

Abilene Christian University

Digital Commons @ ACU

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Spring 5-2018

Overcoming Barriers: Factors of Resiliency in Refugee Students Pursuing Higher Education

Tamika Braye
teb13a@acu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Braye, Tamika, "Overcoming Barriers: Factors of Resiliency in Refugee Students Pursuing Higher Education" (2018). Digital Commons @ ACU, *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 94.

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at Digital Commons @ ACU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ ACU.

ABSTRACT

This research looks at the significant barriers that exist in the United States that hinder African refugee youth from being able to pursue their educational goals.

According to the literature, language, social, and economic barriers during this pivotal point in their lives are often reasons that refugee students may have a difficult time going to college. Refugee families enter the United States in hopes of a prosperous life. The following research will discuss ways that current or former refugees have overcome these barriers through forms of intervention and acts of resiliency to reach their educational goals. The findings of this study are meant to help social service agencies design a curriculum that will support refugee students as they begin their educational journey in America.

Overcoming Barriers: Factors of Resiliency in Refugee Students Pursuing Higher
Education

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Graduate School

Abilene Christian University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Social Work

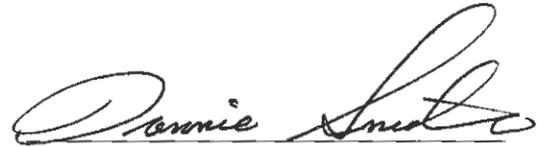
By

Tamika E. Braye

May 2018

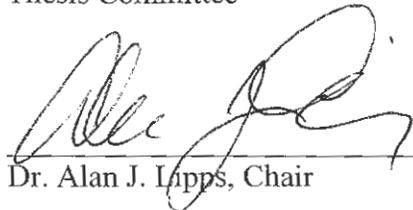
This thesis, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Graduate Council of Abilene Christian University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

Master of Science in Social Work

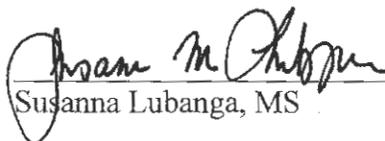

Dean of the Graduate School 5-22-18

5/18/2018
Date

Thesis Committee


Dr. Alan J. Lipps, Chair


Dr. David Merrell


Susanna Lubanga, MS

This thesis is dedicated to my family. They have shown continuous love and support for me throughout my educational journey. Thank you Momma, Gran, Uncle Joe and Aunt Lakendra. Lastly, thank you C.J., you have motivated me to go beyond the limits I thought I had. I cannot wait to see you do the same. I love you all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank each of my thesis committee members for their willingness to work with me. Thank you for sacrificing your time and contributing your unique talents to improve my research. You have been so patient with me. I am happy to express my gratitude for your help.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
II.	LITERATURE REVIEW	4
	Hybrid Assimilation Theory	4
	Language Barriers.....	5
	Social Barriers.....	6
	Economic Barriers	7
	Public Opposition	10
III.	METHODOLOGY	12
	Design	12
	Participants.....	13
	Data Analysis.....	14
IV.	RESULTS	15
V.	DISCUSSION.....	31
	Resiliency.....	31
	Cultural Identity.....	33
	Support Systems	34
	Exclusive Versus Inclusive School Programs.....	36
	Motivation.....	37
	Ambition	38

Coming from Destitution	39
Parental Influence	39
Implications.....	40
Limitations	41
Conclusion	42
REFERENCES	44
APPENDIX A: ACU IRB Approval Letter	48
APPENDIX B: Interview Questions.....	49

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Refugee students are likely to be subjects of academic deprivation in comparison to their American classmates. Some school districts may even place refugee students in grades that correspond to their age rather than their educational preparedness (Ferede, 2011). Their late start or lack of experience within the host country's education policies may lead to poor performance in school and could place the integrated students at higher risks of dropping out of school (Conway, 2014; Figueiredo, Martins, da Silva, & Simões, 2015). Receiving a high school education that provides opportunities to help refugee students become well prepared for college can make a large impact on their likelihood of going to college.

Refugee students who are not aware of the college readiness resources that are available within their school systems (e.g., advisors, financial aid and, registration assistance) are habitually disadvantaged (Suh, 2016). Conway (2014) discusses the tendency refugee students have become generally accustomed to when the topic of higher education surfaces. Conway reasons that many students who apply to educational institutions following high school graduation attend community colleges instead of going to four-year universities. Conway's reasoning for the student's educational decisions for both American-born and newly integrated adolescents refers to their prior educational and financial preparation for college. As Conway states, "Even though the foreign high schooled refugee students were better prepared academically . . . the foreign high

schooled immigrant students were still the least likely group to apply directly to a senior college” (2014, p. 57).

Based on personal experiences of working with a refugee social service organization, refugees do not move to America to live in continuous poverty. They transition into their host country’s culture to create a more advantageous life for their children and themselves. These goals are hard to form into reality without the assistance of community resources that may be used to intervene and establish a thriving life in America.

There are many contributing factors that can either encourage or hinder the likelihood of refugee students receiving a higher education in the United States. Language barriers, social discrepancies, and a lack of economic resources can make it difficult for refugee adolescents to pursue a college education. In response, it is important to be aware of forms of intervention that can be produced to combat the issues that may cause delays in a refugee family’s progress. (Conway, 2014; Nii-Amoo Dodoo, 1997; Sienkiewicz, Mauceri, Howell, & Bibeau, 2013).

Mentors and counselors can intervene and help design a road to success for refugee students. According to the literature, with the extended support from school faculty members, students and their parents can learn about the benefits of going to college (Suárez-Orozco, Onaga, & de Lardemelle, 2010). Educational advancement of refugee students may help the students become productive assets to communities wishing to improve the overall well-being of their refugee population. The literature used in this study created an overall theme claiming that American-born and integrated students alike

have a higher chance of successfully pursuing higher education when there are more accessible resources to assist them through the strenuous process.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to discuss the barriers that generally stand in the way of refugee students' ability to achieve higher education. There is an emphasized focus on stressors that have a direct impact on students who have been integrated into American school systems through immigration. The provided articles of research entail different approaches used throughout the United States that have benefitted refugee adolescents who wish to develop some type of career path after high school. The conceptual framework of this literature review is organized thematically to address important synthesized subtopics based on the information collected about internalized and externalized stressors and forms of intervention to promote educational advancement among refugee youth. Based on the findings in the literature, the research question asks: After examining significant factors that are likely to hinder refugee students' educational advancement in the United States, what forms of preparation will help refugees who desire to go to college?

Hybrid Assimilation Theory

When people make the transition into a new culture, they can usually expect a process of assimilation. Hybrid Assimilation Theory generally implies that newcomers learn to adapt to the social norms of the host culture, becoming more culturally similar to their surroundings instead of the culture they originally bonded with (Habecker, 2017). Refugee youth who have transitioned into America may find commonality with the

hybrid assimilation theory as they blend into both their household's culture and the host country's culture. Hybrid assimilation explains the multifaceted identity refugee children develop during their personal transition into how they fit into the host culture.

