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A Foreign Affair: A Phenomenological Study of Barriers to Adult Liberian Refugees' Success in the American College Classroom

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**A FOREIGN AFFAIR: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF BARRIERS TO
ADULT LIBERIAN REFUGEES' SUCCESS IN THE AMERICAN COLLEGE
CLASSROOM**

by

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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

Liberia has survived a fourteen-year civil war. Within this time, many Liberians were forced to flee their countries and seek refuge. The United States and Liberia have held a long-standing friendly relationship; hence, there are thousands of Liberian refugees living within the United States. The educational issues of refugees worldwide is lacking in research. Consequently, the purpose of this dissertation is to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees matriculating within American college classrooms. Through phenomenological methodology, the lived experiences of ten Liberian refugees enrolled within American college classrooms produced valuable results. Three major themes were found that described the perceptions and barriers to Liberian refugees academic success.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated first to my husband, Rob, without whom I would not have been able to stay motivated and complete my educational goals. You have been patient and supportive throughout this process and I couldn't have done it without you. Thank you for loving and supporting me.

I would also like to dedicate this to my daughter Charlotte. You are the best thing that has ever happened to me. Although you don't realize it, you have gone through this adventure with me. As your mother, I hope to have shown you that with hard work and determination, you can do anything.

Next, I would like to dedicate this work to my parents. You have both been my biggest fans in life and more specifically, throughout my educational endeavors. You have set high standards for all your children and my success is a result of your amazing parenting. I only hope to make you proud, as I am so proud to be your daughter.

Last, I dedicate this project to my best friends, my sisters. I truly would be lost without all of you. You have always been there to listen, support and give advice whenever I have needed it. There is truly no stronger bond than sisterhood and I am blessed to have the three of you.

Acknowledgments

I thank Dr. Felix for her guidance and support throughout this process. She has kept me on task and provided her valuable wisdom through numerous emails and phone calls. You have helped pushed me through the challenging times but have also celebrated with me during times of achievements.

I thank Dr. Boulmetis as well for his continued support. He has been so supportive and has provided me with his expertise and guidance. He has been my role model of what a successful scholar should be.

I would also like to thank Dr. Bassett for providing valuable feedback throughout the writing process. Your expertise was greatly appreciated. Thank you for agreeing to be on my committee and supporting my project.

Last, I thank Zebong, my Liberian angel, for his support in my work and for helping me make this project happen. I would never have found all the participants in this study without you. I value our friendship and thank you for all your support and teaching me about what being Liberian really means.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

World Refugee Day, June 20th, is recognized every year to represent the millions of individuals who have fled their countries. The United States has taken an active role in bringing awareness to the mass numbers of refugees not only worldwide, but also within its own borders. In 2009, more than 40 million displaced persons were reported worldwide. The United States of America hosted more than 275 thousand refugees in 2009 (unhcr.org). More than 922,000 individual claims were made in 2009 for asylum or refugee status, according to UNHCR (2010). The United States is the second largest recipient of these claims. Within this number, a large population of West African refugees is Liberian. The enrollment in higher education institutions has also seen an increase of adult Liberian refugees, specifically in Rhode Island (www.iiri.org). As much as institutions of higher education are now seeing an increase in Liberian adult refugees, it stands to reason that being aware of refugees' academic needs could be the catalyst for providing viable assistance to this unique population of refugees.

The effects on refugees who have lived in refugee camps due to conflict have been researched. Specifically, the negative effects of conflict and displacement can be seen widespread in Liberian refugee camps. The effects are felt not only by Liberian refugees but also the bordering countries giving refuge. The UNHCR (2007) stated,

The result of the conflict in Liberia, therefore, was not only that more young men and women became schooled in warfare and were remobilized from conflict to conflict, but that the culture of war was exported to neighbouring countries with disastrous effects. In addition, large numbers of people became displaced both internally and across borders with devastating consequences for the economies of both the countries at war and those receiving refugees.

Researchers Hampshire, Porter, Kilpatrick, Kyei, Adjaloo, and Oppong (2008) engaged in a four-month study in the Buduburam settlement camp in Ghana to understand the change in inter-generational relations. Hampshire et al explained, “A growing number of literature finds that young people affected by war and displacement can act positively as agents in overcoming adversity” (p. 25). This young generation of refugees have adapted to disruption and change since being forced to migrate. As this generation of young Liberian refugees has proven they can adapt to change, and accessing the opportunity to enroll to an American university would also require adaptation and adjustment.

Although Hampshire et al. (2008) found that Liberian refugees can exhibit resilience and the ability to succeed, overall, they can still have difficulty adjusting to a new culture. Adult refugees enrolled in an American college classroom may offer unique perspectives and experiences that may influence their success within higher education. Merriam, Courtenay and Cervero (2006) wrote, “Indigenous groups, migrants, refugees and prison inmates are other marginalized groups identified by UNESCO as warranting the attention of adult educators” (p.91). It is reasonable to surmise that Liberian refugees are categorized as a marginalized population. It is imperative that American higher education institutions become aware of the barriers and motivations that directly influence the academic experience of adult Liberian refugees, and best assists this marginalized population. This will allow those that are already enrolled to extrapolate greater success within higher education in the United States because the institutions have become aware of their barriers as a marginalized population.

Background of the Study

Liberian refugees are a marginalized population (Cervero, et al., 2006) who, in their quest for higher education, might encounter various barriers within the classroom that most students within higher education might not. In addition, understanding the nature of the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees could be the catalyst for creating a teaching and learning environment that could subvert the barriers and enhance their academic success outcomes. Moreover, a study of this nature is important because although higher education institutions have prioritized their focus on multicultural initiatives within the curriculum, there is still a lack of priority on these initiatives within the institution. Landreman, Rasmussen, King and Jiang (2007) studied educators that are experts in multicultural education from twenty different universities and found little attention was given to multicultural experiences within higher education in the United States. The authors stated, “Despite the priority that higher education institutions have given to multicultural initiatives, the knowledge, experiences and perspectives that influence those charged with developing and facilitating these initiatives on college campuses has received little to no attention (p. 277). Educators have the opportunity to explore working with marginalized populations and acquire more knowledge about the attention required on their learning outcomes. It is necessary then for educators of higher education to understand this marginalized population.

Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen (2009) asserted that refugees face many obstacles when arriving in their new country. These obstacles are not limited to learning the language, basic economic needs, cultural awareness, and job placement. In addition, understanding what defines a successful adult may lack meaning to an adult refugee

because of unfamiliarity with the nuances of his or her new social environment and culture. Atwell, Gifford, and McDonald-Wilmsen also maintained that experience of an adult refugee plays a critical role in how they can be most successful within a higher learning environment.

Refugee Resettlement Process

The United States has eighteen ports of entry for refugees to enter. To enter the United States legally, refugees must be sponsored by family members, communities, or resettlement agencies. Within the federal fiscal year of 2004, 71% of resettlement for refugees in Rhode Island was Liberian (www.ri.gov).

The Overseas Processing Entity (OPE) is the first to receive and process a refugee application from UNHCR, and seldom from a U.S. Embassy or specially trained nongovernmental organization (www.america.gov). The application is then sent to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugee and Migration (PRM), which in return works with the OPE, international and nongovernmental organizations to run eight regional OPEs around the world. Through the guidance of PRM, the OPEs process the eligible applications for resettlement in the United States (www.america.gov). For some, the application process can begin without a referral from UNHCR, if the refugee has close relatives already living in the United States.

Refugees' applying for resettlement in the United States continues through a security screening, which is intended to ensure that criminals and terrorists are not admitted. Once Officers from the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) review all applications, the OPE conducts face-to-face interviews with each refugee applicant to determine approval of resettlement in the United States

(www.america.gov). Once approved, refugees must have a medical screening. Finally, the OPE requests a “sponsorship assurance” and all refugees are offered a brief U.S. cultural orientation courses prior to arriving to the United States (www.america.gov).

Non-Profit Resources

Refugees who received USCIS approval to resettle to the United States enter the Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) (www.america.gov). Though Congress mandated the program, it is through private programs and the support of Americans that make the resettlement program successful. In Rhode Island, there are limited non-profit organizations to assist refugees. In addition, the organizations are not solely concentrated on providing assistance for refugees and their higher education academic success. The two organizations that assist refugee resettlement are the Office of Community Services & Advocacy-Immigration & Refugee Services and the International Institute of Rhode Island (www.iiri.org). The services provided are health programs, housing assistance, cultural awareness, education and social services and job training and placement (www.iiri.org). The International Institute of Rhode Island resettles over 90% of refugees within the state of Rhode Island (www.iiri.org).

In addition to these programs, literacy and college preparation for newly arrived refugees occurs after they arrive in the state of Rhode Island with support from various non-profit organizations. For example, there are numerous literacy programs offered in Rhode Island that offer beginning to advanced reading and writing classes to prepare individuals for college preparation or the workplace within the United States (www.dorcasplace.org).

Barriers for Refugees

American colleges and universities have had, and currently still have adult refugees enrolled within their institutions. In 2007, 18% of refugees in the United States were between 18 and 24 years old (dhs.gov). This age group is legally old enough to gain admission into higher education in the United States. In the future, 82% of refugees under the age of seventeen in the U.S. will soon also have the opportunity to enroll for further education within colleges and universities nationwide (dhs.gov). However, there are limited resources to assist this marginalized population. For instance, there is only one higher education institution in Rhode Island that has open enrollment, which may be the easiest transition for adult Liberian refugees (www.ccri.edu). There is limited information on higher education institutions reaching out to this population to provide academic support. Consequently, the lived experiences of refugees and the barriers they face within the academic classroom are critical to understand in order to guide refugees to academic success.

Statement of the Problem

There is a gap in literature regarding the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees within higher education in the United States. More specifically, it is not known how adult Liberian refugees matriculating through higher learning in the United States perceive barriers to success. No known literature targets this subject. Higher education institutions need to be aware of the barriers to academic success as perceived by this unique subset of the United States population.

Physical and mental transitions can occur for refugees enrolled within an educational program. The transitions from Liberia to the U.S as a refugee have many difficult obstacles. Barowsky and McIntyre (2010) explained that,

Refugees and asylum seekers frequently experience more intrusive and life-threatening circumstances that undermine their physical and mental health as well as their educational functioning. Further, refugees and asylum seekers differ in their legal status, which may be reflected in differences in their vulnerability to emotional stressors. Refugee status in the United States, for example, offers, at a minimum, temporary sanctuary if the individual is threatened by persecution or a "well-founded" fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. (Refugee Act of 1980, 2010, p.162)

These circumstances are not limited to additional stress of deportation if an asylum seeker has not received refugee status thus being separated from their families again (Barowsky and McIntyre, 2010). If granted status, a refugee has more protection and security within the United States. As America is seen as a melting pot, refugee status only adds more diversity and minorities to the country and various classrooms.

It might be difficult for teachers within higher education to understand the emotional turmoil that Liberian refugees may be enduring. Ceballos (as cited in Merriam, Courtney, Cervero, 2006) explained the importance of gaining knowledge about enrolled learners, particularly those with barriers. He stated that, "In the midst of so many destructive forces acting against humanity, education must be an affirmation for what is eminently human. In ... [an economic] system that disempowers its subjects, education has the rewarding task of empowerment its subject" (p.323). Consequently, understanding the perceived barriers of adult Liberian refugees would be a pivotal step toward gaining new knowledge of the difficult transition for adult Liberian refugees to the United States and enrolling in higher education.

Various organizations have given global support for refugees. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 and has globally brought awareness and helped refugees worldwide. There are also many non-profit organizations that have had similar causes. Although there are many non-profit organizations nationally, the state of Rhode Island only has one non-profit that resettles the majority of refugees. In addition, there is limited literature on the issue of the growing number of refugees enrolled within higher education and is not adequately supported, according to Hampshire et al. (2008). The growing number of refugees and adult refugees enrolling in higher education worldwide is a topic not globally discussed. Although the Salzburg Seminar has had success bringing a diverse group of adult educators to discuss these global issues, it is the only large seminar discussing these topics at a large scale.

Purpose of the Study

The intention of this study was to gain an understanding how adult Liberian refugees matriculating through institutions of higher learning in the United States perceive and describe barriers to their academic success. Additionally, the purpose of this study was to create a dialogue and examine the responses of adult Liberian refugees to find common themes within their lived experience as refugees and American college students.

The researcher transcribed responses to various questions asked of the adult Liberian college student. The question and answer response process revealed the essence of what a Liberian refugee seeking higher education within the United States. Hence, a phenomenological approach was taken for the study.

Rationale

Considering that adult Liberian refugees must transition from their country of origin, adapt to a new culture, language, and way of life, it is reasonable to assert that in their quest for academic success within higher education in the United States, they might encounter various barriers to the classroom. Whether intrinsic or extrinsic in nature, these barriers must be identified and analyzed to best assist the marginalized population of Liberian refugees to succeed within higher education in the United States. The lived experiences of Liberian refugees engaged in learning academic institutions in the United States remain unknown.

The number of adult refugees enrolling within higher education institutions is increasing in the United States. According to the U.S State Department, “The foreign born from Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean have the lowest proportions of college graduates and the highest proportions of persons lacking a high school diploma [in the US], in sharp contrast with those from Africa, Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East” (<http://fpc.state.gov>). The Congressional Research Service continues, “The proportion of the foreign born with a bachelor’s degree [in the U.S] has increased by roughly 50% since 1950, and from 21% to 32% for those arriving this past decade” (<http://fpc.state.gov>). Thus, it is important for educators and administrators alike to gain new knowledge on this marginalized population because foreign born that are attending and graduating with a bachelor’s degree is steadily increasing, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Institutions within the New England area are contributors towards college success for Liberian refugees. Through these organizations, the lived experiences of adult

Liberian refugees can be heard and transcribed. The voices of this marginalized population are the impetus to identifying barriers individuals have come across in their academic journey within the college classroom.

Research Questions

The primary research question addressed was: What are the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees matriculating through institutions of higher learning in the United States? This question was significant to the research because of the limited literature on adult refugees matriculating through higher education in the United States. At a New England higher education institution there is a growing number of adult Liberian refugees enrolled in classes (www.ccri.edu). Colleges and universities alike can begin to gain new knowledge of the lived experiences of this marginalized population and the barriers they may face.

For the purpose of this study, the primary research question was:

R₁: How do adult Liberian adult refugees matriculating through institutions of higher learning in the United States perceive and describe barriers to their academic success.

The study was also guided by the following question:

R₂: What do adult Liberian refugees perceive as barriers to successful matriculation through higher education in the United States?

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because there is a growing number of adult Liberian refugees' enrolling within higher educational institutions. In 2009, 15,000 Liberian refugees were documented as legally living in the State of Rhode Island (www.iiri.org). In order to create a classroom environment that is supportive of this population, research

needs to be completed to learn more about the adult Liberian refugee student. There are various ways through which higher educational institutions within the U.S. can assist and support refugees to have a successful college learning experience. It is important for American institutions, administrations, and faculty to understand the cultural perspectives of the adult refugee who is enrolled within their school. The proposed study addressed the gap of current literature relative to the lived experiences of adult refugees within higher education so as to open communication, increase cultural awareness of a marginalized population within higher education. Moreover, it is hoped that data derived from this study could be the catalyst for creating support services, for Liberian refugees within the institutions.

This study was conducted to unveil the unique experiences of adult Liberian refugees embarking on a college degree in the United States. Their untold stories allow faculty and staff to learn about their lived experiences and their perceived barriers. Through these experiences, the themes of barriers and motivations were analyzed to understand the cultural perspective of learning, necessary for them to succeed. Using a phenomenological approach, this study used interviews to gather information.

Definition of Terms

1. Internally displaced persons (IDP): are people or groups of individuals who have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of, or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural- or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an international border (www.unhcr.org).
2. Refugee: is a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (www.unhcr.org).

3. Asylum-seekers: are individuals whose applications for asylum or refugee status are pending a final decision (www.unhcr.org).
4. Refugee Returnees: refers to refugees who have returned voluntarily to their country of origin or place of habitual residence (www.unhcr.org).
5. Culturally Responsive Teaching: recognizes, honors, and incorporates individual student abilities into teaching strategies (Gay, 2000, p.1).
6. Andragogy: is the art and science of helping adults learn (Knowles, 1980, p.43).
7. Transformational Learning: involves one's values, beliefs, and assumptions that compose the lens through which personal experience is mediated and made sense of (Merriam, 2004, p.61).
8. Phenomenological Study: is the philosophy and method to understand the lived experiences of participants through a qualitative approach.

Assumptions

The following were the assumptions relevant to this study:

1. Adult Liberian refugees were available to interview at local non-profit organizations and institutions of higher education.
2. Participation was voluntary.
3. Participants were able to terminate their participation at any time during the interview process without fear of reprisal.
4. All participants answered questions honestly during the interviews.
5. The research was specific to adult Liberian refugees.
6. The research assumed the information gathered from the participants was unbiased and adhered to the phenomenological process.
7. All procedures followed the moral codes of ethics for human participants.

Limitations

The following limitations were presented in this study:

1. The research was limited to adult Liberian refugees in Rhode Island who were matriculating through higher education locally.
2. Participants represented various areas of Liberia who have fled to the United States.
3. Interview questions were limited to questions of lived experiences focusing on barriers and motivations only.
4. Information gathered could not be generalized, as each lived experience of the participants was unique to their needs and success within higher education in the United States.

Nature of the Study

The study used a qualitative methodology. Through this method, a phenomenological approach was conducted in order to build an understanding through interviews of the marginalized population within their environment. The study used a qualitative methodology.

Dominant themes were identified through the transcripts from interviews conducted with participants. The data analysis strategy for qualitative data was to find themes of lived experiences and the perceived barriers of Liberians within higher education in the United States. Themes were found upon completion of the interviews and transcriptions.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

The remainder of this study was divided up as follows: Chapter Two will concentrate on Liberia's history, population, economy and politics. In addition, relevant literature expanding from the adult learning process, transformational learning and culturally responsive teaching will be discussed. These topics focus on the adult refugee experience. Chapter Three will describe and discuss the research methodology used to

study the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees. This chapter will also describe the phenomenological process, data collection and analysis. Chapter Four will present and analyze the data collected using the methodology discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Five will provide results, conclusions and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The American consciousness within education has led itself to cultural sensitivity. Social movements of the 1960s and 1970s have aimed at creating accessible education for racial minorities. It has also expanded to address other marginalized populations (Moya, 2002). Adult refugees have had the opportunity to matriculate within the college classroom leading towards a more diverse learning environment. Consequently, this population brings forward unique lived experiences as refugees and various barriers to the college classroom. This chapter provides an overview of (a) Liberian history, (b) the adult refugee experience, (c) transformational learning, and (d) culturally responsive teaching.

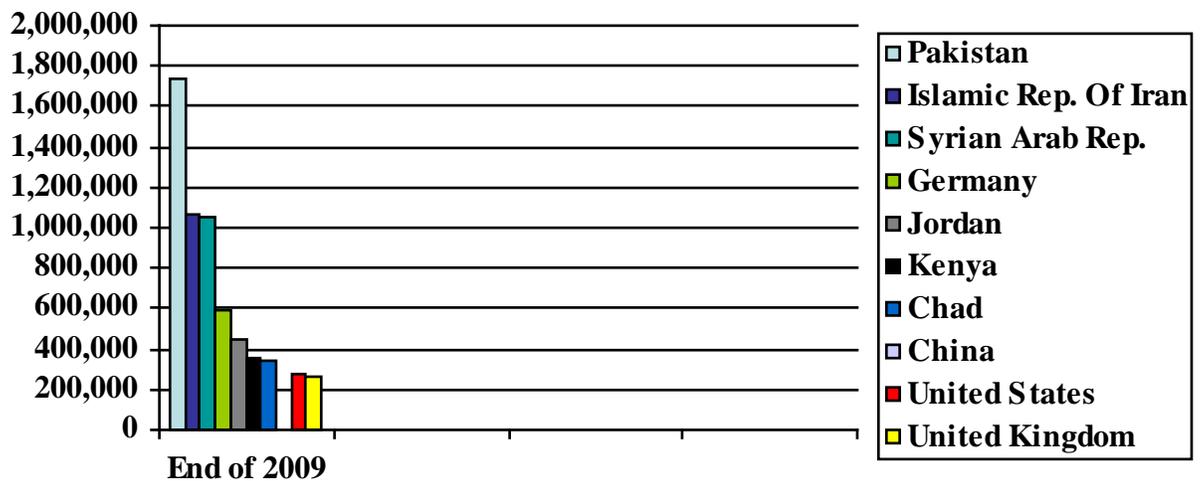
Understanding the lived experiences of adult refugees within higher education in the United States could affect the future of multicultural education. A growing number of Liberian refugees have found refuge and opportunity in the state of Rhode Island. In order to provide a quality and accessible education, it is important for administrators and educators within higher education to gain knowledge of this population. This is possible by evaluating transformational learning and culturally responsive teaching in the college classroom.

The Adult Refugee

A refugee is defined as,

Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (unhcr.org)

Millions of refugees worldwide are resettled in various countries and the number of refugees has not been as high since the 1990's (unhcr.org). The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) stated, "the number of refugees at the end of 2007 stood at 11.4 million, including 1.7 million people considered by UNHCR to be in a refugee-like situation" (UNHCR, statistics). This outstanding number of refugees is increasing in many African countries today. Statistics shared by the UNHCR confirmed that, "By the end of 2007, Asia hosted the largest number of refugees (55%), followed by Africa (22%), Europe (14%), Latin America and the Caribbean (5%), North America (4%), and Oceania (0.3%)" (UNHCR, statistics).



