What drives West African Diaspora students to success?

Toby Madubuko
Claremont Graduate University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd

Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the CGU Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in CGU Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@claremont.edu.
What drives West African Diaspora students to success?

by

Toby Madubuko

Claremont Graduate University

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Claremont Graduate University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education

Claremont Graduate University

2023
Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Toby Madubuko as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

Thomas F. Luschei, Chair
Professor of Education

Carl Cohn
Claremont Graduate University
Professor Emeritus and Senior Research Fellow

William Perez
Loyola Marymount University
Professor of Education
Abstract

What drives West African Diaspora students to success?

By

Toby Madubuko

Claremont Graduate University: 2023

This qualitative research investigated the first and second-generation diaspora of West Africa and also examined if there were differences between the two generations. The goal was that if such differences exist, it will help plan the learning experience for students with similar backgrounds. The research used in-depth, open-ended interview questions to collect data for analysis. Forty-one participants were interviewed, and they provided personal insight into the first and second-generation West African immigrants' attitudes to education and the differences between them. The participants included university professors, nurses, K-12 teachers, attorneys, and housewives who reside in Los Angeles County in Southern California. The data the participants provided were coded, analyzed, and categorized. The data showed a positive view of education, the economic value of education, respect for authority, religious beliefs influencing attitude, parental involvement, and the importance of working hard. First and second-generation West African immigrants further claim that their school success results from academic diligence, a positive and respectful attitude, non-confrontational behavior, and family and community support, all consistent with John Ogbu’s (1998) research. The research used the topics from the interview to categorize prominent themes the participants articulated. The percentage of the participants that mention the importance of education shows how views about education continue to be dominant and appear to drive attitudes about education in West African communities. Key findings included the belief that going to school was a plausible way out of poverty, education is
the pillar of all success, and turning negative stereotypes into assets by embracing education and attitudes related to achievement.

This research highlights some of the challenges first- and second-generation West Africans face in school. They face the dual polar-opposite realities of over-expectation of their abilities in the classroom on the one hand and the other hand, condescension of their being and abilities that may be rooted in prejudice motivated by animosity towards their racial group. This knowledge could benefit teachers and administrators to confront this incompatible duality, evaluate how their curriculum addresses the discrepancy, and reflect on possible strategies to ensure equity, respect, and equal accountability for teachers and their students.

*Keywords:* West African immigrants, first-generation, second-generation, diaspora, community forces, attitude, acting White, education.
Dedication

With so much love to my children

Onyemaechi
Tochi
Olanna
Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor and dissertation chair, Dr. Thomas Luschei, for his excellent feedback. Words cannot adequately express my appreciation for the guidance you provided.

I want to thank another member of my dissertation committee, Dr. Carl Cohn, for introducing me to the history of urban schools in the United States. Thank you for the gift of friendship you offered your students, including me.

Dr. William Perez, for agreeing to serve on my committee and never relents in helping students.

I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Lucia Maria Greve for editing and formatting my dissertation. You offered your boundless energy, time, and patience to help me reach the finish line. Thank you for the lengthy feedback sessions that dragged on into the next day. Even distance and the passage of time could not stop you.

Much appreciation to the 41 participants who sacrificed their time to sit for my interviews. Thank you for your encouragement.

Special thanks go to my dearest wife, Onyinyechi “Oladiya” Madubuko. You are a unique gift. To my daughter, Olanna, you have a special place in my heart, and my sons, Onyemaechi and Tochi, I love you.

My mother, Mrs. Uzoma Madubuko, I love you, and my late father, Mr. Jeremiah Madubuko. My siblings, Sis. Calista, Evans, Chioma, Ngozi, and Ndidi. My late stepmother, Mrs. Janet Madubuko, and my other siblings, Sis. Helen, Patricia, Caro, Bernadett, and brothers Alexander and Innocent. And my late sister, Chinenye.

I sincerely appreciate my mother-in-law, Mrs. Christina Ikwuadinso, and my late father-in-law, Elder Francis, for giving me their daughter in marriage.

I am profoundly indebted to Mr. Emmanuel Azubuko, my uncle; thank you for your unflinching support. Mr. Anthony & May Akalemeaku, Mr. Godfrey & Dr. Ejiro Ogbute – I treasure our friendships and the brotherly love between our three families.
# Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction ......................................................................................................................... 1

  Statement of the Problem ................................................................................................................... 1
  Significance of the Problem ............................................................................................................... 2
  Theoretical Framework ....................................................................................................................... 4
    Community Forces .......................................................................................................................... 6
    Barriers Faced by Minority Groups ................................................................................................. 9
    Why Cultural-Ecological Theory for this Research? ..................................................................... 10
  Purpose of the Study .......................................................................................................................... 10
  Research Questions ............................................................................................................................ 17
  Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................................. 17
  Organization of the Chapters .............................................................................................................. 23

Chapter 2: Literature Review ................................................................................................................. 24

  Motivation to Study African Immigrants’ Educational Experience .................................................. 24
  Increase in African Immigrant Population in the U.S. ..................................................................... 25
  Brief Overview of Immigration from West Africa ............................................................................ 26
  Demographics of West African Immigrants ...................................................................................... 31
  Immigrant Selection of West Africans .............................................................................................. 32
  Acting White ..................................................................................................................................... 33
  West African Immigrant View of Educational Institutions ............................................................ 35
  Influences on Attitude Towards Education ...................................................................................... 37
    Economy and Job Stability ............................................................................................................. 37
    Family Structure .............................................................................................................................. 39
    Religious Belief ............................................................................................................................... 40
    Peer Relationships and School Disciplinary Practices .................................................................. 41
    Identity ............................................................................................................................................ 43
  Summary of Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 46
  Gaps in the Literature .......................................................................................................................... 47

Chapter 3: Methodology ......................................................................................................................... 49

  Introduction and Overview ................................................................................................................ 49
  The Rationale for Adopting Qualitative Research Design ............................................................... 49
  Research Sample ............................................................................................................................... 50
  Protection of Human Subjects .......................................................................................................... 60
  Instrumentation ............................................................................................................................... 61
  Analysis and Synthesis of Data ......................................................................................................... 63
  Researcher Positionality .................................................................................................................... 64

Chapter 4: Results .................................................................................................................................. 66

  Research Question 1 .......................................................................................................................... 68
    Positive Attitude about Education and Why Education is Important ........................................... 69
    Positive Attitude About Education and the Influence of Parents .................................................. 73
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religion Shapes Attitudes Towards Education</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect For Teachers</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Research Question 1</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Research Question 2</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Question 3</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Generation Error! Bookmark not defined.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Generation</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary of Research Question 3</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5: Discussion</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Findings</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education as Pillar of Success</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Role of Religion</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family is Central</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Roles</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Attainment Among Diaspora West Africans</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selectivity of West African Immigrants</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capital of Having Educated Parents</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social mores</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accent and Identity</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication for Teachers</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Teacher Training Institutions</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Schools and Local School Districts</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Research</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model Minority Myth</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Forces</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contributions of West African Immigrants</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reason for differences</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further research</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of this study</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 1  This Author’s Interpretation of Community Forces ........................................ 5
List of Tables

Table 1  Annual Admissions for Countries to the U.S. effective July 1, 1929 ......................... 27
Table 2  Percentage of Immigrants Admitted to the U.S. from Different Regions .................. 28
Table 3  Growth of African Immigration to the U.S. from 1970 to 2015 .............................. 29
Table 4  Diversity immigrant visa allocations by region, 1994-2015 ................................... 31
Table 5  Participant Demographics ...................................................................................... 51
Table 6  People from West Africa in Los Angeles County by the numbers ......................... 55
Table 7  Ancestry of Black population in Los Angeles County by the numbers .................... 56
Table 8  Summary of Participant Demographics by gender, education, and age group .......... 59
Table 9  Summary of Participant Demographics by country affiliation ............................... 60
Chapter 1: Introduction

Immigration from Africa continues to grow, including in U.S. public schools, where the number of African immigrant children is rising faster than other immigrant subgroups (Dryden-Peterson, 2011; Roubeni et al., 2015). Even in higher education, the population appears to be fully represented, which demands celebration. Charles et al. (2007) documented that African immigrants boast of academic achievements like increased test scores, impressive work habits, and a highly motivational attitude for success.

For example, in 2012, first- and second-generation African immigrants accounted for 41% of students with African heritage in twenty-eight selective universities (Valentine, 2012), and Massey et al. (2007) claim these immigrants demonstrated highly sought-after qualities admission officers valued for success in academic institutions. This is a significant achievement for an immigrant subgroup whose overall population was only 80,000 in 1970 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014). These success stories raise questions about why it is hard to find research about first and second-generation African immigrants’ attitudes to school despite their numerical representation in the U.S. public school system (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011). When the data is further disaggregated, the underrepresentation in the research is most apparent for West African immigrants, who accounted for 44.2% of the 2.1 million Sub-Saharan African immigrants who lived in the U.S. in 2019 (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Research like Charles et al. (2007) raises the question of the rationale for labeling African immigrants a “model minority.” The label suggests “educational achievement and excellence” (Ukpokodu, 2017, p. 69), even though there is sparse data to support the claim that they are making exceptional academic achievements. Ukpokodu (2017) states that it is both
“disingenuous” and a “disservice” (p. 69) to ascribe the generic label to African immigrant students because such label masks the challenges some of them face, including poor academic performance for some of them and the pressure of over-expectation to achieve in school for others. These challenges may cause psychological stress and even depression in individuals. Thanks to their determination, many West African immigrants overcome challenges through sheer persistence, optimism, and resilience to achieve success.

In light of their challenges, there is a need to integrate policy and practice to help those who could not overcome the challenges to become more successful in school. As we now have more than one generation of West African immigrants in the U.S., it would be interesting to examine the differences in attitudes towards education across two generations of West African immigrants. If differences exist, there is a need to maximize the benefits to create practical and actionable policies that will improve their odds of success in high school and college.

Significance of the Problem

The lack of K-12 achievement data of students from African immigrant families - a demographic that is not often disaggregated to accurately account for their academic strength or lack thereof versus native-born African Americans and other students of African descent like Caribbeans has led to new claims by first-generation West Africans that second and later generations of students from African immigrant families are heading towards perceptions that are contrary to their immigrant experience of accomplishment and positive attitude towards education (Awokoya, 2012). In the article “Identity Constructions and Negotiations Among 1.5- and Second-Generation Nigerians: The Impact of Family, School, and Peer Contexts” by Janet Awokoya (2012), the author asserts that Black immigrant parents “fear that their children will adopt U.S. African American youth culture, as their children’s peer groups in schools and
neighborhoods often consist of African Americans” (p. 258). Awokoya (2012) states that first-
generation immigrant adults fear their children “who spend the majority of their formative years
in the United States, may experience a strong desire and external pressure to fit in with and
identify with their African American peers” (p. 258). This is not a surprise because both African
immigrants and African Americans hold a mutually prejudiced view of each other - African
Americans consider Africans as “ignorant and uncivilized” (p. 258), and Africans see African
Americans as “lazy, prone to criminality, and lacking familial ties” (p. 259), according to this
research. In another study by Warikoo and Carter (2009) in which they referenced the segmented
assimilation theory, the authors acknowledge that “growing up in one’s ethnic community - even
if disadvantaged can lead to school success” (p. 371), it also states that “growing up and being
educated among disadvantaged African Americans, for African American and second-generation
children alike, can lead to poor outcome” (p. 371). This fear is further strengthened by some
research that shows poor academic performance, poor school engagement, or outright dropping
out of school may lead to associating with criminal groups or other crimes (Ukpokodu, 2017).
Awokoya’s (2012), Warikoo and Carter’s (2009), and Ukpokodu’s (2017) research demonstrate a
fraction of the root of the apprehension from some first-generation immigrants about their
students engaging in aggressive behavior, disrespecting authority figures, and other attitudes that
do not support achievement, all behaviors that were not previously attributed to this
demographic. To the first-generation West Africans, the shift by students from African
immigrant families means a shift in attitude towards education. It is plausible that the new
observation about students from African immigrant families is a consequence of West African
families living in some of the urban cities in Los Angeles County. In some towns within South
Los Angeles, where some West African immigrants live, the structural problems of poverty,
crime, and poorly funded schools abound. Students from West African immigrant families attend these poorly resourced schools, some with poorly trained teachers and high teacher turnover (Gregory et al., 2010; Kozol, 2005; Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Through association and peer pressure, students from African immigrant families may bend to values and attitudes contrary to the expectations parents set for them and, in the process, develop negative attitudes towards school.

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework used for this study is this author’s adaptation of Ogbu’s (1998) interpretation of the cultural-ecological theory (CET) (see Figure 1). CET was introduced by Julian Steward (1955) and adopted by the late John Ogbu, an anthropologist at the University of California, Berkeley, who popularized it as a mechanism for explaining the school and academic engagement of minority students (Ogbu, 1978, 1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Carter, 2004).

Although Ogbu argues in his research that minority school performance cannot be explained only through the prism of culture, CET uses culture to explain differences in school performance.

Essentially, the cultural-ecological theory posits that although racial discrimination and structural problems like poverty and inequality are negatively affecting the educational achievement of minorities, they are not determinative because some minorities with similar challenges overcome similar obstacles and are successful in school (Gilbert, 2009). According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), cultural-ecological theory on minority school performance relies on two major components: *the system and community forces* (see Appendix A). *The system* deals with how society treats minorities in school, compensates for academic achievements, and how
educational policies impact minorities in society. *Community forces* refer to immigrants' sociocultural adaptation strategies to ensure school success. Community forces were central in Ogbu’s theory as a mitigation strategy to dilute the stress of being a minority (see Appendix B). I have considered this argument as I attempt to examine first and second-generation West African immigrants’ attitudes towards school. But I paid more attention to the unique role *community forces* play in the success of West African immigrant groups and how they deploy them. In the process, I examined the concept of attitude because of its centrality in this research. Also, the discussion on attitude may offer clarification in understanding the views of the interview respondents in this research.

**Figure 1**

*This Author’s Interpretation of Community Forces*

![community forces diagram](image)

According to my research, community forces are not just sociocultural adaptive strategies; they are human structures and instruments that help actualize those adaptations. They
are community resources. For example, the roles families and social organizations play (see Figure 1). In examining this, I divided the community forces/resources that influence and promote West African immigrant attitudes towards education into internal and external forces (see Figure 1). The internal forces come from family members - parents, grandparents, siblings, and individual motivation. Family members play roles in advising, guiding, and motivating. They advise behavior, lay down codes for socializing, and teach ethnic mores and norms. The external forces come from religious institutions like churches and mosques and social and community organizations, some of which are registered as 501(c) and 503(c) organizations which not only work to benefit the immigrants through offering finance or scholarships but reinforce the teaching from the internal forces entities. Other external forces come from professional organizations like doctors and engineers, in which many West Africans are well represented, and some socio-cultural organizations like women’s groups that settle disputes, provide scholarships, mentor young women, and speak up on political issues affecting their countries of origin. As Figure 1 shows, the varied roles of the individuals (internal forces) and the agencies (external forces) form the ecosystem that helps West African immigrants navigate the challenges of belonging to a racial minority.

Community Forces

Research in cultural ecology has not established a definitive link between discrimination and cultural and language differences as the only causes that explain minority students’ poor academic achievement. John Ogbu’s (1994) assertion that school and societal variables alone cannot explain the differences in the academic achievement of “different minorities in the same school” (Ogbu, 2003, p. vii) underscores the importance of understanding community forces. Community forces are behavior, beliefs, and attitude tools certain minorities deploy to counter
and cope with society’s hostile treatment of minorities. Community forces help to understand the differentiation of minorities with similar challenges in society and school (Lim, 2012; Ogbu, 2003; Ogbu, 1992; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Community forces clarify reasons certain minorities, especially immigrants, may interpret similar situations differently (see Appendix C). For example, Ogbu (2003) surmises that U.S.- born Blacks see curriculum and language, which are major components in school success, as a White imposition and code to suggest to Black people they are inferior. Immigrants’ views on this issue may differ, partly shaped by community forces and reinforced by how they came to the U.S. - voluntarily or involuntarily. Ogbu’s (1998) community forces are a functional asset at the disposal of the immigrant who possesses it to fit the environment and experience the individual is engaged in at any given time.

The strength of community forces lies in the fact that an immigrant who possesses them is better equipped to manage issues in the school system that is structured to the culture of the dominant population than an involuntary immigrant who lacks them (Anyon, 1980). Community forces are not bits and pieces of resources, values, or processes that are activated independently. Instead, I see community forces as a box of survival tools that work symbiotically and at the disposal of the immigrant to ensure the individual’s success in the face of a hostile environment. Centrally, understanding community forces, how they work, and their potency rests on knowing the background of the people of West Africa. Lastly, my theoretical framework of community forces dwells on the mechanisms and ecosystem that activate the behaviors to deal with the challenges. They are protective mechanisms.

Community forces are composed of four frames highlighting Black immigrant students’ education engagements: (1) comparison with schools in the immigrants’ home countries, (2) their instrumental belief about education and its role in upward mobility in society, (3)
immigrants’ relationship with school personnel, and (4) their interpretation of differences in language and culture (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

Analyzing the role of community forces is crucial because it helps us understand why certain groups in the same racial classification fare better than others. It also underlines the importance of data disaggregation when reporting research on racial minorities. Some studies, including Carter (2004), documented that tracking students, stereotyped teacher attitudes, cultural differences between home and school, and issues of social class contribute to Black underachievement. But how the minorities came to live in the U.S. - whether voluntarily, out of their own volition, or involuntarily, acquiesced under duress, has consistently been cited as vital in understanding the difference in academic achievement within minority groups. Ogbu and Simons (1998) categorized them into two groups described in this chapter.

It is essential to point out here that Ogbu’s research has not been without criticism. Gilbert (2009) contradicts Ogbu and Simons (1998) assertion that school performance should be examined through cultural models because the cultural model group depends on how that group came to the U.S., voluntarily or involuntarily (Gilbert, 2007; Ogbu, 1990, 1991; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Gilbert (2007), in his research, found that immigrant and native-born students’ performance did not differ as theorized by Ogbu and Simons (1998). Warikoo and Carter (2009) point out that other factors like discrimination and institutional racism immersed in the curriculum are essential to consider. Examples of discriminatory acts and racism are placing minority students in remedial classes, denying them access to Advanced Placement classes, and offering them “lower-level exams” (p. 374) that hardly translate to “high exam marks” (p. 374), which all impact students’ performance. Although Warikoo and Carter (2009) presented citations illustrating the negative impact of “acting White” or the resistance to adopting achievement
behaviors associated with the White racial culture, including “spending much time in the library and getting good grades” (p.370), the authors argue that the involuntary minority students work against their own self-interest because they “collude in their own academic underachievement” (p.370). According to the authors, the involuntary minority students “know what it takes to succeed” (p.370) in school, the labor market, and politics but refuse to embrace those behaviors. Warikoo and Carter (2009) also point out that the acting White behavior is mitigated, especially in schools with diverse populations, when equal access to competitive classes like Advanced Placement courses is granted to minority students to make it have the approval of minority students and not make it seem as an only-Whites class, and the minority students who enroll in the classes are not seen as selling out to their ethnic community.