Age seems to play a role in the flexibility that comes with hybrid assimilation. Habecker (2017) explains this reasoning by discussing the roles school-aged refugees learn to play after resettlement. When refugees are with family members, the home culture is likely to be practiced. The primary language spoken in the home is probably not English, and social roles are well known. At school, the students learn to adjust to the predominant culture of their classmates. While on campus, English is the predominant language being used. Other cultural differences are likely to create obstacles for refugee students as they try to make the proper adjustments. Learning to adjust to a new culture may act as a barrier for resettled refugees who are transitioning into American schools. The adjustment includes embracing a new language, modifying their social norms according to those upheld in their host country, and persevering through economic issues among other important topics.

Language Barriers

Learning the English language is often one of the most challenging stressors for refugees arriving in the United States. Being skilled in fluent English is usually a standard requirement for employment, especially in competitive career fields, as well as for a student's educational advancement (Conway, 2014; Sienkiewicz, et al., 2013). A language barrier can set back a student's academic success. For some, being an English as a Second Language student carries a shameful label. Even though it is not necessarily accurate to imply that academic capabilities of refugee students are in correlation with

their mastery of the English language, students have expressed their reasoning for feeling embarrassed. One reason some students are uncomfortable with this label is that ESL courses are often referred to as remedial courses (Kanno & Varghese, 2010).

In comparison to English speaking school-aged students, being an ESL student has the potential to diminish their admission to higher education. English literacy standards for postsecondary education can potentially produce a concerning hurdle for a student with newly learned English skills (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Kanno and Varghese (2010) continue by mentioning the difficulty ESL students often have with reading and comprehending complicated terminology at the college level. Linguistic limitations often make the application and acceptance process more complicated. The students' ESL status can add hardship to their college experience from the very start (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Language barriers can affect the range of colleges and universities to which a student might have a realistic chance of admittance. Time needed to develop English proficiency varies based on the amount of time students have spent in America. (Lamb, Brown, & Goldschmidt, 2014). For some families, the timing of the resettlement process effects the initial integration of their child's educational experience. Students may be required to take ESL courses at a junior college if their skills are not confidently instilled before graduating from high school (Conway, 2014).

Social Barriers

Refugees face many barriers that may slow their process of cultural adaptation. Premade judgments create a barrier for refugees as they try to become integrated into the American culture. In addition to their migration being involuntary, these distorted perceptions can make the refugee resettlement process an even more stressful (Craig,

2012; Murray & Marx, 2013). Historically, African American people have faced discrimination in America, making them economically disadvantaged in the United States. American, English speaking, culturally competent African American people experience dissonance being marginalized in America. Model Minority Theory explains why refugees have become intertwined with the social stigma that African Americans are suffering from. According to the theory, refugees experience similar marginalization (Nii-Amoo Doodoo, 1997). According to the Census Bureau's March Current Population Survey, an estimated 22% of African American citizens are living in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2017). Even though the percentage of African Americans living in poverty has dropped from 24.1% in 2015 to 22% in 2016, the average household income of African Americans is less than \$40,000 indicating that this race has the lowest annual income among other numerically significant racial categories. The average household income for the Caucasian was over \$65,000; Hispanic, over \$47,000; and Asian, over \$81,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2017). According to Model Minority Theory, systemic racism explains why Americans assume that refugees will play the same economic role in society as African Americans. The two groups have extremely different life experiences, cultural differences, and reasons for abiding in the United States. Yet, the two can be categorized as one group of people (Nii-Amoo Doodoo, 1997).

Economic Barriers

Although there are organizations that make a great effort to help support refugee families financially and to lead them towards a path of economic independence not everyone who resettles in America receives such support. For example, a negative stereotype some may believe about this population is that they are in the host country to

take advantage of its welfare resources. This idea makes refugees seem like an economic burden when in contrast, African refugees are often very eager to become gainfully employed once they have been successfully resettled. The common reason that they are unemployed or need financial assistance should not be blamed on their lack of work experience. In their country of origin, it is common for the adults to have earned a degree with credentials that are nontransferable to the United States (International Rescue Committee staff, personal communication, 2018). Furthermore, Sienkiewicz et al. (2013) found that some refugee families have a preconceived idea that moving to the United States would immediately ensure financial stability. There is a stereotypical notion that all American people are financially well off and poverty is nonexistent. Being resettled in the United States and learning that people are suffering due to their economic status even in America may be disheartening for those who are fleeing one level of strain and entering another one. During an interview conducted by Sienkiewicz, et al. (2013), one participant expressed frustration by saying, “We were taken out of death, and we have stayed in suffering,” (p. 21). This indicates that resettlement has removed them from their vulnerability to physical harm in their country of origin but the economic struggles many families face in the United States is also likely to endanger the wellbeing of their quality of life as refugees.

Numerous sources state that experiencing a loss of resources during a resettlement transition contributes to the likelihood of living in poverty once refugee families begin living in America (Betancourt et al., 2015). Being resettled in America could lead to a loss of credentials and economic status. People who may have had prestigious positions and experience in higher education are likely to gain a lower paying job that may not

reflect their former occupation. This could be a reason that many refugee families struggle financially (Betancourt et al., 2015). Being in competition with American citizens often makes it challenging for refugees to become financially secure after resettlement. As discussed in the segment about racial barriers that may slow the economic process of this population, newly arrived refugees are more likely to obtain lower paying jobs that contribute to the cycle of poverty than are natives and non-natives within a community. One contribution to this significant wage gap is not necessarily blamed on a lack of education but the inability to transfer educational credentials that were valuable outside of America (Ferede, 2011). Upon arrival in the United States, a master's degree in Education can lose credibility because it may not meet the qualifications of many institutions in the United States.

Economic barriers may also be a reason refugee youth are unable to reach their educational goals directly after graduating high school. Kanno & Varghese (2010) conducted a study asking refugee students to identify the largest barriers that could keep them from going to a four-year university. Economic barriers can be a discouraging factor for students who aspire of gaining higher education (Ferede, 2011).

The rising rates of tuition can make a goal seem beyond these students' reach. The 2017-2018 average tuition rate for a full-time student attending a public two-year university costs \$3,570; public four-year universities cost between \$9,970 and \$25,620 depending on whether students are applying in or outside of their residential state; and private non-profit four-year universities cost \$34,740 on average. These prices are set without the inclusion of room and board charges (The College Board, 2018). Khanh and Rush (2016) expounded on the tie between parents' educational history and the future of

their children's experience with postsecondary education. Economic barriers and first-generation college students can be products of one another's cycles. People who come from low-income families may have a difficult time paying for an education. Likewise, those who cannot pay for an education often have a low-income status later in life. Just as there are refugees who come to the United States with an education and continue to struggle financially, those who could not go to school before resettlement are also economically oppressed. Parents who do not have a college education are less likely to be involved in their children's educational journey. The educational background of the parents plays a key role in the predictability of their children's relationship with the higher education system. The parents' educational history can make a more dramatic contribution to the students' potential to go to college than the number of barriers gathered from traumatic past experiences and the family's current access to financial resources (Khanh & Rush, 2016).