Major Refugee Hosting Countries

Table 1 UNHCR statistics

At four percent of international refugees, American higher educational institutions have and need to be better prepared for adult refugees enrolling in their schools, especially as these numbers are continually growing. The educational issues of refugees worldwide is lacking in research.

Global Forced Displacement | 2008-2009 *

Category of displaced population	2008 (in min)		2009 (in min)	
	Total	Protected/assisted by UNHCR	Total	Protected/assisted by UNHCR
Refugees under UNHCR mandate	10.5	10.5	10.4	10.4
Refugees under UNRWA mandate	4.7	-	4.8	-
Total number of refugees	15.2	10.5	15.2	10.4
Asylum-seekers (pending cases)	0.8	0.2	1.0	0.2
Conflict-generated IDP's	26.0	14.4	27.1	15.6
Total number of refugees, asylum-seekers and IDP's	42.0	25.1	43.3	26.2

* Does not include natural disaster-related displacement

Table 2 The UN Refugee Agency Statistics

Liberia's Historical and Geographical Overview

In the 19th century, freed slaves from the United States of America relocated to the west coast of Africa (liberiapastandpresent.org). Paul Cuffee (1759-1817), an American Quaker, advocated to free American slaves to Africa. He gained support from the British government and with Congress support he made a plan to emigrate American slaves to the British colony of Sierra Leone (globalsecurity.org). Within twenty-five years, Liberia was recognized as the Republic of Liberia.

The Republic of Liberia is located on the West African coast bordering Sierra Leone to the west (English speaking), Ivory Coast to the east (French speaking) and Guinea to the north (French speaking). Liberia's primary language is English with sixteen

indigenous languages throughout the country (www.state.gov). With a population of 3.49 million people in 2008, only 50% are literate (www.state.gov). Thus, the adult refugees that enroll within higher education in the United States may have the advantage of speaking English; however, they may not be literate in English.

Although located in Africa, Liberia has a long-standing relationship with the United States. The U.S Department of State Diplomacy in Action reported,

Liberia, "land of the free," was founded by free African-Americans and freed slaves from the United States in 1820. An initial group of 86 immigrants, who came to be called Americo-Liberians, established a settlement in Christopolis (now Monrovia, named after U.S. President James Monroe) on February 6, 1820 (www.state.gov).

The relationship between Liberia and the United States has continued to be of a friendly and supportive nature. This long relationship between countries also demonstrates the influx of Liberian refugees within the United States after Liberia's civil war. In addition, American congress in 1819 gave \$100, 000 to Liberia to reestablish its country.

According to the State Department, "The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) implements the U.S. Government's development assistance program in Liberia, the second-largest USAID development program in Africa" (www.state.gov). The relationship between the United States and Liberia has only grown stronger with time.

The history between Liberia and the United States of America provides a background of Liberians and their quest for America. After a 14-year civil war from 1989-2003, there are still thousands of Liberians that have not returned and are living as refugees worldwide (www.state.gov).

Liberian Population Overview

Liberia's population was targeted at 3,476,608 in 2008, according to the Population and Housing Census (www.citypopulation.de/Liberia). The population is growing in Liberia with an approximate 2% increase in population each year.

Table 1. Population of Liberian Counties in 2008

(www.citypopulation.de/Liberia)

Name	Abbr.	Capital	A (km ²)	C 1984-02-01	CF 2008
Bomi	BM	Tubmanburg	1,942	66,420	84,119
Bong	BG	Gbarnga	8,769	255,813	333,481
Gbarpolu	GP	Bopolu	9,685	48,399	83,388
Grand Bassa	GB	Buchanan	7,932	159,648	221,693
Grand Cape Mount	CM	Robertsport	5,160	79,322	127,076
Grand Gedeh	GG	Zwedru	10,480	63,028	125,258
Grand Kru	GK	Barclayville	3,894	62,791	57,913
Lofa	LO	Voinjama	9,978	199,242	276,863
Margibi	MG	Kakata	2,615	151,792	209,923
Maryland	MY	Harper	2,296	69,267	135,938
Montserrado	MO	Bensonville	1,908	491,078	1,118,241
Nimba	NI	Sanniquellie	11,546	313,050	462,026
River Cess	RI	Cestos City	5,592	37,849	71,509
River Gee	RG	Fish Town	5,110	39,782	66,789
Sinoe	SI	Greenville	10,133	64,147	102,391
Liberia	LBR	Monrovia	97,036	2,101,628	3,476,608

Liberian Government Overview

The political climate of Liberia between 1989-2003 was unstable. Doe Krahn's ethnic group took over the Liberian government in 1985, that was characterized by widespread fraud" (www.state.gov). The October 1985 elections caused increased human rights abuses, corruption, and ethnic tension. In addition, the standard of living was further deteriorated (www.state.gov). In December 1989, rebels of Doe's former procurement chief, Charles Taylor, invaded Liberia from the border of Cote d'Ivoire. From 1989-1996 the civil war began and more than 200,000 Liberians were killed and millions fled to refugee camps in nearby countries (www.state.gov).

Taylor's presidency lasted six years while the lives of Liberians were still not peaceful. During Taylor's presidency, unemployment and illiteracy were above 75% and little investment was made towards Liberia's infrastructure (www.state.gov). Although Liberia is still rebuilding its infrastructure, it currently has a democratic president and new government that have been positively received by the Liberian people.

Liberia has organized a bicameral legislature that consists of 64 representatives and 30 senators (www.state.gov). The executive branch has historically been the leading influence on the legislature and judicial system. With 15 counties in Liberia, traditional courts and lay courts exist within the rural areas and counties. However, the formal judicial system has a shortage of qualified judges and other judicial officials, according to the U.S Department of State (www.state.gov). Recently in 2009 the Supreme Court in Liberia appointed the president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, power of choosing the city mayors and county superintendents.

Social and Economic Overview

Within Liberia's history, the country was known for its academic institutions. However, after the 14-year civil war (1989-2003) Liberia's economy and known academic institutions have drastically fallen. In addition, the UN sanctions banned timber and diamond exports until 2006, which was a major exporting production. Currently, Liberia's revenue comes from rubber and maritime registry program, the second-largest maritime registry in the world (www.state.gov). According to the United States government, Liberia is seeking to build strong relationships and negotiations with large foreign investors for their mining, rubber and other sectors (www.state.gov).

The U.S. Department of State explained, "Years of conflict and mismanagement also left Liberia with a large debt burden of \$3.4 billion" (www.state.gov). The country is moving forward to improve its financial management and begin to build its businesses and exports for a stronger tomorrow through President Sirleaf's presidency. The current focus on building stronger relationships with foreign investors may slowly ease the country of its debt.

Liberian Education

Traditionally, educational infrastructure existed mostly in the capital of Monrovia. Limited educational opportunities are available in the rural areas. During the war, many of the educational facilities throughout Liberia were destroyed. However, UNHCR has built over 1600 classrooms in 2006 in order to support the reconstruction of the democratic country (unhcr.org). Approximately seventy percent of Liberians complete primary school, while only twenty-eight percent complete high school (unhcr.org). However, these numbers have grown since 2004, the end of the civil war, and more

Liberian refugees are now continuing their education as adults. According to William Kandel, analyst in Immigration Policy for the U.S. Congress, in 2007, 42% of Africans living in the United States have graduated with a bachelor's degree (www.state.gov).

The Adult Learning Process

It is imperative for educators to understand the marginalized population of adult Liberian refugees matriculating through American college classrooms. Theories of how adults learn (Knowles, 1975) have been explored, however, the application within the college has gained less attention. The concept of how adults learn differently than children began in the 1970's. Knowles introduced andragogy, a theory of how adults learn differently than children with a focus on his or her life situation (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007). As Knowles quickly became known as the pioneer of adult education, other theorists contributed to the field and introduced various models of how adults learn.

Andragogy allows for adult educators to have an assumption of the adult learner. This assumption leads the adult educator to use an andragogical approach, learner-centered, rather than a pedagogical, teacher-centered, approach (Knowles, 1975). In addition, Knowles introduced self-directed learning a method of teaching by using andragogy. Self-directed learning is the overall goal of andragogy (Brookfield, 1985).

Autonomy or self-directed learning has grown in theory since the adult education movement. Tennant and Pogson (1995) noted that "the idea of autonomy or self-directed learning is firmly entrenched in contemporary thinking about adult education, and there has been a great deal of scholarly interest in the subject" (p.121). This interest and progress in the 21st century has lead to different definitions of what autonomy (self-

directed learning) really means. Although there is a gap in literature regarding adult Liberian's success within an American classroom, there has been a slight increase in research focusing on marginalized populations within higher education in the United States, according to Merriam, Courtenay and Cervero (2006).

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation

Adults enroll in higher education classes for various reasons. In addition, the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of adult learners is widely researched, particularly by Patricia Cross (1981). Cross emphasized the importance of self reflection within the student to understand that the motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic. Motivation involves doing an activity, in this case, enrolling within higher education for the pure enjoyment of it.

On the contrary, extrinsic motivation is instrumental in nature. An outside component leads the learners to motivate themselves to enroll and complete courses. For example, a learner's parents or a promotion for a job may create an extrinsic motivation to enroll into higher education courses or a specific certificate program. Consequently, motivation cannot be imposed on a learner it must be elicited.

Theorist Cyril O. Houle published *The Inquiring Mind* in 1961, which investigated the motivations of twenty-two adult learners (Merriam, Caffarella, Baumgartner, 2007). Houle conducted a qualitative study with in-depth interviews that focused on the subjects' history of learning, self-reflection of being a learner and factors that contributed to them continuing their learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Although his study was completed in 1961, there are still researchers and educators that identify learners through his research. Houle identified three types of learners: goal-oriented,

active-oriented and learning-oriented. A goal-oriented learner becomes self-directed and takes responsibility of his or her learning. An active-oriented learner is extrinsically motivated and does not make any extra effort to participate or become self-directed. A learning-oriented learner uses positive experiences of learning from the past and intrinsic motivation to succeed in education (Merriam et al., 2007).

Pew (2001) identified the benefits of learners having intrinsic motivation. Pew stated that,

The benefit of intrinsic motivation is its availability and portability. If what drives one to succeed is based on factors that derive from one's own beliefs, morals, desires, and goals, then access to those motivators is instant and not dependent on the availability or cooperation of external sources such as money or motivational speakers. The reward of acquiring knowledge or critical thinking skills comes from a personal sense of accomplishment that one has somehow grown as an individual; achievement of personal goals outweighs any external reward. External gratification, while desirable and not to be discounted, is secondary to an internal sense of accomplishment. (p. 17)

The author's thoughts closely followed the ideologies of Houle. The intrinsic learner may have benefits over the extrinsically motivated learner within the classroom. Identifying the motivation of each individual student may create a closer examination of how students learn best.

Finding the underlying motivational structure of adult Liberian refugees matriculating within the college classroom is the responsibility of educators and administrators. This knowledge can assist in "identifying and meeting the needs of a wide spectrum of learners relative to program content, as well as the time, duration, and location of related activities" (Merriam et al., 2007, p.65). The various reasons behind why learners are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated can assist educators and

administrators in having higher success with the marginalized population.

Transformational Learning and Critical Thinking

Confucius once said, “in order to teach students what they don’t know, you must start from where they are” (Hawkins, 2009, p.11). Self-reflection for students and educators is a core element to transitioning how students learn. Transformational learning can be applied within education to assist learners in understanding themselves in order to successfully learn new information. Problems that may occur can be a lack of confidence, efficacy, and perseverance (Hawkins, 2009). Hawkins focus on reoccurring potential problems could be addressed first by the educator, in order to set an example for students and to lead towards positive change for all.

Transformational learning is a vital component within adult education. The adult education movement focuses on three areas: andragogy, self-directed learning, and transformational learning (Merriam, 2001). Transformational learning is also an important contributor to understanding adult Liberian refugees within a college classroom. This section will explore the history, theories and relevance of transformational learning with adult learners.

Transformational learning was first introduced to the field of adult education in 1978, which brought a new theory into practice. Theorist Jack Mezirow “urged the recognition of a critical dimension of learning in adulthood that enables us to recognize and reassess the structures of assumptions and expectations which frame our thinking, feeling, and acting” (Sutherland & Crowther, 2007, p.24). Mezirow is well-known as the pioneer of transformational learning in adult education. This new theory in adult education was criticized by some, but overall welcomed as a new way of understanding

how adults learn differently than children. Many compared Mezirow's theory to Piaget's theory of how children learn throughout childhood. Merriam (2007) stated, "By mid-century, adult educators became concerned with the question of how adult learning could be differentiated from the way in which children learn" (p.200).

Merriam (2004) explained, "in transformational learning, one's values, beliefs, and assumptions compose the lens through which personal experience is mediated and made sense of" (p.61). Mezirow's unique approach towards using self-reflection, one's personal beliefs, and assumptions lead learners to identify self awareness for themselves in order to grow for the future. The goal of transformational theory is to lead individuals into autonomous thinking. This can be achieved by reflecting on personal values, beliefs, and assumptions. Mezirow (2000) stated, "fostering greater autonomy in thinking is both a goal and a method of adult educators" (p.29). This concept is the gateway for educators within higher education to view their teaching methodologies when working specifically with marginalized populations.

In addition to Mezirow's transformational learning, Freire and Kuhn have also contributed and influenced the development of this theory. Paulo Freire's influence on transformational learning leans heavily on a personal and society level. Dirkx (1998) stated that, "For Freire, transformative learning is emancipatory and liberating at both a personal and social level (p.2). The concept of society influencing an adults' transformation is an important step towards understanding Freire's theory.

Freire examined the pedagogy of freedom and hope within marginalized populations. The author believed to be a progressive educator. Freire (1994) articulated "even when one must speak *to* the people, one must convert the "to" to a "with" the

people. And this implies respect for the “knowledge of living experience”” (p.26). This concept and belief can influence how adult Liberian refugees are respected and approached within an American college classroom by allowing mutual respect and open-mindedness.

Critical thinking and consciousness are also closely linked to transformational learning, which is described by both Mezirow and Freire. Theorist Dirkx (1998) suggested, “critical consciousness refers to a process in which learners develop the ability to analyze, pose questions, and take action on the social, political, cultural, and economic contexts that influence and shape their lives” (p.2). Critical thinking has taken a large role in many adult learners’ lives. Without critical thinking and reflection, no transformation can be made.

Freire’s first book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, illustrated freedom of learners and a critical review of society and its role in education. He described emancipatory education that requires open-mindedness and acceptance. The concept of society influencing an adults’ transformation is an important step towards understanding Freire’s theory. Freire’s main message “is that one can know only to the extent that one “problematizes” the natural, cultural, and historical reality in which s/he is immersed” (Freire, 1973, p. ix). This message compliments Mezirow’s theory that an individual must reflect and learn from experiences. These experiences are not limited to personal, cultural, or historical.

Dirkx (1998) explained transformational learning by using a four-lens approach. He elaborated on the foundation of Mezirow’s theory and Freire’s approach to learning. The four-lens approach begins by describing the cognitive-rational approach to

transformational learning. The first lens finds the similarities between Mezirow and Freire and their focus on theoretical underpinnings that lead to empowerment. This lens contributes to adult education and its motivation to guide learners to become confident and critical thinkers. The second lens also collaborates Mezirow and Freire's constructivist approach to transformational learning. Dirkx demonstrated the importance of reflection and critical thinking for educators and learners. Third, Dirkx described a developmental approach (Brookfield & Merriam, 2005, p. 263). This is using communication with others to validate new perspective and thoughts. The educator plays a significant role in mentoring and supporting learner's growth. Last, Dirkx focused on spirituality and learning. The feelings and images through reflection are important to Dirkx's fourth lens of transformational learning.

The empirical research found in transformational learning can be seen in Mezirow, Freire, and Dirkx's theories. Although there are different approaches, there are many areas that combine to create a positive transformative learning experience. For example, incorporating Freire's focus on open-mindedness and Dirkx's focus on critical thinking. In addition, Mezirow's theory incorporates self-reflection that can contribute to transformational learning within the classroom. The ultimate goal of these theorists allows for educators to choose which approach is appropriate for their learners while considering the political, cultural, and personal views of their learners.

It can be difficult for educators to practice critical thinking in their courses. However, theorists have emphasized the importance of incorporating critical thinking within the classroom. Paul and Elder (2009) wrote,

Most importantly, to be effective every instructional strategy should embed

critical thinking concepts and principles in it. Each strategy should be based on the guiding thought that the only way to learn content deeply and truly is to thin it into your thinking, to connect it with other important ideas, and to apply it to everyday life issues and problems. (p.40)

The authors stress the importance of incorporating critical thinking within the course content. Paul & Elder (2009) continued, “It is essential for teachers to design instructional strategies that engage students in thinking through the content so they take possession of the knowledge and insights embedded therein” (p.41). Teachers have the opportunity to apply critical thinking by using strategies that involve deep thinking of the content being learned by the student.

Critical teachers are considered educators that develop critical thinking within their students. Schor (1980) defined critical teaching as “assisting people to become aware of their taken-for-granted ideas about the world” (as cited in Brookfield & Merriam, 2005, p.179). The foundation of this theory stems from Freire’s view of liberating classrooms through consciousness and critical thinking. Critical awareness by learners is considered by Gamson and Associates (2005) as liberating education, which also strongly supports Freire’s model (as cited in Brookfield & Merriam, 2005, p. 180). Transformation is possible through reflecting on areas taken for granted, assumptions made, and behaviors of society and cultures.

Guidelines for transforming can differ for educators. Consequently, most educators and theorists will agree that there is no one way to use transformational learning. Agryis and Schon (1974) used seven basic steps as a guideline for transition. The authors’ stated that effective learning is the following:

- (1) is based on personally caused experience,
- (2) is usually produced by expressing and examining dilemmas,
- (3) values individuality and expression

of conflicts, (4) must be guided by an instructor who has more faith in the participants than they may have in themselves, (5) who recognizes the limits of participants' learning methodologies, (6) whose idea of rationality integrates feelings and ideas and (7) who can encourage spontaneity. (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p. 98)

Argyris and Schon's guidelines suggest that the student is responsible for different levels of their learning. However, it "allows people to express positive and negative feelings in a way that minimizes harming others and creating guilt in the actor if he realizes later that his behavior was dysfunctional" (Argyris & Schon, 1974, p.108). A learner's feelings and expression have a large impact on his or her road to self-discovery and becoming self-directed. Since the 1970's, models such as Argyris and Schon's have been created and have contributed to the adult education movement.

Critical Reflection and Autonomy

Mezirow's unique approach towards using self-reflection, ones' values, assumptions, and expectations lead learners and educators to identify these characteristics in order to grow and improve for the future. The goal of transformational theory is to lead individuals into autonomous thinking. Adult educators and adult learners can both become aware of using more autonomy within the classroom. Mezirow (2000) stated, "Fostering greater autonomy in thinking is both a goal and a method of adult educators" (p.29). Adult educators have a large role in providing guidance in autonomy and creating life-long learners. This is possible by using self-reflection and critical thinking. Taylor (as cited in Mezirow, 2009) defined critical reflection as "a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs are built" (p.1). Educators and learners all have beliefs and these beliefs may all differ. However, it is important for the individuals to critique their own personal

beliefs through reflection and autonomy. This can create an enhancement in adult teaching and learning.

Adult educators have the responsibility of critically reflecting in order to enhance their teaching. Brookfield (1995) explained, “Becoming critically reflective increases the probability that we [adult educators] will take informed actions” (p. 22). Through informed actions, educators have the opportunity to achieve and justify their teaching methodology and offer insight into successful practices. Brookfield further explained that, “when we have seen our practice through others’ eyes, we’re in a much better position to speak and behave in ways that ensure a consistency of understanding between us, our students, and our colleagues” (p.22). Educators using critical thinking can increase the likelihood that their words and actions have the intended effect.

Reflective practice has been growing, along with the adult education movement and transformational learning. Brookfield (1995) wrote, “theorists of reflective practice are interested in helping teachers understand, question, investigate, and take seriously their own learning and practice” (p.215). Transformational learning can assist this practice that so many theorists are helping teachers apply. Brookfield (1995) maintained that, “Through continuous investigation and monitoring of their own efforts practitioners produce a corpus of valuable, though unprivileged, practical knowledge” (p.215). Adult teaching and learning can gain more value through reflecting and transforming within the classroom. Critical reflection, at this time, could be seen as an opportunity for Liberian refugees to reflect on their learning of a class session, to clarity of instruction and how they will improve their learning within a particular class or program.

Imel (1998) referred to Mezirow's theory of transformational learning and the importance of life experiences and how it can influence the learning and change within and adult learner. Imel (1998) stated that "Transformational learning may not always be a goal of adult education, but its importance should not be overlooked and all adult educators should strive to understand it, even if they do not choose to foster it" (p. 4). Although educators may have different philosophies of teaching, transformational learning should still be recognized by educators to influence self-directed learning for students. Educators can teach more effectively when he or she accepts and creates change within themselves. Imel indicated the importance of understanding transformational learning and its effect in the classroom.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Cultural perspectives of diverse students, particularly refugees, are the educators' responsibility. Educators need to understand these students' needs, motivations and barriers within the classroom. Gay (2000) stated that, "Teachers need to understand very thoroughly both the relationships and the distinctions between these [ethnic identify & cultural socialization] to avoid compromising the very thing they are most concerned about -that is, students' individuality" (p. 23). Refugees' uniqueness is a characteristic that can lead towards various teaching methods. Nsonwu (2008) explained that, "as victims of persecution, trauma, and violence, refugees have had limited or non-existence personal control of their lives" (p. 4). Although traumatic, these experiences can be used to assist an educator to better reach their students.