**Barriers Faced by Minority Groups**

According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), there are three major barriers minorities face that help explain the impact of White domination: (1) instrumental discrimination in employment and wages, (2) relational discrimination, which includes social and residential segregation, and (3) symbolic discrimination characterized by disparaging attitudes towards the culture and language of the minorities (See Appendix C). Ogbu (1990) summed it up as the joint problems of minorities (See Appendix C).

As one would expect, the collective problems of the minorities correspondingly have a collective solution as shown in Appendix A. The cultural-ecological theory directs attention to the treatment of minorities in U.S. schools as a microcosm of how the larger society treats them. For example, despite the desegregation of schools in 1965, persistent traces of discrimination still abound in the school system, wherein “evidence of segregation along racial and socioeconomic lines” persists (Schwartz & Stiefel, 2011, p. 427; Glass, 2015). In some schools,
the enrollment of White students is marginal or nonexistent, even though research findings support a diverse and inclusive classroom as beneficial for both minority and White students (Gurin et al., 2004). First, these schools are poorly resourced and have poor infrastructure and equipment, including technology. The teachers employed in such schools are sometimes the least effective. Secondly, low teacher expectations for minority students’ academic ability often result in the students being placed in low-track classes because the teachers consider Black students unintelligent compared to White students (Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Ogbu, 1982; Rong & Brown, 2001). Thirdly, educational accomplishments by minorities infrequently translate to high-paying jobs and economic success (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

**Why Cultural-Ecological Theory for this Research?**

A cultural-ecological theory model fits this research for three reasons. First, the community forces component of the cultural-ecological theory offers the best explanation for understanding the interactions between West African immigrants and the institutions in the U.S. (Lim, 2012). Also, community forces are a vital tool for developing resilience in dealing with the aggressive societal treatment of the immigrant (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 1995; Lim, 2012).

Secondly, cultural-ecological theory can help us understand immigrants' unique experiences and interactions with institutions in the host country (Foster, 2004; Lim, 2012). Thirdly, cultural-ecological theory offers comparisons based on “sociocultural and academic experiences among different minority groups” (Awokoya & Clark, 2008, p. 50).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative research is to explore what are the attitudes towards education by first-generation West African immigrants (born within the geographical boundaries
occupied by the 16 countries claiming membership of the Economic Community of West African States - ECOWAS) and second-generation West African immigrants (born in the U.S., with at least one parent who was born in West Africa) in Los Angeles County. For this study, attitude consists of the responses people or individuals make about an entity, individual(s), or thing. It is a value judgment about a concrete object or an abstract idea. The responses can be positive or negative. The research literature on immigrant populations shows that working hard and embracing the power of education positively impacts an individual’s future life outcomes; they have the most influence in predicting a positive attitude to education (Ogbu & Simon, 1998). Although this may be true, it does not show what it is about first and second-generation West African immigrants’ thoughts, feelings or behaviors that predict positive attitudes towards education or what influences their attitude to education. Some studies have focused on the absence of stereotype threats for West African immigrants versus native-born African Americans as contributing to a positive attitude to education (Steele, 1997). They argue that since the pressure of not conforming to stereotypes based on race did not weigh down on them, and they had seen people whose lives have transformed through education, they have a positive attitude toward it. Therefore, the absence of such burdens (stereotype threat) explains their positive attitudes towards education. But interviews with West African immigrants and some studies point to more than that conclusion. For Obiakor and Afolayan (2007), motivation could be a factor. They see motivation as a survival tool for immigrant families to achieve “the American dream” (p.269). Other studies point to the influence of the affective, behavioral, and cognitive domains in attitude development (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). This research attempts to identify and discuss attitudes towards education.
Furthermore, this research is focused on West African immigrants because their number in the U.S. is increasing, and what influences their attitude to school is vital to inform better approaches to meet their unique needs. A report by Lorenzi and Batalova (2022) published on the Migration Policy Institute website puts the current estimate at 2.1 million African immigrants in 2019 compared to only 881,000 in 2000, as published in Pew Research (Anderson, 2017). This population growth is substantial and therefore demands that the group be accorded more attention to understand and mitigate their needs to be successful before they become social problems in society and a strain on the economy. As is to be expected, the spike in migration of African immigrants has correspondingly led to an increase in children born in immigrant families. About one in four U.S. children is the child of an immigrant, but research is often focused on Hispanic and Asian populations (Capps & Fix, 2012). The educational needs of children born in West African immigrant families deserve as much attention because certain attitudes and how they deploy the community support available to them will impact their school and occupational outcome. The current trend in which only minimal empirical study advances the problems of children of African immigrants suggests their needs will not be quantitatively or qualitatively identified. The consequence of the absence of such data is that they will continue to be underserved in America’s public education system. In the short term, their performance will be unknown compared to students whose learning needs are empirically identified. In the long term, these children of West African immigrants may lack the essential skills of computation and reading that are essential for being successful later in life.
Closely tied to the need for more rich data for children of African immigrants is the lack of disaggregation of data. Whenever research is presented, it often lumps them together - Blacks of all ethnicities, including native-born African Americans, Haitians, Jamaicans, and others from the Caribbean. Although these populations share a standard skin color, they differ in culture, language, social patterns, and how they identify themselves. In misidentifying the unique needs of children of West African immigrants, their values and attitude to their school experience are lost. Studying West African immigrants is important because the group boasts a profile of highly educated individuals with high educational attainment. Compared to native-born adults in the U.S. and all foreign-born adults, African-born adults in the U.S. were more likely to have bachelor's or advanced degrees. According to Anderson and Connor (2018), in 2015, 69% of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa aged 25 and older said they attended some college. And according to McCabe (2011), in 2009, 41.7% of African immigrants aged 25 and over possessed a bachelor’s or higher degree compared to 28.1% of native-born adults in the U.S. and 26.8% of all foreign-born adults.

It is expected that more West Africans will seek to settle in the U.S. in the future. A Gallup poll of potential migrants worldwide recorded 31% of the people from sub-Saharan Africa showing a willingness to migrate to other countries, especially the United States (Esipova et al., 2017), and a Pew Research Center (2018) survey has four in ten respondents from sub-Saharan Africa say they would migrate to the United States or other countries if they had the means to do it. The major reason for the movement to the United States is the high unemployment rate in West African countries. Another reason is the very low wage that can hardly sustain families and the high birth rate in the region, indicating a potential scramble for
fewer jobs by many job applicants (Pew Research Center, 2018). The increasing need for safety because of the population's danger from armed terrorists like Boko Haram and the violent Fulani herdsmen in the region also plays a part. Both groups are Islamist terrorist groups that force millions of people from West Africa to be displaced. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees - UNHCR, 2022) estimates that 108.4 million people worldwide were newly displaced in their countries in 2022. In addition to the displacements in West Africa, economic, social, and political order is disrupted in the historically fragile governments of the region. Also, corruption and its high cost on governance are still rampant in West African countries (Abed & Gupta, 2002; Gaspar & Hagan, 2015), causing economic instability. In sum, inter and intra-ethnic strife continue to make governing difficult and cause political instability in the region's countries.

Moreover, Portes and Fernandez-Kelly (2008) state that immigrants from Africa can overcome their challenges because they integrate into the social, educational, economic, and political fabric of American society. The earlier assumption that immigrants would follow a straight path to embrace American values, prosper, and become mainstream Americans began to fade with the growth of second-generation immigrants who are not White. These second-generation immigrants found utilizing aspects of their culture, language, and heritage identity beneficial as they assimilated into U.S. society. This is called segmented assimilation. This path is different from the classic or straight-line assimilation process. The straight-line assimilation process is largely based on the experiences of earlier European immigrants in America whose children spoke English, were White, and appeared to share a similar culture. Critics of segmented assimilation, or the varied paths second-generation immigrants take, which may lead to upward or downward mobility into American society, characterize any assumption of success
of this process as exaggerated (Waldinger & Pearlmann, 1998; Alba & Nee, 2003; Portes & Zhou, 1992; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). The critics describe second-generation immigrants who embrace the segmented assimilation path as an outlier, arguing that segmented assimilation does not predict a social phenomenon (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008). According to the critics, the straight-line assimilation process is still the norm. The weakness of this argument against segmented assimilation is that the African immigrant experience is different and racially unique, linguistically, and culturally. African immigrants are unlike the early immigrants from Europe, whose culture and language are similar to American culture. In addition, American society considers African immigrants’ dark skin a disadvantage. It makes sense that African immigrants will choose segmented assimilation. Apart from African immigrants following the segmented assimilation path to integrate into U.S. society, they bring other advantages to account for their success and achievement in school. Some advantages are the parent's level of education, the way the U.S. government considers the immigrant group or mode of incorporation, and the family structure (Portes & Fernandez-Kelly, 2008; Fears, 2007; Guinier, 2004). The African immigrants often tout the embrace of certain aspects of their culture, such as the internalized belief and habit of the indispensability of working hard no matter the circumstance, the embrace of the power of community versus individualism that is prevalent in Western cultures, and an unrelenting determination to succeed as responsible for their success in the U.S.

In addition, the different generations of West African immigrants, like other immigrants, markedly differ in how they respond to living in a new country (Pew Research Center, 2004; McKeever & Klineberg, 1999). For example, while first-generation may ignore discriminatory acts at the workplace or in the classroom, second-generation may object to such treatment.
Secondly, first-generation immigrants, although highly educated, markedly make a lower yearly income because first-generation immigrants may be open to accepting unskilled positions in the labor market, unlike second-generation immigrants who make a higher yearly income and are selective about the jobs they accept. This income disparity may give second-generation immigrants more leverage in reacting to both individual and public issues and therefore affect their attitude. The differences, wherever they exist, have implications for the school experiences of the immigrants.

Therefore, understanding and addressing these implications is crucial because it will, in the short term, promote the immigrants’ transition to a new culture, including adapting to school expectations and navigating institutional rules like schools and graduating from them. It will help the immigrants’ assimilation process, including learning English, to be successful in school. In the long term, it will promote informed citizenship. It will help the immigrants to persist in college, build resiliency, become productive citizens who will contribute to the economy of their local communities, and advocate for the rights of other immigrants, especially West Africans. This research aims to fill a gap in understanding and addressing the needs of West African immigrants in an era when inclusiveness and respect for diversity are much discussed and less put into operation.

Finally, understanding what shapes the attitudes of different generations of West African immigrants, helps policymakers push for effective laws in educational reforms. Still, it offers guidance to teachers who face challenges on how to respond to the needs of the students daily. But there is not much research on first-generation and second-generation high school graduates and college students of West African immigrants regarding their attitudes towards education. This work adds the factor of students’ attitudes towards education as an essential variable in
school success. It focuses on the education attitude of two generations of West African immigrants.

Some researchers have tried to capture some of the experiences of immigrants from Africa to the U.S. Few have captured articulation of their attitude toward school (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011; Ukpokodu, 2017) The absence of such information makes it difficult to plan any intervention to ensure school success for this group. With their fluid identity, education planners cannot assume different generations of West African immigrants will take a straight-line approach toward school. Education planners need accurate information to implement practical strategies to benefit different generations of West African immigrants.

**Research Questions**

To understand the attitudes towards the education of first and second-generation West African immigrants, this study examined the following research questions:

1. What are the attitudes of West African immigrants towards education?
2. Do these attitudes differ across first and second-generation immigrants? If so, in what way do they differ?
3. According to West African immigrants, how do these attitudes affect their school experience in positive or negative terms?

**Definition of Terms**

**West African States** - The following countries make up present-day West Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, the island of Cape Verde, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Ivory Coast, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, the island of Saint Helena, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo.
West Africans - The Boston University Institute on Culture, Religion, and World Affairs (CURA), describes West Africans as ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse people who share a historical experience of European colonialism.

First-generation West African Immigrant - For this research, any participant defined as a first-generation West African immigrant must be born within the geographical boundaries of the 16 countries claiming membership in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

Second-generation West African Immigrant – defined as the individual who was born in the U.S. with at least one parent born in West Africa.

1.5 generation West African Immigrant – defined as immigrants born in their parent’s country of birth but arrived in their new country as children under 12 years old and went to school there (Roh & Chang, 2020). Some members of this group who were old enough on arrival to the United States, like their parents who brought them to the U.S., are well aware of the challenges and unique experiences of being an immigrant, mainly from West Africa. They also own the experiences of being the child of an immigrant like the second generation. They share a dual experience from the origin country where they were born and their new nation - the U.S. Their perspectives, although unique, can be represented from both the expressions of the first and second generations. But the 1.5 generation is categorized as the second generation in this research and is written as such whenever it occurs. The two spaces they share - home, where they learn the values of their parents’ country, and the school, where they learn to assimilate and try to fit into the mainstream of the host country’s culture, including the English language (Roh & Chang, 2020), means they live their lives in the mold of second-generation immigrants. Like the second generation, the country most 1.5 generation know is the new country their parents
brought them to, so both generations shared similar lived experiences. For that reason, in this research I categorized the 1.5 generation as the second generation.

**Voluntary Minorities** - Voluntary immigrants are those who willingly immigrated to the U.S. to seek a better economic future and political freedom (Roubeni et al., 2015; Gilbert, 2009) and do not consider their presence in the host country as forced on them (Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Good et al., 2010). Voluntary immigrants encounter challenges due to discriminatory practices because of differences in language and culture. However, their school success tends to mask the challenges they face in language and cultural differences because they interpret how society treats them and their place different from other minorities who are less successful and often involuntary immigrants. According to Ogbu and Simons (1998), immigrants from countries in Africa, countries like Cuba, China, India, Korea, countries in Central and South America, the Caribbean, and Mexico are generally voluntary immigrants. Ogbu considers the people from these nationalities voluntary immigrants because they were not forced to come to the U.S. on an unequal basis of master and slave. The voluntary immigrants came to the U.S. without a mandate by the U.S. government to do so. In addition, voluntary immigrants enjoy what Ogbu and Simons (1998) called a dual frame of reference. This means that voluntary immigrants compare their life in the U.S. to living in their native countries.

**Involuntary minorities** - Involuntary immigrant minorities “are people who have been conquered, colonized, or enslaved” (Ogbu & Simons, 1998. p. 165). Apart from African Americans, whose ascendants were forcefully shipped by White merchants to the U.S. during the transatlantic slave trade, other involuntary immigrants are American Indians, Alaska Natives, Native Americans, Hawaiians, and Puerto Ricans (Ogbu, 1990; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Gilbert, 2009). The involuntary immigrant populations view their status as imposed by the White-
dominant population. The involuntary immigrants may have different cultures, races, religions, and languages from the dominant population, and they experience more challenges academically. Ogbu (1990) framed them as a caste because of their relationship with the dominant population. The involuntary minorities’ view of the dominant population generally predicts their attitudes toward the school and other societal institutions.

According to Ogbu (1990), voluntary immigrants are non-oppositional while, in contrast, involuntary immigrants can often exhibit oppositional behavior, including anti-intellectualism, pejoratively referred to as resistance to acting White.

The African Minority Groups - Generally, African immigrants are considered successful when they are compared to U.S.-born African Americans because of their ease in adapting to the American culture and their higher education attainment. However, they still suffer from humiliating stereotypes and discrimination (Roubeni et al., 2015). This hostile attitude may account for the academic struggles some encounter (Guenther et al., 2011). Understanding the extent of the problem and finding a solution is difficult because of the limited data available on the African immigrant experience.

On the other hand, when data is available, they are not disaggregated based on how the immigrants identify themselves socially. Instead, African immigrants are grouped with African Americans and subjected to the stereotyped depiction of African Americans as hostile and lazy, even as we know Black immigrants’ identity is fluid (Roubeni et al., 2015; Balogun, 2011; Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Harry & Klinger, 2006). Awokoya and Clark (2008) assert that ignoring such distinction and labeling all blacks as homogeneous ignores significant national, ethnic, linguistic, and racial differences. Such broad categorization also ignores the fluidity of identity for black immigrants as they navigate, sometimes the volatile racial divide between
Blacks and Whites prevalent in the U.S. Some Black immigrants resist the rigidity imposed by identifying with either African Americans or the White-dominant population (Awokoya & Clark, 2008).

Also, West African immigrants are a vulnerable group. This is because they experience more stress than non-immigrants as they try to adapt to their host country (Dyal & Dyal, 1981; Kamya, 1997). Newly arrived immigrants may lack social networks to interact with their countries of origin, issues related to proficiency in the English language, immigration issues, or other family problems (Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007). This creates loneliness and alienation. Also, as the immigrants acculturate to their new environment, they are expected to acquire the cognitive and behavioral skills to engender socialization in a new culture (Kim, 1978; Padilla, 1983; Kamya, 1997). These expectations put a lot of pressure on immigrants.

Despite these obstacles, African immigrant students achieve some success and are sometimes referred to as model students. Although often viewed as a compliment, this label hardly escapes negative racial overtones about Blacks as unintelligent, lazy, or outright disdain for immigrants. In recognition of the vulnerabilities of the West African immigrants and their capacity to achieve some level of success in academics and their socioeconomic outlook that may not be as dire in comparison to some native-born minority populations, it is not an overstatement to categorize their perceived label as a model minority group as overblown and a myth.

The Model Minority Myth - The model minority is a racial stereotype that categorizes Asian Americans as a “hardworking racial group whose high achievement undercuts claims of systemic racism made by other racially minoritized populations, especially African Americans” (Xu & Lee, 2013; Osajima, 2000, p. 469). The label became popular with the publication of
William Petersen’s work “Success Story: Japanese American Style” (1966). The model minority essentially casts Asians as an example of individuals of a demographic succeeding and upending a familiar narrative in other minority groups that the governmental structures of equity and fairness are implemented in ways that work against all minority populations in the United States.

Apart from the academic achievement of Asian Americans, which is often referenced when the model minority label is mentioned, apologists of the label also cite the considerable socioeconomic gains that Asian Americans make in their income, the high representation of Asians at the supervisory position in industries, and the high monetary compensation for their education (Xu & Lee, 2013, p.1367). Xu and Lee (2013) state that the model minority label might just be a myth because the label obscures the fact that the poverty rate among Asians is higher when compared to Whites. According to the authors, the success of Asian Americans is often premised on individual efforts. It results from the high selectivity of educated and highly skilled Asians who immigrated to the U.S. in the 1960s when the U.S. government implemented the 1965 immigration law targeting skilled workers abroad (Mallick, 2010; Xu & Lee, 2013).