Public Opposition

The previous sections identified common barriers that discourage refugee students from pursuing higher education. Some research addresses the viewpoint of those who do not support the idea that refugee students should receive special treatment once they are in American schools (Gray & Vernez, 1996). Apart from ESL courses, Gray and Vernez (1996) supported having refugee students integrate their needs with the rest of the students who may need similar resources. Some have expressed the idea that many American students are also experiencing the same type of barriers that refugee students endure and believe that it is unfair to have programs that are specifically tailored to favor refugee students. (Gray & Vernez, 1996)

There are American students who have fewer resources than some refugee students. For example, refugee students may have access to after school programs that assist them with their homework, teach them about how to prepare for higher education, and possibly include more courses and skills that are created to specifically benefit this population. Refugee students may not be as willing to join preexisting programs that will help them overcome the same barriers (Gray & Vernez, 1996). There are programs that cater to students in need regardless of their cultural backgrounds but instead, refugee students may be looking for a more exclusive program that is meant to serve their population (Gray & Vernez, 1996). Creating more programs requires more personnel, implying the need for more funding while current programs are already in place to address many similar needs within a community (Gray & Vernez, 1996). The evolving policies regarding refugees make the process of assistance labor-intensive for those who are catering to the social services for this population. Upon acceptance into a source of higher education, the obstacles that come with the financial aid process often include an extensive amount of service output for organizations. Legal documentation and verification elongate the average financial aid application process.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Design

The purpose of the study was to gather information from current or former refugees who chose to pursue their educational goals despite the barriers they had to overcome. Learning from the experiences of adults who have been through a similar journey the refugee youth are facing right now may help social service agencies that assist refugees to develop a youth-focused intervention including the most efficient way to empower these students to reach their goals. Therefore, six refugees with experience in achieving higher education were interviewed. This study was reviewed and approved of by the Abilene Christian University Institutional Review Board (see appendix A).

This research was a qualitative study conducted as a semi-structured interview process to discover descriptive patterns and themes. Participants were initially screened to determine their eligibility for participating in the study. This screening involved meeting these requirements: be a former or current refugee of African descent and have experience in higher education or some sort of professional certification. For the use of this study, the researcher prepared interview questions asking about each participant's educational journey. The sessions were recorded and stored as confidential data. The researcher created a list of 17 interview questions to collect the data. The interviews were given to six adults who came to America as refugees. Those who participated in this

semi-structured interview were actively pursuing higher education as a college student at the graduate or undergraduate level.

Participants

The researcher interviewed six people who were actively pursuing their educational goals. All the participants were upper-class students at a four-year university. The sample group was split evenly between men and women who chose to be interviewed. Four of the participants were pursuing their undergraduate degree and two were continuing their journey with a master's degree. The participants were all working towards different degrees in fields including: speech pathology, ministry, nutrition, biomedical engineering, social work, and criminal justice. The research method included non-random sampling. The participants were contacted through email. A snowball sample from participants who encouraged others to express their interest in being a part of this study made an impact on the number of people who were interviewed. The purpose of the interview was to gain an understanding of the barriers that the participants have endured and to learn about the resources they used to obtain the educational credentials they are working towards. The target group included people who reside in the proximity of Abilene, Texas, and moved to the United States as refugees from the continent of Africa. The participants were also attending a local college or university at the time the interview took place. Certain criteria had to be met for an individual to be a participant in this study. In return, exclusive criteria were also listed as the following: refugees who are not from Africa, those currently living outside of Abilene, Texas; or those who need an interpreter to communicate during the interview session. The researcher asked individuals selected for participation to sit for one interview over the

course of the 2018 Spring Semester. Each interview took less than 20 minutes to complete. All visits were hosted in a quiet yet non-secluded area that was comfortable and appropriate for both the interviewer and the participants.

Data Analysis

The data has shown common themes that were created by the participant's responses to the interview questions. All interviews were recorded with a digital recording device. The data analysis began with transcribing records of interviews into a Word document. The transcripts were read several times, and the recurring themes, phrases, and ideas categorized and analyzed in order of topic frequency. The themes that were discovered in the interview sessions allowed the researcher to decipher what resources equip refugee youth to take effective steps that will lead to obtaining higher education.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The following results are organized by question. Rather than quoting verbatim each participants response, some interpretation is incorporated into the results. This interpretation sought to integrate responses into a unified whole. However, in some cases verbatim quotations are presented to accurately present the response.

In describing how age factored in to adjustment to the US educational system, participants gave a variety of responses. One participant spoke of a language barrier that made adjustment difficult. Difficulties described included fitting into the education system and relating to peers. Others stated that being young during relocation to America facilitated easier adaptation to the English language. One participant attributed a lack of a foreign accent to her very young age (i.e., pre-verbal) at relocation. Another participant explained that being older would have meant having expectations of how things were supposed to be in a new culture. One participant did not believe age at relocation was a very significant factor in the transition; however, this participant stated that age at relocation impacted the way she viewed her classmates. Ages of participants at the time of relocation were: 1, 3, 8, 8, 13, and 36. Five of the participants began their United States education in middle school or younger. In response to the question about how much their aged factored into their adjustment to a new country. Participant one said that being a non-English speaking teenager in America was difficult. He said that he struggled to fit into the education system and relate to his peers. Participant two said that

being young in America helped him adapt to the English language. Participant three said moving during her childhood played a big role in her adjustment to the United States and that her young age made the transition easier. She explained that if she had been older she may have had more expectations of how things were supposed to be in a new culture. Participant four said that moving to America in elementary school played a big role in her adjustment as well. She learned the English language quickly and says that due to her young age, she does not have much of an accent. Participant five said that his transition into a new culture was also easier due to his age and he was able to grow up with American kids. Participant six said it did not play a big role but it impacted the way she viewed her classmates.

Question number three asked about being fluent in English when the participants moved to the United States. None of the participants were originally fluent in English. Participant four knew how to say yes and no at most. Participant one said,

I barely spoke English so that was a struggle, but we got there. When I first moved here I spoke about five to seven different languages. The reason is I grew up in an area where there were a lot of immigrants, so people spoke different dialects and to relate to them you had to learn their dialect and stuff like that, so I ended up learning seven different languages and don't even know what my primary language is.

Participant six was not fluent in English but knew the basics of the language. She said that she could understand the content but could miss some small points.

Question number four asked about the participants' educational history prior to moving to America. Among the participants, the highest level of primary education

experienced before resettlement had been the fourth grade completed by participant four; she also had to repeat that same grade after coming to the United States. Other participants had been to elementary school. Participant two said, “I dropped out of second grade. I used to run back home every time they took me to school, so they just gave up one day. I promised them if we come to America then I’ll go to school.” Participant one’s educational journey was accelerated after moving to the United States. He skipped first, second and third grade. American school policies placed him in middle school due to his age and comprehensive capabilities. Participant six already had a bachelor’s degree in social science as an English Language and Literature major from her home country, which was Burundi. Participants number three and five were too young to begin formal education before their families moved to America.

Question number five asked about educational goals once the participants moved to America. Participants one placed emphasis on the importance of higher education. He said that his main goal was to go to college and pursue the career he had dreamed of having. Participants four and five wanted to master the English language well enough that they would no longer need ESL courses as a part of their educational curriculum. Participants two and six said that they did not start out with any educational goals. Participant two said he was forced to go to school. Participant six had no intention of going back to school but saw that she was missing many opportunities. She said, “To move and become fully integrated she had to go back to school.”