The purpose of learning is to understand the meaning of our life experiences and values (cited in Brookfield, 1985). Andragogy can offer hope for changing learning styles

and teaching methodologies that as a result, will assure safety and justice for marginalized populations (Bright & Mahdi, 2010). An American college classroom should “encourage, foster and nurture learning climates to engage discussions, explore life’s options, and an understanding of human desire” to best reach a diverse classroom (Bright & Mahdi, p.37). Liberians should be able to assume that their American college classroom is open-minded and eager to learn about their culture and academic needs.

Mainstream American teachers may find themselves isolated from understanding their diverse student population. American ethnic, racial, and linguistic characteristics have not changed in the last century, but have grown. Florio-Ruane (2001) wrote, “what is astonishing is how little that picture of education has changed in what has otherwise been an astounding century of change in other arenas” (p.xxv). The importance of altering curriculum to be less Euro-American focused and more culturally framed, is an important consideration to make for the future of the American school systems. The importance of altering this would create a stronger, more personal learning environment for refugees enrolled in higher education. Tisdell and Tolliver (as cited in Mezirow, 2009) indicated that culturally responsive education enables a curriculum to be focused on finding an alternative way for learners to find their cultural roots and their peers. Transformative approaches towards teaching can lead towards culturally responsive teaching in a multicultural classroom.

Culturally responsive education is not limited to the educator’s role. Higher education institutions and curriculum development are just as important as the educator’s culturally responsive teaching. Cohen (2007) shared her research and the barriers identified for adult refugees enrolled within an American community college. Cohen

(2007) stated that, “This case study describes local international students' (LIS) self-identified barriers to academic success at a metropolitan area community college and recommends institutional, classroom and co-curricular responses” (p. 1). The role of the educator is important for these students to succeed. Cohen concluded her dissertation by offering solutions to the barriers LIS students face. She suggested institutional support, immediate responses to the needs of students, faculty teaching methods and training and an orientation for both students and faculty.

Authenticity and imagination are two elements of culturally responsive education. Cranton (2006) explained, “teaching with a sense of authenticity reflects a profound sense of self-awareness and self-understanding” (p.29). An educator must first be able to have self-awareness in order to ask their own students to do the same. Culturally responsive teaching draws on learning where our roots and beliefs come from and ask the same of our students. Nieto (1999) suggested,

Teachers who can identify with their students culturally, racially, in terms of social class origin, or in other ways, may find that the process is not quite as difficult because they can draw on and reflect about their own experiences with difference and consequently they are able to more readily understand the feelings and perspectives of their students. (p.140)

Adult educators need to experience their own reflection on their culture to expect their students to be able to do the same.

Autobiographies

Self-reflection can be utilized within the college classroom by incorporating autobiographies for students to write. Educators can use reflection themselves to think privately of their autobiographies. Brookfield (1995) emphasized that, “the critical journey has to start somewhere, and examining our autobiographies as learners and

teachers is one obvious point of departure” (p.33). This journey has the potential to assist educators that are teaching marginalized populations to reflect on themselves before asking their students to do the same.

Consequently, Brookfield (2005) noted, “Our experiences as learners are felt at a visceral, emotional level that is much deeper than that of reason” (p. 31). This step of creating and reflecting on our autobiographies can be used as a step towards understanding the cultural perspectives of adult refugees. Brookfield (2005) also suggested understanding students through their eyes. Brookfield wrote, “knowing what is happening to students as they grapple with the difficult, threatening, and exhilarating process of learning is of the utmost importance; without this foundational information, it is hard to teach well” (p.35). Based on Brookfield’s assertion, it is reasonable to surmise that applying autobiographies to reflect on in the classroom can create a more comfortable and successful learning experience. In addition, faculty and administrators of a higher educational institution should have knowledge of their students’ background and culture to better assist them towards academic success.

More importantly, educators can create autobiographies to critically reflect on themselves. Educators can analyze their autobiography as a learner to try and better understand their students. Brookfield (2005) explained, “We may think we’re teaching according to a widely accepted curricular or pedagogic model, only to find, upon reflection, that the foundations of our practice have been laid in our autobiographies as learners” (p.31). This valuable resource could enable educators to become more sensitive to students’ experiences, culture, and learning needs. Although educators may not be able to fully understand a refugees’ life experience, it is still important for the educators to

reflect on who he or she is as an instructor, and who their students are.

Thompson created a dissertation with a focus to benefit the Hmong refugees enrolled at the University of Montana by providing a forum where they could express, examine, and understand their own experiences (Thompson, 2001). Thompson used a phenomenological approach to examine the Hmong refugees enrolled at the University of Montana and interviewed each member. Through this style of research, the author was able to listen to the voices of the immigrants and their concerns and overall comments about being a university student in the United States.

This research is another supporting example of the importance of listening to and understanding the voices of students. Through Thompson's research, faculty and administrators at the University of Montana may have the opportunity to take the concerns and comments from the Hmong refugees to better prepare for future refugee students. Thompson (2001) stated, "the results of the analysis revealed that the subjects felt apprehensive, lonely, overwhelmed, and frustrated in the college setting" (p. 1). These feelings expressed by the refugees need to be assessed by the university. The Hmong students worked honestly and openly with the author. This open communication between teacher and student is the first step towards understanding the refugees and their needs.

Culturally responsive teaching is evaluated and practiced by many educators. Culturally responsive teaching emphasizes that "teachers must learn how to recognize, honor, and incorporate the personal abilities of students into their teaching strategies" (Gay, 2000, p. 1). Students' families and communities can have a significant influence on the success of diverse students. In addition, administrators and educators have the

opportunity to keep the same standards for all students, no matter their social class or ethnicity by incorporating culturally responsive teaching. In addition, promoting a culturally driven teaching methodology would quickly be noticed and could potentially be the new future trend of American educational systems.

Within the American educational system, curriculum is still considered to focus on the European learner (Gay, 2001). Although America has now become a much larger melting pot, privileges for whites are still occurring. Educator Peggy McIntosh reflected on her experiences as a white female citizen and learner. Her article examined the various privileges Whites, particularly men, are given in the United States. Her concern that educational institutions coincide with societies prejudices is strong. McIntosh (1988) noted,

To redesign social systems we need first to acknowledge their colossal unseen dimensions. The silences and denials surrounding privilege are the key political tool here. They keep the thinking about equality or equity incomplete, protecting unearned advantage and conferred dominance by making these subjects taboo. (p. 6)

Perhaps McIntosh's view of the United States having prejudices within society and giving unforeseen privileges to specific groups, foreshadows the educational system. The concept of privilege for students of middle-class, white decent needs to be quickly addressed in order to have a higher level of successful American students. The social class and ethnicity of a student should not alter their educational opportunities.

An obvious direction for educators to take is to understand the relationships between the curriculum and their diverse students. Gay (2000) stated, "the close interactions amount ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement (that

is, between culture and cognition) are becoming increasingly apparent” (p. 25). Refugees in higher education all have their own ethnic identity, even those from the same country. In addition, student achievement can be widespread for socioeconomic reasons within the same country. These interactions between diversity and curriculum must be evaluated and implemented into the curriculum and instruction. Teachers should build a bridge between the cultural differences in students and the curriculum content (Gay, 2000).

Globalization in Adult Education

Global perspectives on adult education have received high interest in the last decade. In addition, understanding the adult learner has also created high interest. Abdi and Kapoor (2009) commented,

Every adult education learner knows something, not only about the demands of the context in which the desire for more learning is created, but also about the subject that she or he is interested in, even when the learner may not be aware of that *a priori* knowledge. (p.1)

Adult education has taken a global perspective specifically because of the “rapid pace of global economic change” (Abdi & Kapoor, 2009, p.3). The need for adults to become lifelong learners is now more prevalent in today’s day in age. Hence, globalization in adult education has become a common interest among adult education including Liberian adult refugees who are matriculating within American college classrooms.

Historical Influence on Adult Education

Forms of globalization can be traced back to the end of World War II (Merriam & Nicolletti, 2008). Topics of globalization and global awareness began stirring around this time. According to Charters (1992), there has been an increased cooperation among

international adult education organizations. Since the 1960s, advocates of adult education became internationally known. The International Congress of University Adult Education was founded after UNESCO's conference in Montreal (Charters, 1992). This first step towards communication among educators has created a foundation for development.

The first area of concern in the field of adult education was adult illiteracy. Particularly in third-world countries, governments around the world began to discuss the field and importance of adult education. John Dewey, an American pragmatist once said, "True education is both worthwhile by itself and a life long process" (as cited in Munoz & Munoz, 1998, p.3). Adult education can be looked upon through the years as a worthwhile process. The growth of adult education seems to be progressing within the fast-paced society we now live. Munoz and Munoz (1998) stated,

All societies need education to guarantee continuity of their culture. Through the years, one generation transmits/communicates to the next one the fruit of its experiences, namely, knowledge, customs, values, institutions, occupations, traditions, and all the specific characteristics that distinguish their way of life. (p. 15)

More than ten years ago, Munoz and Munoz identified the growing future of adult education and the essential need of all societies needing education.

Political and Economic Influences on Adult Education

Political influences and views have an extreme impact on globalization. Merriam et al. (2008) explained, "globalization is in the hands of transnational and multinational consortiums from the financial capital centers" (p.31). The United States is currently the super power of the world. This has caused changes in globalization and heavily affected third-world countries. Consequently, refugees from third-world countries are matriculating through American colleges and universities.

Imel (2000) wrote,

Now, however, there is increasing discussion and analysis of the context in which learning takes place, including "the larger systems in society, the culture and institutions that shape learning, the structural and historical conditions framing, indeed defining, the learning event. (p. 2)

The larger systems Imel referred to are the governments involved in making decisions of education within their countries. These large and important decisions are important for adult educators to become actively involved in the decision making for their adult learners.

Adult educators can prepare for the causes of these issues by collaborating to discuss the causes of globalization and how they can implement new strategies into the field of adult education. Individuals and groups have begun to develop a community of adult educators in order to collaborate to discuss their roles of globalization and adult education. For example, the Salzburg Seminar has a rich history of collaborating "culturally diverse groups of adult learners to engage in intense dialogue about issues that have global importance" (Merriam, et al., 2006, p.xiv). The theme of global issues and the responsibilities of adult educators take place every year. A common topic discussed is the economy and its influence on poverty and education and the need for change.

The severity of globalization and education is heavily related to poverty and the economy. Drastic numbers of people worldwide fall under the category of living in poverty and are a marginalized population. Merriam, Courtenay, and Cervero (2006) stated, "There will always remain a constant struggle and tension between those in the margins and those at the center" (p.187). The severity lies in those in marginalized populations. Merriam (et al.) wrote, "marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form

of oppression” (2006, p.169). Refugee students may find themselves consistently fighting against the odds of living in poverty and being a member of a marginalized population.

Marginalized Populations

Others who are affected by politics and the economy are marginalized populations. Sheared (1992) defined marginalization “as the silencing of lived experiences in discourses constructed through legislation and policies created by the dominant culture, which...negates the political, economic, historical and social realities of those living in the margins of society (as cited in Merriam, Courtenay, Cervero, 2006, p.99). Liberians can be considered a marginalized population by this definition as they have taken refuge in other countries for a civil war that lasted for fourteen years (www.state.gov).

Merriam, Courtenay, and Cervero (2006) stated, “Throughout the world there are groups of people who live on the margins of their society” (p. 91). These groups vary from gender, race, refugees, and disabled to name a few. They are all influenced by globalization and they do not receive the support from their governments to become active within adult education (Merriam et al., 2006). This is the case with Liberia, currently due to the reconstruction of their economy after their civil war (unfpa.org). Liberians are still currently recovering from global influences. The United Nations Population Fund (2011) reported

Education is critical to sustaining peace and stability: more work is required to improve school enrolment – net enrolment for primary education is only 33 percent³ – and more investment is needed in the education sector. The gender gap is narrowing – it is 0.88 in primary education and 0.69 at the secondary level – but more work is required to support enrolment among girls and boys.

(unfpa.org, p. 4).

Although it has been years since the Liberian civil war ended, the country is still slowly recovering. The currently slow economy is also not allowing for Liberians to improve their education system, according to The United Nations Population Fund (2011).

Within the American college classroom, educators have an important role and responsibility to maintain. Merriam et al. (2006) suggested an educator “recognize the diversity of learning needs, lifestyles, languages, and other cultural attributes in order to ensure access to education, foster relevant educational opportunities, and facilitate the full civic and social participation of all learners throughout life” (p.99). Marginalized populations need others to be culturally sensitive in order for their self-efficacy to grow within the classroom. Landreman et al. (2007) argued that “Educators can support students’ development of critical consciousness [and learning] by assisting them in making meaning of their experiences within a context that acknowledges societal realities, and engaging them in liberatory education” (p. 294). These intentional efforts by the educator can assist Liberian refugees’ learning by recognizing their cultural backgrounds.

Student Development

There are various aspects of learning that can be used as guides to self-evaluate. Self-concept and self-esteem are two major components that construct a phenomenological theory in personality (Bandura, 1986). Self-esteem begins from an individual who bases their success or failure to the competence or attributes they have or have not achieved. Bandura (1986) explained, “cultural stereotyping is another way in

which social judgments affect perceptions of self-worth” (p. 356). Liberian refugees can easily fall within the category of an adult learner discovering his or her individual competences or attributes within an American college classroom.

Chickering’s theory of identity development examined and explained the adult learner but also marginalized populations. The author’s seven vectors describe a comprehensive glance at psychosocial development for students of higher education (Evans et al. 2010). According to Evans, the seven vectors investigate the emotional, interpersonal, ethical and intellectual aspects of development for adult learners (Evans et al. 2010). Chickering’s seven vectors are (a) developing competence, (b) managing emotions, (c) moving through autonomy toward interdependence, (d) developing mature interpersonal relationships, (e) establishing identity, (f) developing purpose, and (g) developing integrity.

Evans et al. (2010) explained that developing competence, the first vector, focuses on three areas: intellectual, physical and manual skills. Intellectual competence includes growth in critical thinking skills, cultural sophistication and knowledge of and development in particular subject matters. Evans et al. also noted that the physical competence involves the athletic and artistic activities in which a student partakes. Last, the interpersonal competence is how well a student can collaborate with others through communication skills and leadership (Evans et al., 2010).

Managing emotions involves identifying and accepting emotions with an ability to express and control them as well (Evans et al., 2010). With a marginalized population such as adult Liberian refugees, the emotions may include depression, anxiety, shame or

anger. Chickering (as cited in Evans et al., 2010) addressed the negative emotions of college students in their development, as well as the positive.

The third vector, moving through autonomy toward interdependence, follows a learner's emotions to create independence and self-direction. Chickering focused on the student awareness of interconnectedness with others while maintaining positive relationships with parents.

Intercultural and interpersonal tolerance contributed to the fourth vector, developing mature interpersonal relationships (Evans et al., 2010). More importantly, the acceptance and appreciation of differences is a focus in becoming a mature college student that is independent. Reisser stated that both tasks, "involve the ability to accept individuals for who they are, to respect differences, and to appreciate commonalities" (as cited in Evans et al., 2010, p.68). The learner's growth in experience with relationships supports the sense of self-identity.

The fifth vector, establishing identity, uses the foundation of the other vectors while concentrating on the physical, sexual and ethnic complexities of an individual. Learners must be secured in themselves, even when feedback from others may be different or difficult. Chickering's sixth vector, developing purpose, leads the learner to create goals that solely made for their personal interests and commitments. The learner develops a sense of commitment while also being independent to successfully reach a goal, even in the face of opposition (Evans et al., 2010).

Using Chickering's vectors, learners are able to find a balance between the interests of others and their own personal interests to create the final vector, developing integrity. The learner must be responsible, motivated, and independent in order to

establish a personalized value system. Learners' values create an individual integrity for college success. Faculty advising can support the learners' integrity to succeed by offering support. Gordon et al. (2008) suggested that

Faculty members hold a basic and critical responsibility for the academic mission and the curriculum of the institution. Since they both determine and teach the curriculum, they remain central to how students come to understand connections between what they are learning and the overall purpose of their academic programs. (p.254)

The support and involvement of the educator is important to compliment the academic mission but also to support the dedicated learner.

Chickering's theory has enhanced student development by incorporating in-depth research of students' experiences and also faculty involvement. The seven vectors have been revised by Chickering and Reisser (1993) in order to accommodate changes in college students. Although the theorist does not specifically report on marginalized populations, each vector developed can be applied to this unique student population.

Conclusion

The overview of Liberia's political, educational, and economical history presents a country healing from its past and moving forward for a brighter tomorrow. The adult Liberian refugees who are currently enrolled within higher education in the United States have many motivations and barriers that will affect their success within the college classroom. The adult learning theories are essential to understanding the perceived barriers of this marginalized population. In addition, the growth of theories contributes to the success of Liberian refugees matriculating within American college classrooms.

Culturally responsive teaching and transformational learning are two key theories that support this marginalized population. Through autonomy, self-reflection and critical

thinking, adult Liberian refugees can begin to see through the fog and start viewing themselves differently. Educators and administrators also have a crucial role to contribute to the success of this population. There is a significant connection between adult learning theories and the success of adult Liberian refugees matriculating through higher education in the United States.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Liberian refugees enrolled within American classrooms are an area of adult education that needs further research. There is a gap in research focused on the marginalized population of adult Liberian refugees and their success within an American college classroom. The study focused on the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees matriculating through American college classrooms and their perceived barriers to success. The voices of this marginalized population were heard by using a qualitative study. In this chapter, the following are discussed: (a) statement of the problem, (b) research question, (c) research methodology, (d) research design, (e) phenomenology, (f) participants, (g) sources of data, (h) validity and reliability, (i) data collection and analysis procedure and (j) ethical issues.

Statement of the Problem

There is a gap in literature regarding the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees within higher education in the United States. More specifically, it is not known how adult Liberian refugees matriculating through higher learning in the United States perceive barriers to success. No known literature targets this subject. Higher education institutions need to be aware of the barriers to academic success as perceived by this unique subset of the United States population.

The transitions from Liberia to the U.S. as a refugee have many difficult obstacles. Barowsky and McIntyre (2010) explained,

Refugees and asylum seekers frequently experience more intrusive and life-threatening circumstances that undermine their physical and mental health as well as their educational functioning. Further, refugees and asylum seekers differ in

their legal status, which may be reflected in differences in their vulnerability to emotional stressors. Refugee status in the United States, for example, offers, at a minimum, temporary sanctuary if the individual is threatened by persecution or a "well-founded" fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. (p. 162)

These circumstances are not limited or exhausted. Currently, there is a lack of literature identifying which, if any, of these experiences adult Liberian refugee students may have experienced.

The emotional turmoil that adult Liberian refugees may have previously or are currently enduring can be difficult to understand as an educator of higher education in the United States. In addition, the difficult process of transitioning to higher education within the United States is yet another barrier. Ceballos (as cited in Merriam, Courtney, Cervero, 2006) explained the importance of gaining knowledge about enrolled learners, particularly those with barriers. He stated, "In the midst of so many destructive forces acting against humanity, education must be an affirmation for what is eminently human. In a system that disempowers its subjects, education has the rewarding task of empowerment its subject" (p.323). Consequently, understanding the perceived barriers would be a pivotal step toward gaining new knowledge of the difficult transition to the United States and enrolling in higher education.

Various organizations have given global support for refugees. For example, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) was established in 1950 and has globally brought awareness and helped refugees worldwide. There are also many non-profit organizations that have had similar causes. However, there are limited organizations or literature on support of refugees enrolled within higher education. The

growing number of refugees and adult refugees enrolling in higher education is a topic not globally discussed.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study the underlying assumption were that Liberian refugees who enroll in American institutions of higher education encounter barriers in both matriculation and academic success. Therefore, the primary research question was:

R₁: How do adult Liberian adult refugees matriculating through institutions of higher learning in the United States perceive and describe barriers to their academic success?

The study was also guided by the following question:

R₂: What do adult Liberian refugees perceive as barriers to successful matriculation through higher education in the United States?

Research Methodology

The selection of research study should begin with the researchers worldview assumptions of the study (Creswell, 2009, p.3). This will allow for the researcher to explore which research design will be most appropriate for their study. The lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees and their perceived barriers of success may best be explored by using a qualitative approach. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.4). Through this method, the researcher explored the perceived barriers adult Liberian refugees have within the American college system.

Qualitative Inquiry

Generally, the purpose of qualitative inquiry is to understand and interpret human experiences by asking broad questions to identify the view of the participants through open-ended questions. Through descriptive analysis, a qualitative study can explore a topic of which little is known or has a central phenomenon (Creswell, 2008, p51). Denzin and Lincoln defined qualitative research as “the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials-case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts-that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives” (1998, p. 3). Qualitative research has a plethora of approaches that all focus on the meanings in individuals’ lives.