The reason behind the model minority label may be a mischaracterization. The African diaspora, including West Africans in the United States, is sometimes labeled a model minority because of the relative success they achieve in school in the United States when they are compared to some native-born minority groups. The same reason immigrant selectivity accounted for the Asians might very well be the same for the Africans because immigrant selectivity for education in terms of immigrant’s high level of educational attainment relative to those in their country of origin high among the group (Feliciano, 2015). Also, the 1990’s Diversity Immigrant Visa, of which many immigrants are beneficiaries, stipulates minimum high school education as a qualification criterion.
Organization of the Chapters

Chapter 1 is an introduction to the study. Apart from detailing the purpose of the study, it provided a rationale for focusing on West African immigrants. But most significantly, it discussed community forces on which the theoretical framework is built. Chapter 1 also covered the concept of attitude. Chapter 2 is a literature review that details the rise of the African immigrant population in the U.S., the different waves of immigration of West Africans to the U.S., and the concept of acting White. This chapter reviewed values that appear to influence the two generations of West African immigrants’ attitudes towards education. Chapter 3 describes the methodology employed for this qualitative study, the rationale for adopting a qualitative research design, the research sample, and how data was analyzed. Chapter 4 presents the results. The results are organized according to each research question. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results. It addressed the implications and the limitations of this research, as well as the need for future research.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature inquiry will provide an overview of diaspora West Africans and the factors influencing first- and second-generation attitudes towards education. The review will start with familiar statistics about the rise of the African immigrant population in the U.S. The aim was to lay a framework on how the demographic became essential and the need to study them. The analysis also lays out the waves of immigration from West Africa from the 1960s to the 1990s when the Diversity Immigrant Visa Lottery program was launched. The research will briefly examine the group’s educational attainment and the selectivity of the immigrants who chose to come to the U.S. After laying these foundations to help understand the group, the analysis will delve into a discussion of the “acting White” phenomenon (Ogbu, 2004; Fryer, 2006). Fryer’s (2006) research helps create a clear delineation of what the literature says influences the attitude of West African immigrants toward school - they mostly take pride in performing above average. From thence, other factors that influence their attitude, like family, faith, internalized views about education, peer relationships, and personal experience that help explain what influences their attitude towards school and their potential success, will be discussed (Kamya, 2007; Ogbu & Simons, 1994, 1998). Issues of race and class often influence a description of the dilemma of personal identity in a polarized society. Finally, this literature assessment will address how the group identifies and how that might influence their attitude towards education.

Motivation to Study African Immigrants’ Educational Experience

Before the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965, which caused more Africans to immigrate to the U.S., there appeared to be little motivation to study their educational experience, including the first and second generations’ attitude to school. Thanks to the rising visibility of children of
African immigrants in U.S. public schools, there is a renewed interest in studying elements that may explain their educational experience and what influences their attitude towards education.

**Increase in African Immigrant Population in the U.S**

Statistical tabulations by the Migration Policy Institute (MPI) from the U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 2.1 million sub-Saharan African immigrants lived in the U.S. in 2019 (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). But according to Corra (2023), “African immigration to the United States was relatively small until the decade of the 1900s and it continued to remain so for the next few decades” (p. 02). It started to increase only in the 1960s and 1970s, and it started to accelerate only by the decades of 1990 (Corra, 2023). For instance, in 1960 the total number of foreign-born African immigrants living in the U.S. was only 35,355. In 1970, there were 80,143 African immigrants in the United States, which grew to 199,723 in 1980, 363,819 in 1990, and 881,300 in 2000 (Terrazas, 2009). Then, between 2000 and 2010, African immigrants in the U.S. rose from 881,300 to 1.6 million (Grieco et al., 2010). The most significant number of African immigrants, about 44.2%, comes from West Africa, followed by East Africa, with 35.2% of immigrants (Migration Policy Institute, 2019). In 2019, the African countries with the highest number of immigrants to the U.S. were Nigeria (393,000), Ethiopia (256,000), Ghana (199,000), and Kenya (153,000) (Migration Policy Institute, 2019; Awokoya & Clark, 2008; Rong & Brown, 2001). The states with the most significant number of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa are California, New York, Texas, Maryland, and Virginia. Between 2000 and 2010, the number of foreign-born African immigrants increased by 111.1% in Texas, 110% in Virginia, 100.1% in Maryland, 40.3% in California, and 35.9% in New York (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

The sudden increase in foreign-born populations from Africa, many born in West Africa (36%), East Africa (29%), and North Africa (17%), calls for a concerted effort to understand and
address their educational needs and to ensure future success at a personal and a general level to an educated participant who will contribute to creating a strong economy (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Addressing the educational needs of West African immigrants is also empowerment because West African immigrant parents express their future hopes for upward social mobility, professional career growth, and wealth by acquiring education (Roubeni et al., 2015; Dryden-Peterson, 2011).

**Brief Overview of Immigration from West Africa**

The 1960s was a transition period for West African countries because it marked a time when European colonial rule was ending, and more countries in the region declared independence. The nation of Ghana led this charge when Dr. Kwame Nkrumah successfully guided the then Gold Coast to its independence in 1957. Other regional neighbors like Nigeria, Senegal, Gambia, Mali, Niger, Sierra Leone, and Cote d’Ivoire quickly followed the path to self-governance. The now-independent states thrust with the responsibility of governing themselves were confronted with the challenge of providing human capital to manage their public infrastructure in health, education, the judiciary, social services, and the economy. The need for trained manpower in management leadership forced the countries in the region to start looking to the U.S. to provide education and training. It was the most opportune moment because the United States had just passed a new immigration statute in 1965 (Nandan, 2007). The new immigration statute effectively reversed the 1924 immigration law that promoted “national origin quotas” against people who were not Caucasians (Rumbaut, 1997; Nandan, 2007) (See Table 1-annual admissions for countries to the U.S. effective July 1, 1929.). As evident from Table 1, priority was given to countries with the majority White populations. Great Britain and Northern
Ireland were allocated 65,721, Germany received an annual allocation of 25,957, and the then Irish Free State (present-day Ireland) was allocated 17,853 spaces. Compare this figure to the African countries on the list, including Togo and Liberia; each was allocated 100 spaces annually. Table 2 below shows the trickle of African immigration to the U.S. from a mere 0.03% in 1910 to 0.8% in 1970 to 5% in 2017. However, this is a fraction of the numbers from Latin America and Asia, but a substantial increase, nonetheless.

**Table 1**

*Annual Admissions for Countries to the U.S. effective July 1, 1929.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/ Region</th>
<th>Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>1,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>1,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon (English speaking)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon (French speaking)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czechoslovakia</td>
<td>2,874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>1,181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia (Abyssinia)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>3,086</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>25,957</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain and Northern Ireland</td>
<td>65,721</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irish Free State</td>
<td>17,853</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>5,802</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morocco (French and Spanish Zones and Tangier)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>3,153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>2,377</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>6,524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruanda and Urundi (Belgian mandate)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia, European and Asiatic</td>
<td>2,784</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa, Union of Southwest Africa (mandate of Union of South Africa)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>3,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
<td>1,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanganyika (British mandate)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togoland (British mandate)</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from “Proclamation by the President of the United States”, no. 1872, 46 Stat. 2984 (March 22, 1929)
Five years after the 1965 immigration statute was signed in the U.S., West Africans moving to the U.S. accelerated. Their goal for moving to the United States centered around searching for a university education, a higher degree, and technical skills to return to their countries of origin. This movement in the 1970s was the first of two “waves” of West African immigrants to the U.S. Once back in their countries of origin, they assumed important government positions in the civil service to manage public-owned agencies. Some took over the management of public-owned enterprises the colonists had exclusively managed, and some sought and achieved very successful careers in national and regional leadership. They formed the burgeoning new African elite. The few African immigrants who stayed behind in the U.S. after their education could put their newly acquired engineering, medicine, academia, and management skills to use and join the U.S. labor force. One of those West Africans was a young Ibo man who left his village in the heat of the Nigeria civil war in 1968 to study in America. The name of the young man was John Ogbu, a revered and distinguished academician and anthropologist at the University of California, Berkeley. His name has become synonymous with the cultural-ecological theory (CET) because of his scholarship in explaining the theory.

### Table 2

**Percentage of Immigrants Admitted to the U.S. from Different Regions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regions</th>
<th>1910</th>
<th>1970</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>0.03%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>5.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>1.00%</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
<td>31.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>9.00%</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>87.00%</td>
<td>60.00%</td>
<td>11.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>2.00%</td>
<td>19.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.
was possible because of the 1965 immigration law’s quest to diversify the U.S. workforce (Nandan, 2007). The Nigeria civil war was a war in which pogrom was allegedly committed against the very entrepreneurial, highly educated, and predominantly Christian Ibos of south-eastern Nigeria by the mainly Muslim north. The war ended in 1970 after claiming nearly a million lives of men, women, and children from all strata of society, including intellectuals like Christopher Okigbo, a renowned poet.

The Nigeria civil conflict was quite an upsetting event that reverberated far beyond its borders that caused many people in the region to leave their countries to seek some form of stability in Europe and the United States.

The turn of the new decade - the 1970s, marked the first significant wave Africans, including West Africans immigrating to the United States, as indicated in Table 3 below, which shows numbers for all of Africa.

**Table 3**

*Growth of African Immigration to the U.S. from 1970 to 2015*

*(Numbers are in thousands)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>80</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>881</td>
<td>2,060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center

Since then, there has been a steady increase since 1970 and peaking in 2019. The sharpest increase in African migration to the U.S. occurred between 2000 to 2013 when it increased by 41% (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022; Anderson, 2017). However, just as some of the first waves of West African immigrants were returning to their countries, the weight of inter-ethnic and tribal rivalry was upending the progress the newly independent countries were trying to make. The
result was the rise of warlords who engaged in guerrilla warfare to challenge the central
government in their countries. The wars and over-grazed grassland gave rise to a severe drought
and famine, leading to people fleeing their regions and even beyond the borders of their own
countries to seek refuge in neighboring African countries and the West, including the U.S. In the
U.S., the Refugee Act of 1980 created a pathway to absorb some of the refugees. Meanwhile,
military coups and countercoups continued unabated in most West African countries into the
1980s. The military dictatorships and poor governance forced more citizens to seek a way out of
their countries. This group of new arrivals to the U.S., mainly recipients of the Refugee Act
1980, formed the second wave of West African migrants to the United States (Lorenzi &
Batatova, 2022). Rather than stay in their newly independent countries, these educated, and
technically skilled persons started migrating to the U.S., leading to the natural depletion of a
trained workforce and the consequent brain drain in West African countries. This second wave of
migration to the U.S. gained dramatic momentum in the 1990s when the Diversity Immigrant
Visa Program was initiated (Anderson, 2017).

The U.S. Library of Congress claims that over 500,000 Africans immigrated to the
United States in the 1990s alone, a number it claimed far surpasses immigrants from the
continent that had come to the U.S. in the past 150 years (Library of Congress, n.d). However,
the data was not disaggregated to show those whose immigration directly resulted from the
Diversity Immigrant Visa Program of 1990, asylum seekers, refugees, those who entered the
U.S. illegally, or those who came in legally. Such disaggregation is essential to accurately gauge
the net impact of the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program on African immigration to the United
States. This surge was the direct result of the program because it was implemented to benefit
countries with historically low visa issuance to the United States. One of the eligibility
requirements is a minimum high school education or higher to apply for the program. This requirement affects the selectivity of African immigrants to the United States as they continue to rank as the most educated immigrant group in the country. On the other hand, the increase could be the result of accelerated immigration to the United States from across the world during that period.

Table 4

*Diversity immigrant visa allocations by region, 1994-2015*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Allocation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>415,994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>404,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>151,251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America and the Caribbean</td>
<td>38,162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>14,864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: USCIS

Table 4 above shows that Africans have benefited from this program more than other regions. Between 1995 to 2017, 40% of Africans benefitted from the program. The allocation to Africans is considerably higher compared to only 31% for Europeans and 25% for Asians.

(Anderson, 2017)

**Demographics of West African Immigrants**

African immigrants rank as one of the most highly educated immigrant subgroups in the U.S., and two-fifths have bachelor’s degrees or more (Knight & Watson, 2014, McCabe, 2011, Feliciano, 2005). Sixteen percent of African immigrants 25 years and over have graduate degrees. This percentage is higher than the U.S. population, 10.4% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). African immigrants make up 34% of Blacks enrolled in America’s Ivy League colleges, even though they are just 13% of the Black population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). According to
Guinier (2004), African immigrants have an added advantage in academic achievement because they are free from the burden of a caste system native-born African Americans bear because of their historical past. In addition, many African immigrants enjoy educated parents’ social capital and are free of stereotype threats which is the dread of confirming assumptions of intellectual inferiority by African Americans (Guinier, 2004). However, some researchers state that African immigrants strive to be non-oppositional. This set them apart from native-born African Americans in the U.S., whose forebears involuntarily came to the United States during the transatlantic slave trade and consequently often showed oppositional behavior (Balogun, 2011; Ogbu & Simons, 1998; Rong & Brown, 2001). Unlike native-born African Americans who historically have not seen education translate to more significant economic gains with people they know (Feliciano, 2005), West Africans express optimism about their future economic prospects and believe education is the key to this success (Roubeni et al., 2015; Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Ogbu (2001) theorized that the immigrants' optimistic outlook was predicated on community forces (see Appendix B). Community forces are sets of strategies minority groups employ to counter societal challenges.

**Immigrant Selection of West Africans**

The African immigrants who come to the U.S. are unlike the general population in their home countries in terms of their level of educational attainment or how long they have been in school (Feliciano, 2005). Also, Black Africans who immigrate to the U.S. are likely to have a high school diploma or a vocational education that requires at least two years of training because most enter the U.S. through the Diversity Visa Program, which has these requirements (Capps et al., 2012). They are also more likely to be highly skilled due to their education. For example,
59% of Nigerian and 47% of Ghanaian highly skilled immigrants chose the U.S. as their final destination (Capps et al., 2012).

In contrast, among West Africans living in West Africa, 42% of adults are illiterate; secondary school enrollment is only 20% (Feliciano, 2005). Economically, the population of West Africans who live in their countries in West Africa fares worse than those who live here in the U.S. For example, more than 55% of the population lives on less than $1 a day, and the average annual income per person is $309, with a life expectancy of 46 years at birth (The World Bank, 2015). These grim statistics sharply contrast with those who immigrated to the U.S. The African immigrant selectivity sets them apart, but they face challenges; therefore, the group deserves more research to understand what influences their attitude to education.

**Acting White**

Fryer (2006) notes that the way schools are organized may account for why hardworking minority high school students, especially African Americans, and Hispanics, are shunned, ridiculed, and seen as different by their peers if they work to excel academically.

Fryer notes that Black and Hispanic students become less popular when they strive to achieve academically and possibly become more popular within their circle of friends when their grades drop. Although this behavior manifests more in schoolwork, it is also evident in fashion and personal preferences. Fryer (2006) claims that students perceived as studious and taking challenging classes or demonstrating any appearance of scholarship are seen as stepping out of the expected norms for their race and consequently alienated. Even a personal fashion sense and style could draw penalties (Fryer, 2006). An African American teenager who engages in excelling behaviors not tacitly approved by his peers is labeled as “acting White.” According to Fryer (2006), this social ostracizing of a diligent minority student may help explain the decades-
old question behind disparities in academic achievement between African Americans and White students. It may also explain the relative scarcity of African American students in elite universities. Although research interest continues to grow on the prevalence of acting White or the opposition to academic excellence and the social penalty meted out to non-compliant Black teenagers, some researchers assert that such behaviors are nothing new except in nomenclature. It is not far-fetched to describe it as part of the oppositional culture Fordham & Ogbu (1986) described in their research two decades earlier. According to the authors, this oppositional culture is most prevalent in the African American communities, a group they describe as involuntary.

Fordham & Ogbu (1986) see resistance to acting White as an outcome of the government’s perennial neglect of African Americans and other communities of color. Other researchers see it as self-inflicted injury by African Americans who claim they are victims, especially when contrasting with similar groups like Blacks from Africa and the Caribbean, whose academic outcomes are competitive.

Although resistance to acting White is often associated with African American high school students passing up academics for popularity conferred by the membership of a sports team, it is not a new phenomenon. Coleman (1955), in his The Adolescent Society, records, "In a high school, the norms act to hold down the achievements of those above average so that the school’s demands will be at a level easily maintained by the majority” (p. 42). Although Coleman did not include racial data in this report, it underscores high school students’ preference for social acceptance to academic achievement. Researchers have also found varying levels of subordinating academics within the ranks of Buraku outcasts in Japan, the Italian immigrant
population resident in the West End districts of Boston, the blue-collar populations in Britain, and the Maori people of New Zealand (Fryer, 2006).

It is worth noting that researchers have been unable to find any correlation between race or ethnicity and African Americans’ supposed disdain for intellectual pursuit. The authors of quantitative analysis were emphatic that the seeming scorn on intellectualism by African Americans or Hispanic teens is at par with Whites of relative age (Ainsworth-Darnell & Downey, 1998; Fryer, 2006). Other studies (Cook & Ludwig, 1997; Fryer, 2006) also debunked the narrative about African Americans and acting White, stating that high-achieving Black students are as popular when compared to their low-achieving peers. The problem with these studies, including Fryer (2006), is that they have not identified the concrete reasons whether and why resistance to acting White is more prevalent in minority communities leading to the intractable gap between White students. As long as no definite answers are found, the problem of resistance to acting White—to the extent that it actually exists—will continue, and the issue of the achievement gap between Whites and African Americans will persist. The remaining sections of this review will discuss some West African attitudes towards education.

**West African Immigrant View of Educational Institutions**

Voluntary West African immigrant families in the U.S. see education as a gateway to a higher status in society. In the immigrant parent’s theory of “making it,” they believe that “getting a good education” is vital in achieving success and more excellent opportunities in the U.S. (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 172; Roubeni et al. 2015). They believe in the efficacy of education in translating to future economic gains and communicate to their children that success in school is an obligation and an expression of gratitude for all the sacrifices the parents have made (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). The parents, therefore, set high academic expectations for their
children and hold them accountable for their school performance. In addition, the West African immigrant parents are trustful and respectful of the educational institution.

The immigrant parents view the school positively, respect the school personnel, and hardly challenge the authority of teachers and administrators (Gilbert, 2009; Lee, 2005). On the other hand, native-born African Americans or involuntary immigrants see the school and its personnel differently. According to Good, Masewicz, and Vogel (2010), they do not believe acquiring more education guarantees social mobility in society. Ogbu (2001) characterized these differences as oppositional and non-oppositional behavior. He framed oppositional and non-oppositional behavior as ways different minority groups interpret similar societal problems, mainly because that group became a minority group in the U.S. For instance, the recent West African immigrants who voluntarily came to the U.S. interpret their experiences in the U.S. based on a dual frame of reference, or comparison to their life and what they know in their countries of origin, otherwise folk theory. Although they acknowledge the problems in the U.S. as they present themselves in school and society, including being treated differently, they are not oppositional. On the contrary, native-born African Americans are not known to tolerate behaviors by the dominant group when the act appears discriminatory. The reason is that they share a different cultural and language frame of reference (Clark, 2008).