Question number six asked about sources of motivation. Participant one said that his motivation comes from his previous living conditions. He came from a remote area where he spent the first half of his life without clean water, electricity, or Internet. He

said that when he experienced how backward that was, he wanted to pursue higher education to be able to fend for himself, his family, and those who are still living in those conditions. Participant two said, “I didn’t care much in middle school or high school, but I had passion for youth and ministry; and thought, ‘This is the only thing I’d go to college for. Even while others told me to go do business, I didn’t want to.’” Participant four was also motivated by her parents. Both of her parents earned degrees while living in Africa. Her father was a nurse practitioner and her mother was a social worker. Their passion for higher education motivated the participant to continue her journey beyond a bachelor’s degree. Participant five was also inspired by his family as well as his culture. He said, “In the African culture, you either pursue engineering, law, medicine, accounting or other higher paying jobs.” He was also motivated to make new networks within educational communities. Participant six was motivated to go back to college in America to fulfill her need for a better opportunity. She said that there is a correlation between opportunities and status of an obtained degree. Participant three was motivated by her mother’s leadership:

A big reason to come here was higher education. As the oldest, school was a big deal and it was important for me to do well in school. For my parents and myself. My mom was in her late 20s and started a degree in Congo. She decided to do a degree here in America. She exposed me to that experience.

Question number seven asked if the participants were first-generation college students. Participant one said that neither his parents or grandparents have achieved such educational goals. He said, “It was like putting my feet in an ocean and I don’t even know how deep it is. The trials and errors were kind of rough, but it worked out.”

Participant two's father went back to college in the United States because his degree got declined. His older siblings have also graduated. Participant three entitled herself as a first-generation traditional student. Participant four was not a first-generation college student either. Her dad was a nurse practitioner in Africa and her mom was a social worker in Africa. Participant five was a first-generation college student. His younger brother had recently enrolled in college after graduating from high school early.

Participant six said that her parents did not go to college, but her father had a professional level occupation.

Question number eight asked what role their parents played in their perusal towards higher education. Participant one said that his parents were not able to help much on a financial level but said that they were a great source of encouragement. His parents told him, "If you want a better life the best way out is education. They showed us what they did and did not have and that motivated me to pursue higher education." Participant five's parents were able to provide tutors to help him and his brother understand the concept of his classes and ensure that they passed their important tests. Participant six said her parents played a big role from the beginning by enrolling her in elementary school. She said that they were supportive and took responsibility for her primary education. Higher education depended on her though, not her parents. Participant two said that his dad was not going to let him stay home. There was a lot of encouragement. He saw his siblings and dad pursue higher education. Participant three's mother went back to school here in America. She said, "I was on campus with my mom at the age of 10, working hard and studying. My dad didn't go to college, but he worked hard so my

mom would go to college. My parents taught me that it is important to go to college no matter what.”

Question number nine asked about other support groups the participants may have had on their educational journey. Participant one said that he did not experience many other support groups outside of what ESL classes were able to provide. He said that ESL slowed the pace down so that students could understand. He said that ESL class made school subjects more relatable and made integration possible. Participant four also found support in her ESL teacher. She said, “She was very patient, and nice. I always think about her when I reflect on my journey here in the US and how it has shaped me.” Participant two said that his biggest resource is passion. He said once the students realize that it is less about the classes and more about the fellowship, experiences, and the people meet, they will find motivation to keep going. Participant three said that her mother was her only support. Her family was excited, but she was the one who guided her. High school counselors contributed, too, but her mother was her main source of support. Participant six said that her first support group is her family, otherwise she would not have been able to make it. Her husband is always there to support her by taking care of their children’s needs while the participant is completing school assignments.

Question number ten asked the participants to discuss the largest barriers that tried to keep them from getting an education. Participant one had to overcome obstacles involving his language barrier but said that finances were his largest problem area. He said that middle and high school were easy, but college was another issue. Having parents that did not go to college and did not know how much it would cost made unforeseen expectations and uncertainty much higher. Discouragement came with feelings of

uncertainty within his family, but they knew that it would be beneficial to search for scholarships and needed to learn how to apply for college. The participant expressed his feelings by saying, “As a first-generation student, these were things that had never been done before it was just a process filled with anxiety and that was a challenge.” Finances were also an initial barrier for participant two. He said that God has been obvious in his life so after continuous praying, their family had the resources and confidence they needed to apply for the participant’s college of choice. Participant two said that money was the first stumbling block he faced while pursuing higher education. He discussed other barriers that emerged after beginning his college education, “I found out I had educational disabilities, ADHD, below average scores and short-term memory issues but I am a senior now. I do not know how I did it.” Participant three said that she had to figure out a lot of things on her own. After getting into college, she said she still had to figure out what credit hours meant because she did not have someone to explain what it all meant. She did not know how expensive school was until her family got the first bill. She said, “My parents were acting out of faith and we just did it. The money did come, we just didn’t understand what everything meant.” Participant six said that the requirements it took for the school she applied to in America needed an extensive amount of time to compare her bachelor’s degree and approve her credits. The process was expensive and lengthy which delayed her initial entry into the university. Participant four did not have many barriers that slowed her progression towards college. She said that she has surrounded herself with educated people who wanted her to become someone. She said that if anything, she was her own barrier. Participant five was easily distracted at

home and just wanted to be outside but his parents kept him focused, obedient, and doing his homework.

Question number 11 asked how the participants overcame each barrier.

Participant one said that he had to work harder than most of his peers. He had to prove that he could do what most native students could do. He had to take AP (advanced placement) classes, attend dual credit classes, stay after school, and engage in extra activities. He forced himself to be involved in various leadership roles, internships, and similar activities. It exposed him to different networks. Participant two said that he was scared but he just knew things were going to work out. He said that many people do not take advantage of help and talking to professors. Once they see how determined students are, even if they are doing badly, the professors are willing to help. Participant three had a mentor who was a doctor. A large part of her passion came from her time with her mentor. Participant six was determined. She said it was challenging but her determination was already instilled. She saved her money for the degree completion process until she was able to have it completed.

Question number 12 asked about the resources participants used while pursuing higher education. Participant one used the resources provided by his school counselor. He was able to take advantage of a free waiver to take his Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). His counselor helped make the application process easier but, could not help much with the next steps of the admission costs of his institution of choice. He and his family depended on Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and would figure out how to pay the remaining balance, but the counselor was a big help. Participant two said he had a college advisor at the Boys and Girls Club who was a big advocate for him

going to college. The advisor let him be a student assistant. So, all he did was fill out applications for scholarships his entire senior year. Participant three said her counselor also gave her the free waiver for the SAT. To get to college, she explained that her counselor helped with government documents. She said, "While I am on my college campus, I ask a lot of questions. Some of my professors have been responsive and helped me a lot." Participant four said that her teachers were helpful. They helped her find a career she could pursue. Participant five utilized private tutors and practice tests so that he was able to focus on his weaknesses and improve before it was time to take his SAT or other major exams for college. Participant six said that academically, her professors were a good source of support. She was able to talk to them about her barriers. She said that language and full integration into the American culture were still barriers for her. She constantly kept in touch with those professors and faculty members to tell them where she is struggling. She also reaches out to nontraditional alumni to ask about what they have gone through and overcome.

Question number 13 asked about the participants cultural identity. Participant one stated, "I'm definitely African American. I was born and raised in Africa so that's where I am from." Participants three and five were raised by African parents and born in Africa but also raised and influenced by America. They both identify as African. Participant four agreed with participant two by saying that she has lived in the United States much longer than she lived in Africa. She said, "I cannot speak the language of my country of origin, but I understand it. I've been here almost 13 years. I have not forgotten where I have come from." Participant six expressed her confusion on the topic of ethnicity in America. She said that she was purely African. She was confused because most of the time they

ask what her ethnicity is on paper: African American or Black. She said that the question did not make sense to her because she is not American yet. She claims to be black African and expressed having great pride in her cultural background. Participant two identified himself as a third culture kid from Africa. He said it was a difficult question to answer because he was not born in America; he is from Africa, but he has lived here longer than he has lived anywhere else:

When I go home I speak Swahili. Born in Congo raised in Kenya, but my family is from Rwanda. It just depends who is asking because at the end of the day I am me. I do value my African culture.