Qualitative research has a rich history beginning in the 1920s and 1930s in the field of sociology (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). It has expanded to the disciplines of anthropology and psychology as well. However, philosophers of education in the 1960s felt that quantitative research was lacking the researchers’ participants view (Creswell, 2008). Qualitative research has emerged from strictly using face-to-face interviews to more diverse approaches. Keegan (2009) noted that,

In the last 10-15 years there has been something of a sea change, leading away from interviewing as almost the sole methodology. Although group discussions and depth interviews still account for 85 per cent of qualitative research worldwide (Esomar, 2008: 6, 15), other methodologies are growing in strength. (p.71)

In addition, these newly developed approaches are also being merged with interviewing to compliment face-to-face interviews.

Debating whether a qualitative study employs explicit theory is discussed among many researchers. Creswell (2009) argued that, “Some qualitative studies *do not employ*

explicit theory. However, the case can be made that no qualitative study begins from pure observation and that prior conceptual structure composed of theory and method provides the starting point for all observations” (p.64). Creswell continued, “Still, one sees qualitative studies that contain no *explicit* theoretical orientation, such as in phenomenology, in which inquirers attempt to build the essence of experience from participants” (p.64). A qualitative study proves to have more significance through using observation and discovering the experiences of participants within a study.

Research Design

Phenomenology

The best method of research to create open dialogue to further understand the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees matriculating through American college classrooms is by using a qualitative approach. Through qualitative inquiry, the researcher used a phenomenological approach in gathering data and still followed the research purpose. This section will begin with the definition, history and function of phenomenology.

Definition of Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is a qualitative strategy that identifies the fundamental nature of the human experience told by the participant. Understanding the lived experiences of each participant is a goal of phenomenology. Phenomenology is seen as a philosophy as well as a method. Moustakas (as cited in Creswell, 2009) explained that, “the procedure involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (p.13).

Phenomenology allows the researcher to gather information from the participants and find patterns and relationships.

A phenomenological perspective, according to Kvale (1998), “includes a focus on the life world, an openness to the experiences of the subjects, a primacy of precise descriptions, attempts to bracket foreknowledge, and a search for invariant essential meanings in the descriptions” (p.38). Although each adult Liberian refugee has a unique story, the patterns and relationships of each participant will be discovered using a phenomenological approach.

History of Phenomenology

The subject matter of phenomenology began by philosopher Edward Husserl (1859-1938) that focused on consciousness and experience. It developed to include the world of human life by Heidegger, which also included human action and existentialism by Sartre (Kvale, 1996). Phenomenology has developed through these European philosophers and writers who were all dominant contributors. However, it is Husserl who is widely seen as the father of phenomenology.

Husserl (as cited in Denton and Lincoln, 1974) asserted that,

It [phenomenology] has to place before its own eyes as instances certain pure conscious events, to bring these to complete clearness, and within this zone of clearness to subject them to analysis and the apprehension of their essence, to follow up the essential connections that can be clearly understood, to grasp what is momentarily perceived in faithful conceptual expressions, of which the meaning is prescribed purely by the object perceived or in some way transparently understood. (p.128)

These steps, offered by Husserl, can allow for educators to create a clear study that focuses on the connections found between participants and their experiences. In addition,

it allows for the educator to begin the task of perceiving the data in an honest, unbiased manner.

More importantly, Husserl described a process of bracketing. Husserl suggested that researchers using a phenomenological approach should bracket. Bracket is described as a process whereby “the natural attitude involves consciously setting it aside in order to give attention to its assumptions and presuppositions” (as cited in Denton and Lincoln, 1974, p. 130). This concept is important while working with adult Liberian refugees, as it allows for the researcher to gather information on their lived experience while consciously setting aside personal opinions or judgments.

Participants

The participants in this study were adult Liberian refugees who are matriculating within an American college classroom. The participants were selected by their educational backgrounds in Liberia and matriculating status within the United States. Through the various organizations, a list of eligible participants arose and was used to contact twelve to fourteen potential participants. The interviews were arranged by signing up for various days and times for the participant’s convenience and schedule. The interviews took place at a venue agreed upon by both the participants and the researcher. Participants volunteered their time to interview and answered open-ended questions regarding their perceived barriers to success within their college classrooms. The interviewee discussed the format and length of time of the interview with all participants prior to the interview. The participants for the study were chosen because of the increase of adult Liberian refugees matriculating through colleges in the state of Rhode Island.

A homogenous sample was used in the study. Creswell (2008) stated that, “In homogenous sampling, the researcher purposefully samples individuals or sites based on membership in a subgroup that has defining characteristics” (p. 216). The individuals of the homogenous sample in this study included matriculating adult Liberian refugee college students. The size of the sample was ten adult Liberian refugees in different settings. The study used the purposive sampling from various higher educational institutions within the state of Rhode Island. In addition, the settings for data collection were located at various nonprofit organizations that support this marginalized population. Specifically, the settings were at the location of the subject’s college or nonprofit within the state of Rhode Island.

The qualitative research interview enables the researcher to gain access to the participants lived experiences. Kvale (1996) stated, “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ points of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples’ experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p.1). This approach to data collection allowed the researcher to use open-ended questions to each participant.

Validity

Validity is essential to a study because it draws meaningful and justifiable inferences from a population, within a qualitative study (Creswell, 2008, p.649). While using interviews as data collection, the validity is important to give credibility to the study and the researcher. In this study, Kvale’s (1996) seven-stage procedure was used to determine the validity of the data collection process.

Kvale (1996) described seven stages of using interviews that allows for validity to take place within a qualitative inquiry. The seven stages of interview investigation are (1) thematizing (2) designing (3) interviewing (4) transcribing (5) analyzing (6) verifying and (7) reporting. *Thematizing* formulates the purpose of the investigation and describes the concept of the topic to be investigated before the actual interview begins. *Designing* the interview focuses on obtaining the intended knowledge and moral implication of the study. *Interviewing*, in this procedure, means through a reflective approach to the knowledge and interpersonal relation of the interview situation. *Transcribing* prepares the material for analysis, which will then be transcribed from oral speech to written form. *Analyzing* decides on the basis of the purpose and topic under investigation and the nature of the interview material. *Verifying* reviews the results to confirm reliability and validity were used throughout the study. *Reporting* communicates the findings of the study and takes the ethical aspects of the study into consideration.

Validation of the seven stages of Kvale's procedure was considered previous to the start of the study. According to Kvale (1995), there is validation for each step:

- (1) *Thematizing*. The validity of an investigation rests on the soundness of the theoretical presuppositions of a study and on the logic of the derivations from theory to the research question of the study.
- (2) *Designing*. The validity of the knowledge produced depends on the adequacy of the design and the methods used for the subject matter and purpose of the study.
- (3) *Interviewing*. Validity here pertains to the trustworthiness of the subject's reports and the quality of the interviewing itself, which should include a careful

questioning as to the meaning of what is said and a continual checking of the information obtained as validation.

- (4) *Transcribing*. The question of what constitutes a valid translation from oral to written language is involved in the choice of linguistic style for the transcript.
- (5) *Analyzing*. This has to do with whether the questions put into an interview text are valid and whether the logic of the interpretations is sound.
- (6) *Validating*. This entails a reflected judgment as to what forms of validation are relevant to a specific study, the application of the concrete procedures of validation, and a decision on what the appropriate community is for a dialogue on validity.
- (7) *Reporting*. This involves the question of whether a given report is a valid account of the main findings of a study, as well as the role of the readers of the report in validating the results. (p.237)

Kvale highlighted the act of questioning each of the seven steps in the interviewing procedure to collect data. Each step has carefully been evaluated to justify its data collection for this study.

Reliability

In addition to the validity of the study, the reliability is also imperative.

Qualitative reliability focuses on the consistency across the study that the researcher has approached and completed (Creswell, 2009). It is the responsibility of the researcher to determine if their approach to the qualitative study is consistent and reliable. There are many suggested reliability procedures a researcher can take.

Procedures taken in this study to determine the reliability of the data collection were tape-recorded and the transcripts were checked often to revise for obvious mistakes. In addition, member checking was used to allow participants to check and determine whether the themes found were accurate. This was done by offering a follow-up interview. Another procedure, suggested by Creswell (2009), is to use rich and detailed description to communicate the findings. Last, a peer debriefing was used to “enhance the accuracy of the account” (p.192). This enabled another person to ask questions of the study and review for any errors.

Overall, the procedures were taken to determine the reliability of the data collection ensured validity and reliability throughout the collection process. In addition to the researcher using active procedures, a peer was also used to verify that the validity and inter-rater reliability were apparent. Finally, organizing a follow-up interview with participants allowed the researcher to accept comments from the participants of any misinformation.

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Kvale (1996) described a five-step data analysis that can be used to benefit the study (p.189-190).

(1) *Subjects Description*. Participants will describe their lived experience during the interview. The researcher will have little interpretation or explanation of the participants’ descriptions, feelings or explanations.

(2) *Subjects Themselves Discover*. Participants begin to find new meaning or new relationships with the interviewer. This can take place while the participant

spontaneously describes their lived experience and understand that the interviewer is free of judgment.

(3) *Interviewer Condenses and Interprets*. During the interview, the interviewer will describe and repeat ideas from the participant in different words to verify the meaning. This allows confirmation of clarity throughout the interview.

(4) *Transcription Interpreted*. This is a three-step process that involves structuring, clarifying, and analyzing the transcriptions. The interviewer will transcribe the interview, clarify for repetition or redundant materials and develop themes from the different perspectives given within the interview.

(5) *Re-Interview*. After the researcher has transcribed, analyzed and interpreted the interviews, the researcher will have a follow-up interview to give an opportunity for the participants to find any errors in their statements or elaborate on an answer. Prior to the second meeting, the researcher will give participants the transcription for them to review for accuracy. Any errors or confusing areas will be discussed during the second interview.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were addressed by communicating with participants that their time was voluntary and a consent form was given. As the participants are a marginalized population that would be describing their lived experiences, the participants' names were anonymous throughout the study. The protection of the identity of the participants was extremely important to share with the participants before the interviews began. Participants were presented with a written form explaining their protection.

Summary

Using qualitative inquiry, the study applied a phenomenological approach to discover the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees. In one-to-one interviews, the researcher was able to transcribe and analyze data collected to find themes of perceived barriers to success within an American college classroom.

The participants were presented with a written form explaining the study. In addition, the participants were told of their protection. It was important for the participants to feel comfortable answering open-ended questions about their lived experiences and their perceived barriers to success within the American college classroom. After the interviews, a follow-up interview was offered to revise each transcript for validity before analyzing the results.

CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to find a gap in research regarding the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees within higher education in the United States because there has been a steady increase of Liberian refugees in college classrooms within the state of Rhode Island but also refugees nationwide. Moreover, it was to learn how adult Liberian refugees matriculating through higher learning in the United States perceive their barriers to success. The researcher asked ten participants to explain their lived experiences and perceived barriers within the college classroom through a phenomenological approach. The primary research questions asked were:

R₁: How do adult Liberian adult refugees matriculating through institutions of higher learning in the United States perceive and describe barriers to their academic success.

The study was also guided by the following question:

R₂: What do adult Liberian refugees perceive as barriers to successful matriculation through higher education in the United States?

Data were gathered from the ten individual Liberian participants using a phenomenological approach, focusing on each individual's lived experiences. It gave each participant an opportunity to have his or her own voice heard through face-to-face interviews. Chapter 4 introduces the participants, reports their responses to the interview questions, and presents major themes found from their responses.

Descriptive Data

The ten participants for this study were currently matriculating within higher education in the United States or had recently graduated. Two participants were siblings

and a father and daughter were also interviewed. Out of the ten participants, only two were women. The colleges and universities varied between participants, but all were currently or had taken classes either in the state of Rhode Island or Massachusetts. Participants ranged from obtaining a bachelor's, to a master's degree. At the time of this study, one was pursuing his doctorate. All participants were elicited through referrals and followed the same interview questions (Appendix A).

Eight participants were male and two were female. Participants ranged in age from mid-twenties to mid-fifties. Participants represented four different counties in Liberia: Grand Bassa (4), Gbarnga (1), Grand Gedeh, (2) and Montserrado (Monrovia) (3) (Appendix B). The four different counties represented in the study demonstrate a broad sample of Liberians from all areas of the country and how each participant was displaced from the civil war.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant read and signed the consent form before the interview began. No participants had questions about the purpose of the study. After the consent forms were signed, the interviewer began with a short five-minute re-introduction with the participants to reiterate the purpose of the interview and study. This informal time allowed the researcher to create a comfortable atmosphere with each participant. This was an important tactic because it enabled the researcher and participants to build a rapport and open communication. This supported the relationship between both the researcher and participant throughout the interview.

Each interview was conducted within a 45 to 60 minutes time frame. The researcher met the participants at local public libraries or a university's library in a

private study room to ensure there was no distraction or noise pollution. Only two participants rescheduled from the original scheduled meeting. There was only a temporary delay in rescheduling these participants. Non-verbal affirmations were frequently used in each interview in order to allow few interruptions and to offer the participants positive reinforcement throughout the interview.

During the interviews, participants discussed their lived experiences within higher education in the United States and educational experiences prior to arriving in the United States. The interviews produced 170 pages of interview data from which the researcher found overlapping themes for meaning. Participants' responses to each of the questions were examined to find common terminology and concepts. Through these commonalities, lists of potential themes were created.

The Five-Step data analysis (Kvale, 1996), as mentioned in Chapter 3, was used to benefit the study. The five steps were (1) Subjects Description, (2) Subjects Themselves Discover, (3) Interviewer Condenses & Interprets, (4) Transcriptions Interpreted, and (5) Re-Interview. These steps were followed by the interviewer. Although the fifth step was offered to participants, no one rescheduled a second interview. Creswell also called this step "member checking" (2009). The researcher forwarded, via email, the transcription to participants for review and to make any corrections or clarify any areas highlighted by the interviewer. Most transcriptions demonstrated clarity throughout the entire interview and comments or clarifications were not necessary. The second interview was an opportunity for any participants to meet again and discuss any specific questions or responses they found needed clarity. However, none of the ten participants asked to re-interview after reviewing the

transcriptions. The researcher would have preferred the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy; however, offering the opportunity was the ultimate goal.

Creswell (1998) also discussed epoche and “bracketing” as the first step in phenomenological research. The researcher used this method in order to exclude preconceptions of the participants’ answers to the questions during the interview. It also allowed the researcher to identify any preconceived notions or biases she may have. While engaging in applying epoche, the researcher was able to set aside prejudices and biases while interviewing each participant. This important step allowed each participant to have the opportunity to speak freely and have his or her voice heard as recommended by Moustakas (1994). This also supported Kvale’s (1996) third step Interviewer Condenses & Interprets. The researcher used both Moustakas and Kvale’s methods to confirm the validity and reliability of the study.

Results

Question #1: Liberian Home

What city, town, or village are you from in Liberia?

Participant 1 was born and raised in Grand Bassa county of Liberia. Participant 2 is also from Grand Bassa. Participant 3 is from Grand Gedeh County. Participant 4 is from Gbarnga County. Participant 5 is from the capital city of Monrovia. Participant 6 is from Grand Bassa. Participant 7 is from Monrovia. Participant 8 is from Grand Bassa. Participant 9 is from Grand Gedeh. Participant 10 is from Grand Bassa.

Question #2: Educational Background in Liberia

Explain your educational background prior to the United States?

Participant 1 attended elementary school through high school in Grand Bassa County. He then attended the University of Liberia in Monrovia and graduated with a bachelor's degree in accounting. Participant 2 also attended elementary through high school in Grand Bassa. He then attended the local community college to receive an associate's degree before attending the University of Liberia to study accounting but could not finish due to the civil war breakout. Participant 3 began elementary school in Grand Gedeh County but became a refugee at age nine and fled to the Ivory Coast where he attended a refugee camp school organized by the UN. Participant 4 successfully completed primary through secondary school in Gbarnga County and then attended a technical institution. After graduating he began a degree at the University of Liberia but was unable to finish due to the civil war outbreak. Participant 5 finished 7th grade in Monrovia but fled to Ghana and began the 8th grade at a private school in Ghana. Participant 6 completed all school in Grand Bassa and then continued to graduate from the University of Liberia. Participant 7 completed elementary through high school in Monrovia before attending a French institute to become a French teacher. She was unable to complete her degree because of the civil war. Participant 8 completed primary and secondary school before coming to the United States. Participant 9 fled Liberia as a small child and attended elementary and junior high in the Ivory Coast in a refugee camp. He then attended high school in Ghana. Participant 10 finished all his schooling in Grand Bassa and then attended the University of Liberia for only a year before fleeing Liberia.

Question #3: Previous Academic Work

Explain what type of academic work did you do back home?

Participant 1 completed an internship at an accounting firm while studying accounting. He had hands-on experience collecting data and preparing financial statements. Participant 2 had many interruptions during his studying at the University of Liberia due to the war. He sat on bricks or under trees, where the class could find a place to study because the university's buildings had been ruined. There were no textbooks or materials. Participant 3 had limited resources in the refugee camp school and did not attend regularly. Participant 4 went to a trade school and had many resources for hands-on training. Participant 5 compared school in Liberia and Ghana and found that in Ghana they must use a second language more in school and agriculture classes are mandatory, which all differs from the Liberian school system. Participant 6 had a unique experience of working for the State Department and immediately used his skills from college to his internship and work. Participant 7 took all general education courses at the French Institute but did not take any mathematic courses. Participant 8 had minimal resources in his general studies. Participant 9 had little resources at the refugee camp school but learned to read, write, and speak English. He later attended a boarding school in Ghana, which offered many resources. Participant 10 had no resources because the university had become a ruin during the civil war.

Question #4: Age Upon U.S. Arrival

How old were you when you arrived in the United States?

Participant 1 was 38 years old when he arrived in the United States and had obtained a bachelor's and a master's degree from the University of Liberia. Participant 2

was 32 and began his MBA in the United States. Participant 3 was 19 years old and took college level courses through a scholarship from the UN and began to study French and English. Participant 4 was 44 years old when he came to the United States and went to a technical school in Liberia before arriving to the United States. Participant 5 was 13 when she joined the rest of her family in the United States after being separated from them at a very young age and lived with an aunt in Ghana. Participant 6 was 46 when he arrived and began a master's degree in the United States. Participant 7 was 35 when she arrived in the United States. Participant 8 was 24 when he arrived after attending a refugee camp school to obtain his high school diploma. Participant 9 was 19 years old when he arrived and attended a community college. Participant 10 was 40 when he arrived and began a master's degree.

Question #5: Stress Upon U.S. Arrival

What kinds of stress did you experience coming to the United States?

Participant 1 was separated from his wife and children when he first arrived to the United States. His wife originally came on a one-year visa and their two children were sent to relatives in Ghana for protection. It took almost five years to unite the entire family who all came at different times. He identified the separation of his family as the most stressful experience coming to the United States. Participant 2 expressed that after walking 88 miles for refuge, the most stressful experience he had was finding refuge; however, knowing that he would have another journey alone to come to the United States was also stressful. Participant 3 relived his traumatic experience with the rebels during the civil war. After his mother was killed and sisters raped, he and his brother eventually were able to escape to the Ivory Coast. The memories of his survival are what has been

the most stressful experience coming to the United States. He is constantly thinking about what happened to his mother and sisters and is now forever separated from them.

Participant 4 explained the tears he and his family member shared when he was getting ready to leave. No one knew if they would see each other again and the emotions and feelings were most stressful.

The last five participants also had unique experiences. Participant 5 was separated from her parents as early as 12 years old and had to live with her aunt in Ghana. The years of separation were stressful but arriving to the United States was a joyous occasion and stress-free for her because her parents were waiting to welcome her to the United States. She also explained that going to the United States was exciting and well respected by others. Participant 6 explained that he did not have stress coming to the United States because he thought he would only come for a visit, not to live permanently. Living in Liberia was more stressful than arranging to come to the United States. Since this initial feeling, he has changed his mind and is living in the United States permanently.

Participant 7 shared that the most stressful experience she had was finding a job in the United States to support herself. Once she found a job, washing uniforms and clothing for companies, it was very stressful because it was a physical job and she worked many hours with little time for a break. Participant 8 explained the most stressful experience was waiting for all the paperwork to go through and trying to arrive in the United States as quickly as possible. Participant 9 expressed that he had low expectations of the United States because he did not know where he was going or what American society looked like. This was his most stressful experience upon arrival. Participant 10 felt an obligation to provide for his family and extended family still living in Liberia. He currently still tries

to send money back to help them but it has become very stressful because he also has to support himself and his family here in the United States. According to the Participant, his family in Liberia thinks he has much more money than he really does because they think he is living a life as they would see in a Hollywood film.

Question #6: Identifying Cultural Identity

Do you feel you still have a strong cultural identity? Why or why not?