Another oppositional group is the American Indians. They were conquered and confined to reservations by the White majority (Ogbu, 2001). Ogbu (2001) argued that these minorities turned to oppositional behavior in part because they “were not rewarded for behaving like White Americans, were not permitted to behave like Whites, were punished for behaving like Whites”
According to Ogbu (2001), the Native-born minorities define the barriers they encounter in society not as to overcome but as a marker of their identity to be maintained.

**Influences on Attitude Towards Education**

**Economy and Job Stability**

Immigrant parents know the importance of their children acquiring a college education. For many immigrant families, education is a ticket to occupational rewards. For middle-class immigrant families, education is the cultural capital they transmit to their children. The families do this by emphasizing the value of a college education and ways of getting into college and succeeding in college (McDonough, 1997). The emphasis on education cannot be more significant for immigrants when economic considerations are put into play. In 2022, the unemployment rate for Blacks was 6.2% compared to Whites, who had rates of only 3.2% and Asians, who had rates of only 2.8% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023a). In 2023, the first quarter unemployment rate for Blacks was 5.7% and considered a historic low even though it was far higher than other racial groups like Whites and Asians, which both recorded 2.8% nationally for the same period (Williams, 2020). In some parts of the country, the unemployment situation for Blacks is even worse. Williams (2020) notes that Nevada, Illinois, and D.C. recorded the highest unemployment rate in the group for the same period and stood at 11.0%, 10.5%, and 9.6%. These numbers indicate that Blacks suffer profound inequality in the labor market and must try twice as hard, possibly through more credentialing or higher educational attainment, to be employed or even compensated equitably. Morrison (2020) notes that African American university graduates are more likely to be unemployed after graduation than their White counterparts. Morrison (2020) further claims that African Americans suffer systemic
inequalities like under-assessment from their teachers and assignment of lower grades that hold them back from attending selective universities, unlike their White peers. With these glaring inequities within the general Black population, West African immigrant students, as a subgroup, view themselves as twice at a disadvantage – their race and being an immigrant, and therefore stake their bet on acquiring more education as a mitigation strategy and deploying the tools of community forces (see Appendix B). Also, in 2022 the percentage of 25-29 years old who had completed a bachelor’s or higher degree was 28% for Blacks compared to 45% for Whites and 72% for Asians (National Center for Education Statistics – NCES, 2023).

Furthermore, in 2021, Whites made up most of the labor force (77%). On the other hand, Blacks and Asians constituted an additional 13% and 7%, respectively. American Indians and Alaska Natives made up 1% of the labor force, while Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders accounted for less than half a percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023b).

On the other hand, Black African immigrants enjoy high employment rates, possibly due to their high educational attainment (Capps et al., 2012). For example, in 2019, the unemployment rate of Black immigrants is typically lower than that of U.S.-born Black residents. Nationwide, 6% of Black immigrants and 10% of U.S.-born Black residents ages 16 and older were unemployed (Lacarte, 2022).

But the high employment rate of African immigrants does not often translate to higher remunerations. This is despite the knowledge and skill they bring to the job due to their education. For immigrants, employment statistics like that for U.S.-born Blacks are not only a stark reminder about their minority status and the inequity that Blacks suffer in the U.S. but an
added pressure at three levels. They must (a) compete educationally in hopes of future economic gains, (b) adopt a more deliberative approach to how they assimilate and acculturate in their new country, and (c) navigate the process of their identity. This information is crucial for immigrants because their choices determine their prospects of upward mobility or downward trajectory.

**Family Structure**

Family is the typical West African community’s epicenter of events and relationships. The family is often comprised of a man and woman and their children. It is common to see some extended family members, especially grandparents from the maternal or paternal sides of the family. Having grandparents join families has seen an upsurge because the United States immigration laws allow naturalized citizens and green card holders to file for visa permits for immediate relatives, who can file for their other unmarried children. Once they arrive, they usually join their host family members, waste no time searching for work to earn income, and move out to their own house. Guidance on how to navigate seamlessly and assimilate is provided to the new arrivals. So, the family unit is strong, but there have been occasions when the family irretrievably collapses or faces the challenge of depressed income, among other problems like housing and finding jobs.

Despite the multiple problems that confront the immigrant family, such as low income, living in high-poverty neighborhoods, accepting menial jobs, adapting to a new cultural milieu, and facing the hostility of a new society, West African immigrants generally have positive attitudes and confront their obstacles with an amiable disposition (Gilbert, 2007; Portes & Zhou, 1993). This is because they see the obstacles as temporary and that can be overcome in due time by working hard and acquiring more education (Ogbu & Simons, 1994, 1998). This is the
message West African immigrant families transmit to their children at home. Apart from developing optimistic views about the future, they compare conditions in their home countries to those in their new country (Gilbert, 2009). West African immigrant parents communicate this information at home in no uncertain terms. The same message is restated to the children in numerous West African communities. The acts and traits of persistence and resilience are built into church sermons and other religious talks due to the centrality of religion and its place in the family life of West African immigrants.

**Religious Belief**

African immigrants, including those from West Africa, adopt coping strategies and engage in spirituality to sustain themselves emotionally and mentally. They do this to help them make sense of the complexities of living in an alien culture. Prevalent in the U.S., African immigrants’ engagement in spirituality is also a protective mechanism to maximize their self-esteem in the face of difficulties. Their value system is steeped in the belief in a supreme God “who controls the natural order of things” (Kamya, 1997, p. 156). This belief helps researchers understand why “prayers, invocations, and praises” are important in immigrants’ lives (Kamya, 1997, p. 156). Religion, spirituality, ethnic loyalty, and maintaining relationships with an individual’s indigenous culture strengthen resilience and persistence, a major component of the success of the West African immigrant (Kamya, 1997). This is consistent with Ogbu’s (1998) argument that *community forces* (beliefs, values, behavioral patterns, and coping strategies) play a vital role in how the immigrant responds to adverse treatment from society (Lim, 2012).
Peer Relationships and School Disciplinary Practices

According to Ogbu, for the involuntary immigrants, the oppositional behavior is manifested in putting only minimum effort into schoolwork, disengagement during lessons, discipline issues, and disruptive behavior demonstrated through defiance of authority figures, use of profane and vulgar words, and quarrels and fights (Ogbu, 2003; Ogbu, 1998; Fordham, 1996).

Although school misbehaviors were observed in other groups, they were observed to a lesser extent when compared to African American students (Ogbu, 2003). However, discrimination and disproportionate discipline practices in schools also play a powerful role in the attitude of African American students. Since after a study in 1975 by the Children's Defense Fund whose study indicated that Black students are far more likely to be suspended from school and punished for infractions that may otherwise be overlooked by when White students flout the same or similar rules, other studies have shown the same result (Gregory et al., 2010). Gregory et al. (2010) cited a raft of studies that clearly showed an escalation of suspensions of Black students, including a study by KewalRamani et al. (2007) that showed about “1 in 5 Black students were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White students” (p. 59), and a national study of 74,000 10th grade students in which 50% of Black students claimed they had been suspended or expelled compared to only 20% of White students (Gregory et al., 2010). So, in assessing the disengagement of African American students in schools and its impact on their achievement, it is prudent to consider the solid adverse effects of school suspension. One example of those adverse effects is that it may lead to dropping out of school (Gregory et al., 2010). Some researchers have tried to link poverty prevalent in the African American community to the discipline issues Black students have in school and how it impacts their achievement. In a
paper the National Association of Secondary School Principals presented to the United States Commission on Civil Rights (2000), Gregory et al. (2010) state correlation among “certain demographic characteristics that are more common among some racial and ethnic groups” (p.60), explain the disparity in disciplining students. Other researchers see a link between living in crime-prone neighborhoods with a prevalence of violence and substance abuse with the expected effect of stress and depression that may impact student discipline behavior in school. Gregory et al. (2010) assert that “being enrolled in a school with high rates of low-income students or being from a low-income family does increase the likelihood that a student will be subject to punitive forms of discipline” (p.61). Expectedly, this discipline experienced by African Americans has negatively impacted their long-term prospects of achieving economic prosperity or success in school. The result is that more African Americans lack the human capital often achieved through higher educational attainment. Their skill level for employment is low, and they are pushed to a life of poverty by discrimination which manifests itself in the classroom through disproportionate punishment, and consequently, higher percentages of Black children live in poverty. For example, in 2016, about 19% of children under age 18 were living in poverty in the U.S. But the percentages of children living in poverty were highest for Black and American Indian/Alaska Native children (34% each), followed by Hispanic children (28%), Pacific Islander children (23%), and children of Two or more races (19%), and were lowest for White and Asian children (11% each) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019a).

Moreover, in fall 2016, the percentage of students who attended high-poverty schools was highest for Hispanic students (45%), followed very close by Black students (44%),
American Indian/Alaska Native students (38%), Pacific Islander students (24%), students of two or more races (17%), Asian students (14%), and White students (8%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019b).

These numbers indicate the vulnerability of the Black population in a society polarized by race like the U.S. The numbers also highlight the relevance, potency, and indispensability of good education for the Black minority population.

*Identity*

First-generation immigrants have an identity often cemented in their country of origin. They believe that in the U.S., working hard will guarantee success and economic and social mobility. Their high selectivity reinforces the strength of this conviction through the immigration process for education and job skills (Waters 1994, Waters et al., 2011; McCabe, 2011). The advantages of school persistence and professional or job skills appear to account for their likelihood for employment compared to African Americans, whose incorporation into the U.S. is involuntary. First-generation African immigrants who are non-oppositional staunchly identify and stand by their ethnic identities as Africans. Although research literature often identifies these immigrants solely based on their skin color with native-born African Americans, African immigrants interpret it as misidentification. And they push back on the non-disaggregation of data that categorizes all Blacks as one homogenous unit (Waters et al., 2011). African immigrants insist on differences in language, culture, values, and worldview regarding government and its institutions, including the schools, separating them from native-born African Americans.
A shared dilemma of second and other generations of African immigrants is how they identify themselves. They face the challenge of either adopting the ways of native-born African Americans or embracing the ethnic identity of their parents’ heritage. Scholars who study immigrant issues posit that at the turn of the twentieth century, when immigrants to America were mainly Whites from Europe, it was thought that the longer children of the immigrants lived in the U.S., the more they would learn and adopt the culture here and minimize the link to their parents’ origin country. Researchers called this “straight line” assimilation. At the theory's core is the rationalization that each successive generation will be better off economically than their parents (Warner & Srole, 1945; Waters et al., 2010; Waters et al., 2011). However, the surge in the immigration patterns of people of color and how they adapt to the U.S. society in which they try to maintain aspects of their own culture as they assimilate into the U.S. society led to the articulation of what researchers called a “segmented assimilation” process. Specifically, this segmented assimilation process identifies various “possible outcomes” for second-generation to adjust to living in the U.S. (Portes & Zhou, 1993, p. 74). In forming their identity, second-generation immigrants adopt aspects of the language, cultural practices of socialization, and fashion of their parents’ origin country (Woldemikael, 1989; Waters et al., 2011). On the other hand, they may choose to follow the path of other native-born minorities who oppose the system (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Portes and Zhou (1993) opine that children of immigrants who align with the ethnic identity of their parents’ heritage have better economic outcomes than those who identify with native-born minorities who were less successful in their economic outcomes.
Finally, comparisons are sometimes made between the much-touted success of the minority Punjabi Indians in the U.S., whose culture and language are vastly different from the dominant White population in the U.S. They see the differences in the U.S. as obstacles they could overcome as they keep their goals in perspective (Ogbu, 2001, Gibson, 1988). Like other voluntary immigrants, they apply the principle of the folk theory of making it. Despite the differences and barriers, they encounter in U.S. society, they are not oppositional. In another study, Chua and Rubenfeld (2014) see the chosen trajectories of the immigrant groups as a reason for their success in the U.S. For example, Chua and Rubenfeld (2014) cited Nigerian students, who make up less than one percent of the Black population in the U.S. in 2013, as a typical high-achieving group from West Africa. According to the authors, in 2013, nearly one-quarter of the Black students at Harvard Business School had Nigerian heritage. In addition, more than a fourth of Nigerian Americans possess a graduate or professional degree, compared to only about 11% of Whites (Chua & Rubenfeld, 2014). This example about Nigerians can be interpreted in two ways: as a microcosm of the achievement attitude some African immigrants possess and continually demonstrate and as the high selectivity of Nigerian immigrants to the United States.

The obvious implication of the experiences of the immigrant groups is that the choice of how to deal with the barriers in school and society for voluntary and involuntary immigrants affects their educational outcomes. Put differently, the ways each minority group engages and interprets or applies their community forces generally dictate the outcome.
Summary of Literature Review

The implementation of the Diversity Immigrant Visa program in the 1990s marked a notable rise in immigration from Africa, with most coming from West Africa. These immigrants are highly selected for education. African immigrants rank as the most highly educated immigrant group in the United States. While their presence in the United States contributes to economic growth, it has led to a brain drain in the countries around the West African region.

Although West African immigrants are often ascribed with achievements and attitudes such as having determination and being hardworking and are sometimes called model minorities, the model minority label disguises the struggles some of them encounter. Several factors influence their attitudes to education, such as their sense of themselves and peer relationships.

Put in simple terms, resistance to acting White means opposition to academic excellence. It is a practice of teenagers seeking peer group validation through a preference for social acceptance while minimizing academic excellence. Although it is observed often within minority populations, it is not new. West African immigrants encourage, promote, and see value in demonstrating academic excellence. Students who do not take schoolwork seriously are seen as choosing a path leading to poverty. So West African immigrants discourage any action that mirrors the resistance to the acting White behavior or actions that denigrate academic excellence. The group emphasizes achievement attitudes of persistence, resilience, and optimism as they work to achieve their goals. These achievement attitudes are interwoven in religious talks because their values are steeped in religious beliefs (Kamya, 1997). The attitudes of West African immigrants mirror voluntary immigrants - people who were not forced to come to the United States versus the involuntary immigrants who were forced to come to the United States on an
unequal basis. The poor employment statistics of a comparative racial group - native-born African Americans who are associated with resistance to acting White is a reminder about taking school seriously. No research linked resistance to acting White and poor employment, but educational attainment is linked to higher employment prospects which West Africans enjoy.

Identity, or how the West African immigrants see themselves and the paths they consider in their assimilation process, influence their attitude towards education. There are benefits to studying the West African immigrant demographic’s attitude to education intensely because their success contributes to the growth of the economy, education, and the cultural landscape of the United States.

**Gaps in the Literature**

More research is needed to explore the educational experience and the factors that influence the attitude of West African immigrant students. Although a starting point, this research is not exhaustive enough to fully understand the varied perspectives of the issue. Examining the issue by adopting a quantitative approach to capture a more comprehensive response and cover more expansive geographical locations is recommended. This research and other readings from the literature review did not yield information as to whether and why resistance to acting White is prevalent among Black teenagers.

Qualitative research offers opportunities for getting a deeper understanding of a phenomenon being studied because respondents can verbally express those phenomena the way they understand it, and it affects them. In this research, the respondents spoke in-depth about their attitudes toward education across two generations and how they understood and interpreted those experiences. They expressed their feelings, motivations, and beliefs in ways quantitative
research cannot. Qualitative research targets problems individuals deal with on a personal level rather than as raw numbers and data sets that quantitative research employs, which may not have any real-world relationship with the individuals. With interviews as a staple of qualitative research, an individual’s gestures and verbalizations can provide a gateway to making meanings of the respondent’s reason for a particular perspective the individual might hold about an issue.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction and Overview

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate with a sample of first and second-generation West African immigrants their understanding of the factors influencing their attitude to education and to leverage that information in planning learning outcomes targeting students, teachers, school administrators, and parents. This researcher asserts that a deeper understanding of this issue will shed light on the impact of home life, ethnic community resources, cultural background, and their influence on attitude, identity, and school. In trying to understand the first and second-generation attitudes towards education, this study posed three research questions:

(a) What are the attitudes of West African immigrants towards school?
(b) Do these attitudes differ across first-generation and second-generation immigrants? If so, in what way do they differ?
(c) According to West African immigrants, how do these attitudes affect their school experience positively or negatively?

This chapter describes the research methodology and discusses (a) the rationale for adopting a qualitative research design, (b) the description of the research sample, (c) the sampling procedure, (d) the protection of human subjects, (e) instrumentation, (f) procedure, (g) analysis and synthesis of data, (h) limitations of this study, (i) summary.

The Rationale for Adopting Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative research focuses on explaining, describing, and exploring phenomena and, for good measure, is linked to the constructivist philosophy of an individual’s knowledge being formed from their sociocultural interactions. Constructivism is also described as a spiral of knowledge; it involves students building on what they have learned, constructing knowledge, and
interpreting the meaning of their experience to gain greater understanding (Krathwohl, 2009; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The sample in this study represents a demographic group with accumulated experience of living as immigrants in the United States. They may be constructing their lives around the confines of those prisms. The participants voiced their interpretations of immigrant experiences through interviews; therefore, a qualitative design appears most appropriate to capture this data (Patton, 1990; Krathwohl, 2009). Qualitative methods will directly capture the intentions of this research about the attitudes of the different generations of West African immigrants and make it appropriate to use. It contrasts with quantitative research focusing on statistics to measure attitudes.

**Research Sample**

This study utilized purposeful sampling, a staple of qualitative research, to select participants because it helps identify individuals and attitudes essential to the research. According to various researchers (Krathwohl, 2009; Creswell, 2014; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012), purposeful sampling helps clarify the problem and the research question the researcher is seeking answers to. In the quest for this research to explore the differences between two generations of West African immigrants in the U.S., there was a goal to seek out individuals who not only possessed the experience that was important to this research but also might have contrary and/or contrasting views on issues posed to them during the interview process. It was also important that those people were accessible to me regarding location. Some individuals possessed social contacts in their network, such as friends and family, some of whom the researcher requested. Five participants provided references to their networks, culminating in the participation of those referred to in this research. This is called the *snowball* sampling approach in academic research,
and that technique was utilized to recruit participants. The following criteria were set for selecting participants:

- All participants were 18 or older.
- The participants traced their direct ancestry to West Africa within the past two generations.
- All the participants lived in Los Angeles County.

The research sample included 41 individuals living in Los Angeles County (See Table 5 below). Many West Africans in the U.S. call Los Angeles County home. The County also boasts of many socio-cultural, linguistic, and ethnic-based associations from the diverse populations of West Africans. Some participants belong to unincorporated associations that benefit their communities, for example, local Christian churches whose congregations are predominantly immigrants from West Africa. Other participants were adherents of the Islamic faith from West Africa.