Question number 14 asked if the participants felt like African Americans and African people have been placed in the same social category in the United States. Participant one answered, “yes”. He said that there is a misunderstanding, “When you come from Africa and then you come here, and they call me African American or black I was like what is this thing? African American? I am African, I am from a particular country.” He said that the difference was a big misunderstanding and it took him a while to come to this realization. He elaborated on these differences between these two groups by saying that African Americans are accustomed to American traditions and he is from Africa and is accustomed to African traditions. When he came to America, he said he did not know how to interact with African Americans. He said:

When people approached me, they thought I was African American because of my skin. I thought that was tough to be able to understand we live in a culture that identifies people by the way you look instead of where you are from.

Participant two said that he was unsure. As an African, people ask him questions but, being an African American is a whole different story. Participant three reasoned African Americans did not have to go through ESL or the social barriers of being foreign. She also said that African and African American people are both minorities and being black in the education system comes with its own social barrier. Participant three felt like she had to go above and beyond to be the representative for her culture on her college campus to fight for her community. She also came to the realization behind certain barriers:

That's a barrier that I thought existed because I was a foreigner, but it also exists because I am black. I think we are placed in the same social circle in the educational world. We are viewed by others as the same and becoming highly educated people. fluent, able. In the uneducated world we are different. We are viewed as people who cannot speak English.

Participant four said, "no". Based on her experiences, she watched shows about pop culture. She watched African Americans on TV and wanted to be like them because they were cool, famous, and rich. Some places in Africa mimic that. She concluded, "Here we are the same because we are black. They don't really separate us as black from Africa and black from America." Participant six said that the two populations have their own social categories. She said that Africans tend to say that they are second to the white social class. She said that this system is ingrained into their minds and history. Participant five says, "Yes because of the color of our skin. If you dig deeper, Africans view ourselves different from African Americans in social settings." The participant placed an emphasis on the differences between the way the two populations view education, based on his experiences. He said:

I had the resources I needed. My parents said when you go to school, make sure you talk to your teacher and use the resources. We stayed after school for tutoring and I never saw African American students in there with me. Africans uphold education at a high level. You have to pursue it. Our parents tell us about how they have sacrificed for us and how they were not fortunate enough to have these resources. We must take responsibility for this higher education. That one reason why we are in the US.

Question number 15 asked, when creating school programs to help children reach their educational goals, is it more beneficial to have specific programs for refugee students or should these programs be integrated with American students? Participant one said that exclusive programs for refugees allow them to catch up and feel comfortable in their learning experience, but he does believe that there should be programs that are also integrated. Inclusive programs allow them to be immersed in that culture. He continued by saying that through integration, refugee students learn how to do things in the American culture in comparison to how they do things in the African culture. Integration allows them to learn from each other's experiences. Participant two said that both programs are necessary for the sake of moving forward together. When he first came here he was the only African in the whole school, but he learned that if the students were friends, they can make progress together. If refugee students are in a secluded program, they need to know that they are in America and they do need to adapt. There could be events that help them do that but at the same time keep the foundation of them being together. Participant three agreed that it is important to have programs for refugee students. She went to a school where none of the students looked like her. The lack of

comfort caused her to be afraid to share her ideas. She loved reading and learning but felt like no one around her was like her. She chose not to speak up in class because she felt uncomfortable. She said, “Before you walk out the door you have to make sure home is home.” She elaborated by saying that students need to feel comfortable being at school before the school system pushes them into everything else. ESL was dreadful, but it gave students space to work on what they struggled with. She said that leaving ESL class was the happiest day of her life, but having that space was needed. She wanted to get better and be comfortable. Participant six said that the existing programs that are designed for refugee students do not have any structural problems, but the issues begin with the way they are administered\There are some needs that should be fulfilled before these programs can be effective for both black and white kids. The program is good, but reform needs to be done when it comes to how people access basic resources.

Question number 16 asked about the tools social service organizations that engage with refugee students need to give middle and high school students so that they can pursue their educational goals. Participant one said that he used to think it was just about having resources but looking back, at his journey he feels like it is not all about the programs. It is about simple encouragement and being able to say: “Hey, I understand where you’re coming from and everything is going to be fine. You can do it just like everybody else.” Looking back on his academic journey, the participant said that if he had someone to encourage him through the process that would have been good. As a refugee, it is common to receive negativity from peers. Having a language barrier makes them say, “you cannot go to college, you do not speak English well enough.” He talked about the way that his peers looked down on him and those words could be spirit

crushing to the point that students may think they do not want to go to school anymore. He said that having someone who will speak encouragement and say “everyone started from somewhere...” would go a long way. Participant two answered by saying that inspiration and encouragement were necessary. His advice was, “Make them believe that they can do whatever they think is impossible.” There was doubt that he could reach his goal and he wanted to prove those people wrong. His other African friends told him that he could not go to a university and would just go to a community college. He said, “As soon as the students find their passion that connects with college, it will just click.”

Participant three said that exposure to different careers and people were things that need to be instilled in the students. Before being exposed to other career choices, she thought that she could either be a doctor or a lawyer. She also said that it is important to create a fun and safe environment where the students can ask questions. Participant four said that the students need encouragement to pursue their dreams. She said that these students are in the United States now and despite the controversy, they can pursue what they want no matter where they come from. She said, “That has been a reality for me and I hope these organizations can make it a reality for them.”

Participant five said that the students need motivation and encouragement. He advised, “Let them see people who have been in the same situation and understand what you’re going through. They can do it by themselves but if they have someone who has gone through that, they will go a lot further.”

Participant six answered, “Give them resources, connect them to resources. What they need is encouragement. This youth has been left to themselves.” From what she has seen, this is a category of students who need guidance. She thinks the best thing for organizations to do is advocate for the students. She said that refugee focused social

service agencies have the necessary tools and resources. They can reach out to these kids and really encourage them to pursue higher education. She said that the refugee students need leadership. She suggested that organizations need to start small with the basics of their programs by finding an area of interest. She emphasized the importance of placing students in an academic environment and away from the playground. She said that the students need motivation.

Question number 17 asked what advice the participants would give to high school-aged refugee students wanting to pursue higher education. Participant one said, “If you can dream it, you can see it, you can achieve it. You just have to work hard. You can’t be lazy and expect to get it. It doesn’t work like that you have to work for it.”

Participant two said “Look at me. The only advice I would give them is personal experience.” He elaborated by saying that he came here not knowing English, then he learned English. He did not like school, but he is currently a senior in college. He said that his family came from nothing and that the kids today have more than he had.

Participant two spoke about experiencing learning disabilities throughout his educational journey and said that the refugee students who want to go to college now have no excuse in not being able to make that happen. His advice to the leaders of the organizations was to, “Get your hands dirty and understand where they come from. Unless you understand them and where they come from you won’t be able to get them to do anything.”