Participant 1 explained adjusting to American culture by stating, “we can easily assimilate or get adjusted somehow. But that’s one of the things. The relationship, the family dynamic kind of changes because of the cultural exposure that we get here.” He has needed to make adjustments like going grocery shopping, cleaning and cooking, which is not traditionally done in Liberia. These are the major changes he has felt of changing in his culture but he has not lost his cultural identity as a Liberian. Participant 2 belongs to a Bassa Organization and is very active within the Liberian community within the state of Rhode Island. He also celebrates all Liberian holidays while here. As for his children, he stated, “I try to make my children to know and feel that they are not American; they are Liberians living in America.” Participant 3 still feels a strong cultural identity but has found some major difference between Liberia and the United States. He mentioned the difference in making eye contact to show respect. It is the opposite in America. For example, in Liberia you should not make direct eye contact to show respect to one another. Another difficulty he has found is that his mother (his deceased mother’s sister) has found him a wife in their village. He is torn because he has an American girlfriend. Participant 4 said he does not have a strong cultural identity here in the United States because the cultures are so vastly different. He explained that raising his children

is the biggest difference in culture. He stated, “You know, we use the rod if the rod, you know, just to straighten them, but you cannot do that here. They call that abuse, you know? So that’s the difference.” Participant 5 has not lost her cultural identity by joining a Western African dance team to keep in touch with her culture and fellow Liberians. Although she found that when you live in the United States you must try to fit into the culture, she explained, “I didn't, I didn't do too much of moving away from my culture because I came here in 11th grade. I only had 11th and 12th grade.” Participant 6 is the director of a Liberian organization and feels strongly about his cultural identity. The organization meets every week and they are able to secure their cultural traditions. He explained, “Liberia meet weekend and we have fun, so we see, they show that our traditions not forgotten.” Participant 7 answered the question by stating, “Hmm, not strong, per se. Not like when I was back home.” However, he does still eat traditional food at home and dresses in African attire. Participant 8 still feels a cultural identity because the only major change he has made while in the United States is that he now helps his wife do household chores. Participant 9 also feels a strong cultural identity because every weekend he visits his family and friends and “the connection is still there.” Participant 10 reported that he did not make any strong cultural changes since he has been in the United States. He is active within the Liberian community and this satisfies his connection to home.

Question #7: Personal Values

What do you value most about being Liberian?

Participant 1 felt that being Liberian “was what God wanted me to be.” His small town is what makes him unique. Taking care of yourself and not relying on others is

something he feels Liberians are proud of. Participant 2 responded simply by stating, “I’m proud to be African.” Participant 3 valued taking advantages of opportunities and never quitting. His experiences from the civil war gave him invaluable lessons on being persistent, which he values most. Participant 4 described the strong connection between the Liberian people as what he values most. Participant 5 stated, “And I don’t like the whole generalization, like I said, of saying, oh, you’re just African, though. I’m, I’m Liberian.” She values the collaboration Liberians share with each other. Participant 6 also shared that personal independence was something he valued most about being Liberian. Participant 7 said, “I’m finally aware that, you know, some countries they don’t really have a regard for God but Liberians, they always try to put God first in everything you do, you know?” She felt that Liberians are religious and that this is valued within the Liberian culture. Participant 8 explained that he valued the sense of community within the Liberian culture as what he valued most. Participant 9 clearly stated, “a sense of pride, a sense of togetherness, a common purpose and I believe that we all share one thing in common which is our connection to our homeland.” The sense of community and unity is what he values most. Participant 10 also shared that togetherness was most important.

Question #8: Influences From Family

How has living away from your family or living with them here in the United States influenced your learning and success in the American classroom?

Participant 1 felt that living away from his family and country has made him more motivated. He explained,

I want to be able to learn and go back because the exposure here has definitely opened my mind to a whole range of things that I think I can take back to Liberia. Some values, some ideas that will benefit the system there. When you live here for some time in a free society as this, you begin to see the shortcomings in your own system back home.

Participant 2 felt that his family in Liberia has motivated him to learn and succeed within higher education here. He plans to go back to Liberia to share his knowledge and help his village grow. He continued, “So we need more educated people to go to help, you know, and we needed to build universities in different parts of the country, because most of the universities are focused on the capitol. So those are the kind of things that were in the back of my head. If I hurry up with my program, and things are normal in my country, I can go back and, you know, go to my village, and try to help educate other people.” This is his major motivation. Participant 3 had a lot of support from professors at his current college and feels that this has helped to influence his learning. He explained, “I’m telling you, man. So I’m happy that I’m here. So I’m trying to make maximum use of the opportunity because I’m in the midst of opportunities. I’m in the midst so why can’t I just maximize so those opportunities and do whatever I can do for myself to better my life.” Participant 4 said that family support has influenced his learning within the academic classroom. His family gave him advice before leaving Liberia. He explained, “if you have that [family] support you go a long way, because coming over here, you know, and the first thing I was told, like, ‘you know what, Joe? You can decide to, you know, pick up a McDonald’s job, and that would just be your life. Or you go and prepare yourself, which is going to be tough, you know? And then they’re going to be better.’ And that’s what I think I’m experiencing right now.” Participant 5 explained, “Well, for number one, I have my dad, I have my dad with me who's like my

role model. He's like my idol, like you know.” Her close relationship with her father has pushed her to succeed and has led her to be successful academically. Participant 6 got a divorce before he attended school in the United States. He shared, “A lot of folks that I have friended with here, Liberian here, just told I couldn’t have done it. “How can you go to school when you 24? Would you be able to concentrate?” It’s so stressful but I challenge initial and challenge some of my friends to prove them that I could have done that so I went to school.” He felt that having people doubt him motivated him even more to succeed. Participant 7 was separated from her husband for some time. When finally arrived in the United States, she felt that it helped her continue her academics. She stated, “When he was not here, I had to work and pay all the bills by myself. And with the nursing, I took two classes. So when he came it was a great help for me because he took all the bills and then it was a relief for me.” Participant 8 agreed that his family helped motivate him to not quit school when it got difficult. He felt that the family standard was high. Participant 9 responded, “My success is totally influenced by my brothers. My older brother is, he’s, he loves school and he is the one who tell us, you know, do this, led us to succeed, work hard, do your homework, do this, do that, so, he still has that influence.” Participant 10 responded that his spouse and children pushed him in difficult times to succeed and continue his academics. He felt his family was his motivation.

Question #9: Expectations of the American Classroom

What did you expect from American college classrooms before attending college in America?

Participant 1 had insecurities coming into the American college classroom. He stated, “I thought I would be inferior in the classroom. I thought I will be far behind in

learning because of the abundance of educational resources that you have and the students are being exposed to as opposed to us from back home.” He explained that this was generally true because American students knew more cultural references within the class. He continued to explain that another major assumption he had was that there would be a difference in the professors. In Liberia, if a student does not pass a test it is understood that the professor is well respected and is a successful educator. However, he felt the opposite was true in America. He said, “he’s a bad teacher if he teaches all this time and students fail. It means the student did not understand and so he fails as well.” Last, Participant 1 had the assumption that college tuition would be reasonable in price and that most Americans can afford and attend college.

Participant 2 had a positive perception of what an education in America would be. He remarked, “I knew that the education in America was far better than any other place.” He thought that each classroom would have an ample supply of textbooks for each student to have access to. The participant explained that in Liberia that students must go to a class early to find a seat. If the class is full, students must stand and take notes. He was hopeful that in America that it would be different than this process he has experienced.

Participant 3 said he was skeptical of what he had learned in Liberia because he felt that in American classrooms, they had all the “right” answers. For example, he said, “Like what I was told what was not true like, you know, “Two plus two is four.” I thought in America two plus two was five, you know what I’m saying?” He had this perception that the truth lied within the borders of the United States.

Participant 4 had a very different perception on what an American classroom would be like. He explained, “What I expected was I was going to be, you know, I was going to be one of the top, that I was going to be on the news all the time, in terms of, you know, the grades. Because we know that it’s not as difficult as people may think, compared to the education down there. Down in Liberia, you can be 50 years old, and you don’t pass the first grade. You stay in the first grade.” He had a strong feeling that an American college would be an easy experience because his experience in school was very challenging and difficult.

Participant 5 came to the United States as a junior in high school. However, her school advisor in Liberia gave her advice about graduating from an American high school and attending college. She explained, “She's [advisor] like, "It's gonna be tough; it's gonna be hard. You've got to work your butt off." And honestly, my dad was giving that speech, and that's all that was going my head. Oh, my God, I hope I don't fall on my face when I go to undergrad. Oh, my God, I hope I don't fall on my face. That's all I was thinking about. That's, like that was, that was a fear and a motivation for me at the same time.” Her expectations were that although she felt American high school was a “piece of cake,” that going to an American college was going to be a drastic change.

Participant 6 focused on the perception of what his American classmates would think of him. He wondered whether he would make friends in the classroom and his learning experience would be a smooth transition. He stated, “my expectation prior to going to school was that would-would the American kids accepts us.” He explained that he had the perception that he would make friends in his classes.

Participant 7 shared that in her hometown Liberians have a perception of the American education. She stated, “Back home we say, “Oh, the education in America is easy.”” She explained this feeling and continued by stating, “: Back home we’re not used to too much reading because our instructors do the reading and then come to class and lecture. And we take notes. And then we study from those notes and we pass. So we thought, yeah, it would be a lot easier.” She also explained that in Liberia they do not have a lot of reading and rely on their notes to pass classes.

Participant 8 also had the perception that American college classes would be an easier adjustment than his experience in the college classroom in Liberia. He explained, “A lot of Liberians think that school is easier in America because they [students] have all the resources they need to do well.” He expressed the mainstream opinion of Liberians is that all students have resources hence they will pass all their course work.

Participant 9 shared that he had heard positive reports about American colleges. The perception he had was that there was open communication between the professor and students. He stated, “So, is that from reading ability, reading skills that reading and, you know, expressing yourself. How you feel about certain issues, how you feel about what’s your learning basically. So that’s, that was my expectation, you know, how I express myself, you tell how I feel about this particular issue.” He gave an example of being able to tell a professor that the participant did not agree with something in the textbook and that questioning the textbook was encouraged and not ridiculed.

Participant 10 shared that he felt he would be looked at differently by students and the professors and would be treated differently. He said, “I was nervous that my accent would make me different and I would be treated differently.” He did feel that he thought

classes would be more difficult because American classes expect more from their students.

Question #10: American Students Attitudes Towards International Students

Prior to meeting them, how did you imagine the attitudes and behaviors of American students towards international students?

Participant 1 commented that he was not concerned with American students attitudes or behaviors towards international students. He remarked, “I was not quite sure about that. Yeah, I wasn’t quite sure. I thought they were part of that whole cultural--cultural anxiety, that I have to go experience, would not be able to fit in and really perform to the standards and all that.” He was not overly concerned about others and said he knew he had to just concentrate on himself and his own success.

Participant 2 was concerned with racial issues. He commented, “Well, we're, this whole race stuff, okay, we're like, they're not going to accept, you know, they're going to treat you like a black man. And you know, they're going to be mean to you, you know.” Although he did not have these experiences once he was here and concluded that the American students were very friendly and helpful, he shared that this was a very big concern of his.

Participant 3 was concerned with his accent and whether or not other students would be able to understand him. He said, “When I came here the first day I turned the TV on to see how to speak. And I found out, wow! Big difference here. I don’t speak like that. I don’t know if they ever understand, you know, what I got to say but I don’t know.” His accent was the only concern he had thinking about American students.

Participant 4 said she had accurate thoughts about American students' attitudes and behaviors towards international students because her brother worked for Pan Am Airlines and visiting the United States often. He remarked, "You know, they're not—they don't care if you, you know, if you black or you white, you got money, you don't got money, or something like that. You know? They just don't care. I mean, they got that kind of live free, okay? That kind of attitude." He was very confident that this is exactly what she would experience once she attended an American college.

Participant 5 said she was expecting American students to have attitudes towards her because of her accent. Immediately she found that this was true. She explained, "People were telling me, 'oh, I don't understand your accent. Can you repeat yourself?' Like constantly. Can you write down what you just said? Like something like that, you know." She mentioned that this happened more often in high school than in college where people were more diverse.

Participant 6 thought that American students would have positive attitudes and behaviors towards him. He commented,

... it depends when you go to school or even to work how you position yourself, how you intern, how you interact yourself with your other colleagues and on the job or in classroom, in school, so I have that expectation that probably maybe [I] will not be accepted but I think that it depends on myself how I present myself.

The participant focused on himself first before he made a large general assumption of how American students would behave towards him.

Participant 7 felt that most American students would be open and accepting of international students. She commented, "I thought they would be friendly and no, like, when I got in, they have some friendly ones and they have some ones that don't want to

be bad with others. You know, some people grew up in a home that they don't talk to strangers." Overall, the participant felt that American students would be friendly.

Participant 8 felt comfortable about the idea of being in a classroom with American students. He felt "Americans are the friendliest people!" He was optimistic about American students' attitudes and behaviors towards him.

Participant 9 expressed that his perception of the potential attitudes and behaviors of American students toward international students was that they would be "friendly and at the same time, you know, not knowing other cultures, not knowing ... other cultures." He thought American students might be ignorant of his culture.

Participant 10 had a positive assumption of what American students behaviors and attitudes would be towards him and other international students. He said that many Liberian people had told him that Americans "are our friends." He thought it was very comforting and perceived the students to have a friendly attitude towards him.

Question #11: American Faculty Attitudes Towards International Students

Prior to meeting them, how did you imagine the attitudes and behaviors of American faculty towards international students?

Participant 1 did not have a perception of American faculty and their attitudes towards international students. He remarked, "I didn't really think about it, even though I've heard other people concerned that the treatment would not be the same, that the faculty may not--what is the word I want to use? May not think you can really make it. They might think you're a little bit inferior and all of that. I heard people have these

concerns. And maybe the only reason why I was thinking is that I will be able to cope and not be necessarily inferior.” He was not concerned about the faculty’s attitudes.

Participant 2 had a minor concern that his professors would treat him differently as an international student. He said, “Well, we felt that they would have treated us like, I know people who were from a different place and did not have the kind of education as compared to other students, yeah, you know.” He did feel that his professors did not treat him any differently were extremely supportive and treated all students with the same respect. It was his university that he felt treated him differently. He gave an example of the university not accepting a Business Law class he had taken because the course was not “the same standard.” He argued that the course used American textbooks. He took an exam and was able to be exempt from taking it again and received his 3 credits from his course from Liberia. He also explained he was fearful that “they would have looked down upon us because we're black people.”

Participant 3 was concerned that American professors would have an attitude that they knew everything and that the international students knew nothing. He was concerned that their attitudes would be negative towards him and other international students. He shared an experience that he found a grammatical error in the text and asked his professor about it. He was quite surprised that the professor could not explain why the sentence was grammatically incorrect.

Participant 4 did not have strong perceptions of what faculty would be like before attending an American classroom. She remarked, “You know, like, my first time meeting, I don’t know, you never saw me before. So, you know, that’s human. You need to think about it.” She thought the professor would act in a “human” manner and need time to get

to know all the students, American and international, before having an attitude or specific behavior towards them.

Participant 5 did not have any perceptions of faculty and their attitudes or behaviors towards international students. She felt that every professor was going to have a different personality and to expect each individual class and professor to be different. She did give an example of one professor who did not treat her differently and understood her accent. She explained, "Like I had the thickest accent; he would understand every word I said. And it's not like, oh, he was like African-American or anything. He was a blond-haired guy, blue eye. Like blond hair, blue eyes; as, as white as they get." She learned from this experience that each class and professor demonstrates individual experiences.

Participant 6 had experience with Americans teaching in the Peace Corps and felt that professors would have the same attitudes and behaviors towards international students. He remarked, "They want for you to do your work and do your work and you have problem you can discuss it with them." Although he said he did not have expectations of the faculty in the U.S., he did feel that they would be similar to his exposure to the Americans teaching in Liberia that he had encountered.

Participant 7 assumed that professors would have the same attitudes and behaviors towards international students as they do with domestic students. She commented, "I thought the professors would be open to everybody and not, like, fail certain people and not fail the others. I expect them to be open to everybody because teaching is a career that you meet a lot of people, you know?" She completed the

question by adding that she expected American professors to be used to teaching international students because she assumed all American classrooms were diverse.

Participant 8 felt that American professors would treat him differently than the domestic students because he would look and speak differently than everyone else in the classroom. He thought “maybe they [professors] don’t think I can do the work like the American students.” He was unsure if he would be looked at and treated the same as the other students in his college classes.

Participant 9 felt that faculty would treat him equally with the American students. He felt that their behaviors and attitudes would be positive, overall. He commented, “there are a lot of foreigners who study in America. So, I imagine that was good.” He had a positive feeling about his future American professors before attending his first course.

Participant 10 also felt confident that he would not be treated differently than the American students. He thought the attitudes and behaviors would be to treat students respectfully. He explained that he heard from other Liberians that “you can speak your mind in America.” He was enthusiastic about meeting his American professors and thought they would be very accepting of their international students.

Question #12: Acclimating to the U.S.

How did you acclimate to U.S. culture and your college/university?

Participant 1 explained that he had some time to acclimate to the U.S. culture before taking classes, which was very helpful. He did not begin to take classes until his wife arrived. Once he began classes, he felt “I didn’t feel like a foreigner because I had gotten used to the way Americans speak and interact.” He continued to explain that in the

first couple of classes he only observed and did not participate unless asked to by the professor. This technique was used to get comfortable and familiar with his classroom environment.

Participant 2 felt that it took him some time to acclimate into the U.S. culture because he was nervous about how he would be accepted by others. The participant explained, “Maybe it took me more time than other Liberians. I was very quiet in and out of the classroom because I needed to just watch how Americans behaved in these settings.” This technique seemed to work for him as he felt he adjusted to American culture at his college later within the semester and felt more comfortable in and out of the classroom.

Participant 3 found that Americans were more informal in and out of the classroom than what he was expecting. He remarked, “The professors sometimes sat on their desk! This was very strange to me.” In Liberia professors would always be lecturing and standing. It was rare to see the professor sit during class. In the participant’s opinion, the American classroom was much more relaxed than he had ever experienced in Liberia.

Participant 4 became acclimated by focusing on her studies. She felt that if she were successful in class, then she would be successful in America. She commented that her professors were a large part of her success and being comfortable in a new environment. She said, “the professors were always there. They were really—you have to just make that time. And because, you know, I wanted to get something. So I made the time.” Her commitment to succeeding in the classroom helped her to become acclimated within the culture.

Participant 5 explained the biggest technique he used to become acclimated to the culture was to listen to native speakers. He commented, “I feel like once you get adjusted to the way of speaking, it's easy to find your way around because then once you can speak clear enough or in the essence of clear enough for them to understand you, it's easier to find everything else. It's easier for everything else to fall in place.” The participant confirmed that listening to others was the most important way for him to feel more acclimated with his surroundings.

Participant 6 was surprised by the behaviors of Americans in and outside the classroom. He remarked, “I’m here to learn the best of America, not do kind of stuff, you know?” He still opens doors for others and gives his seat up for others on the bus. He also said, “Sometimes I see the same behavior from Americans but it doesn’t seem to all Americans.” He has focused on learning in the classroom and not necessarily learning some habits of Americans that he feels are not polite or respectful.

Participant 7 learned how to acclimate into the culture by people in his church. The church members shared ideas on how to become better acclimated into the culture by watching others. He quickly learned that Americans address each other differently than in Liberia. He said he was surprised that you do not address others women ‘Miss’ before their first names. He explained, “Because we are taught to respect people who impart knowledge.” Some Americans feel it is too formal and want to be addressed with only their first names.

Participant 8 had family that was able to share with him how to act in public in America. In addition, a cousin shared what to expect within the college classroom and how to act towards the professor and classmates. He said, “My cousin told me to just

follow everyone in class. Not to stand out.” He felt that this was good advice from his cousin.

Participant 9 felt that spending time with people of other cultures was important for him to expand his social network and broaden his horizons. He thought this was very important. He remarked,

Getting into the real world and seeing, getting to relate to Americans and other people, I felt comfortable. I also felt comfortable in my, in, among my people but I feel like that is, it narrows down your thinking, it narrows down what you kind of supposed to be knowing.

Getting out of his comfort zone was important to him and proved to work well.

Participant 10 talked to Americans in and outside the classroom in order to truly understand the culture. He commented, “I wasn’t scared to talk to people. Liberians always say that Americans are friendly, they are like family. You can ask questions and it’s okay.” He felt that the Liberians were right about Americans being friendly. It has been easy talking and learning with Americans.

Question #13: Difficult Educational Experiences

Describe one, two or three things that make your classes and overall educational experience difficult for you as an international student.

Participant 1 remarked that he has not had much difficulty in his educational experience except that one of his professor’s has had some difficulty understanding his accent. He commented, “Sometimes he would ask me to repeat myself.” It was fine to me to repeat it because I want to be understood.” He commented that this was the only experience he could think of at the moment.

Participant 2 said that the amount of reading was a big challenge for him. He said, “I wasn’t used to how much reading needed to be done in and out of class. I was a slow reader in the beginning.” He did not have as many textbooks per class and had difficulty trying to keep up with the pace of the other students in class.

Participant 3 was not accustomed to using a computer for all his assignments. He remarked,

I didn’t have a lot of experience with using a computer. I had to learn a lot of skills while also trying to learn the material. It took me much longer to complete assignments than the other students. This was frustrating in the beginning.

He was not accustomed to using PowerPoint or Microsoft Word and had to learn while he worked on the assignments.

Participant 4 expressed that his accent was the first struggle he encountered in the classroom. He said,

At the start, you know, some of the pronunciation. You know, like, I’d say, sometimes some of the voice, I’m saying, maybe now I understand it because of my accent. You know, some of the pronunciation, you know, I have a little bit of rough edges there.