Table 5

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generation</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Country affiliation</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Profession</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M001</td>
<td>Akin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F002</td>
<td>Ugomma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F003</td>
<td>Philomena</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Pre-school Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M004</td>
<td>Moses</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M005</td>
<td>Idika</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Accountant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M006</td>
<td>Christopher</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Education Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Country affiliation</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td>Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F007</td>
<td>Perpetual</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F008</td>
<td>Khadija</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M009</td>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0010</td>
<td>Clifford</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>EKG Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0011</td>
<td>Thaddeus</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Social Worker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0012</td>
<td>Ibrahim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Realtor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0013</td>
<td>Uzoechi</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Realtor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F0014</td>
<td>Ekua</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Elementary School Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0015</td>
<td>Armstrong</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>Medical Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F0016</td>
<td>Mariama</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Retired School Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0017</td>
<td>Onochie</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F0026</td>
<td>Evelyn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0027</td>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>K-12 School Administrator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>F0036</td>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Community organizer /Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0037</td>
<td>Cheikh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Country affiliation</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td>Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0038</td>
<td>Ousmane</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Bachelors (enrolled)</td>
<td>Healthcare Technician</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>M0041</td>
<td>Paulson</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>44-64</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>University Professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0018</td>
<td>Kevin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0019</td>
<td>Ogechukwu</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Associate-degree</td>
<td>Bank Cashier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0020</td>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Foreign Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0021</td>
<td>Yetunde</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Software Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0022</td>
<td>Obong</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Associate-degree</td>
<td>Fashion Sales Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0023</td>
<td>Ogbeh</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Businessman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0024</td>
<td>Kingsley</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Masters/attorney</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0025</td>
<td>Godswill</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>US (Nigeria)</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>University Director of Finance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0028</td>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0029</td>
<td>Amina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Pseudonym</td>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Country affiliation</td>
<td>Age Range</td>
<td>Educational Level</td>
<td>Profession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0030</td>
<td>Adaeze</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1.5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0031</td>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Masters</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Nigeria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0032</td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Bachelors x2</td>
<td>Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Nigeria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0033</td>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>College Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Nigeria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0034</td>
<td>Regina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Nigeria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>F0035</td>
<td>Ruth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>US</td>
<td>18-32</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Nigeria)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0039</td>
<td>Samuel</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Engineer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>M0040</td>
<td>Ahmed</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>33-43</td>
<td>Bachelors</td>
<td>Personal Trainer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within this demographic, Nigerians continue to dominate other populations in numbers in Los Angeles County. For example, census estimates for 2010, 2020 and 2021 taken from the U.S. Census American Community Survey data titled “Country of Birth of Foreign-Born Population Los Angeles County,” published by the Los Angeles Almanac, has a population of people from Nigeria higher than all other countries from West Africa listed in the data combined (see Table 6). In 2010, an estimated 7,111 people from Nigeria called Los Angeles County home. By the year 2021, the number had increased to 12,980. This large number of immigrants from Nigeria is a clear contrast to Cabo Verde. However, it is a relatively more minor island but
a country in West Africa in its own right, with no representation in the data in 2020 and only an estimated 44 people living in Los Angeles County. Recall also that West Africa is comprised of 16 countries, and only six are represented in this data. The combined ten other countries not represented in the data accounted for only 1,515 in 2010; by 2021, their number had declined to 908 (see Table 6). The other countries represented in the data had only a few hundred. Ghana was the only country whose people were counted in the thousands and ranked a distant second to Nigeria in the data (see Table 6).

**Table 6**

*People from West Africa in Los Angeles County by the numbers*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>2021 Estimate</th>
<th>2020 Estimate</th>
<th>2010 Estimate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Africa (Annual total estimate)</td>
<td>18,243</td>
<td>17,879</td>
<td>11,301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabo Verde</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>2,828</td>
<td>2,612</td>
<td>1,682</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberia</td>
<td>423</td>
<td>429</td>
<td>362</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>12,980</td>
<td>12,934</td>
<td>7,111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>347</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other West African countries</td>
<td>908</td>
<td>799</td>
<td>1,515</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In another data showing the population of Black immigrants from all over the world who live in Los Angeles County, Nigeria appears to be the top-sending country among the nation-states and regions represented in the data (see Table 7). According to USC Equity Research Institute analysis of 2019 5-year (2015-2019) American Community Survey microdata from
IPUMS USA, of the 74,116 Black immigrants from different countries who live in Los Angeles County, Nigerians alone account for 12,409 inhabitants or 17%. All the other countries of West Africa combined account for just 6,837 residents, or only 9% of the population. In Table 7, Black immigrants who live in Los Angeles County come from three major countries: Nigeria, Belize, and Ethiopia. Still, the number of immigrants from Nigeria alone dwarfs them in comparison. This considerable number of residents from Nigeria in Los Angeles County helps to explain the relatively higher number of participants from Nigeria in this research sample.

Table 7

Ancestry of Black population in Los Angeles County by the numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ancestry of Black population in Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Total population of Specific country or region resident in Los Angeles County</th>
<th>Percentage share of Black immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>12,409</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>9,801</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>6,759</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>5,650</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>4,306</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of West Africa</td>
<td>6,837</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of East Africa</td>
<td>5,912</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Africa</td>
<td>2,756</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Central America</td>
<td>3,946</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Caribbean</td>
<td>6,659</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>2,021</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>3,198</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of the world</td>
<td>3,862</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In a study entitled “Ethnic populations in Southern California, 1990 and 2010” conducted by California State University, Northridge, between 1990 and 2010, the population of Nigerians in Los Angeles County grew from 4,079 inhabitants to 9,385 inhabitants, or a 130% increase. This increase may explain the overrepresentation of the Nigerian population in the data. Also, there was an overrepresentation of males. However, the sample was diverse regarding economic, social economic status, social standing, educational attainment, and age.

**Recruitment of Participants**

The initial plan was to select 45 participants purposively. The 45 participants would be 22 males and 23 females, or vice versa, who would share experiences that would help make sense of the first and second-generation towards education. At first, recruiting 45 participants for a population with which I claimed familiarity did not appear very challenging. I was wrong. It took far longer to recruit participants than I had anticipated. In recruiting participants, I made Google searches for West African community organizations, religious organizations, and other social and civic groups like those focused on health, women’s health, and education operating in the Los Angeles County areas. Some Google results yielded flyers for annual national Independence Day commemoration celebrations of some countries or notice of a group meeting that shares the same language or geographical region in West Africa. From these flyers, I called the people listed to introduce myself and my research and ask if they would be willing to participate. If they agreed to participate, I would email them the consent form or take it to the interview for them to
read and sign before the interviews start. In certifying the eligibility for the research, I asked how the participant traced his/her lineage to West Africa, where he/she was born, and where the parent or parents were born. The questions helped me accurately categorize the participants into the generations defined in this research. In my project, I initially considered including a third generation in this research: West African descendants who had both parents born in the U.S. But none of the participants fit into this category. After interviewing 31 participants, I paused to directly search for participants whose parents were born in the U.S. The pause yielded no positive results, and I continued interviewing others who met the research requirement. A significant reason was that the third-generation individuals I found within the geographical area related to this research did not meet the age requirement. The reason is that their parents, the second-generation participants in this research, just started raising their own families a few years ago. Of those second-generation West Africans, some just graduated from college or have been out of college a few years back but are working to stabilize themselves financially before raising a family. For most West Africans, including the second generation, pursuing a graduate degree or entering the labor market immediately after graduating from college takes precedence over marrying to raise a family. Unlike Asian and Hispanic families, with a more extended history of immigration to the United States, few West African families have multi-generational families up to the third generation. So, I did not interview third-generation immigrants and eliminated them from this research. As an immigrant from West Africa, I leveraged my status as a community member to post appeals in alumni groups and old boys’ group (high school alumni group) to make appeals to be introduced to a person of West African descent who met my research requirement.
Of the 41 participants I interviewed, 23 were first-generation, and 18 were second-generation. There are 8 females and 15 males in the first-generation category. The age range of the first-generation participants is in the 33+ and 44+ groups. Of the 23 first-generation West African immigrants, 15 have graduate degrees, including 7 with doctorate degrees. A total of 7 participants have bachelor’s degrees, and one is enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program. All 23 first-generation West Africans hold careers ranging from university professors to medical sonographers.

The second-generation participants consisted of 18 participants; 10 were females, and 8 were males. Of the ten females who are the second generation, three have master’s degrees, and seven have bachelor’s degrees. The age range of the majority of the second-generation females was 18+ to 32+. Of the eight males in the second generation, two have associate degrees, four have bachelor’s degrees, and two have master’s degrees. The age of the second-generation males ranges from 33+ to 43+. As stated earlier, participants with Nigerian ancestry are overrepresented in this research. The participants’ countries of origin from other countries are as follows: Mali (1), Senegal (2), Guinea (3), Ghana (5), Sierra Leone (1), and Nigeria (29).

Table 8 below summarizes my sample in terms of generation, gender, level of education, and age group. Table 9 summarizes it in terms of country of affiliation.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>With Graduate degree</th>
<th>With Undergraduate degree or enrolled</th>
<th>Age group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0 3 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9 9 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9

Summary of Participant Demographics by country affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Nigeria</th>
<th>Ghana</th>
<th>Sierra Leone</th>
<th>Mali</th>
<th>Guinea</th>
<th>Senegal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First generation</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second generation</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overrepresentation of participants with Nigerian ancestry is not surprising when considering the breakdown of residents from West African countries in Los Angeles County (See Table 6). In Table 6, people from Nigeria far outnumber all other West African countries represented in the data, followed by Ghana by a wide margin - the same as in my data.

Also, in Table 6, Senegal and Sierra Leone are both represented in the data with the number of residents over many years with less than a thousand residents. Table 7 reflects the same trend of the population of people with Nigerian ancestry dominating other residents from West Africa and other countries with a Black population. Also, in Table 7, residents in Los Angeles County who trace their ancestry from Nigeria have a commanding 17% overall.

Protection of Human Subjects

The institutional review board (IRB) at Claremont Graduate University gave their full approval before I initiated any contact with potential participants. The institutional review board ensures that the highest level of ethics is observed in treating humans during research. I informed participants they were being contacted because they had been identified as a cohort of new immigrants whose ancestry is traced to West Africa. Also, I informed them of the purpose and the eligibility criteria for the research, as well as the potential loss of their time. I assured the
participants that I would maintain their confidentiality and that they could choose pseudonyms. I informed them I would alter identifiable names, places, and people mentioned to ensure confidentiality. Then, I asked the participants to read and sign the Informed Consent Form (See Appendix D). These measures are meant to ensure participants are not linked to the study. I offered a $10 Starbucks Coffee gift card to participants; while expressing appreciation for the gesture, some participants graciously declined the gift as a token to support my research.

Instrumentation

The main data sources for this qualitative research were standardized open-ended semi-structured interviews. The interviews lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face at a location most convenient to the participant, the participant’s home, or a public restaurant. Some interviews were conducted over the phone when logistical problems could not permit face-to-face meetings. The themes for the interview questions were derived from readings during the literature review process. A writing group moderated by a faculty member and composed of other doctoral students assisted in refining the questions. During this process, a female person of color in the group suggested adopting ranges for age rather than directly asking participants their age. The doctoral student reasoned that some female participants might view the question as intrusive, disrespectful, culturally insensitive, and capable of creating a hostile interview. At this time, the writing group moderator also suggested merging the demographic survey with the main interview to shorten the process and the interview time. The questions were field-tested with five individuals from immigrant families. These individuals, two males and three females from the first and second generations, were not from West Africa but shared other requirements for this research. All the interviews were recorded and followed the protocol (see Appendix E).
Several themes emerged from the interviews. One of the central themes that emerged was the centrality of education in getting ahead in life. The respondents stated that education and all its potential advantages are so strongly intertwined in the culture that the absence of it might seem like a personal failure. Working hard in school, from grade school to higher education levels, is highly valued. Families endeavor to create their standard of success and hold their members to it. They see success through working hard within the collectivist prism because the individual can achieve success only through community support. An individual’s success is celebrated as the family or community's success. Closely tied to working hard is the theme of personal discipline. Personal discipline, self-control, and respect are considered essential qualities for forming a positive attitude that translates to success in school or other areas of work. Respect for teachers, school personnel, and other people was a theme most respondents said helps create solid relationships and a path to success.

Some respondents spoke about the consequential benefits of having a role model. Some pointed out that their parents’ admonishments to take school seriously and seeing their parents struggle while catering to their family needs to inspire them to dream bigger, persist, and be resilient. Many respondents stated that seeing people from their community of immigrants for second-generation and the first-generation people who are educated and successful acts as motivation and catalyst for them to work harder in school or other engagements. This helps them develop a mindset of success. Finally, religious faith and belief in the efficacy of prayer run deep in things that shape their attitude. The respondents said praying and making supplications offer them spiritual comfort and strength to confront their challenges and ultimately find solutions to address their problems. The respondents also said they find value in relating to their peers. To
them, the relationships with their peers have a net positive effect because their goals to be successful in school, follow the rules, and work hard are often aligned.

**Analysis and Synthesis of Data**

I conducted all the interviews, listened to the recordings, transcribed them verbatim, and uploaded them to the data analysis software *Atlas ti*. I started the coding process by reading through the 221 typed pages of the interview transcripts. I took notes as I read the transcripts and attached labels to statements many participants repeated, such as the importance of education, the issue of identity, and parental involvement or influence in shaping a child’s educational outcome. Respect for teachers and other authority figures emerged as a preeminent example of the desired quality for success.

Patton (1990) stated that developing a topic from the data is like “constructing an index for a book or labels for a file system” (p.381), thus underscoring the relevance of an organized process like this one. This process is commonly referred to as open coding. Next, I grouped answers from different participants to common questions. Also, I separated the statements the participants made by subject and coded them based on the themes they addressed while being mindful of my biases. Krathwohl (2009) claims that establishing trust in research and minimizing “biasing influences” (p.341) is essential in advancing credibility because the consumers of the research are the mediators of validity for the study.

The role some participants ascribed to acquiring education elevated it as an essential theme for this research. I marked quotations and highlighted relevant sentences that culminated in 121 codes. I selected the most important codes and combined them to create topics. Next, I labeled the topics based on their importance and their relationship to each other. Then, I separated the topics into themes.
In pursuance of this, I shared the interview transcripts and the themes generated from there with some of the participants to adjudicate the report’s trustworthiness and whether they were accurately represented. Of the ten who received the transcript, eight responded and indicated their acquiescence to my conclusions. Two participants did not provide any feedback. I left them alone after my failed attempts to get their feedback. This process is called member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checking provided additional opportunities to review my interview data and its relationship with the literature on different generations of African immigrants. I found member checking invaluable in interpreting the data to check whether the research questions match the interview questions, and in conducting follow-up interviews with the participants (Bloor, 1997; Krathwohl, 2009; Creswell, 2014). A major criticism of member checking as a quality control measure in qualitative research is that few researchers admit to implementing the process and the difficulty in interpreting the feedback the participants provide.

I categorized some of the themes I found during the literature review and often mentioned by the participants during the interview.

**Researcher Positionality**

My story shaped my views about the attitudes of the different generations of West Africans. I am a first-generation West African immigrant living and working in a large, diverse populated county in the United States. Some of the experiences the respondents shared in this research are familiar because I have had similar experiences. I, therefore, bring certain biases to the study, like an unrelenting positive attitude to education, a strong belief in working hard, and the importance of role models, all consistent with the views the respondents expressed. These biases may have affected the way I collected and interpreted my data.
Chapter 4: Results

This study was inspired by John Ogbu’s research on oppositional culture and its limiting effect on achievement, minority populations, and their attitude towards education, especially in the context of native-born African Americans and their school experience. The purpose was to answer the three research questions:

(1) What are the attitudes of West African immigrants towards education?
(2) Do these attitudes differ across first-generation and second-generation immigrants? If so, in what way do they differ?
(3) According to West African immigrants, how do these attitudes affect their school experience in positive or negative terms?

This chapter is organized by the themes I identified from my qualitative analysis of the interviews of the 41 participants. The 41 participants were drawn from six West African countries, namely Nigeria with the most significant number of participants - 29, followed by Ghana with five participants. Guinea had three participants, and Senegal had two participants. Mali and Sierra Leone had one participant apiece. Regarding generations, 14 participants from Nigeria were first-generation, and 15 were second-generation. Of the five Ghanaian participants, three are first-generation, and two are second-generation. Two first-generation and one second-generation participants are from Guinea. The two participants from Senegal are first-generation. The lone participants from Mali and Sierra Leone are first-generation.

Regarding gender, of the 23 first-generation participants, 15 are males, and eight are females. There were 18 second-generation participants; eight were males, and 10 were females. Twenty participants in this research have graduate degrees; 15 are from the first generation, and five are second-generation. Twenty-one participants have or are enrolled in undergraduate
degrees. Eight of them are first-generation, and 13 are second-generation. The age group falls into three categories. In the 18-32 age category, there were no first-generation participants and nine second-generation participants. In the 33-43 age category, three are first-generation, and nine are second-generation. Finally, in the 44-64 age category, 20 are first-generation. There was no second-generation in this category.

This chapter addresses how themes arising from the participants’ attitudes affect their education or, in reverse, what themes emerging from the research questions affected their attitudes and what influences they have had on their education. Some of the statements from the respondents touched on salient aspects of my theoretical framework, especially in the internal forces category that deals with family and individual motivation. In the external forces category, the invaluable impact of role models and the community laying codes of conduct were themes the respondents clearly stated. Other themes that emerged were the highest degree the community elevated and continues to elevate education, diligence, and perseverance. The topics that formed these themes were also represented in the literature. The responses were the lived experiences of my participants and how they interpreted those experiences. In presenting the themes, I showed the attitudes of the first and second generations as they stated them without categorizing their responses according to the different generations because it was not the focus of the question. Here, the participants expressed their attitude towards education. In the second research question, I separated the responses of the first and second generations. In seeking an answer to the second research question, I sought to find out the participants' opinions about the difference between first and second-generation attitudes and in what ways those differences exist. In the third research question, the two generations spoke about their attitudes and how the attitudes influenced their school experience. The objective here is to show how these attitudes
affected their path in school. Here, as in the second research question, I analyzed the generations separately. The themes that received the most mention were the ones that I assigned a heading. The ones that received fewer mentions from the participants did not get a heading, but I nevertheless hinted at them in the overall discussion of this Chapter. Also, I endeavored to use as many of the participants' words to better reflect their thinking on the issue they discussed. Finally, I added a summary of the main research questions at the end of each research question.

Of the total forty-one participants in this study, only two respondents did not give a full-throated endorsement of education as very important. Still, they did not explicitly say they have a negative attitude towards education. This is a testament to the value the participants have in education. In explaining their claim about education, it is apparent that they lean toward vocational education that will lead to entrepreneurship and owning rather than education focusing on white-collar careers, which was not the premise of my question. Throughout the interviews, the importance of education as a potent vehicle out of poverty was constant. Each interviewee had a personal story about how they experienced or were told by a parent that education was important. They contend that the encouragement reinforced the saying that education is the great equalizer and declared that going to school and acquiring education translates to economic and social value. They said these experiences shaped their attitude about education. Their voices are detailed below.