Participant three said:

Someone is waiting for you to succeed. It is important to accept your culture because someone like you is waiting for you to succeed and speak for those who

cannot speak for themselves. They can become a doctor for those who need to see your face and feel comfortable. Work as hard as you can.

Participant four advised the students not to let anyone stop them. She said that the journey gets discouraging but encouraged students not to listen to those opposing voices. She said that there are people who will be supportive and there are those who will be discouraging. She advises students to focus on themselves. Participant five said the students should go out and look for resources. He elaborated on his personal experience by saying:

I regret not going to my high school counselor and finding out what was available. I didn't know about scholarship opportunities until after I graduated.

None of the black students had those types of connections to know that they could take college-level classes while they were in high school and get college credits now. You have to be self-motivated.

Participant six said their success is in their hands. As an advisor, she said that the high school students should be planning for the future. She said that she has seen others who have been through the refugee process and succeeded. Her continued advice was for the students to seek role models. She ended her interview saying, "This country is full of opportunities, but it is up to you to seize those opportunities."

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Resiliency

The refugee population has a list of vulnerabilities. The barriers listed in the literature can be detrimental to the academic advancement of refugee students, yet the resilient characteristics within this population can be seen through such circumstances. Strong motivation combined with various support systems can help refugee students reach their educational goals. While the refugee community is an at-risk population, they are also “world's most vulnerable and resilient populations” (Ferede, 2011, p. 85). Refugee students move to the United States with their parents and often have great motivation to learn English and go to college. As discussed in the literature review, language is a prominent barrier for the participants in this study. Youth are usually the most developed English speakers in their household. They use public resources around them such as music, television, and their peers to absorb the complexities of the language on their own time. Research has implied that the refugee students take their educational journey into their own hands, starting with learning the American language to become more academically advanced (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). Paying for college was also a large barrier that was brought up in the interview sessions. Being a first-generation college student caused uncertainty when students were beginning their journey towards higher education. The participants in this study took initiative to gain as much information about the admission process as possible. A lack of assistance made it difficult

for some participants to understand important concepts as they adjusted to their new college environment. Self-doubt was also seen as a barrier in some participants experience.

This student population is also likely to be more motivated to pursue higher education than some of their American classmates. Upon arrival, many refugee students have dreams of obtaining high paying positions in America to help their family defeat the cycle of poverty. These students are driven to create a better life for their parents in return for parents' efforts to provide a better life for their children. In comparison to American students who aspire to go to college, a survey was conducted to show the positive outlook on continuing an education and the positive views toward school. The refugee students' results were higher than the native-born students when addressing their work ethic and plans to go to college after completing high school (Gray & Vernez, 1996). Hudley (2016) addressed optimistic outlooks among non-natives seeking educational advancements and how school opens doors that were once closed. Refugees are aware that education breaks down barriers that try to slow the process of their economic well-being in the United States.

Many participants talked about taking the initiative to reach out to their professors and ask for the help that had not yet been provided. Instead of waiting for someone to rescue them from their confusion, resources were found. After showing professors, counselors, and other staff that these students cared about their education, paths were created. Barriers that were once discouraging were transformed into problems that had a solution. Self-advocacy has helped these participants achieve their goals. Mentors and parents who had an educational background were also significant resources for these

students. School counselors were able to provide waivers for SAT testing and or application fees, as well as aid with government documentation that the admission boards needed. One participant talked about how she surrounded herself with educated, positive people who only wanted to see her succeed. Mentorship and exposure to possibilities magnified these participants capabilities. The use of resources outside of school also helped instill effective learning techniques by utilization of tutoring services. Having college advisor as a mentor created an opportunity for one participant to become well skilled in his ability to complete scholarship forms and apply to colleges.

Cultural Identity

It was interesting that when the participants were asked about their own cultural identity, they had extensive and multiple answers to the question. All the participants incorporated their country of origin in their cultural identity. Some said that where they have lived, where they were born, ability to speak or understand certain languages, and where their family is from made up their cultural identity. Often, one specific location was not the answer that was given. All participants carried their African heritage with pride and certainty of the importance of knowing where they are from. America has influenced some of the participant's identities as they have had time to grow up in the United States and become more accustomed to the culture. Some said that they are African people living in America, but it was clear that they are not placing themselves under the same assumed label of being African American.

Identity is an important topic in American culture. Differences in America are often labeled by skin color instead of discussing the location people are from or the various cultures people are submerged in. Many factors create a person's identity that go

far beyond their complexion. One person discussed the misunderstanding American people have when they look at him. Being called an African American after living in a specific country in Africa for more than a decade caused confusion between what people claim to be distinct identifiers in the United States. Other participants expounded on some of the differences between African Americans and Africans who are currently living in America. The results imply that one difference between African American and African people is that African Americans are accustomed to the American culture, language, structures and other common forms of social norms of the United States. Both groups of people wanted to see their children become successful, but the physical transition of moving from a country that had few opportunities to a country that will allow students to pursue their education creates a different point of view.

Support Systems

Counselors who are involved in the educational progress of refugee students can intervene as mentors for those who have not been given the chance to learn about potential paths to pursue after graduating from high school. Parents and counselors both can make an impression on students in hopes that they will pursue positive paths after high school. Goal promotion may be an effective topic to keep as a main subject during parent meetings. Counselors who maintain a direct line of communication with parents can collaborate and gain more knowledge about their students' needs and further clarification (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010). To encourage the educational advancement of the student, it is important that a healthy relationship between the school, students, and parents is set in place (Szu-Yin, 2009; Watkinson, & Hersi, 2014).

American and refugee students can often contribute a portion of their academic achievement to the support of school faculty members. Suárez-Orozco, et al. (2010) says, “As the landscape of our schools continues to change, the instrumental role of school counselors in facilitating healthy and successful transitions for the immigrant population has become ever more pronounced.” Research supports the idea that the school setting is likely to be where refugee children are fully exposed to a new culture for the first time and stresses the importance of evidence-based interventions. Bal and Perzigian, (2013, p. 5) says, “Cultural and linguistic diversity that immigrant youth bring to the United States are vital resources, which could provide opportunities for enriching academic and social contexts of American schools for all students.” Initial integration into a new culture and adjusting to American norms may not be the most difficult part of a refugee students' transition. After students have become accustomed to the policies and curriculum of American education, the next important step is to meet the educational needs of the students (Szu-Yin, 2011).

Counselors, alongside other faculty members who are educated about their student population can then use a comprehensive approach to incorporate proper learning styles that will help the students in the most effective way (Szu-Yin, 2009; Watkinson, & Hersi, 2014). In addition to understanding refugee students' preferred learning styles, it was also imperative that the counselors or mentors identified their needs. Becoming well educated about the students' distinctive cultural differences may help faculty members find effective ways to ensure a smooth transition into the school system and student body. It is also important that the mentors on campus give the refugee students their attention because they are likely to be unprepared for the educational challenges to come.

The success of the integrated students places an abundance of pressure on this population due to the high stakes of their future as well as their family's future success in their host country (Sanders & Killian, 2017; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010). The counselors can incorporate a school-family partnership to create a strong support system for each student. It is important that the counselors define the nature of their relationships with their families to ensure that the parents know that the faculty members hope to help the students as a complementary team effort. Educators can conduct parent-focused seminars or special programs about college readiness, offer ESL courses, and tell their students about higher education and future career choices. Parenting programs would also attest to the school's desire to value the input of refugee parents toward the success of their children (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010; Watkinson, & Hersi, 2014).