Since he began taking classes, he has been able to have fewer situations with difficulty in being understood. He also said another difficult situation was the technology. He used a typewriter in Liberia when he went to college in the 1980s. It was challenging in the beginning to learn how to use the computer.

Participant 5 struggled in the beginning with speaking in class. She was nervous others would treat her differently if they heard her speak with an accent. She commented, “I would been like—if I didn’t understand something, I would be afraid to put my hand up because that I don’t want to speak, and that everybody who wouldn’t understand me

would be like ‘oh, the African girl is talking, blah, blah, blah.’” However, she found that the professors were all “open-minded” and she never had a problem with them understanding her accent.

Participant 6 explained that he had difficulty during group work within the classroom because there were many different students in one group. He explained that he did not have difficulty with working with American students but with other international students. He explained, “I think one of the problem is not with the American students per say but with the other international students because some of them couldn’t speak English very well, that a few from, kids from Saudi Arabia.” The different accents from other countries made it difficult for him to work easily in the group.

Participant 7 explained how difficult the nursing program is at her college. Specifically, the amount of reading and clinical work she has to complete. She remarked, “Because I don’t mind the physical part of it, like taking care of the patient. I don’t mind that. But the reading and the preparation for the clinical stuff, yeah.” She gave an example of receiving a large assignment and in less than 24 hours she needed to have the work completed and submitted. It was very challenging for her.

Participant 8 shared that the biggest challenge for him was the amount of reading required for each class. He explained, “I’ve never had to do some much reading before. I wasn’t expecting this much work. I thought I would take notes from the professor and study those.” The participant had difficulty adjusting to the amount of work that was required for each course he took.

Participant 9 did not know what to expect from the professors and what kind of work they would assign. This unknown work was difficult for him to concentrate. He

said, “And the way they [professors] designed the exams, it really made that difficult for me.” He found that each professor gave different styles of tests and taught differently so it was difficult to adjust to them all within one semester.

Participant 10 was not expecting so much reading for each class. He remarked, “I couldn’t believe how much reading the professors would give. I never thought I would have so many textbooks and have to read from all of them for my classes.” It was the most difficult adjustment he explained that he had encountered in the classroom.

Question #14: Easy Educational Experiences

Describe one, two or three things that make your classes and overall educational experiences easy for you as an international student.

Participant 1 described the resources being an asset to his learning. He stated, “There were many different resources available that I used that helped me succeed in my classes.” When asked to explain further what those resources were, he continued, “the library, computers, and professor’s availability.”

Participant 2 explained that having the opportunity to speak to the professor after class or during office hours was extremely helpful. He said,

I talked to the professor a lot. Sometimes I was able to talk to the professor right after class to ask a question but sometimes I made an appointment. It made me feel more confident about my learning in the classroom.

The professor’s friendly availability was important to the participant.

Participant 3 answered quickly that the library was the best resource. “I went to the library all the time. They have everything you need,” he stated. He described the different software’s that are free on the computers, the free printing and the Internet being very important for him.

Participant 4 listed a few items that helped his success within the classroom. He stated, “The easy part is you have the tools to your advantage. You have books. You have the internet.” He continued, “You also have the learning in the way of group. You know, you also work in the group. But the group work is just for project, but you know, you have those to your advantage.” The participant seemed to enjoy group work and felt that the groups made his success in the classroom easier.

Participant 5 could not think of any ideas that made her learning experience easier in classes. She went back to another idea of what was difficult for her. She responded,

Easier. Well, I—the difficult part? Let me go back to the difficult part. As an international student, the—I feel like—I know my first semester in undergrad for my chemistry, for doing chemistry, I didn't do well in chemistry because I felt like I didn't have a strong enough background in chemistry, and that was partly due but to I had a bunch of different chemistry teachers between Liberia, Ghana and here.

Her biggest struggle was that although she did well in chemistry in Liberia and Ghana, it was not the equivalent of the level she needed to be once she took the class in the United States.

Participant 6 explained the availability of the professor's was extremely helpful and made learning easier for him. He said,

Make sure you send that e-mail to respond to that as soon as possible. You got a problem to solve, you need an explanation, any other professor or your particular professor for that course can sit with you and talk to you. So those are things I experience I really appreciate.

The professors made a difference to his learning and success within the classroom.

Participant 7 explained that her nursing programs hands-on approach was extremely helpful in her success. She also commented,

If you have a topic, you read and you go on the computer and do questions. Yeah, you would do some questions. The more questions you do, the more your eyes would open up. When you get your test questions, somewhat they can be similar, you know, because if you do the questions, then you go and read the rationales. If you get the answer, it is going to tell you why this is the answer.

The computer was also something that made it easier for her learn. It explained answers she got wrong and helped her prepare for exams.

Participant 8 enjoyed working in groups in the classroom and out of the classroom. He remarked, “I, like, I really enjoyed working with groups. Um, groups helped me have other students help me but it was, um, great to help other students sometimes, too.” The group work was easy for him to participate in because he felt comfortable and felt it was easier to learn in this environment.

Participant 9 had two thoughts that he felt made learning easier for him. He felt his individual effort of reading made a difference, in addition to working with others. He stated,

One of the things that made it really easy for me is putting my time into, putting my time into my work and that really kind of made things easy for me because I read all the time, I go through every day, every single day, so that kind of made that really easy. And also I been to interact with other students, getting to get their opinion and their ideas also made it really easy too.

He seemed to find that having both individual time to read the material for the course and working with others made his overall learning experience easier.

Participant 10 found that making appointments with his professor’s during their office hours was helpful in his learning and made it a little easier. He said, “I liked office hours. I can ask questions and not feel like, I don’t feel like the other students will be learning slower because of me.” He appreciated the idea that he could ask questions in a private setting and did not have to worry that he was slowing the pace of the class.

Question #15: American Assignments

Describe an assignment you have had in America with which you felt comfortable or uncomfortable, and explain why.

Participant 1 felt comfortable discussing his country's history for classroom discussion or an assignment. His knowledge of government and education made him confident in sharing details about these topics. He remarked, "I know a lot about my country's education system and government. This is comfortable for me to discuss in class." His knowledge and experiences made assignments or discussions on Liberian or African history rather comfortable for him.

Participant 2 did not have a strong answer to the question. He replied, "Um, I really don't know. The only thing I can think of is that I am comfortable in math because math is the same anywhere you go." He felt comfortable in something that was familiar and that he knew other students would be at the same general level as him.

Participant 3 felt uncomfortable using technology to complete assignments. Typing an essay was a challenge in the beginning. He stated,

Yeah, like the research thing. It's kind of hard for me because when I was going to school we didn't have computers. And you got to go do research on the computer and I don't know the steps. And it was kind of tough for me.

It took time for him to become comfortable and he did not enjoy having to ask others for help all the time to explain the computer.

Participant 4 felt uncomfortable with courses that involved a lot of computer work and technology. He mentioned a programming class that he was required to take. When asked if he was uncomfortable he replied, "Yeah, because I never did it before. You know? In life, you've got to take race. And when you take a race, you've got to a

moderate race. But I went to a fast race. You get what I'm saying?" His metaphor was that the slow and steady wins the race. He first made the mistake of trying to learn everything at once.

Participant 5 felt a particular assignment was uncomfortable for her because it involved interviewing for the essay she had to write. She explained,

I was taking honors classes. And I was taking this creative writing class, and I hated it because I was the only black student in there to begin with. And then I was an African to begin with. And I still had an accent because it was like my second half year being in America.

She had to interview a boat captain, which she had no background knowledge on. She was uncomfortable because she was the only African in the class and she was self-conscious about her accent.

Participant 6 described a Business Trading course that had an assignment, which made him both comfortable and uncomfortable. He enjoyed the course, which made him comfortable. However, working in groups made him uncomfortable because of time constraints and work obligations. He remarked,

I asked some guy that's working with me and they go to understand the process I've got to go through so that I have to leave and go to work by 6 o'clock because we supposed to send our response by midnight. I finish my job at midnight. I do all my class stuff and then I go to work.

He felt uncomfortable working with groups because he had limited hours he could meet with the members due to his job.

Participant 7 felt comfortable researching and presenting on a topic that she was able to choose the topic herself. She explained, "Last semester I had an assignment where we had to do a presentation. We had to pick out a disease. And you write about it and you stand before the group and do your presentation." She chose a disease that she is

actually suffering from, so she felt comfortable and knowledgeable while completing the assignment.

Participant 8 felt comfortable with assignments that took ample time for him to read about the topic at home. He felt uncomfortable with assignments that were given during class time. He commented, “I am never comfortable with writing in class because I feel it is too fast and I want time. I want time to read or think. I like when I can go home don’t feel like it’s too fast.” In class assignments made him feel pressured, while the opposite was true for assignments given to take home.

Participant 9 described that math assignments were uncomfortable for him because he was weak in mathematics. However, he felt very comfortable discussing world issues because he is a political science major. He continued, “I always felt comfortable with any discussion that-that comes. Now there’s-there’s nothing that really I can say, I can order and say “Well, I’m not feeling comfortable with this now.” He felt, overall, that he was quite comfortable with most assignments within his program.

Participant 10 felt that when he first started taking classes he felt uncomfortable with any assignments that he had to present in front of his classmates. He explained, “I was always afraid to speak in front of people because of my accent. But it changed when I was living in the United States longer.” The longer he was living in the United States, the more comfortable he felt with himself and the assignments that required oral presentations.

Question #16: Description of Faculty & Staff

How would you describe faculty and staff at your college?

Participant 1 responded to the question by stating, “For the most part, I think they’re being cordial. They’re being nice. But sometimes you run across some people with real negative behavior.” His dissertation mentor had given him various challenges to an extent that has made the participant question the professors teaching technique.

He remarked,

The one thing I know is one of my dissertation committee person--I think he’s just--he doesn’t really know me. He has taught me before and I did well in his class. But he doesn’t know the context that comes from--he doesn’t know the African environment. And so he attempts of the--he asks for certain things that are not just workable within the African context. I think his perception is seeing through the lens of the western context.

This experience has been difficult for the participant but, overall, he does explain that he has mostly positive experiences with faculty and staff.

Participant 2 has had very positive comments to make about faculty and staff at his university. He replied,

Wonderful. They were very cordial at Johnson and Wales. Because that's the institution I went to. They were very cordial. They was willing to help. But even from the parking lot, the security in the parking lot, yes, and you know, they're all willing to help. The ladies in the library and the library staff, they were wonderful people.

He felt that everyone that he had encounters with were nice people and were willing to help him.

Participant 3 had overall positive experiences with faculty and staff at both the community college and the university. He commented, “There are you know good people and bad people. There are other people that are, you know, jerks. I don’t want to say that word, but you know. And there are other people too that are, you know, nice people, you know.” When asked about specific faculty or staff he replied, “They’ve all been nice.”

Participant 4 felt that faculty and staff at both the community college and the university he has attended are “polite.” He explained further that he felt there was a difference between the faculty at the community college and the university. He explained,

They [university faculty] just didn’t care, you know. But it was a challenge for you. And there was not like, they were directing it to me, you know, as an individual or as a black guy or as an African. They didn’t care for the whole class. You go and do your job.

He felt that the community college faculty cared more about their students than the university faculty. He felt the community college faculty had higher expectations of their students.

Participant 5 explained that her experiences with faculty were positive and her professor’s were culturally sensitive. She commented, “overall, they’re very nice, very understanding, very aware of like culture differences and stuff.” She remarked that she could not think of any experiences that she had a bad experience with any faculty.

Participant 6 shared that his professors all were very encouraging to all the students in class. He continued, “Knowledgeable, they know the material, they know how to present the material, signify the material to the level of the students.” He has had only positive experiences with his professors and name a few that made a large impact on him.

Participant 7 shared a negative experience with a faculty member, which she says, “maybe this was a personality difference.” However, she continued by stating,

Yeah, I have some good ones after all. They were tough but they were not picking at a specific person. They were willing to teach everybody. Yeah, like, I had one at Memorial Hospital, oh my goodness. She’s a young lady. She’s so nice. The one, Lisa Murphy, she’s good. She doesn’t pick among the students. She treats everyone the same. The only thing, know your stuff. If you don’t know it, then that’s when she gets on you.

Most of her educational experiences led to a lot of hard work but the professors treated all the students equally and respectfully.

Participant 8 expressed that his experiences have been positive with both faculty and staff. He remarked,

I can't complain. I haven't had any bad experiences with my professors or any staff. I've heard some stories but they haven't happened to me. Sometimes I don't know what these stories of professor's treating others differently. I haven't seen it. His overall feeling was that professors have a friendly attitude in class treat students equally.

Participant 9 very simply described experiences with faculty as "friendly and supportive." He said that all this experiences have been positive and he feels comfortable asking questions because he knows that the professors want him to be successful. He could not think of any experiences with staff to share.

Participant 10 said that he felt staff was especially friendly and helpful. He explained, "I always had questions at the library because I wasn't used to computers or so many books. I loved the people at the library. They never made me feel like I was annoying or bothering them." He continued, "this really made me feel good." He had only positive remarks to make for the staff at his school.

Question #17: Faculty Expectations

What do you feel faculty expect from their students, both international and domestic?

Participant 1 felt that faculty had the same expectations of both domestic and international students. Participant 1 responded, "I think they expect the students to work hard and take control of their learning processes, do their readings, do their assignments." He continued,

I think to a large extent sometimes the teachers baby-sit the students. I've sat in classes where students complain about the assignment and the teacher will cut back on their assignments. You can't do that at home. I'm not used to that.

Overall he felt that the expectations were the same between all students, with no difference in their nationality. However, he did see a difference between domestic and international students in the classroom with behavior towards the professor and complaints about the quantity of work assigned.

Participant 2 felt that faculty had the same expectations for all their students. He remarked, "I mean, they expect you to go the extra mile, yeah, to put in more time, you know. While they understand that you are from outside, and they are willing to help, but you first need to help yourself." The participant then gave an example of how one of his professors pushed him to work harder on an assignment. He finished by stating, "They expect excellence from you."

Participant 3 did not specify a difference in faculty expectations between domestic and international students. He described faculty expectations for all students. He commented,

Yeah, I think they want their students to make progress, you know, academic progress. Most of the professors I have met, they've been trying. They want to make sure that we understand the material and they're always willing, you know, to explain to you at a later time even if the time is after teaching the class.

Student achievement seems to be the focus of participant 3's understanding of faculty expectations.

Participant 4 described his experiences with faculty and their expectations. He said, "They want [students to be] independent—what you do, try to do it, you know, that

you can defend.” He shared an experience he had with a professor that told him to have pride in his work and to keep working hard to have self pride.

Participant 5 described faculty members that are enthusiastic about their students’ success and are available. She stated,

Some of them made themselves very available. And some of them, you can tell when a professor is like really passionate about his students doing well. He's not more passionate about is he like passing with all As or Bs and stuff. It's like I want you to get this. I'm here for you.

She continued to describe that they had “high expectations of all their students.” She finished by stating, “They have those faculty like that. And they have those ones where even after you graduate, they're still going to be there for you.” Overall, she had positive experiences with faculty expectations of her and her classmates.

Participant 6 answered with a pause but specific answer. He remarked,

The fact that they always expect students to do the work. Do your work on time, submit the work on time, call in the syllable [syllabus], if you have problems, make sure don't, don't sit tomorrow. So they expect the best out of you.

Students’ punctual assignments and completeness were areas that the participant felt faculty expected of all their students.

Participant 7 explained that the professors that he had encountered had specific expectations. He said, “They expect you to be prepared. You must study and be prepared for class.” He continued to explain the importance of being prepared as a student to lead towards success within the classroom. He finished by stating, “If they teach you and you take a test, they expect you to do good. I guess that would make them proud if they teach you something and they [students] do good.” He felt that these expectations were good and helpful for him.

Participant 8 described that he was surprised that almost all his professors had the same expectations. He remarked, “I think American professors have two expectations for all their students. I think they expect students to be responsible and hard working.” He felt that these two expectations were important for students to accomplish and it was realistic for students as well. He did not see any difference in faculty expectations between domestic and international students.

Participant 9 felt that his faculty had very specific expectations of all their students. He explained that “Determination, hard work and openness in communication, say, and always be willing to-to ask for help” are the key expectations from faculty. His all professors, he explained, shared these expectations.

Participant 10 did not feel that there was a difference between the expectations for domestic or international students. “The expectations are the-the same. I don’t think, well, I’ve never seen anybody treated differently with assignments in class” he answered. He continued further to explain that faculty wants all their students to do the assignments and hand work in on time. If a student has questions or does not understand something, it is the student’s responsibility to find help.

Question #18: Cultural Misunderstandings

Can you share any cultural misunderstandings between faculty, staff or a student and yourself?

Participant 1 described an incident that involved himself and a former professor. He explained that the professor told the class they could address him by his first name. This made participant 1 uncomfortable because “teachers are respected very highly and you can’t just call them by their first names. So that was one misunderstanding.” He

explained that some of the students in class that he was trying to gain extra credit from the professor by addressing him formally.

Participant 2 described that he never had any cultural misunderstandings at his university. He explained that after one semester he recruited three other Liberians to attend the university and they took most of their classes together when they could. He said, “Yeah. You know. And at Johnson and Wales, we know there are people of different cultural backgrounds.” He felt that all the students at his university were respectful of international students and no one seemed to care if someone was dressed in their cultural attire.

Participant 3 had an experience in which he felt an American student challenged his intellect because he was not American. The American student told him that he could not be right because English was not his first language. He told the student, “Even though English isn’t my first language, I know what I’m saying. I’m not stupid. I may have an accent but it doesn’t mean I’m stupid.” He told the American student to look up the answer; it turned out that Participant 3 was right. He concluded by stating, “People always, you know, think that—I don’t know man, but they think that they know better.”

Participant 4 did not have any experiences with cultural misunderstandings with faculty, staff or students. He responded that “no one seems to care if you are an international student or not. There are so many in the United States.” The participant did not feel that this was an issue, at least not for him.

Participant 5 found that having an accent was the biggest cultural misunderstanding she found was with faculty and students. She explained that it

... was annoying. And then, it's a whole thing of you, you're trying to speak in front of people, but this is just like—then I have to go through this whole thing of can you speak it slower? Can you do this slower? Can you do that slower? I mean it's ridiculous. And if anyone would've told me before, hey, go to a speech class, I would've been pissed off.

However, this improved as she stayed in the United States longer.

Participant 6 never had a cultural misunderstanding within a classroom. He felt that his professors were respectful of international students and understood them. He stated that

there is no time in recollection that any faculty would say “Mr. James, I don’t understand you. What’re you talking about? Repeat yourself.” No. They were very respectful to the students. Forget about background, where we’re from. And because they accept us up at that level we ourselves would do the same.

The participant felt that because the faculty were very respectful of all their students, it made the students also respect one another.

Participant 7 had misunderstandings with a professor because of her accent. She said that it was sometimes annoying but it did not let her stop her from participating in class. She continued to explain that she had another experience that in a health course the professor referred to Africa many times when talking about particular diseases. The professor kept asking the participant if she knew about the disease. Laughing, participant 7 continued to share the experience. She explained that her professor said,

Yeah. She said, “It came from Africa, right? You know?” I said, “No. I don’t know about that.” I have forgotten what it was, I mean, it was something that she was talking about how they treat it or something like that. And she said, “Africa,” and she asked me if I knew about it. I said, “No.” “Maybe it’s the part of Africa you’re from?” “It’s not where I’m from.

Although she laughed about this experience, she did say that she did not understand why her professor kept drawing attention to her every time she felt something came from Africa. “Africa is a big place,” participant 7 laughed.

Participant 8 responded that he could not think of any cultural misunderstandings between faculty, staff, students and himself. Overall, his educational experiences have been positive and without frustrations from cultural misunderstandings. He remarked, “I’m lucky I guess. I haven’t had any problems with misunderstandings. Everyone seems to understand me.”

Participant 9 had an American student ask him questions about where he was from in Africa. She asked him questions like: ‘do you have cities in Africa, do you have houses, did you live in a house?’ These questions seemed “not real good” according to participant 9. He had to explain to the student that “There are schools in Africa. There are houses. There are cities and there are rural areas. There are villages and towns. Just like any other place.” He later explained that the American student told him what she sees on television about Africa suggests that it is very poor and rural.

Participant 10 experienced a cultural misunderstanding with a student as well. The student assumed he was not interested in the group project because he could not make many of the meetings. He remarked,

The student in the group felt I didn’t want to work with them. I had to explain later that it is because I work a full time job and also have a family so it’s hard for me to find time to meet with other students and their schedules.

Although it was frustrating at first, he knew that some of the American students did not have the same responsibilities as he did.

Question #19: Interaction with American Students

How, if ever, have you interacted with American students?

Participant 1 replied that he has interacted with Americans in the classroom. However, he noted that, with regard to work, there are cultural differences among American students and Liberians. He explained,

We don't respect time. You call a meeting here. You have a project working with Americans. If you say 9:00, people will come at 9:00. If they can't come, they will write you and text, "I can't make it" or "I'll be late." Liberians don't really care what time. Any time it starts, that's it. You would be surprised. Meeting is supposed to start at 9:00. Might start at 10:00. And people will come and you got to wait for the other people. And it's just cultural.

He continued that Americans are hard working and usually "make their contribution" to the group work. He has had positive experiences interacting with American students within the classroom.