**Research Question 1 – What are the attitudes of West African immigrants towards education?**

In posing this question, my goal was to have the participants articulate in their own way what they considered as the attitude of West Africans towards education. It was also an opportunity to rationalize why that attitude - positive or negative - persists among West Africans.
I was also interested in understanding this attitude through the perspective of female respondents whose lives are shaped by male patriarchy. This thinking applies specifically to the first-generation females who grew up in West African countries. Until recent years, when there was a surge of females allowed to go to school by their families, the preference was to send males to school rather than females, thereby giving the men better opportunities for career outcomes (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008). The reasons for this include child marriage, social and cultural factors related to the female gender, and religious beliefs (Tuwor & Sossou, 2008). For first-generation females, parity in economic mobility may play a part. Economic advancement is also the major incentive for all the other demographics represented in this research.

**Positive Attitude about Education and Why Education is Important**

The respondents in this research universally state that they have a positive view of education. There were only two out of 41 respondents who appeared restrained or hesitant in giving positive approval of their attitude toward education, but as they explained their position it was obvious that it was not exactly a negative attitude but to express greater emphasis on vocational education rather than academic education. The respondents often qualified their answers with rationale that supports their claim. The additional step to offer reasons why education is important was also the rationale for making it reflect on the sub-title here. Mariama, a retired female teacher and first-generation West African immigrant born in the Gambia but who completed her grade school here in the U.S., said she and other West Africans generally have a positive attitude towards education. She rationalized the positive attitude by clarifying that it is rooted in the expectation that with education, one will succeed in the future and that success lies in embracing education. She contends that speaking as a woman, this positive
attitude is reflected mainly in how they see the importance of education as incontrovertible when viewed within the intersectionality of gender and economic self-reliance. She said:

We have a positive attitude about education because education was very important, and especially being female, I thought education was the key because it ensures economic freedom. Often, people get married because they see that as a way to make it, and if you can take care of yourself and be self-sustaining, even if you get married, that’s still good. After all, if it works out, it works. If it doesn’t, you’re not ‘gonna’ remain in the spot in which you are not able to pay your bills or take care of your kids. So, education is the key.

In continuing to rationalize her economic argument as driving her positive attitude, she said, “We also needed to be successful to help our siblings or the rest of the family. So, it was a communal thing.”

Another first-generation female, Cecilia, who trained as an attorney before coming to the United States but had since shifted her focus to organizing for African diaspora women in economic, social, and political issues, rationalizes the reason why she and other West Africans have positive attitudes towards education. According to her, the way she saw the daily life of women, including that of her mother and other women in her community, convinced her that education was the only way to escape a certain life of hardship in the future. She says:

Growing up in the village, I was always aware of how hard women worked. Looking at it, I told myself, I don’t want to work like that all my life. And I thought the only thing that could get me out of it was education. And fortunately, my mother, who was not educated, saw how much I wanted to go to school and sent me to a boarding school which then laid the foundation for the education which I got later and a law degree.
Many respondents tied their positive attitudes towards education and rationalized with the economic benefits that accrue from acquiring education. Paulson, a university professor of History who left Nigeria for the U.S. after his Ph.D. asserts that West African immigrants view education positively and that:

Education was number one, it was everything! Although we also participated in extracurricular activities, such as athletics, soccer, etc., our parents would tell us that, number one, we’re not sending you to school to play football; we’re sending you to school to learn. So even athletic activities are considered secondary, and you have to improve your academic grades before they can allow you to play on the school team. So, for us, education was the pinnacle of everything. It was the most important thing you did. So, you realize that, of course, the parents also support it. That is your life. It is your very existence. Consider how we approached it; we put our lives into it. We studied hard under generally difficult conditions. If you think about it, some of us had to study without electricity. We use candles and lanterns. We burned the midnight oil. It was literal for us; it wasn’t figurative; you know you have to study, and you take it seriously! We also believe in the positive outcome, with the expectation that you will become a successful teacher, doctor, engineer, or any other professional or civil servant. So, you look up to the positive outcome of completing your education. And we focused on the future. He framed the attitude to education and the importance of education in the necessary acquisition to be competitive in employment. He says:

It’s extremely important because if you think about it, particularly growing up, that’s all we had to move ahead. So, for our generation coming out from eastern Nigeria, the devastation of the Nigerian civil war, we realized that our parents and grandparents
focused on education made it clear to us. Recovering from the Nigeria civil war of 1967-1970, that’s all we had to move ahead in life. It was no surprise we plunged into it with everything we had. Yes, education is the most important thing. That’s the passport to success, that’s the passport to life, that’s the passport to our future. That’s how the value was given to us, and we picked up that value.

Still rationalizing a positive attitude to education and positive economic outcomes, Mark, a first-generation, puts this line of thinking very bluntly “When you are educated, you get a good job, get a better white-collar job. If you are not educated, it means you will be roaming around.”

Ekua, a first-generation female, said:

I grew up with the mindset that if you’re educated, the sky is your limit. And also...I see people; my parents showed me people who did not go to school and how most of them are struggling in life. It instilled in me that if they could go to school, their lives might be different from what it was then.

Kingsley is an attorney, a second-generation male in his early thirties. He grew up in a middle-class family of six from Nigeria. He says he has a positive view of education and values education because he sees growth opportunities in the process, and education is a gateway to better jobs. He says, “I knew it was a catalyst to better-paying jobs.” But some characterize the importance of education beyond the economic benefits.

In West Africa, where the extended family system is robust, an individual is well-regarded if his/her economic success is extended to people beyond the nuclear family consisting of a couple and their children. This may explain why most respondents who express a positive attitude to education quickly qualify their assertion with the advantages education brings to an individual’s economic prospects. This is the rationale of another respondent, Cecilia, who also
claims to have a positive attitude to education and explains that “if you’re able to go to school, you’re going to make a better life for yourself and a better future, not just for you alone but a better life for people around you.” Obong, a second-generation male in his early thirties with some college credits who professes a positive attitude to education, said he learned that it is difficult to advance economically in the future without taking school seriously and achieving. He says, “If you need a decent job or even if you are an entrepreneur, business partners and clients are looking at your educational background. My dad always said that if you want to progress in America, you need an education.” According to Obong, “Education was always the focus. It was always instilled in me that education needs to be a priority, the thing to focus on!”

Positive Attitude About Education and the Influence of Parents

The interviewees overwhelmingly claimed parental influence was a reason for their embrace and subsequent love for education. Some first-generation respondents stated that although their parents did not get the opportunity to attend school nevertheless encouraged and “pushed” them to remain in school. A possible explanation could be the large number of educated individuals who occupied positions of power in the civil service when many West African countries gained independence from the British or French colonial governments. The probable interpretation was that to be employed in the civil service (which was considered a promotion to the middle or upper class and a ticket out of poverty), their children had to be educated in what was then called the “White man’s” education, a nickname for western education. Now, many parents are educated and, not surprisingly, share the same characteristic of supporting their children.

Also, the theoretical framework of this research emphasizes the oversized roles of the family and the community in the overall attitude of the individual toward education and
equipping them with skills to mitigate the problems inherent as a minority (See Figure 1). The respondents here found a way to credit their families or the communities they came from as the source of their positive attitude toward education. From the statements of the respondents, their idea of the family extends beyond their immediate biological parents but also the community they were raised in. Kevin, a male second-generation and practicing attorney’s statement, accurately captures this sentiment about the role of the parents as well as the community in fostering a positive attitude toward education. He said:

Every time we go to a cultural event, party, or anything, one thing that people ask is how school is going, and I realize that school is essential. Every time we go to a party, it doesn’t matter what happened to you or what’s going on; they only ask you about school first. So that tells me school is so important, and that resonated with me to keep going to school.

Male respondent, Mark, a first-generation immigrant with a Ph.D. in Education like other participants, credits parents as laying the foundation for attitudes about education, which unsurprisingly trend towards the positive spectrum. He said:

Our parents placed a high value on education, and nothing mattered to them like ‘you must go to school and get this education.’ So, this attitude motivated me to think that education is key to everything and a way of life.

He explained further the origin of his attitude to education:

My parents know the importance of education. Because they knew the importance of education, they encouraged me in all ways and methods to make me feel that without education, I would not amount to what I might want to be in the future. So, the tendency of their encouragement to my education was obvious that it is only through education that
anybody or we can succeed. That was the foundation I got from my parents and the people around me. How they were educated and got a job was another extrinsic motivation that made me believe education was the only way and key to life.

Ibrahim, a first-generation male who was born in Senegal, a French-speaking West African country, said he and the community where he was born has a positive attitude towards education and summarized the reason for the attitude thus, “if you are not educated, there is a minus in your life.” According to him, the positive attitude transcends generations because even parents who lacked the benefit of Western education knew the benefit of acquiring it. Ibrahim states:

Our parents from back home, they did their best over there even though we didn’t have a lot of instructors as far as the quality, but they did their best to put us in school. Some didn’t have the chance to finish school, but they did their best to give us the best education we could get and adapt that to the environment wherever we live. Or, in a word, so that we don’t struggle as they did. When you are educated and in a good environment, in a country that is not dictatorial, where things are transparent, and opportunities are for everyone that deserves it, you can make a good living. So, I highly consider education the driving force for me and all my generation.” Ibrahim also credits the community for fostering the attitude towards education. He said, “They[the community] taught us to focus all our energy on school and being successful, and later on you can enjoy the result; it had a good impact on my life.

Regina is a registered nurse and mother of two young children. She was born in the U.S. and grew up in a Nigerian immigrant household. According to her, she has a positive view of
education because her parents started early to emphasize it to her. She said she knew quite early she had to take education seriously:

  Because we heard it from our parents every second. [She hilariously mimics her mother’s remarks with a raised voice]: ‘Look at your mates, look at your mates, your mates are doing this… your mates are doing that… [laughs] look at your mates, look at Chinyere.’

  She concludes, “so you have to try your best to do what you have to do.”

  Stella’s story sounds familiar too. Stella is a second-generation female from a Ghanaian family who came to the U.S. with her parents when she was 11. She also attests to her positive view of education. She credits her parents as instrumental in instilling the love and value of education in her and her sister. She said:

  It was crucial to me because, at an early age, my parents emphasized the importance of education that to be anything you want to be in this world, you must go to school and get an education. Especially coming from an African family, one of the most important things you could do is to get an education. To me, I think it is crucial because it opens up your mind to different things and different ways of learning.

  She also talked about the importance of parents getting directly involved in their children’s education. She said:

  My parents were very involved in our education, whether it's homework or something we didn’t understand, they made sure they help us with whatever we don’t understand, or they get somebody to help us. There’s nothing as you come home from school, you have homework, and my parents would help us with homework and also ask us to read, which I loved to do growing up. They get different books for us to read and make sure that the TV shows that we’re watching are things we can learn something from that can help us in
school. My parents were hands-on and taught us that there’s nothing like a stupid question. If you don’t understand something, ask questions.

The same parental influence in having a positive attitude to education was the experience for Adaeze, a second-generation female who arrived in the U.S. at the age of 10. Adaeze recounted her experience as a college student a few years ago before she went to graduate school, was wedded, and had her infant daughter. Adaeze said:

As a second-generation, you have your parents who are already educated in Nigeria. They keep telling you must do well, not fail—encouraging you. When it comes to course registration, they make sure they are part of choosing your classes. My parents were part of doing those things. So that’s one thing I learned from them, the structure, the way they trained me to be responsible and manage my time. You know, things like that. Those experiences certainly influenced my positive attitude towards education.

Speaking about her positive attitude to education, she adds, “To me, it is imperative because I know without education, you can only go so far.”

Ogechukwu, born in South Los Angeles to first-generation parents from Nigeria, credits his positive view about education to his parents. Ogechukwu was raised along with his three younger brothers, now a banker himself, married to a nurse, and raising their three children states, “The biggest thing my parents did to instill in me a positive attitude about education and that education was a key to being successful was to show me their diplomas.” He elaborated:

They showed me how far they went in their academic life, and they showed me how much they persisted and pushed through to achieve whether it be a goal. That was the biggest thing they could ever have done, showing me how far they went.
He also credits his parents for the eventual success he and his siblings achieved. He said:

I believe we did well in school due to the amount of respect, the amount of importance that our parents put on education. And they were resolved to make sure that we are educated, make sure that we do things that will make us have a great future.

He added that this also contributed to his success because it:

Defines my identity a lot and really helped me cope with problems in school because it taught me how to deal with people who are contrary to whatever it is I’m doing. The religion my parents introduced to me gave me the foundation to put the effort to stand up against any obstacle.

Ogbe, a second-generation respondent, said he has a positive attitude towards education and learned very early from his parents. He said:

I have parents that not only went to school in their home country but also got to the U.S. and went to school here. To witness that and know that my parents were able to do it, and it’s something that has always been extremely important to them. They made it a known fact to me that if I wanted to be successful, I had to go through school. So, when you have that experience at a very young age and if you have any sense of or desire to be successful, then it’s obvious you have to go through school. So, I’ve always known through my parents that if you want success, go to school. And to see that my parents could go through school and be successful in their way, it was easy to want to follow that model.

Another first-generation respondent, Evelyn, a female also with a Ph.D. and a university professor, explained her positive attitude about education and what motivates the attitude, and
why parents steer their children towards education, said: “Education is everything.” She explains that the mindset was:

   Education is empowering. Education is liberation, and every child should have a good education. Education means empowering people and making them become independent thinkers and problem-solvers even outside the classroom. You don't attend school to become a doctor, lawyer, or teacher. We go to school to learn how to solve our problems and the problems of our environment and to thrive. Becoming a doctor or a teacher will now give us an avenue to apply what we learned from school.

She drew from a personal experience to explain her point. She said:

   I’m a success story because my father was an educator. My father was a retired principal, and as the child of the principal, there’s no way you would not do well in school. So even if it means putting your feet on ice-cold water to stay awake and memorize the textbooks for a test, you have to do that.

   The advantage of having educated parents plays an important role in attitudes about education, which a child whose parent is not educated may not enjoy. Ekua, a female first-generation employed in K-12 who recently earned a doctoral degree, said of her own experience with her parents: In my own house, the belief is that if you are educated, you are successful. So, every communication between my parents and me was that I must go to school. I must go to get the highest level that I want to get to because education is the key to success, and that is the belief of most people back home.

She said some of the specific things her parents did were:

   Asking me what’s going on with my academics and looking at my report card and grades. They want to see how well I’m doing whenever my grades come out by looking at the
midterm tests taken and asking me questions when I return from school. They ask me, ‘What did you do at school today?’

Patience, another second-generation student, says she has a positive view of education but thinks it is over-valued nevertheless credits her parents as being instrumental to her positive attitude toward education. She said:

I think it was important. I don’t know if I had to grade it on a scale of 1-10; it would be like a 7. I knew education was important, but I don’t think I was convinced that education was important for my future. In the Nigerian community, they consider it important; I don’t think it was that important.

Like most participants in this research, Patience thinks the parent’s influence is responsible for the engagement and focus, culminating in positive views of education from their children. She said:

The reason was that our parents believed that education was important. So, there was more attention to completing your homework, and more detail was focused on making sure you are at school and the help that comes along with it. Parents make sure you get the help you need, put children in the right school to ensure the child succeeds.

She expanded further:

Parenting is important. Not only parenting but the community itself. I was separated from my parents for some time. So, in that separation, the community that I was in did not promote education or encourage it. I don’t think it would be the same outcome. The high value of education in the Nigerian community in general, especially within the Igbo culture, it’s the kind of thing that is embedded in you. Now whether you are on the right
part or purpose is a completely different story as far as focusing on your education. It’s something that your community and your parents have to foster.

Another second-generation participant, Godswill, a male who has a master’s degree, stated he not only has a positive attitude to education but that “I consider it important not only to my well-being and my future, I consider education and the pursuit of education by all people as a right. It should not be a luxury.” Like most other participants, Godswill credits parents as the catalysts to students doing well in school “Students did well in school from my experience because their parents were very focused on going to school and doing well and becoming something in life. So, to that extent, parenting was important.” He continued:

They [parents] did a good job at, I think, motivating my siblings and me. You know, once we get our report cards and we come back and show them, they will give us advice on how we should look to improve our GPA from year to year in hopes of becoming more successful in the future. They tried to benchmark our success as much as possible, especially in grade school where GPA is important and getting a good grade is very important.

Another second-generation female, Christina, who came to the U.S. when she was two years old, said she has a positive view of education and claims that getting an education is the key to making it “here in America.” Abigail, a second-generation female with a bachelor’s degree, is one of only two respondents who did not explicitly express a positive attitude towards education. She characterized education as somewhat necessary “but not very important.”

Religion Shapes Attitudes Towards Education

In the theoretical framework of this research (See Figure 1), religious institutions occupy a prominent position because of their role in people’s lives, including attitudes about education.
The intermix of religion and education may be a factor in people’s attitudes toward education because the British missionaries who arrived in West Africa in the early 19th century simultaneously carried on their evangelization by constructing schools. As they evangelized, they taught their new West African converts to read and write and even sent some to study in England and consecrated priests and ordained bishops. A famous example was the success story of Bishop Ajayi Crowther (Walls, 1991). With the acceptance of the mission schools and the embrace of the Christian religion, religion and Western education became inseparable. So, the acceptance of religious faith transferred to a positive view of education. Paulson, a university professor who attended a Catholic mission school, said although secular content was difficult to erase from the curriculum, the students learned the fundamentals of the Catholic doctrine. He said the doctrine of faith and prayer shaped his life. He said:

As we learn all the secular things you learn as a student, there was that clear understanding that the faith [Catholic doctrine] was the ether of the institution. So, every morning, we had a morning assembly, we started with prayer, and we sang religious songs. And some teachers, like the reverend father and sisters, will start their classes with prayer. And we have to go through all the religious observances in the calendar. And some days, we go to mass in the morning, and we also end the day with prayers. So, it’s an integral part of the holistic development of the person. You have your education, you have your religion – you educate the mind, you educate the body, you educate the spirit, and all of them are complete. And that’s how we were brought up to understand and see life.
Uzoechi, a first-generation male from Nigeria, stated how his life is shaped by his religious faith and the role it played in shaping his attitude towards education. According to him, the role it played was “Very major.” Uzoechi continued:

Growing up, I was raised in the church. My parents made sure we went to church services, Sunday school, church activities, and community outreach. It is part of our lifestyle...religion, and Christianity has to be seen. You have to display the life of a Christian. Now that same discipline was worth the journey through peer pressure and all other influences. Knowing right from wrong and being able to separate those decisions that matter the most. Today I still try to practice the same religion and teach my kids to go to church and participate in all of that. In terms of education, when you are disciplined in terms of your religion, you can carry out that discipline over to your education. Being in charge of time, showing up for classes, following instructions, being respectful, and all that! So, it’s all part of my life. It is one of the major reasons I am where I am today.

Christopher, another first-generation respondent, described how his exposure to religious faith influenced his education:

I’m a Catholic. I grew up seeing my parents go to church every Sunday, dressed in our best attire, and I went to a Catholic school, all-boys, and so on. I went to mass every day, even in high school. Even in boarding school, we wrote a religious exam. Some of us proceeded to attend seminaries. So, you can see that was a deep faith, and that shaped my perception of education.