Exclusive Versus Inclusive School Programs

This study uncovered a healthy balance between exclusive and inclusive youth programs that serve refugee students. According to the data, the benefit of exclusivity is that it creates a comfortable environment. Being surrounded by students who are transitioning into a new culture encourages fellowship among refugee students in a school setting. Though it is likely that these students are already in the same social groups in the schools, there may not be many times when they can be secluded and learn at a comfortable pace that allows them to process large concepts. With exclusive programs, students are free to ask questions with less anxiety of being incompetent in the American culture. During that time, instructors can inform students about the factors of American culture and discuss how to adjust together. Exclusivity provides the space that is needed to promote social support within the refugee community.

On the other hand, there are also strengths found in integrated youth programs. Integration gives refugee students an opportunity to become connected to the American culture. Students have the chance to build relationships that they may not have been able to develop in a classroom setting. Integrated programs promote the idea of growing together, accepting differences and learning about each other's cultures on a relative level. Inclusivity gives the refugee students a chance to become integrated in a way that the exclusive program cannot provide. Learning the English language by spending more time with English speaking students is a benefit of an integrated program. In exclusive programs, it may be easier for refugee students to revert to their languages of origin in conversation. The literature discusses the likelihood of student's native language being predominant in the homes. While all languages are important to respect, the students will have more opportunities to exercise their lessons from ESL class when they are in an integrated environment where the students are comfortable. Regardless of a student's status, integration could promote learning in groups that are based on their level of understanding of certain subjects.

Motivation

The participants in this study had different sources of motivation to pursue higher education but all of them had distinct reasons to go to college. Throughout the interview sessions, some would say that they were determined to reach their goals, others had family members who were willing to work hard to make sure that educational needs were met. The results indicate that refugee students feel like it is necessary to prove themselves to be as intellectually capable as their peers. The participants had common goals to be more than what society may consider them to be due to their refugee status. The

interviews also indicate the amount of motivation students may need to be an advocate for themselves. Faith also played a role in the participants and their family's ability to stay motivated while discovering the unforeseen obstacles of paying for a college education. The data indicated that families may depend on the support of a higher power to meet their needs when the solution seems unattainable.

In the interview sessions, the participants had an extensive amount of reassuring advice for people who work with refugee students while they are pursuing higher education. The interview responses indicate through personal aspirations and acts of resiliency, participants could achieve their dreams. The results also show that the presence of a trailblazer helps inspire students to believe that they can achieve a similar goal. Inspiration and exposure to the possibilities of a student's future served as great motivative factors in the participant's lives.

Ambition

Some motivation was rooted in the passion that some participants had for their field of study. Without genuine interest in a subject, it may be difficult to become motivated to persevere through the hardships of higher education. Passion can be developed by observation. Exposure to the benefits of a career, as participant three spoke about, watching her mentor work in doctoral expertise inspired her to pursue nutrition. Watching her mentor be so passionate about what she did for a living showed the participant that achieving higher education could lead her to a job that could leave her satisfied with her contributions to her community.

Coming from Destitution

Motivation can also stem from previous living conditions. Participants talked about how few resources they had previously. The participants talked about some of their parents' sacrifices and the major changes they made to provide greater opportunities for their children to pursue higher education. The participants and their family members may have grown up lacking many basic items that adolescent students may take for granted. Achieving higher education could create a new life for refugees. At a young age, the realization that there is a way to combat poverty and extreme situations of destitution could motivate students to continuously push to ensure that they receive an education.

Parental Influence

The data indicate that having at least one parent who achieved higher education, influenced the educational progression of their children. Some participant's parents already had a degree in their country of origin and influenced their children to follow their same path in the future. Some had non-traditional students as parents. Perhaps the observation of parents pursuing higher education could have been a motivational response to children's belief in their own ability to go to college. Other participants were first-generation college students. Their parents influenced them by explaining how hard they worked to create an environment that would allow their children to flourish and go to college. Being the first person in their families to gain a degree would likely place a large amount of pressure on students but the motivational techniques may be effective. Others who lacked initial motivation to go to college were inclined by their parents' authority to continue trying until an intuitive reason to go to college was discovered.

Implications

Reflecting on the themes that have been produced from the interview process, knowledge and advice will be shared with social service organizations that have the opportunity to work with refugee students. As refugees come to the United States, it is important that organizations have effective resources available for them to utilize. Youth programs, both inclusive and exclusive, will be able to look at existing barriers that can disrupt refugee student's paths towards higher education. These results will help agency personnel develop forms of curriculum designed to encourage this population. Resiliency, cultural identity, support systems, and motivation play a large role in a refugee student's likelihood to actively pursue educational goals.

It would be beneficial to use this data when providing educational orientations for the parents of refugee students. The results of this study mentioned the valued role that parents have played in the educational career of students. Presenting this data to the immediate support systems that cater to the needs of this population would help implement continuous interventions that could promote higher education outside of the timeframe youth programs may have. Utilizing access to organizations such as the International Rescue Committee to contact prospective participants would provide assistance for future research. A larger scale study would provide more clarity to the existing barriers. With greater participation, the researcher would be able to specify themes within age brackets.

Limitations

The methodology limited recruitment to people who were fluent in English and would not need any form of interpretation to complete the interview process. The recruiting also took place in a small vicinity so that the researcher and participants could meet face to face. This exclusivity did not allow extensive miles of travel for an interview session, excluding participants that the researcher knew about but chose not to reach out to. All the participants in this study are currently students at two faith-based universities. Due to the limited time in which the researcher could contact potential participants, a small number was suggested in the methodology to ensure completion in a timely manner.

A significant limitation of this study is attributed to the small sample size. Further recruiting should be done for a more valid data collection process. The ages of the six participants contribute to the factor of limitations. Four of the six participants were in elementary school when their families moved to the United States. Their adjustment processes were not as difficult as the experiences of the remaining two participants. Resettling in America at the age of one, three, or eight exposed them to new customs at a young age, which generally made it easier to submerge into the American culture. The researcher did not ask the participants to disclose their previous school history. Knowing where they received their education prior to college may have created another theme in the discussion of the findings. This research was dedicated to finding barriers that often affect refugees from Africa. The literature review was tailored to fit barriers that African refugees generally face after resettling in the United States.

The researcher also specifically recruited participants of African descent. The researcher did not ask the participants about their resettled location. One participant disclosed that their family lives in the Dallas area, which is where the participant grew up but there was no additional data gathered regarding previous living locations in the United States. Although there is a significant amount of research dedicated to the mental health barriers that exist among the refugee population, it was not listed as a barrier in this study. The researcher purposely asked open-ended questions about larger barriers the participants faced while pursuing their college degrees, but aspects of health were never brought up in the interview responses. The researcher contacted people who had successfully pursued their higher education goals. As a limitation, none of the interviews had data about failure or extensive periods of time where education was not being pursued.

Conclusion

There are significant barriers that make it difficult for refugee youth to achieve their goals of pursuing higher education. Throughout this study, it has been discussed that existing language, social, and economic barriers play a dominant role in the reasons behind a complicated journey for this population to receive a post-secondary education. The research also gives insight into the resiliency of refugee populations and their motivation to continue despite the barriers in their path. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR; 2015), refugees with higher education credentials lead to positive outputs including recreating communities, social, economic and gender equality, and overall empowerment within their resettled population. Higher

education benefits the resettlement country's economy as more refugee students become gainfully employed. UNHCR (2016) says,

It is critical that we think beyond a refugee's basic survival. Refugees have skills, ideas, hopes, and dreams. They face huge risks and challenges, but they are also tough, resilient and creative, with the energy and drive to shape their own destinies, given the chance.