Participant 2 also had experiences working with American students on group work. He remarked,

We worked on projects together, and they were very helpful. Because they were able to make the contacts; they knew most of the areas." It was beneficial for him to have local students to assist him on his academic work. Outside of the classroom, he explained that he had a couple of American friends. He continued to explain that "for some, once the project was over, I mean, they would go on their way, and you know, and they would not interact with you again. But there were some who, I mean, that friendship continued, you know.

He had difference experiences with different groups of people.

Participant 3 explained that he spent most of his time with fellow Liberians. "It's more comfortable for me to speak with other Africans because it's just more relaxed" he replied. He later remarked that he has worked with Americans in the classroom but outside of the classroom he does not make an effort to speak to the Americans and vice versa.

Participant 4 had positive remarks about the American culture. He replied that “living with Americans has been a great experience. I learned early about the differences in culture and they have helped me with things, too.” This experience has led to Participant 4 interacting with more Americans on a daily occurrence in and outside of the classroom. He found that “having American roommates is important for me to become part of the culture and make a home here.” He has made lifelong friends due to this living situation.

Participant 5 interacts with Americans outside of the classroom on an individual basis. She stated, “There's some times where I would probably be like really snobby to them, and then sometimes, I but will be really nice because like I said, I deal with people on individual basis.” However, when asked if she interacted with Americans within the classroom, she replied that she is usually the only black person in the class. However, there were two Nigerians and a Haitian student going through the same program and for the most part they studied together. However, she did have one American that she studied with and befriended in class. She stated,

This kid is smart. Like he's straight up American, like the blue eyes and all that jazz, but wicked smart. Like he's very, very smart. Like very smart. And we studied together. And I've had like a lot of them I—I'm, I'm really open as far as like culture.

Participant 5 has mostly worked closely with other Africans from class but explained that she is open to collaborating with students from any culture.

Participant 6 often interacted with Americans after class. He stated that “we meet after class, or after we would come to the club so that we have fun and we drink beer.” Besides his occasion outing to the club, overall he said that ordering pizza and spending

time after class was normal. He concluded by saying that “we have a very social time together.”

Participant 7 explained that she does not interact often with Americans in the classroom.

I just try, I try to be friendly with everyone. The only thing, when they, you know how students are. They come to class, oh, they're talking all their personal stuff and, no, I don't go there. I don't want to know their personal business. She continued that at times the American students would tell her talk and she would reply that “When I'm at school I don't but I don't talk about my private life.” Overall she keeps to herself while in class and does not interact with many Americans outside of the classroom. “I have a family and Liberian community here, I'm happy.”

Participant 8 enjoys interacting with Americans in and outside of the classroom. For example, he participates in an international club that has many different members from different countries. Many of the Americans that are members in the club have become close friends of his. He said that “hanging out with Americans at the club or just off campus is always a good learning experience. I think they learn from me, too.” He has daily interaction with American students.

Participant 9 lives with five Americans at an off-campus housing area of town. He explained, “right now I'm living with American students. There's a six bedroom house. Yeah. So, we hang out all the time. We talk about different issues. We share ideas.” He explained that he is very happy with his living accommodations and is happy that he chose to live with American students.

Participant 10 reported that he did not interact with Americans outside of the classroom or work. He felt he had limited hours outside of work and school that he spent

the rest of his time at home with his family or staying active within the Liberian community. He stated that “it’s important for me to be with my family whenever I’m not at work or school. My wife and I want our kids to be around other Liberians so they don’t forget where they came from.” This leaves little to no time for him to interact with Americans in or out of the classroom.

Question #20: Language Barriers

Explain any language barriers or accent barriers you have had in the classroom or within the college.

Participant 1 immediately responded to the question. He stated,

I think that’s one of my major problems in the classroom. But two things. I really noticed that people in a higher education environment--they tend to understand me. They tend to understand me easier than people outside the environment. Like where I work, for example, they’ll say, “What? What is that?”

He continued that he was not certain if within the higher education environment they always understood him but rarely had anyone ask him to repeat himself because they couldn’t understand his accent. He completed his thought by adding, “It’s frustrating. But I understand it’s a problem. I come from a different culture. I’m used to pronouncing things differently. It’s English where it’s Liberian English.” He felt that schools could talk about accents in their orientations for international students, which might help students prepare for these situations.

Participant 2 first discussed the accent barriers he experienced with his professors. There were times when he could not understand his professors because of their American accents. He explained,

Professors were like fast. You now, from the talking, they were like fast, you know. You have to pay extra attention to understand, you know. You know, and—and I mean, and like for me, I know when I go to class, I like to make myself feel comfortable. And so I would, I will put up, I say, "Look, professor, I'm a black man from Africa; this is my first time in this country. And I'm not understanding. Could you speak slowly?" And everybody would laugh, and you know.

He also explained that it was frustrating when his professors would ask him to repeat himself because they could not understand his accent. He simply stated, "it was frustrating."

Participant 3 shared an experience in a class that he felt badly because his professor could not understand him. He commented,

I don't know what you're talking about." And when she says that everybody was just, you know, "Well, guys, come on you know. What are you guys talking about it?" So I had to spell it out. And she said, "Oh." And when say that and she pronounced it, everybody said, "Oh, okay. That's what he meant?" You know, I don't think that was professional. Yeah, I'm just I'm wondering the word that I was trying to use.

He later spoke with another student who told him not to worry about his accent. He emphasized that it was important for him to be able to ask questions in order to understand the class. This advice helped Participant 3 but learned to ask questions after class.

Participant 4 has faced accent barriers at work more than within his classes. After years of working in the United States he has learned how to work with individuals that cannot understand his accent. He remarked,

I've had a different mindset and, you know, how to go on your life. I mean, it's a lot of capacity, you know, dealing with people, and so, I just know that human will be human. People will not change. You know, so if you did not understand it, if I feel like it, I'll repeat it. If I don't then I'll just, go about the day.

He has managed to change his attitude about the language barrier and does not let it frustrate or annoy him like it did when he first arrived to the United States.

Participant 5 felt that at her university she has not had professors that cannot understand her because of her accent. She explained,

No, no, no, because I feel like from what I noticed, like from what I went through, I feel like the university level, they're really open-minded. And I'm, I'm not the first—but I'm pretty sure I'm not the first African student they've come across. So by the time it's my turn, they, they understand perfect.

She has not experienced problems within the classroom and feels that because the United States is very diverse, many of her professors are used to hearing difference accents.

Participant 6 felt that he should not have to change his accent, as this is who he is as an individual. When speaking of his professors, he stated,

He cannot change me at a level now to say I must speak, the beautiful things that the professor always treat me very well so why should I, why should I imitate, I want the best thing of America so my concern was yes, the question will always come “What did you say?”, “Can you repeat yourself?” in a very polite manner. So, I don't have a problem with that.

Although he does not get frustrated or upset if someone asks him to repeat himself, he feels strongly that his accent is part of his identity.

Participant 7 is not offended or frustrated when someone asks her to repeat herself due to her accent. She explained, “The only time—unless you say it in a rude manner. Then you can offend me. But I have not really seen that with some other students.” Overall, she doesn't mind repeating herself and feels that within the nursing program, there are many individuals with accents so she is not the only student.

Participant 8 has had numerous occasions that he has been asked to repeat himself due to his accent. He responded that “it can be annoying. I guess it depends on how

someone asks me. It was embarrassing in the beginning too, especially when the professor asks you in front of the class.” However, he has learned to accept that this situation happens now and then within the classroom. He reported that he does not get embarrassed anymore.

Participant 9 had an experience with a student asking him to repeat himself during his oral presentation. He told the story by stating,

He said “Can you repeat that? What did you say?” I said “No, no problem.” and I started, I took my own time and-and spoke. So, after class he came to me and he said “I’m sorry for making you to do that but I couldn’t understand your accent so that’s why I asked you to go over it again.” I said “No, it’s, it’s not my problem that, I don’t mind going over it.”

He admits that because the student approached him after class made him happy and less insecure about his presentation. He said that he has patience with others accents because the first time he came to the U.S. he had a difficult time understanding the accent and how fast the language is spoken.

Participant 10 has also learned through time that when people politely ask him to repeat himself, it is not out of disrespect. He commented that “people are almost always polite if they ask me to repeat myself. How can I be upset with that?” Participant 10 has not had negative feelings about having an accent because he had to ask Americans to slow down when he first moved to the United States.

Question #21: College Resources

Do you think your college has helpful and accessible resources for you as an international student?

Participant 1 was dissatisfied with his undergraduate school. Immediately upon asking the question, he replied,

I think a lot more could be done, really. I don't know what they do on the undergrad level, but maybe at the doctorate level it would be assumed that people don't need the support. But again, I went to New England Tech. I didn't really see that support.

The participant was then asked if he was speaking specifically for international students. He replied, "Yeah. Yeah. I would have loved to see orientation programs specifically for our class." The participant explained that an orientation could have made him feel more comfortable at the college before beginning his classes.

Participant 2 felt that the International Center at his school was very helpful. He responded, "Yeah, they were good. They were able to help people with the, you know, visa situation, driver's license. They were, they were able to, I mean, direct you to the necessary resources you needed if you had a problem." He further explained that the only experience he had that was frustrating was receiving documents to send for his family to come to the United States to watch him graduate. He finished by explaining that he did not feel that it was the International Center's fault but a difficult situation.

Participant 3 was thankful for the Writing Center at his college. He reflected on the numerous appointments he had with tutors. In describing his visits, he portrayed the foundations of writing that he learned. He remarked,

I mean, the ideas—how your ideas flow, you know, it's a strategy. You got strategies that you have to follow to be a better writer. So I thank god for that that I didn't know that before. I was told how to write a sentence, "John is going to school," is a sentence. I was told how to write a paragraph. A paragraph is supposed to have a thesis, the main idea in a paragraph, you know. But I mean I wasn't taught how to logically arrange your ideas in a paragraph of one idea to the other using transitions, all those things.

He was enthusiastic when he reminisced about his visits to the Writing Center and he felt deeply satisfied with the resource that was available at his college.

Participant 4 first responded “They’ve got too much.” He commented that the amount of resources offered to students was overwhelming and that most students did not take advantage of the many resources available. Although he felt that there was a vast array of resources, he did find that he enjoyed a few. He first mentioned that the orientation was helpful. He stated, “I mean, we had an orientation and they gave us the information. You’ve got to take the first step, because this is a university. They won’t get in touch with all the, you know, students.” The participant found useful information from the orientation. From this information, he took advantage of the Career Services office and received help on his resume. He said, “But right now, I’m so—I can put my resume on any website, but it was just—like just, but she sat with me, and she just, she did it. And, you know, and I told her thank you.” The assistance with his resume was extremely helpful and he enjoyed the one-on-one attention rather than using an online service.

Participant 5 had not used any resources that her university offered. She explained that the Academic Research Center was helpful for a lot of students. She explained, “They have like bunch of different, bunch of different like tutoring sections and people who couldn’t understand the language, understand English very well. Like I didn’t have a problem with those because the only language I know is English.” She answered that she did not use the writing tutors because she felt her writing was strong and it was not necessary.

Participant 6 quickly responded “Absolutely.” He felt that the library and the bookstore were two of the most important resources he used. He commented,

The textbooks are there. All the material that I need for my courses I do. In fact, if you went to my house, you would see all my textbooks. I'm one of the students that never sold my book back. I keep it but I always keep my books and then I feel that after graduation that's the time I learn so I sit home.

He continued to explain that he always read the supplemental material offered by his professors and that these extra assignments were just as important than the assigned readings and assignments.

Participant 7 explained that her nursing program offered valuable resources for students. Specifically, she described resources for students needing extra help or clarification. She remarked,

You're talking about, like, what I was talking about they have videos that will teach people. Like if I'm supposed to do a skill that I'm not comfortable with, I can go to the nursing lab and find a tape for that skill, put on the earphones, put it on, and then sit and watch it and they will explain everything to me.

She used this resource often and found that it dramatically made a difference in her learning and success within the program.

Participant 8 felt that there were many resources that were helpful for him. He mentioned that the resource he used the most was his professor's office hours. He shared a story of one particular professor that was always willing to help and meet him. He said, "The professor always made time for me. I could ask questions and get additional examples of things I didn't understand, ya know. He even gave me extra assignments so I could try I could practice more." The participant found his own professor to be the best resource his college offered.

Participant 9 answered that the International Center at his university was very active and he enjoyed stopping by on campus. He said, "And I visit it sometimes. Great stuff. Very helpful." He enjoyed spending time with other international students and felt

that they always helped each other and watched out for each other. He continued to state, “If I don’t know where something is, I would ask someone from the International Center. I always found my answer.” The International Center was the most useful and important resource for him.

Participant 10 did not feel that he used many resources because he was too busy. He replied, “I have to work and go to school. I don’t go the library because I do my work at home most of the time.” When asked if ever used a tutor he explained that he did not feel he needed the tutor nor did he have the time to make an appointment. The participant did not have regrets of not utilizing the resources that were offered by his college because he had other responsibilities, such as work and his family.

Question #22: Home Connections

Are there any connections you have discovered between your experiences in education at home and in the United States?

Participant 1 found that the general education in Liberia was very similar to an American education. He stated, “so there’s a lot of similarities. But mostly the books we studied over there were American books. So I knew a lot about American history and geography, all of this compared to maybe European history and geography.” He continued to explain that they were able to watch ABC News with Peter Jennings in Liberia to see all current affairs in the United States.

Participant 2 was proud to explain that Liberia used American textbooks and that Liberia was designed after American. He replied, “everything we do in Liberia is modeled after the United States. And I can boast that we even know more about the United States than people in this country.” As he smiled he continued to explain that due

to the strong connection between the two countries, it is an easy transition for Liberians to come to the United States. He continued,

It would be easier to come to America to go to school than to go to England to go to school, okay. Because I mean, we did do British pounds, we do dollars. In Liberia, we do the same dollar, okay. So our, we do the same English measurement they do here. So it's easier for us to come here and go to school, okay. So that even talking about government, you know that based upon what we have, we know it's modeled after the United States. So you can have a discussion, you can participate in the discussion. Unlike where you have kings and queens.

The strong connections between governments and education have allowed many Liberians, in the participants' view, to have a smooth transition.

Participant 3 responded by thinking of a large difference between higher education in the United States and Liberia. He explained that American professors specialize in one subject. He continued,

But in Africa the professors over there, they're like versatile. A math teacher could be a good English teacher. Yeah, a math teacher could be a good history teacher. That's why most of the Africans they are very smart because we don't just go in like limiting one area. You know, we like it because it's better to be all over the place, you know, that's our thinking. You know, then for you to just be limited, "Oh, he's just math teacher. He doesn't know English." No, he could be versatile, you know. So most of the professors in Africa, they're like that. They are very smart. They are good in almost every area.

This difference of qualifications was something Participant 3 felt very strongly about. He had positive learning experiences with Liberian professors because they could help him in more than one discipline.

Participant 4 felt that degrees in higher education in the United States were extensions of Liberian degrees. He felt this was true because many government officials and successful businessmen graduated from American colleges or universities and returned to Liberia to work. He commented,

... The minister for finance, he was in Pennsylvania. The minister of, the foreign minister, he graduated here. So I mean, the minister for port, he graduated from here, so I mean, those are all friends that I know. I mean, just say here and there, so I knew, people are coming and so on.

Obtaining a degree from an American college or university allowed many Liberians to gain successful professions back in Liberia. The participant also explained that it is helpful when Liberians return home and have connections with fellow alumni.

Participant 5 had an experience with getting accepted for an internship at a hospital in Rhode Island. When interviewing for the internship, she realized a notable similarity between how things worked in the United States and in Liberia. She explained,

... So you know someone on the inside, you have connections. It takes you a long way. So that's the same common thing for the Liberian thing, where it's like even though if you're not fully qualified, you know someone inside. It takes you a long way.

This connection allowed her to get the internship she applied for. She further explained that there are many gray areas when it came to finding work both in the United States and Liberia.

Participant 6 shared that many of the courses offered at the University of Liberia were similar, however, the resources were very different. He shared that

the technologies were not there in those days so they got to go on the blackboard and write and probably you gonna, you got a, one textbook and one textbook was reserved in the, in the library so you gotta go there.

The comparison between both educational experiences was quite fresh in the participant's mind, as he gave specific examples of classes he took in Liberia. He also shared an experience he had in an American classroom. His professor assigned work via email and he had not checked his email, as this technology was new for him. Technology was a

major difference between the two college experiences and one that took time for the participant to become comfortable with.

Participant 7 found that the commonality between Liberia and the United States education was that both countries speak the same language. She found this helpful when she began nursing school. She felt that the teaching was similar but “the reading is heavier” in American classrooms.

Participant 8 felt that the educational connection between Liberia and the United States was the subject matter. He explained that in Liberia he was able to study the same subjects as they offered at his American school. “A lot of the, of the classes are the same. I think, this is I think easy for us. No class subject is surprising to me,” he remarked. The content was taught differently he specified. However, there were no surprising course options for his major at his university.

Participant 9 felt fortunate that he was able to use technology in his school in Liberia. Although it was his high school, he compared technology resources in both countries. He replied,

There are books, there are computer labs, you know, you can go and do your work, type your own papers and everything. But the connection I can make is technology, just a little, it’s a little different. There, the school I went to in Africa there are computer labs just like universities in the U.S. but the one in the U.S. is more, you know, more advanced than the one in Africa, the high school I went to in Africa.

The participant had previous experience with technology before attending classes in the United States and felt it was extremely helpful for him.

Participant 9 felt fortunate that he was able to get exposure to technology before he attended an American college class because he was more comfortable. He still had to learn new software but overall was comfortable using computers to complete his work.

Participant 10 felt the only connection he could think of between the educational systems between Liberia and the United States was the history courses. He described the history courses he took in Liberia and how all children learn American history along with their own. He felt that this connection “has been like this forever.” He had lucid memories of his childhood into his adulthood learning about American history and its strong tie to his country.

Emergent Themes

The researcher was able to successfully analyze the data from the taped interviews of all ten participants. Emergent themes were emerged from the various questions each participant answered. The open-ended questions allowed the researcher to reflect on the various themes. The major themes found were: (1) *Perceptions of the U.S. Classroom*. All of the participants shared what they felt would be their experience in an American college classroom from stories and advice they had been given from family, friends and colleagues. Through this major theme, the following sub-themes were also discovered and recorded (a) Fear, (b) Optimism, (c) Academic Level, (d) Race, (e) Language Barriers, (f) Acceptance, and (g) Friendliness. The second major theme found was (2) *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation*. Each participant described both types of motivation in detail. The sub-themes found were (a) Intrinsic Motivation and (b) Extrinsic Motivation. Last, the third major theme was (3) *Struggles In and Out of the Classroom*. Each participant had their own journey before arriving in the classroom. These experiences and

personal backgrounds of the participants created the following sub-themes. The sub-themes found were (a) Family Separation, (b) Educational Delays, and (c) Accent Barriers.

Each participant was asked to discuss specific perceptions they had of what an American college classroom would be like, as well as expectations of their professors and fellow classmates. The following remarks and emerged from participants' answers to their different perceptions. Participants answered with the following themes to their perceptions of the American college classroom:

Fear

Participant 1 felt fearful of what an American classroom would be. He was concerned with how he would be perceived and would not have the educational knowledge of his classmates. He replied, "I would be inferior".

Participant 10 was also nervous. He remarked, "I think it really being nervous about what to expect and if I would be different."

Optimism

Participant 2 felt optimistic about what the classroom would be like. He compared his educational experiences in Liberia and what it would be like in American. He responded, "America was far better."

Academic Level

Two participants remarked that they were told by fellow Liberians that education in America was much easier than school in Liberia. They replied with the following responses:

Participant 4 remarked about education in Liberia. He stated,

“You can be 50 years old and not pass the first grade.”

Participant 7 remarked,

“Oh, the education in America is easy...that’s what we believe.”

Participants also had perceptions of their fellow classmates before entering a classroom. The following themes were found:

Race

Participant 2 explained, “Well, we're, this whole race stuff, okay, we're like, they're not going to accept, you know, they're going to treat you like a black man. And you know, they're going to be mean to you, you know.”

Language Barriers

Participant 5 declared,

“I feel like that was the most frustrating part for me was like you always have to repeat yourself.”

Acceptance

A couple of participants believed that students would be accepting of international students within the classroom. The following participants responded:

Participant 4 articulated,

“You know, they’re not—they don’t care if you, you know, if you black or you white, you got money, you don’t got money, or something like that. You know? They just don’t care.”

Participant 5 stated,

I'm going to say a vast majority of the black population that was over there was—were internationals, so either like Haitians. There were not like originally Americans, Americans. They were probably like Haitians. There was a lot of

Haitians at URI. There was a lot of Liberians. There was a lot of Nigerians. There was a lot of Ghanaians. So you don't feel much of a culture barrier to me. If I was probably going to a smaller school, I would probably pay attention more to that.

Friendliness

Most participants expected students to be friendly towards international students.

Participant 6 stated,

“Honestly, to be frank, when I went to school I made some great friend, in fact, my current wife-to-be she’s an international students from Asia and I met her in school, grade school.”

Participant 7 asserted,

I thought they would be friendly and no, like, when I got in, they have some friendly ones and they have some ones that don’t want to be bad with others. You know, some people grew up in a home that they don’t talk to strangers.

Participant 9 said,

“Friendly and at the same time, you know, not knowing other cultures, not knowing a-a-a, yeah, not knowing other cultures.”