Perpetual, a first-generation female, also pointed out the influence of religious faith in her upbringing “We went to church a lot in my household. We used to be instructed by the word of
God.” Ugomma, another first-generation female, also emphasized religion's role in her family growing up:

Religion played a huge role in my life. Coming from a family where your parents have to tell you what to do from school, you must go to church. Coming to the U.S., I continued with the culture of letting religion play a big role in my life. I have a strong faith in God. I try to pray in whatever I’m doing for God’s guidance. I am a Catholic.

Ekua, another first-generation female, declared that her religious faith helped her to stay focused:

Religion helped me to be focused, not to engage in behavior that could get me in trouble or derail my focus. Because of my religion, there are certain things that my religion does not encourage, so I stay away from those, and that helped me to stay on track in terms of my education.

Khadija, a first-generation female, agrees that religious faith plays a part in her life. The belief in the efficacy of prayer is widely held in the West African community. The participants claim it also affects their attitude towards education. Philomena, a first-generation, characterizes it this way:

We’ve always been a God-fearing people knowing that our success only can come from knowing who God is, and our success can only come when we come as part of God’s family. So, religion played a great part in my life during my school years because as things got worse, I knew I could get to God, that He would help me with this exam or that exam, my schoolwork. If I’m behind, I will pray that He will help me; usually, that comes through for me. Therefore, my life could not have been successful if I wasn’t immersed in God’s love.
Another first-generation male, Idika, said, “My religious faith helped me a lot because whenever I talked with my friends, they would ask where’s my Bible, and I prayed about any bad situation I was in.” Ousmane, a first-generation immigrant who was born in Senegal and a Muslim, put it aptly “I pray a lot. It keeps me grounded.”

**Respect For Teachers**

In the theoretical framework for this research, advising and guiding were two of the three functions I listed families perform under the internal forces categories (See Figure 1). In the external forces category, I listed laying moral codes of conduct as one of the critical functions religious or community organizations play. These functions are vital because they codify the rules individuals engage with one another in their relationships, including respect. The respondents all touched on the issue of respect and respecting teachers as an extension of the positive attitude to education.

Ahmed, a second-generation male who came from Guinea to the U.S. when he was a child, said his positive attitude about education had its beginning with respect for teachers, which his parents taught him as a child. Ahmed said of his parents:

“They laid much emphasis on respect. In our culture, respect is very big. That’s the number one thing you learn. That was what I saw as different when I moved to New York. I saw that respect was different. In school, the kids did not respect teachers. They talk back to the teachers. They did what they wanted. They didn’t listen to the teachers. They talk in class. It was a different culture from where I was coming from. In our culture, we don’t talk back to teachers. We treat teachers like our parents, very respectful. Ahmed said this attitude toward teachers carried over to his attitude about education.

Apart from Ahmed, other respondents who said they have a positive attitude about education
appeared to link that attitude to previously internalized respect for adults and teachers. Adaeze was such a respondent. Adaeze came to the U.S. when she was ten years old, and she recalled an interaction with one of her professors in college who insisted she call her by her first name, which in most parts of West Africa is considered disrespectful. Adaeze recalled:

I had my college instructor tell me, ‘Oh! Don’t call me Ms. Stewart; call me by my first name. I said, ‘No, it is my culture. I can’t call you by your first name because it is disrespectful to do that.

Another second-generation respondent, Ogechukwu, a male, who was born in the U.S. and raised in a Nigerian immigrant family, said, “We gave the teachers an extra level of respect because our parents gave us that foundation to respect authority.” According to Ogechukwu, “the genesis of my positive attitude to education is rooted in respect for teachers and adults.”

Cecilia, a first-generation female who trained as an attorney before her current role as a feminist activist, recalls the reverence and respect students accorded teachers in her birth country vis-a-vis the manner some students treat teachers here in the U.S. She said:

Teachers were like little gods because we respected them so much. These were the people - the owners of knowledge! And knowing the things that they knew and passing all this knowledge to us, we did respect the teachers so much. And I remember in primary school, my friends and I were sitting under a tree during lunchtime, having fun with our friends, and we saw a teacher half a mile away walking; we stood up even though the teacher didn’t even know we were there. We stood up in respect. We had a lot of respect for the teachers, and they were all revered. They were the owners of knowledge! All these influenced our attitude.

Another first-generation respondent, Idika, had a similar response:
When I was in school, the teacher was the ultimate. You can’t say anything bad about the teacher. You can’t argue with the teacher. You can’t speak while the teacher is speaking. That’s the level of respect we had for teachers. Our parents also respected teachers. They had much respect for teachers. So, whatever we do, we make sure that we respect our teachers. So that was the key.

Another respondent, Cheikh, a first-generation male who grew up in Senegal before coming to the U.S., underscored how the respect paradigm works in the community he grew up in, which appears universal in the West Africa region, saying:

Respect is not negotiable. Every single adult at school, in the neighborhood, and one of the best parts of it, you can take it, either way, is that the whole neighborhood and the whole school are your parents! Meaning if your next-door neighbor sees you doing bad, he will take you to his house and whip you and take you to your parent’s house and tell your parents what you did, and then you get another whipping. The village raises you, especially in my case, the village raised me. After all, the whole village was watching over me. So, I couldn’t do anything bad. Even something minor, when I do something foolish, I pay for it.

Clifford, a first-generation respondent, also said,” The teachers are like our second parents back home in Nigeria.” Onochie, a first-generation male, described disrespecting a teacher as “abominable,” while Philomena, another female first-generation, reasoned that teachers are highly respected because “they are almost taken as your parents.” These responses show the relationship between respect for the teachers and a positive attitude to education. Still, in the sphere of respect influencing attitude to school, in various ethnicities and tribes, expressions of respect in speech or gestures appear to be the norm, and it is expected. It appears
that the interplay of culture and tradition embedded in the life of the people of West Africa
transferred to teachers, as indicated earlier. That cultural norm of respect is what some pointed
out as they try to explain the attitude to education.

Idika, a first-generation male, recalls that “There’s always emphasis on greeting people
older than you. You have to greet them first.” Philomena, a first-generation female, thinks that
“Our culture respects elderly people no matter how old you are. If someone is older than you,
they automatically get respect. You don’t have to be told what to do.” Ugomma, a first-
generation female, said, “You just grow up and know you must respect your elders. In Africa and
Nigeria, where I come from, I don’t think they sit you down or educate you on it [respecting
others]. It’s something that’s embedded in you.”

In California, the state’s education Code 48907, like in most other states in the U.S.,
allows certificated personnel to exercise physical control of students without fear of litigation,
but they rarely exercise this control because of fear of lawsuits against them. The possible
consequence of credentialed teachers losing their teaching license keeps them from
reprimanding students when they err. West African immigrants represented in this research think
this fear of litigation has caused some school personnel to think twice about disciplining students
on the one hand and encouraged some students to be disrespectful. Most respondents iterated that
it is culturally acceptable, albeit loosely, in traditional West African society for community
members to stand in loco parentis or discipline a child as a parent would do. Cecilia says, “The
teacher will discipline the child without fear that they will get into trouble with the parents.” For
Cheikh, “We considered teachers as our parents, so we gave them a lot of respect.” For
Ousmane, a first-generation male born in Senegal, “We saw teachers like our parents.” For
Philomena:
We respect them more than our parents. The teacher better not come to your parents and say you didn’t do your homework or didn’t do what you should do. They better not come to your parents and say you disobeyed or didn’t do what you were supposed to do. You get a whipping! We saw educators as our second parents. They are there to help you achieve your goal. They are there to help you reach your goals and accomplish what you have set out to do.

Ogbe, male, second generation said the secret to staying focused and having an abiding positive attitude to education is the value ascribed to respect. He said:

Respect, I think, is key in the Nigerian community. It’s something you know you just have to do, respect your elders. It can be as small as something they offer you to eat, and you have to say, ‘thank you’, even if it’s something you don’t want. Respect is something that’s instilled in you. And the youth in the Nigerian community at a very, very young age not only respect the elders but respect themselves. There are very many things you don’t do because of the perspective it gives your image. And the image is extremely important in the community. So, respect for elders is just as much as you have respect for yourself. I think it was something that was instilled in me at a very, very young age.

Ogbe says this culture of respect lines up well with his Christian faith. He said:

I come from a Christian background. You have all of the principles that go along with religion. That is whether you respect your mother and father and what religion says. With the Christian background that you come across in the education realm, you’re practicing those principles within your education structure. You have a teacher that you may see in class more than you see your parents and spend 8 hours with them out of the day. That teacher now becomes your resource or the person that you look towards in class, and you
try to give them that kind of respect that you give your parents. And I think it circles fourfold that you learned from a Christian background.

**Summary of Research Question 1**

The responses from the respondents demonstrated an undisputable fact about attitudes toward education. First and second-generation West Africans expressed a positive attitude toward education. The data presented here indicates that individuals hardly need any form of persuasion to take this stance about education. Parental influence, better economic outcomes, the internalized habit of respecting people, including teachers, and their affinity towards religious faith and practices appear to be the driving forces for the positive stance. More first-generation respondents cited religious faith and practices than second-generation.

**Research Question 2 - Do these attitudes differ across first-generation and second-generation immigrants? If so, in what way do they differ?**

On this question, the focus is asking the participants to give their opinions about the differences between first and second-generation attitudes toward education. The respondents are free to be specific, which some respondents did in identifying those differences but often defaulted to verbalizing similarities. If anything, they were quicker to see differences with the third generation even though that generation was not part of this research. For example, Khadija, a first-generation female’s answer, summarized how most participants approached the question. She said:

For the second-generation immigrants, I don’t see attitudes change. However, with third-generation immigrants, there’s a change in attitude because of the culture conflict – this culture believing in this and that culture believing in that!
Besides third-generation immigrants do not consider themselves immigrants. They consider themselves part of the society they’ve grown up here. So, there is a difference between the generations in that regard.

First Generation

In tackling the second research question, the first-generation participants spoke about their own unique experiences. An overwhelming majority say they generally expect their children to follow in their footsteps in their attitude to education. Some first-generations, in responding to this question, made a point about how the second generation growing up in a different environment may create some level of divergence in attitude because it is not only a different time period, but the society is markedly different from the society the first-generation respondents were raised in - a society with different values and expectations. Going by the sheer volume of the second generation who credit their parents as models for behavior, they may share similar attitudes with their parents and some differences. Regarding the similarities, some first-generation believe that the second generation will follow the precedent the first generation laid about the positive attitudes toward education and other characteristics that support outcomes both in school and the labor market. The characteristics where they can find similarities are that education is important and brings economic success, total focus on schoolwork and hard work is worth it, religion instills discipline, and God supports them. Others are respect for teachers, a mindset for success, persistence, being intrinsically motivated, being responsible, and being part of a collectivist culture; for example, one must respect others and the fear of disappointing parents.
Attitudes Do Not Differ: Culture of Working Hard, Personal Responsibility, and Role Models.

First and second-generation respondents fairly concede that there are more similarities in attitudes toward school than there are differences. The respondents claim the values behind the motivation to think positively about education are similar. Although, in a few instances, the respondents concede there might be differences, those claims of differences are quickly followed by examples of where they see similarities. The responses are nuanced. Perpetual, a female first-generation registered nurse, said:

I think personally coming from a West African background, we’re very hardworking, growing up we didn’t have much of the opportunities we desired, so I think that’s one of the things that motivate students in my generation to work hard, and also being optimistic about the future and motivation.

She thinks the attitude may differ but not so much in the context of not being focused on school but on navigating the system to ensure even greater success:

Yes, they differ. I think second-generation immigrants are already used to the environment – they are used to the culture, and the attitude, so that makes it easier for them. They [the second generation] can understand the culture and ways of life here, but the first generation, I think, had more challenges. That is, dealing with culture and things different from where you’re coming from.

Khadija’s view about the differences between the two generations is nuanced. Although she sees the second generation following the same part as the first generation, she thinks further generations like the third (third generation is not a part of this research) will be different. Khadija said:
For second-generation immigrants, I don’t see attitudes change. However, with third-generation immigrants, there’s a change in attitude because of the cultural conflict. Different cultures conflict and this culture believes in this, and that is that! Besides, third-generation immigrants do not consider themselves immigrants. They consider themselves part of the society they’ve grown up in here. So, there is a difference between the generations.

Khadija thinks the second generation is likely to follow precedent because of the experiences of the first generation, who have experienced some measure of success, like advancing their education through earned graduate degrees and the inroads they have made in the labor market. She said:

Students from my generation did well in school because of the communities we came from. In the communities we came from, education is part of success. So, the generation did well because everybody knew that to be successful, you need an education. That’s why they did well. Everybody. Everybody wanted to do well in life.

Luke, a first-generation male from Nigeria who graduated in engineering, thinks that, on the one hand, the second generation may hesitate to follow the attitudes due to the influence of their peers but will eventually follow the attitudes of their parents. He said:

The second generation relies much on what their friends say. You can talk to them as much as you want, but they will do what they want to do. I had experience with nephews and nieces. However, when they realize what you told them is true, sometimes they will buckle up and do what’s right. It has nothing to do with defiance; it has something to do with the individual’s motivation to do well. The advice I would give is that they do what they need to do that would help them.
He thinks the environment has the most influence in shaping attitudes because that was his experience:

Growing up at home in Nigeria, all the people I knew were educated people. They all went to college/universities. So, when you see people who have made it around you, that’s what you aspire for. You want to be like them. So, most of the people I knew were medical doctors. When I came to the U.S., I planned to become an engineer and then return home and work. Unfortunately, none of us went back home. We’re stuck here because things became worse at home. So, my upbringing had something to do with people who went to universities and became engineers and doctors. That’s all the people I knew; I didn’t know anybody else!

Clifford thinks the goals of first and second-generation are alike, and so are their attitudes:

The reason is that since we’re in the U.S., we came here with a goal. We still have the same goal, and that goal is to advance ourselves academically. Also, a good education will go a long way financially to helping the whole family.

Thaddeus, a male first-generation thinks attitudes differ between the two generations, arguing the first generation “focused more on education as the ‘all that ends well’ compared to other people making it without much education.” He stated further:

There’s something about the first generations. We tend to continue no matter how hard it is, we achieve our goal. We don’t get disillusioned. It’s something I teach my children. They lose it sometimes… this is no use…we move on. I’d like to say that we are persistent. I don’t know if it’s genetic or not.
But Ibrahim, a first-generation male, thinks parental influence more than any other factor determines the second-generation attitude. He references his first-generation friends and family and the things they do to nudge their children’s attitude towards education, saying, “A lot of them are not educated, but they are doing anything they can, like the way the parents did in Africa, to give their kids a good education.” Ibrahim puts the success of the second generation to the level of support the parents are offering. He said, “I think the second generation is doing well depending on how much effort the parents put in.”

Uzoechi, a first-generation male who heads a real estate company and holds a graduate degree in business, also said a positive attitude towards education is transferred from the first generation to the second generation; thus:

[In] my generation, I think education was pushed forward and drilled into us by our parents. It was almost like a competitive thing where you needed to attain or get to a certain level of education to be accepted. And we welcomed the competition, so we all strived to do better than each other, and outperform each other, which drives the competition. Of course, excellence becomes what we are pursuing and looking forward to attaining.

Uzoechi continues about the influence of his parents on his attitude towards education, which he thinks the second generation has adopted as they navigate their educational path. He said:

They paved the way for everything. Every day that I was here or in school, that whole culture, that whole system, built me and carried me along to discipline and study. The desire to do well and excel still maintains the same culture of being the best that I can be, not even settling for B’s. I just made sure that in all my classes, I was coming out with an ‘A’ grade in all of them, making the right choices as far as friends were concerned using
the right …. the smart ones around, and we could learn from each other by forming educational groups. All that standard was a result of Nigeria and the impact that it had on me. So, coming over here, how some people are here, their attitude towards education was quite different because we took it seriously, and that carried me throughout my education period here.

As for the influence of culture on attitude towards education, he thinks:

Well, the impact of the cultural aspect is the same discipline that I got as a kid growing up. Whatever you do, you have to do it well and be dedicated and show your commitment. You have to reform and outperform. You have to deliver the right….and do the right thing. That translates to everything I do here. So, in effect, if I didn’t have that kind of discipline, I wouldn’t be someone that contributes to the community, willing to offer support and all that. So yes, it helped shape how I do things, my approach, and my…. the level of effort that I put towards things that I do.

Armstrong, a first-generation male, and a medical doctor, thinks the things that motivated his generation will be the same for the second generation. He said:

I believe students from my generation did well because when we were growing up, we came to understand from our parents and our seniors that we were looking up to that we needed to work hard, succeed, and take education seriously. If somebody does not do well, it’s not accepted in the family. Nobody wants to bring shame to their parents. They did everything to encourage us. I don’t know if I should say what is happening here, in Africa parents pay school fees, buy books, and everybody works hard. But what I see here is different. Most kids don’t take education seriously.
Some first-generation West Africans think the competitive spirit within the community appears to play a part in how the second generation responds to the differences because they learn from their parents and push themselves to achieve more - to be like their parents. Ugomma, a first-generation female, states:

“The goal was to go to school, so we kind of had a common goal of graduating from high school and going to college.” According to her:

There is a shared culture of going to school and making sure that you make good grades and culturally, we Nigerians are very competitive. In our community here, most people go to school. So, the culture of people from Nigeria in my community here makes it kind of possible to go to school because, you see, Mr. A is going, Mr. B. Mr. C, and they graduate, and they are doing well, like somebody going to get his Ph.D., and it gives you food for thought.

Philomena summarized the expectation for the second generation this way:

I think if this generation, our second generation, could listen to the experience or listen to the advice our generation will give, I believe they will be much better off. Not only would they succeed, but they would also have information that would help them go through school without tears.

The responses from the interviewees point to one generation passing the attitude to the next generation. Akin said, “It starts from the parents, then to the children. I encourage my children to do well in school. That attitude translates to them, too.” He continues, “There’s a constant reminder that you do well in school. To be successful, you must do well in school. Anytime they [parents] have to say that they never pass that opportunity.” He also concedes the uniqueness of the two generations and the implications it may have “We came in as adults, our
challenges are different, our focus is different, but in their case [second generation], it is unique to them.”

**Shared-Value About Culture.**

A familiar feature of the input from the participants was the constant reference to culture. They used culture to explain the differences and or any similarities. It appears they believe a positive attitude will engender positive outcomes and a negative attitude may provoke poor outcomes so both generations activate and nourish their positive attitude in hopes of better consequence. For example, Moses, although he sees some similarities between the two generations because of the culture, he still concedes there may be differences based on the environment the second generation was raised up. He concedes that: Generations are not the same. The way the first generation will mediate the academic landscape in America will be markedly different from the way the second and the third generations who were born here [in the U.S.] will see it because they are part of the mainstream. There’s a difference between the generations. But I don’t think the difference is markedly different in terms of the goal to be achieved – to get that degree which is like a pathway to be successful in America.