The economic and social well-being of the students are also likely to flourish because of their education level. As more populations inherit a refugee status because of devastating events in their countries, it is important that host countries can make prosperous accommodations that will support both the people who are being resettled and those who are welcoming refugees into their communities (Ferede, 2011). One way to promote a positive assimilation experience is by offering a quality education. Also, it would be beneficial to know what type of environment refugees are likely to flourish in, and how to create that space for other students in the future. Ferede (2011) mentions factors such as age when arriving in the United States, the details of a well corresponding curriculum that effectively educates the students, and access to resources that promote their educational needs. These factors can be used as a springboard for refugee students as they pursue higher education. Understanding what steps former or current refugees have taken to achieve educational goals could help those who are trying to follow a similar path. The next step is to support the advancement of refugees in America. Progressively utilizing that information will help implement effective interventions for programs that assist refugee youth along their educational journey.

REFERENCES

- Bal, A., & Perzigian, A. B. T. (2013). Evidence-based interventions for immigrant students experiencing behavioral and academic problems: A systematic review of the literature. *Education & Treatment of Children, 36*(4), 5.
- Betancourt, T. S., Abdi, S., Ito, B. S., Lilienthal, G. M., Agalab, N., & Ellis, H. (2015). We left one war and came to another: Resource loss, acculturative stress, and caregiver-child relationships in Somali refugee families. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 21*(1), 114–125. doi:10.1037/a0037538
- Conway, K. M. (2014). Critical quantitative study of immigrant students. *New Directions for Institutional Research, 2013*(158), 51. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ir.20045>
- Craig, B. J. (2012). “I am an American”: Communicating refugee identity and citizenship. *Kaleidoscope: A Graduate Journal of Qualitative Communication Research, 11*, 87.
- Ferede, M. K. (2011). Structural factors associated with higher education access for first-generation refugees in Canada: An agenda for research. *Refuge (0229-5113), 27*(2), 79.
- Figueiredo, S. A., Martins, M. A., da Silva, C. F., & Simões, C. (2015). A Comprehensive assessment of immigrant students: Low-income families’ effects and school outcomes in second language development. *International Journal of Assessment & Evaluation, 22*(2), 1.

- Gray, M. J., & Vernez, G. (1996). Student access and the 'new' immigrants. *Change*, 28(5), 40.
- Hudley, C. (2016). Achievement and expectations of immigrant, second generation, and nonimmigrant black students in U.S. higher education. *International Journal of Educational Psychology*, 5(3), 223. <https://doi.org/10.17583/ijep.2016.2226>
- Habecker, S. (2017). Becoming African Americans: African immigrant youth in the United States and hybrid assimilation. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 10(1), 55.
- Kanno, Y., & Varghese, M. M. (2010). Immigrant and refugee ESL students' challenges to accessing four-year college education: From language policy to educational policy. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 9(5), 310. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2010.517693>
- Khanh B., & Rush, R. A. (2016). Parental involvement in middle school predicting college attendance for first-generation students. *Education*, 136(4), 473.
- Lamb O., D., Brown, C. F., & Goldschmidt, M. M. (2014). Developmental immigrant students: What cross-disciplinary faculty should know. *Research & Teaching in Developmental Education*, 30(2), 65.
- Murray, K. E., & Marx, D. M. (2013). Attitudes toward unauthorized immigrants, authorized immigrants, and refugees. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 19(3), 332-332-341. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030812>
- Nii-Amoo Doodoo, F. (1997). Assimilation differences among Africans in America. *Social Forces*, 76(2), 527. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2580723>
- Sanders, M. A., & Killian, J. B. (2017). Advising in higher education. *Radiologic Science & Education*, 22(1), 15.

- Sienkiewicz, H. C., Mauceri, K. G., Howell, E. C., & Bibeau, D. L. (2013). Untapped resources: Refugee employment experiences in Central North Carolina. *Untapped Resources: Refugee Employment Experiences in Central North Carolina.*, 45(1), 17. <https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-131599>
- Suárez-Orozco, C., Onaga, M., & de Lardemelle, C. (2010). Promoting academic engagement among immigrant adolescents through school-family-community collaboration. *Professional School Counseling*, 14(1), 15.
- Suh, E. (2016). Language minority student transitions. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 40(1), 26.
- Szu-Yin, C. (2009). Implementation of supportive school programs for immigrant students in the United States. *Preventing School Failure*, 53(2), 67.
- Szu-Yin, C. (2011). Perspectives in understanding the schooling and achievement of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 38(3/4), 201-209.
- The College Board. (2018). Trends in higher education: Average published undergraduate charges by sector and by Carnegie classification. Retrieved from <https://trends.collegeboard.org/college-pricing/figures-tables/average-published-undergraduate-charges-sector-2017-18>
- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2015). Higher education considerations for refugees in countries affected by the Syria and Iraq crisis. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/enus/publications/education/568bc5279/education-brief-7-higher-education-considerations-refugees-countries-affected.html>

- United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. (2016). Missing out. Refugee education in crisis. Retrieved from <http://www.unhcr.org/57d9d01d0>
- United States Census Bureau. (2017). Income and poverty in the United States: 2016. Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2017/demo/P60-259.pdf>
- Watkinson, J. S., & Hersi, A. A. (2014). School counselors supporting African Immigrant students' career development: A case study. *Career Development Quarterly*, 62(1), 44. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-0045.2014.00069.x>.

APPENDIX A

ACU IRB Approval Letter

ABILENE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Educating Students for Christian Service and Leadership Throughout the World
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
320 Hardin Administration Building, ACU Box 29103, Abilene, Texas 79699-9103
325-674-2885



Dear Tamika,

On behalf of the Institutional Review Board, I am pleased to inform you that your project titled

(IRB# 18-013) is exempt from review under Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects.

If at any time the details of this project change, please resubmit to the IRB so the committee can determine whether or not the exempt status is still applicable.

I wish you well with your work.

Sincerely,

Megan Roth

Megan Roth, Ph.D.
Director of Research and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B

Interview Questions

1. How old were you when you moved to the United States?
2. How much did your age play a part in your adjustment to a new country?
3. Were you fluent in English when you moved to the United States?
4. What type of education had you already received before coming to the United States?
5. What were your educational goals once you moved to the United States?
6. What motivated you to pursue higher education?
7. Are you a first-generation college student?
8. What role did your parents play in your perusal towards higher education?
9. Can you tell me about other support groups you may have had on your educational journey?
10. What were your largest barriers that tried to keep you from getting an education?
11. How did you overcome each barrier?
12. What resources did you use while you were pursuing higher education?
13. What cultural identity do you claim?
14. Do you feel like African Americans and African people are placed in the same social categories in the United States? Please explain why.

15. When creating school programs to help children reach their educational goals, do you think it is more beneficial to have specific programs for refugee students or should these programs be integrated with American students? Why?
16. What tools do social service organizations that engage with refugee you need to give middle and high school students so that they can pursue their educational goals the way that you have?
17. What advice would you give to high school aged students who are refugees wanting to pursue higher education?