Expectations of faculty produced a majority of participants’ responses to have no concern about faculty treating international students differently than domestic students.

An overwhelming six out of ten participants responded that they were not concerned.

Some of the responses were:

No Concern

Participant 1 articulated,

“That’s something else I didn’t think about. But once I got in the classroom, they were very receptive. But honestly, it was not something that I thought about prior to getting in to the classroom.”

Participant 5 expressed,

“ I didn't have any expectations.”

Participant 6 stated,

“I have both high expectation, positive expectation about them because back home another guy who taught me was a Peace Corps from the States.”

Participant 9 asserted,

“There are a lot of foreigners who study in America. So, I imagine that was good.”

Participant 4 said,

“So that’s not just something to think [about].”

Intrinsic & Extrinsic Motivation

As mentioned in Chapter 2, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation affects all adult learners. In this study, a focus on what types of motivation were experienced by the participants was addressed. The different types of motivation addressed focused on three perceptions before they came to the United States and while they were attending an American college. Although all the participants experienced extrinsic motivation to come to the United States due to the Civil War in Liberia, there were different types of extrinsic motivation to attend college once here. In addition, the intrinsic motivations that participants found were individualized by their backgrounds and experiences within the United States.

Intrinsic

Participant 1 declared,

Now I become an important person for my country and keep motivation. I want to be able to learn and go back because the exposure here has definitely opened my mind to a whole range of things that I think I can take back to Liberia. Some values, some ideas that will benefit the system there. When you live here for some time in a free society as this, you begin to see the shortcomings in your own system back home.

Participant 2 stated,

“If I hurry up with my program, and things are normal in my country, I can go back and, you know, go to my village, and try to help educate other people.”

Participant 3 remarked,

Most of us seem to forget our past. And I think the only way or the best way that you make progress is to think about your past. Because for me, I don't know why though, but when I sit every time, Carla, I sit and think about the struggles and the hardships. There were times, Carla, I had to walk for miles upon miles to go to school. My friends refused because they said they were long distances.

Participant 4 replied,

If you have that support you go a long way, because coming over here, you know, and the first thing I was told, like, you know what, Joe? You can decide to, you know, pick up a McDonald's job, and that would just be your life. Or you go and prepare yourself, which is going to be tough, you know.

Participant 7 explained,

When he [husband] was not here, I had to work and pay all the bills by myself. And with the nursing, I took two classes. So when he came it was a great help for me because he took all the bills and then it was a relief for me.

Participant 10 articulated,

“I have to be the best person I can be. I know I need to use the opportunities in America and, and that will help me in the future.”

Extrinsic

Participant 1 asserted,

Another stress is when you're making money [to send back to] Liberia, everybody comes to you and wants assistance, even if they were not part of your family. We have the extended family thing. And so you find distant cousins coming and you feel a sense of obligation. So that poses a lot of stress on you.

Participant 6 said,

“It's so stressful but I challenge initial and challenge some of my friends to prove them that I could have done that so I went to school.”

Participant 5 remarked,

“I knew I had to like live up to family standards... But if you're the oldest girl, a lot of responsibilities lie on you. Like you have to excel.”

Participant 7 declared,

“Thank God people were there to talk to me. Like my husband and friends, they encouraged me to go back.”

Participant 8 stated,

“I need to support my family at home. This means, I, I need to get a college degree to earn more money. I have to do this.”

Participant 9 expressed,

“My older brother is, he's, he loves school and he is the one who tell us, you know, do this, led us to succeed, work hard, do your homework, do this, do that, so, he still has that influence.”

Struggles In and Out of the Classroom

As refugees or asylum seekers, the participants have all gone through various struggles within their own country's borders and within the borders of the American college classroom. The open-ended questions allowed each participant to describe the struggles they have been challenged with and sometimes even conquered. The following themes were found:

Family Separation

Participant 1 remarked,

“My wife came in March of the following year which is 2000. And then our first kid came in 2002.”

Participant 3 said,

They took her [mother] in the bushes and killed her. So even when they [rebels] came and told us, they said, “Your mommy is dead. Don't cry.” They had their guns. If you cry, you're going to be killed. So you had to laugh. The other guy said to me, “You got to dance.” I said, “For what?” Because if you don't dance, I'm going to kill you.” I had to get up and start dancing because my mommy's dead, my mother is dead. So there are things that I did, you know, against my will because I wanted to live. If I had not done it, I would have got killed too.

Participant 3 further explained his other siblings, “But my sisters were raped when I would come because immigration said that they failed to give substantial information about something so they were not qualified to come over.”

Participant 4 commented,

You know, when you're leaving people back, and you know their condition and everything that, you know, you had there. And like, you know, not compared with where you're going, you know, is that kind of emotion that wants, you know, both ways. You know? They would cry and you would cry. And you know, and it's just bad, because you got a family, because you might not meet again.

Participant 2 replied,

“For now, we have ... cell phones in every town and village. And prior to that, I mean, it was very difficult. And so it would take weeks, two months before you can get in touch with somebody.”

Educational Delays

Participant 2 expressed,

I enrolled 1990 at the University of Liberia. And then the war broke out. I came back in 1993, and then continued—I started in 1993, but then the war broke out again. And then, 1997, I started full strength until 2003.

Participant 4 declared,

“The war took place in Liberia, so I did not get my degree from there. And then I got to here.”

Participant 7 explained,

“I started going to the French institute, like to be a French instructor.... But then, when you walk in, everything went dark.” The participant never finished her degree due to the war outbreak.

Participant 9 stated,

“For my elementary school and middle school were actually in a, in a refugee camp... Which was not really high standard. It was provided by the United Nations.”

Accent Barriers

Participant 4 remarked,

So a language barrier could be one. Like in the classroom if a professor were saying, you know, you and I were in the classroom and the professor were, you know, explaining something and, you know, I raised my hands or asked questions. Because I have an accent, if I sit in the middle of the class or the back of class everybody turns around, my classmates. Everybody turns around.

Participant 4 replied,

People will not change. You know, so if you did not understand it, if I feel like it, I'll repeat it. If I don't then I'll just, go about the day. You know what I'm saying? You know what I mean. I'm into the job there.

Participant 5 explained,

She was like, "I don't understand a word you're saying. Can you speak slower?" Can you speak this? Can you speak that? Like—I feel like that was the most frustrating part for me was like you always have to repeat yourself.

Participant 10 articulated,

“It was very frustrating to repeat myself in class because, because people don't understand me.”

Summary

The data answered the research questions posed by the researcher. For Research Question #1 which focused on how and what adult Liberian adult refugees perceive and describe as barriers to their academic success were discovered through open-ended questions. Through the data analysis, the researcher was able to find three Major Themes. The first Major Theme was Perceptions of the U.S. Classroom, which included the following connected sub-themes (a) Fear, (b) Optimism, (c) Academic Level, (d) Race, (e) Language Barriers, (f) Acceptance, and (g) Friendliness. The second Major Theme found was Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation. The sub-themes found were (a) Intrinsic Motivation and (b) Extrinsic Motivation. Last, the third Major Theme was Struggles In and Out of the Classroom. The sub-themes found included (a) Family Separation, (b) Educational Delays, and (c) Accent Barriers.

Chapter Four articulated different phenomena that each participant experienced as a result of analyzing the data from each interview. Through the analysis of the twenty-

two questions asked, the researcher was able to find major themes and sub-themes. The themes allowed each participant to showcase their personal experiences and the various perceptions and barriers within the American college classroom.

CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The findings from Chapter Four were discussed by examining the themes found. Each theme included examples of participant responses to questions asked by the researcher. The researcher then drew conclusions from an analysis of the data collected based on the research questions of the study. In addition, Chapter Five will provide a summary of the study and showcase the research questions that focused the study. The chapter will then describe the findings and provide recommendations for further research and explain why those recommendations were created.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this research was to provide adult Liberian refugees the opportunity to share their lived experiences and discover the various barriers they encountered when enrolled within higher education in the United States. The researcher asked ten participants a total of twenty-two questions. The questions began with each participant's prior educational experiences and perceptions before coming to the United States. The questions then transitioned to focus on whether their perceptions of the American classroom were accurate. This information allowed the participants to describe their experiences and perceptions both before and after they encountered the classroom.

The following research questions focused the study:

R₁: How do adult Liberian adult refugees matriculating through institutions of higher learning in the United States perceive and describe barriers to their academic success?

The study was also guided by the following question:

R₂: What do adult Liberian refugees perceive as barriers to successful matriculation

through higher education in the United States?

Data were gathered through individual interviews with ten participants. In Chapter 4, introductions of each participant were discussed and their responses to the twenty-two questions, reported.

The researcher found three major themes that emerged from the data: (1) Perceptions of the U.S. Classroom; (2) Intrinsic & Extrinsic Motivation; and (3) Struggles In and Out of the Classroom. The researcher also found that within these major themes, there merged from the responses of the participants, sub-themes from within the three major topics. The following sub-themes were found from the first major theme: (a) Fear; (b) Optimism; (c) Academic Level; (d) Race; (e) Language Barriers; (f) Acceptance; and (g) Friendliness. The second major theme included the following sub-themes: (a) Intrinsic Motivation; and (b) Extrinsic Motivation. Finally, the third major theme included the sub-themes: (a) Family Separation; (b) Educational Delays; and (c) Accent Barriers.

Summary of Findings

The primary research question: How do adult Liberian adult refugees matriculating through institutions of higher learning in the United States perceive and describe barriers to their academic success, allowed for various themes to be found within the study. The researcher was able to find these themes by evaluating each transcript from interviews with the ten participants. During the interviews, the participants were forthcoming in their responses and never asked to skip a question due to being uncomfortable with the question or subject. Most participants had never been asked about their lived experiences as a Liberian refugee and how it has impacted their education in

the United States. Although this was the case, each participant was able to reflect on his or her experiences, perceptions and outcomes with ease and articulated him or herself well.

The first theme uncovered was the strong perceptions of what an American college classroom would be like. In addition, they identified how faculty and fellow students would interact with international students. Some participants had strong feelings that the outlook would be a positive experience but, in contrast, some participants responded that they felt insecure about attending an American classroom. All the participants who had an overall positive outlook on how faculty and students would treat them as international students did have that experience. Only one participant had a negative experience with a professor who she felt was not accepting of her nationality. Several of the participants had positive experiences with faculty and appreciated their willingness to work with them. They were also impressed that faculty was always available to talk to after class or during office hours, which was helpful in their success within the classroom. The participant with a negative experience with a faculty member admits that of all the professors she had encountered, only one had given her a difficult time.

Overall, the participants felt that students would welcome them as classmates even though they were not American. The strong relationship between Liberia and the United States had given the participants a feeling of acceptance and that America was an extension of their Liberian roots. This had been taught to the participants from both their education and their families. One participant pointed out that America is a melting pot and being African would not make a difference in the classroom because there would be

students from all different countries learning together. In contrast, a participant was not confident that fellow students would be so accepting. He was nervous about his accent and his age and felt that he would not easily fit in, because of these characteristics.

The participants were asked about various motivations for their success within the American classroom. The researcher found intrinsic and extrinsic motivations after evaluating the transcripts. Ferssizidis et al (2010) summarized the outcomes of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for adult learners. The authors stated that “maintaining intrinsically motivating values increases the probability of creating self-concordant goals and the benefits linked to them; extrinsic motivation often hinders potentially desirable outcomes” (p. 355). The authors believe that individuals who have intrinsic motivation will showcase “great well-being” while individuals with extrinsic motivation can compromise their well-being (Ferssizidis et al, 2010). The participants showcased both types of motivation while demonstrating different outcomes.

The prospect for participants to return to Liberia to offer new trained skills learned from their education in the United States was discovered. Most participants felt it was important to utilize the various opportunities America had to offer and to take back what they had learned to better their own country. One participant explained that the education system in Liberia needed significant improvement and what he had experienced and learned in the United States was the catalyst for him to return to Liberia and begin adapting new educational methods he experienced into the Liberian educational system. The participant wanted to become successful in the United States by obtaining a college degree and finding a job that could provide him a comfortable life while living in the United States but more importantly to send money home to his family.

Another participant shared that there are expectations of Liberians who come to America. He described the pressure of graduating from college and finding a job that allowed him to send money back home. He felt the pressure of his family back home waiting for his financial support.

The final theme that emerged from the interviews related to the struggles in and out of the classroom. The sub-themes found were family separation, educational delays, and accent barriers. Participants expressed an overwhelming feeling of family separation while living and attending school in the United States. All ten participants still have many family members that live back in their hometown in Liberia. This has brought various struggles for each participant while trying to concentrate on his or her studies. One participant explained that when he first came to America and enrolled in school, his wife and all his children were still in Liberia. Living separated other family members as refugees in bordering countries. It was difficult to focus on education while the fear of the unknown was very present. Participants also experienced educational delays during the civil war. Many of the participants began a program at the University of Liberia in Monrovia, but their studies came to a halt due to the war. For some participants, it took years for them to go back to school after fleeing the country or moving outside the city for protection. These participants shared that when they finally did return to the university, the buildings were in shambles and many of the resources were lost. This made it difficult to continue their programs. Last, participants explained that a struggle they had within the American college classroom was an accent barrier. Most participants felt frustrated when a professor or classmate did not understand them due to their accent. One participant explained that he did not want or like the attention having an accent

brought when he asked or answered a question in class. He reported that students would turn around to stare at him any time he spoke aloud in class; this made him uncomfortable. Conversely, another participant expressed that he was more concerned with his job or what he was learning than if people wanted him to repeat himself. However, most participants felt frustrated when they were asked to repeat themselves in the classroom.

For some participants, sharing their lived experience as a refugee seemed to be therapeutic for them. For instance, one participant shared a detailed story of how his mother was murdered and his sisters raped by the rebels. Although the researcher could not truly comprehend what this gentleman had experienced, it was evident that the participant wanted to discuss his hardships and that he overcame this traumatic, life-altering experience. Similarly, other participants shared in detail the difficulty of leaving their families behind during the height of the civil war and leaving for the unknown land of America. Through sharing these experiences, participants found comfort in remembering their loved ones and realized that these loved ones are what motivate them to succeed in the American classroom and culture.

Surprisingly to the researcher, participants never complained or asked why these traumatic events happened to them. Each and every participant shared his or her experience but in the end, had a positive attitude about the future. All the participants expressed that they were proud to be Liberian, to be African. Although their country has been through a fourteen-year civil war, they all have looked past this political unsettlement and have focused on what Liberia truly stands for. Family is a priority for the participants and each participant spoke of at least one family member with true love

and admiration. Family is also more than just blood related relatives. Family extends to close friends and even to any Liberian they may come across. A cousin is seen as a sister or brother. The family values described by participants are the support system for each of them to be successful.

Conclusions

This study confirmed that Transformational Learning occurred for all the Liberian refugees that participated in this study. Transformational learning is when “one's values, beliefs, and assumptions compose the lens through which personal experience is mediated and made sense of” (Merriam, 2004, p.61). Each participant exhibited his or her personal beliefs through their culture and experience of being a refugee. They also individually had their own assumptions on the American college classroom, faculty, and students. Through these assumptions, each participant reflected “and made sense of” his or her own experiences to view what was proven accurate or inaccurate. Freire’s (1994) idea of Transformational Learning as an emancipatory and liberating personal experience was evident in the recounting of the lived experience of each participant. Participants demonstrated their appreciation of having the opportunity to share their lived experiences. Some participants told the researcher that they felt this study was important for the future of education in the United States but also important for the Liberian people, confirming that sharing their lived experiences surely was liberating for these individuals.

The participants all displayed individual cases of self-directed learning. Through intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, they have gained motivation to improve themselves personally and educationally. Administrators and faculty who are aware of the motivation of each student can gain a better understanding of their learners and how to best provide

resources for their success within the classroom. Each participant shared personal stories that demonstrated how he or she was motivated and how he or she focused on his or her educational success. Administrators and faculty should not overlook the motivations of their students. On the contrary, understanding student motivation should be seen as an advantage for faculty to use this motivation to provide high standards and high rewards for their learners.

Nsonwu (2008) explained that refugees have little to no personal control in their lives due to the trauma and violence that has occurred in their countries. However, enrolling in an American college could possibly be the first event in their adult lives of which they have had control. It is through this autonomy that Liberian refugees can become self-directed and learn from their past experiences. All of the participants shared their journeys coming to the United States and where they currently are in their educational success and cultural comfort.

Recommendations

This study allowed the participants to share their lived experiences as adult Liberian refugees that are enrolled within higher education in the United States. They were given the opportunity to explain their personal stories of triumphs, challenges and rewards throughout their journey. Although this study gave participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences as Liberian refugees, it has also allowed their voices to be heard and provided American higher education institutions with an opportunity to evaluate their current systems and areas that may need improvement to better address the needs of all their learners.

It is recommended that higher education institutions gain a better knowledge of their adult learners. Providing support through resources from the institution and support from the faculty would help institutions gain a better understanding of who their students are. For instance, institutions could offer more flexible hours for academic services and extracurricular activities for those learners who work or have families. In addition, faculty could provide more support to their learners if they used more self-reflection of their teaching by offering anonymous evaluations throughout the semester in order to gain an understanding of how students are feeling about their own learning. This would give faculty an opportunity to reflect on their teaching and also provide students the opportunity to feel comfortable raising questions or concerns they may have without the possible discomfort of speaking to them directly.

Tisdell and Tolliver (as cited in Mezirow, 2009) reported that culturally responsive teaching can allow a curriculum to focus on alternative ways for learners to find their cultural roots. Although the participants felt strong pride of being Liberian, their cultural roots may be at risk within the American college classroom because they are fully immersed in American culture. This is an example of where Transformational Learning is pivotal in teaching towards a more culturally responsive classroom. Liberian refugees may need more support understanding how their culture can be integrated with American culture. If the educators are able and willing to see their students through their eyes, it can allow for change to begin within the classroom.

Finally, it is recommended that a focus on specific age groups be examined for future research. As mentioned, more than 80% of the current refugees in the United States are under the age of seventeen and will be enrolling within higher education

institutions in the future (dhs.gov). This large percentage of perspective students would provide more data and opportunities for administrators and faculty to understand their students. Most of the Liberian refugees interviewed within this study were forty years old or older. The younger generation of refugees about to embark on their college careers would give researchers an opportunity to begin documenting the lived experiences from a different population and perspective.

Implications

There is a gap in literature regarding the lived experiences of adult Liberian refugees within higher education in the United States. This study is an addition to phenomenological scholarly research. The researcher believes that this study can not only bring awareness of Liberian refugees perceived notions of what an American classroom experience will be, but also will bring awareness of their actual experiences. This can be the catalyst for further research on how the American college classroom and experience can be improved in order to reach all their learners from various backgrounds.

As an addition to scholarly research, this study can result in a further understanding of Liberian refugees enrolled within American college classrooms. Understanding the lived experiences shared in this study can create further research. The various themes are relevant to individual education institutions and college classrooms nationwide. Administrators could review this study and find areas that need improvement within their own institution. For example, offering friendlier working hours for resources for those learners who work or have families. In addition, they may want to consider offering all incoming students a free, short introduction to computers, specifically

Microsoft Word and PowerPoint. This would give the confidence to those learners that have limited experiences with computers and technology.

There is a need for educators of higher education to be more self-reflective and active in their learners' progress within the classroom. Educators need to be able to understand their own perceptions of their work before they will be able to best reach their learners. By looking at their learners differently, they might be able to see their own strengths and weaknesses as an educator. Furthermore, educators have the opportunity to provide opportunities for learners to provide feedback throughout the term, not just at the end of the semester. Using the Critical Incident Questionnaire (Brookfield, 1995) will allow educators to gain further knowledge of how the class is progressing. Students will have the chance to provide anonymous feedback on areas of stimulation or confusion numerous times throughout the semester. This can allow the educator to make improvements within their teaching in order to best reach all their learners.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Please answer the following questions that are about your experiences, thoughts and ideas before you attended American college classes:

- What city/town/village are you from in Liberia?
- Explain your educational background prior to the United States.
- What type of academic work did you do back home?
- How old were you when you arrived in the United States?
- What kinds of stress did you experience coming to the United States? Explain.
- Do you feel you still have a strong cultural identity? Why or why not?
- What do you value most about being Liberian?
- How has living away from your family or living with them here in the United States influenced your learning and success in the American classroom?
- What did you expect from American college classrooms before attending college in America?
- Prior to meeting them, how did you imagine the attitudes and behaviors of American students towards international students?
- Prior to meeting them, how did you imagine the attitudes and behaviors of American faculty towards international students?

Please answer the following questions that are about your experiences, thoughts and ideas during your experience in the American classroom:

- How did you acclimate to U.S. culture and your college/university?
- Describe one, two or three things that make your classes and overall educational experience difficult for you as an international student. Explain.
- Describe one, two or three things that make your classes and overall educational experiences easy for you as an international student. Explain.
- Describe an assignment you have had in America with which you felt comfortable and/or uncomfortable, and explain why.
- How would you describe faculty and staff at your college?
- What do you feel faculty expect from their students, both international and domestic?
- Can you share any cultural misunderstandings between faculty, staff or a student and yourself?
- How, if ever, have you interacted with American students?
- Explain any language barriers or accent barriers you have had in the classroom or within the college.
- Do you think your college has helpful and accessible resources for you as an international student?
- Are there any connections you have discovered between your experiences in education at home and in the United States? Please explain.

APPENDIX B
Map of Liberia

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.