand cultures (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2019). The two dimensions of power distance and individualism explain the experiences of the

study participants (Ye, Leon & Anderson, 2019). The students come from cultures where there is a high-power distance between professors and students, unlike in the United States, where there is low power distance in educational settings. This explains why some students have difficulties interacting with instructors and engaging in their classrooms. Additionally, with individualism ascribed to most western cultures, including the United States, students from countries in Africa with the least individual tendencies are least satisfied in the community colleges because their desire for a communal society and campus remains unfulfilled in community colleges.

3. Third, African students need more support with first year transition, adjusting on campus and transition support to four-year institutions.

The final finding of this study reveals that African students need support in a wide range of areas to optimize their academic sojourn in two-year colleges. Academic assistance, particularly, the support of instructors in classrooms and training on accessing and utilizing online classroom resources technology as well as the extension of library services featured prominently in the findings. In addition, reliable public transportation arrangements for the students and the provision of affordable campus housing are key priorities of the students in the discussion of ways colleges can better serve the African international student population.

Overall, African students need more support in first year transition, adjusting on campus as well as assistance on smooth transition to four-year colleges. As such, recommendations arise from the study regarding provision of more support to the students when they newly arrive, as new students always struggle to adjust to their new campuses. Specifically, there is the need for students to have mentors on campus that will guide them to navigate campus especially during their first semester.

The literature does not fall short of explanations on how student affairs professionals can support community college international students in various areas. For example, Jared, Tiberio and Hugo (2019) suggest several ways in which school officials could help in creating environments that will augment students' sense of belonging in community college campuses. The author specifically highlights the role of faculty and counselors as instrumental in the process of integration of international students, noting that advisors should create time to meet with international students on a consistent basis and discuss their needs, while faculty can also provide information to students about services available on campus or invite officials to come and speak to the class (Jared, Tiberio, & Hugo, 2019).

The students in this study raised concerns with advising and needing more assistance with transitions to four-year colleges, yet scholars found a high persistence rate among sub-Saharan African students in community colleges. Notably, Ghazzawi, McKinney, Horn, Carales, and Burrige's recent study of transfer pathways for international students of different regions of origin found out that African students have a higher transfer rate to four-year colleges than students from other regions. The possible explanation provided by the authors is that most African students in community colleges enrolled in science-related courses which have higher transfer rates compared to arts courses (Ghazzawi, et al., 2020). This means that African students in the two-year colleges are intentional about transitioning to four-year institutions and willing to seek help from school officials to achieve this goal. Thus, structured advising in two-year colleges can help student better understand the pathway to transitioning to four-year colleges and understanding what courses and credits would count towards a transfer could ameliorate the frustrations of students who take courses that never counted towards a transfer.

Viewing these findings from the conceptual frameworks of both Bohman's and Hofstede's models shows that a gap exists between students' expectation of the colleges compared to their experiences while on campus. The students come to campuses with high academic and social expectations of the learning community. However, they encounter unanticipated difficulties on campus as they navigate new environments within and outside the classrooms. In essence, assisting African students with unique needs including first year transition, adjusting on campus, and transition support to four-year institutions requires carefully planned programs by schools to attract, retain and help African students to succeed. For the participants of this study, such strategies will include mentoring by senior students, targeted social programming as well as consistent advising leading to successful transfer.

Theoretically, the Bohman International Student Community College Decision-making model provides a useful lens to understand the needs of international students in community colleges. In particular, step four of the model outlines the uniqueness of a college base on the academic and other support services provided for the students (Bohman, 2009). Essentially, students get attracted to campuses based on the distinctiveness of the campus and the information available to the students about the atmosphere on campus that allows students to thrive. So, once students are on campus, the lack of those expected services becomes frustrating for many. In summary, the African students in this study places the availability and expansions of several campus services, both academic and non-academic as central to their success, integration, and advancement in community colleges. These concerns are linked to the literature and are theoretically relevant as students expect improved services in deciding to study in community colleges.

Limitations

A study of African students in community colleges comes with several limitations. First, there was a problem with getting enough participants who fit the study criteria, owing to the fewer number of African students on F-1 visa status at the community colleges from which the students were selected. Although there are many African students or students born to African parents in the colleges, most of them do not qualify for this study as they are permanent residents or have attended high school here in the United States. As such, those participants would not be able to highlight the journey to the institutions and their experiences may be entirely different from students who have arrived in the United States purposely to study. While attempts were made to get a balance in participants for a possible representation of students of different regions in Africa, it was discovered that US consulates in some African countries would not give visas for students to study in community colleges. This factor contributed to the lack of adequate representation of students across all the regions of Africa. Nevertheless, participants from sub-Saharan Africa provided an effective representation and a perfect sample population for this research.

Additionally, conducting this research during the COVID-19 pandemic was hectic, especially conducting interviews with participants and making visits to schools. Arranging visits to schools to meet the students in their natural environment as well as picking up physical documents proved difficult on many occasions due to lockdowns imposed by the States and school campuses. However, interviews were conducted via Zoom while the document analysis was limited to school publications available on the internet. The pandemic has not only affected people physically but mentally as well. Some of my participants expressed that they are deeply

worried about themselves and their families back home and were not available to grant me follow-up interviews.

Future Research

While this study highlights the unusual experience of African student population in community colleges, there is still the need for further investigation on the experiences of students from specific regions of Africa. During this research, I noticed that Black students from West Africa tend to have divergent experiences compared to light skinned students from North Africa. Therefore, a research specifically on the experiences of North African students, for example, would provide important insights into the differences in college experiences among students from the various regions of Africa. Additionally, while this research highlights the multifaceted experiences of the students including social well-being and academics, a more concise study looking at just one aspect of their college experience could be explored. For example, a study specifically focusing on the socio-cultural experiences of African students would provide additional useful insights into the lives of the students in two-year colleges.

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APPENDIX A: DISSERTATION RESEARCH STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONS AND
EXPERIENCES OF AFRICAN STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES INITIAL

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How long have you been studying at this institution?
2. What motivated you to choose to study in the United States instead of Africa?
3. How did you find out about your college?
4. Among many other institutions you may have found while searching for schools, what were some of the specific reasons that made you enroll in this college?
5. Tell me more about the process involved in applying for admissions to this college. In what ways were you supported by college officials during the application process?
6. Tell me about your involvement on campus, for example, clubs and associations and activities?
7. How would you describe relationships between African students and other students in this college?
8. How would you describe the support offered to African students by faculty, staff and the administration of this college?
9. What are some academic or social programs and services offered in this institution to enhance the college experience of African students?
10. Can you give me examples of programs and services, both academic and social that this institution could offer to support African students?
11. What would you tell other African students who are considering studying in this college?

12. Is there anything else you would like to share about your decision to study in this college as well as your experiences as an African student.

APPENDIX B: FOLLOW-UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. First, what is a typical school day like for you in your college?
2. How well do you utilize the educational resources on campus including, the library, and the writing center?
3. How are current classroom environments in your institution different from what you are familiar with in your country?
4. What is a typical weekend like for you?
5. How well do you interact with domestic students and how have those interactions shape your experience in your college?
6. In general, how have your expectations of this college been met in terms of learning as well as campus/social life?
7. Now, let's talk about your likes and dislikes. What do you like about this college?
8. And what are some of the things you dislike in this school if any?
9. How are you paying for education at your college?
10. Finally, is there anything else that you would like to add about your educational experience at your college?