Like the other participants, Moses quickly made a pivot to the similarities between both generations based on culture. He stated:

African culture is a culture that respects and expects responsibility. It expects you to be the best steward of what has been entrusted to you. So, the application of culture, religion, and responsibility molded me in my pursuit of the academic laurel that many people yearn for. We must understand there is an intersection between culture, religion, and academic responsibility.
He thinks that:

Conscientiousness and diligence have been some of the things that have propelled West Africans to be very successful in the U.S. It is not by accident. It is by conscious effort and tenacity that West Africans have been able to be very successful in the academic landscape of the U.S.

Idika agrees about the potency of culture in shaping differences in attitudes for the two generations. For example, he references his personal experience as an example of attitude transfer and how the second generation adopts the same mindset to adapt and achieve their own success. He stated, “When I moved here to the United States my African cultural background, the customs, and tradition, it helped me to focus more on my goals. I was very focused, and I attribute it to my culture.” That culture also included his religious faith, which most participants tout as an important factor in their resilience and attitude.

For Christopher, the core elements of working hard, embracing the indispensability of education coupled with parental involvement, and the respect accorded to teachers all play a role in success and both generations embrace similar examples. He said:

There was a commitment because they [first-generation] knew the importance of education. Knowing that they had to work hard to be successful is hard work and a lot of parental involvement. Where we came from, there weren’t that many jobs. People struggle through competitive exams because there is no way to get jobs without education.

He also sees students valuing the work teachers do as essential and continues, “Teachers were looked upon as major role models in the community with a lot of respect. So, we looked at
teachers as people with much respect in the community. Everyone respected them.” He elaborated on the respect issue and the consequence when it is lacking:

It started at home. You couldn’t talk back to your parents. Here in the U.S., you see kids talking back to their parents, staring back at their parents in their eyes – eyeball to eyeball and talking back. Back in Africa, I don’t know if it’s a cultural thing, if your parents are talking to you, you just keep quiet. You don’t look them in the eye. That kind of system doesn’t work with the U.S. system. Here you maintain eye contact with somebody who’s talking to you. We have [in Africa] whereby somebody is talking to you, you just look down, you don’t say anything, and wait for your turn or until you’re asked a question. So, we grew that way. That’s the way we respect adults. Here when students act up in class, and the teacher calls the parents, and the parents come to the parent’s conference, the students interrupt and say, ‘You don’t even teach shit’. The teacher is trying to make a point, and the student is basically going after the teacher. You won’t find this kind of behavior in the culture where I grew up. There [in Africa], when a teacher calls your parents, you [the student] just listen. That’s respect!

Language

West African immigrant families’ view of their children learning a native African language is nuanced. Until about 2010, when inclusion, equity, and diversity issues started gaining traction in the social landscape and schools, first-generation parents thought that allowing their children to learn and speak their language would place them at a disadvantage in social circles and schools and possibly make them victims of discrimination. Godswill is a second-generation whose parents held that view. He said:
I think for me, personally, I think it would have helped to get around my experience to identify as a 2\textsuperscript{nd} generation Nigerian-American, but I can understand at the time why my parents chose not to teach me the language in depth because back then, there was a lot of doubt about appropriating and getting used to your surroundings, wanting to be…. I guess singled out too much. So I kinda understand. Now some of my cousins who have recently come over from Nigeria, who are relatively the same age as myself, and have been here for some time, and may have kids are teaching their kids the language because they know they need it. Also, the attitude has changed in terms of being bilingual and multilingual. They want to teach their kids the language. There’s been a shift, which is a good shift with respect and regards to language.

\textbf{Ruth}, another second-generation, also stated the reluctance of parents to teach their children to speak their native African language even though some of the second-generation might want to learn the language, although some face mockery from school. Some of the second-generation participants in this research regret not trying harder to learn the language. Ruth said,

When I was in grade school, I would never refer to myself as a Nigerian. When I started being around my friends from Nigeria, they kind of reassured me that [you’re a Nigerian]. So I think just not being able to speak the language and your people makes you feel horrible that you don’t know how to speak the language.
And it’s not always your fault when you know your parents never taught you the language.

In speaking about language and how others, including teachers, use it to dehumanize them, Abigail, a second-generation used the example of the agony of listening to her teachers regularly mispronounce her African name without making the slightest effort to learn the correct pronunciation despite according to the respondent, several attempts to teach them the correct pronunciation and the teachers’ total disregard for the student’s discomfort. She said, “The first day of school, I would be a little bit more nervous because the teachers were always messing up my name. Africans got teased back then for just being African or having funny-sounding names.”

In the 2010s, the second generation started to make themselves visible by embracing the African language more forcefully than in grade school when some parents did not teach their children their native language.

Another respondent, Evelyn, a first-generation in speaking about language, related to the researcher the action she had to take to stem the mockery and bullying one of her daughters had to endure because of her African name and speaking with an accent when she transferred from Nigeria and enrolled in grade school in Los Angeles County. She said the teachers did not help her daughter until she, as a parent, had to take action on a particular day when she picked up her daughter from school, and her daughter was crying on their way home. She said she took it as a teaching moment to address her child’s class about respecting other people’s language. She said she’s a proponent of teaching children to speak their native language as she does for her children. So, it is not all first-generation parents who did not encourage their children to learn an African
language. Evelyn reiterated the advantage of having her children learn to speak Igbo (a Nigerian language). She said,

When you start a child with the mother tongue, they will develop strategies to tackle foreign problems. Children who start with their mother tongue do well in other languages. So, when I had my children, I decided to speak Igbo to them because that is our identity. In my family, my children speak Igbo. I insisted.

**Gender Roles**

Some participants in this research say that gender roles have evolved within the immigrant West African community in which the male parent is not considered the only decision-maker in the family. Although in the broader American society, men are more visible in the political and economic sectors, for example, only men have been elected President of the United States. Male chief executive officers (CEOs) dominate the Fortune 500 companies in the United States. Women are nevertheless making a visible impact in the United States, more than in West Africa or the entire continent where males dominate society. The West African immigrant community in Los Angeles County boasts of a labor force in which West African women occupy vital positions of power, which has given them leverage at home because of shifting social trends and their economic influence in the family.

Patience, a second-generation, married registered nurse reflecting on gender roles in her family, said: My father is the alpha male kind of guy, never shy about asserting his position as the head of the family- provider and protector. I like that, except here in America, women have an equal voice in how the family is run. In my family now, as a
married woman, mom, and a registered nurse, my financial contribution to the family gives me more latitude in making decisions about our family. It was the same in my family before I got married. My mom contributed to the family finances.

*Second Generation*

The responses of the second generation correlate with the things the first generation stated as to whether the attitudes towards education differ between both generations. For example, the importance attached to going to school. **Kevin**, a second-generation male, thinks the attitude towards education does not differ between the two generations. The level of importance attached to attending school, which to him translates to a positive attitude towards school, is captured by what the adults ask the younger ones. It’s always about school.

He said these adult inquiries are authentic because they led by example:

They led by example. I saw how my parents were living ‘pretty well’. They went through school, and they went through a lot of schools to get where they needed to go. I realized at a pretty young age that for me to get to where I needed to be, to live comfortably like my parents, I was going to have to go to school. I’m going to have to get an education. That’s the only smart way that I can do it.

**Kevin** said the second generation does not need to be convinced because they have imbibed the discipline to be focused from their parents, insisting the second generation:

Have a mindset that already has been with them since they were in high school or before that. So, they’ve been driven all through their lives, and they see how their parents are living, and want to live like that…. That drives most people to go where they need to go.
Yetunde, a second-generation female with a bachelor’s degree, agrees with the high importance the first generation attaches to education. She said:

It was like a high priority. My parents always stressed the importance of education. That’s their top priority, so nothing else mattered. So that’s the number one priority. What my parents taught me and what I’ve been encouraged to do. Some second-generation said the fear of failing was a motivating factor influencing how they viewed education. Some first-generation respondents also expressed this idea. Ogechukwu, a male second-generation bank teller with an associate degree, said: It was a lot easier for me to not give in to the pressures of school because I understood the value of why I was going to school, the value of doing what I was doing because for one I was scared of my parents…what would happen if I failed. And that coupled with the desire to want to succeed. That kept me from doing whatever will or may lead me the wrong way in school with my friends.

He continued:

As a kid, you feel a little weighted because of the pressure of…like your parents’ hopes and dreams, riding on your ability to take hold of the information they have given you. What they are trying to teach you, and just being able to carry it, and so you do not want to fail, not wanting to let them down. And because of the culture that we grew up in, as far as the Nigerian culture, you’re not just letting your parents down; you’re letting the subset of the family down. So, it’s like…you’re being…you know, you can be the detriment or the savior of that particular part of your family. And just being the uplifting person in your family. So, you don’t want to be the one who is a disappointment. So, the pressure could get to you if you allow it to. For the most part, my parents were
supportive. So, it was easier for me to succeed and go forward and do what I had to do.

So having the pressure, there is one of the negative things I can say growing up.

**Influence of Culture.**

The influence of culture, which was apparent in the responses of the first generation, also appears to be a driving influence for the second generation. Ogechukwu expanded on the influence of culture:

I think it played a big part in how we acted in school. As I said before, even now, at 36 years old, I can tell how I act towards others is based on the culture and how we grew up, and how we were taught to respect others, our parents, and those around us – the adults.

As I said, attending family meetings and events allowed us to interact more with people than just our parents, who had authority. A lot of times, I believe the culture that we live in or the society that we live in because they don’t have a strong cultural base even when they get together as a family at parties and family gatherings; there are a lot of times the kids are taught to kind of listen to their uncles and aunts but not on the respect level they give to their parents. So culturally with us, it didn’t matter if you were my uncle or my aunt; if you asked me to do something, the level of respect that I’m supposed to give to you is as if my mother or father was saying something to me.

The second generation appears to cherish that proximity to the culture the first-generation tout as their driving force. Sometimes the proximity is made possible by visits to the immigrants’ home country, as in Ogechukwu’s case here:

While I was in school, I only had the pleasure of going home once and for one, it allowed me to take in the differences between where I am and where everybody else in Nigeria and why they have the attitude and desire and want to succeed. They have a song
that translates as ‘I start at the bottom of life, the lowest of lows, and now I’m here, I’m succeeding.’ Some Nigerians come with a genuine desire to succeed. They’ve tasted what the bottom feels like; they’ve tasted what it feels like to stay a whole day without food. The conditions may not be conducive so that you can live, and you get to America, you give it your all, and you give everything towards succeeding because you’ve tasted what it feels like at the bottom. And you know that you may not be a billionaire here in America, but with hard work, you can get to a place where you can sustain yourself and your family.

Aisha, a second-generation female who holds a master’s degree, also leans on the power of culture influencing attitude towards education. Her responses dwelt on appreciating their culture, heritage, history, and even the family’s immigration status and personal motivation as a strength in defining attitudes to education. First, Aisha spoke on the impact of growing up in an immigrant family:

I would say that being from an immigrant family is that you don’t have that mindset of being limited, and you don’t have that mindset of society trying to hold you back. You know at the end of the day, if you want something, you go after it. That’s basically what it boils down to. If you want it, go after it, and don’t try to limit yourself by trying to allow other people to have control of your destiny or what you do.

She muses that despite the condescension that came with being an immigrant also came with strength. The strength of attachment to culture and immigrant heritage, she says, respects persistence and resilience. She said:

Growing up, it wasn’t the most popular thing to come from an immigrant family. It was ridiculed, but you must focus more on your education. But as I’ve grown up, culture has
become very important, and it is something you want to carry on. Growing up, I saw my parents care about the culture they came from, but they were open to American culture as well. So, as we grew older, we were very proud of our culture and eager to share it with others.

The culture also includes respect for authority figures and everyone else. She says of her parents, “They impressed on us the importance of respecting others, including people in authority but at the same time, they let us know we shouldn’t allow other people to disrespect us.”

**Obong**, a second-generation male, thinks the attitudes of both generations do not differ because West Africans have historically placed the importance of education above most endeavors. He says:

I think it all goes back to the background. Because some people that are of my generation are not of African descent or direct African descent, education was not anything that was instilled in them as important. So, I think with my background, it’s imperative to have an education.

He used the example of people from his parent’s birth country. He said:

Nigerians associate a lot with education. I’ve noticed that the friends I had that were raised in African American households, that education wasn’t instilled in them as important. To most immigrant families, especially Africans, including Nigerian or Chinese, education was vital. I think it has something to do with the culture. **Ogbe**, another second-generation male, shares the same view: I think my background was one where the goal was education was mandatory…for my parents, it was just one of those things. You cannot get around it – school – school and education were first. I think it played a pretty important part in my upbringing.
Still on the issue of culture, Kingsley, an attorney, and a second-generation male with Nigerian heritage, said, “Our generation experienced a culture that tended to strive for educational success” and was influenced by the same factors as the first-generation which is to “learn as much as we can and focus on eventually getting a good career.”

Godswill, a second-generation male, also thinks the attitudes are similar referenced summer camps as one of the steps the first-generation ensure the second-generation stay focused and perpetuate the attitude of positive attitude to education. He said:

It was good. It was not all funny games. We had to go to class, and we read the book ‘Things Fall Apart’ by Chinua Achebe. We learned about other prominent and respected folks from back home. Those folks were doing things that were around the world. I think the biggest was that people from Nigeria, no matter where you go, are very dynamic. So that message was compelling when I was in grade school because it sort of communicated that you come from a place where many successful people have entered the world and continue to be successful, cherish family, cherish community. It was a powerful message at that age, and it helped me to get into who I am now.

**Summary of Research Question 2**

Most respondents believed that attitudes towards education did not differ between the two generations, indicating a similarity in the widely held opinion within the population that some of these beliefs have become cultural. Some of those beliefs that drive attitudes are working hard in school and strong support from parents to their children in all aspects of their education, including collaborating with teachers to ensure their children are respectful and focused on their academics. The respondents also referenced strong communities in which community members feel free to instruct, direct, and remonstrate a child who displays errant behavior without facing
reproach or fear of litigation from parents of the errant child. Above all, religion, faith, and saying prayers are important factors in their attitude. A few respondents believe that attitudes between both generations differ, but only to the extent of the difference in the environment the two generations were born and raised in.

**Research Question 3 - According to West African immigrants, how do these attitudes affect their school experience in positive or negative terms?**

School experience in this research question refers to the social context of the school, including student interactions with school personnel, teachers, and peers during the participants’ time in high school or the university. The purpose was to see the impact of attitudes on learning, including reading skills already acquired from home, making friends, identity, and interactions with teachers or other school personnel. The aim was to see how their attitude toward education interacted with these nuances, whether it diminished their attitude towards education, reinforced it, or remained the same. The outcome appears that their positive attitude towards education led to a somewhat collegial and cordial relationship with peers and teachers. This information is important because the literature review revealed that poor student engagement, the resistance to ‘acting White’ behavior documented by Ogbu (1998), and the parents’ poor involvement in their child’s schoolwork all combined to adversely affect academic performance of African American students (Ogbu & Simons, 1998).

**First Generation**

One consistent element the respondents articulated was the varied roles they saw their teachers play. They also spoke about how they related with their teachers based on those roles - both as facilitators of knowledge and ‘parents.’ The relationship with teachers was made more accessible with their parents empowering the teachers. One thing was clear: there was complete
reverence for the teachers, which may account for the positive attitude the participants expressed. The first generation talked about how they respected their teachers and how their parents worked with the teachers in their home countries. According to them, the teachers felt empowered because they had the support of the parents, and the students did their best in school, thereby making the most of their school experience. The data below details a sample of the experience the respondents narrated.

**Dual Role of Teacher as ‘Parent’**

I start with *Cheikh*, a first-generation male from Senegal, about his experience with his teachers when he arrived in the U.S. To him, one of the teachers he connected with was also like a parent:

> I showed much respect to her, she was Jewish, and I’m a Moslem, but she took me in and treated me like her son. She was protecting me. If I don’t go to school, she calls, just like the African way. You have to go to school; you have to learn. My education in Africa, the discipline, and the focus I had helped me here. Even in learning English because in Senegal, we speak French. So, when you come over here, you must get your English to a certain level before you find a job. And it did help me.

*Cheikh* recalled that assistance:

> There were so many challenges, especially in reading comprehension and writing. When you do the translation, you think in French, and you write in English, and your sentence will go way out of whack! So, my teacher, who I call my mother, was the one who told me I must take tutorials [sic] on TV programs in English and listen to radio programs in English. So, when you start thinking in English, that will help your reading comprehension and writing because, at that time, we did not have computers [internet].
So, I had a French/English dictionary and an English/French dictionary. So, if I do the literal [translation] and make a sentence, it changes the whole concept of the sentence completely. So, my teacher told me, don’t use the English/French or French/English dictionary, just the English dictionary. So, if you see a word you don’t understand, you go check it in the English dictionary, you see the translation, and you see how the word is used in many different ways.

Ousmane, another first-generation from Senegal, recalled his experience with his teachers that appears to echo Cheikh’s experience, although in a vastly different cultural environment (Senegal). Ousmane recalled:

We saw teachers like parents [in Senegal]. I recall when I was young, playing outside; when you see your teacher, you have to go and hide! You don’t want him to see you outside the school. The day after, you will be … the day after, he will ask you what you did after school the previous day, and you have to know the answer because if you don’t know the answer, he will kick your ass! He will say, ‘Why were you playing soccer yesterday when you had something to learn - your homework?’ The teacher was a potent and influential person. He was like the king. When I went to high school and college, teachers were a bit friendlier and less strict compared to elementary grades.

Paulson also talked about the considerable influence the teachers wielded and how his positive attitude to education helped his relationship with teachers because students perceive them as parents. Paulson said:

Teachers were like little gods. We feared and respected the teachers more than we respected our parents. The number one reason, of course, is they are considered very knowledgeable. So, there is that enormous respect; they come with enormous knowledge.
Also, the teachers saw what they were doing as a responsibility to shape us into successful citizens. In our generation, in addition to providing us with education, teachers also provide discipline. So, it’s a combination of respecting them for their knowledge and fearing them for the discipline they ‘inflict’ on us.

Mark also thinks, “My generation sees teachers as the second god,” meaning they see them as somebody who had a great positive impact on education. They see teachers as somebody trying to prepare them for the future. So, they had great respect for the teachers. So, whatever the teacher says is considered a very important or positive issue that will influence one’s life. So, they are very well respected for their opinion and whatever they have for the students. Onochie saw the parent-like admonishing the teachers utilized were for the benefit of the students:

We were very respectful. My goodness! Why would you disrespect teachers? If you disrespect teachers….it is abominable. As time passed, we realized it was not out of malice that some teachers disciplined students. Those disciplinary acts don't kill. It is meant to remove the rough edges in our behavior. Those disciplinary acts were just tools to correct student behavior.

Armstrong, also speaking on the reverence accorded to teachers because of the students’ attitude to education, said:

We had serious respect for teachers, coupled with the fact that teachers are feared and respected. If you get a bad report from a teacher, the parents will also… For instance, if you did something wrong and the teacher disciplined you and complained to your parents, your parents will also discipline you. So, you know you cannot mess up because you don’t want your parents to get a bad report from your teacher. So, teachers were respected highly in Nigeria when we were growing up.
Armstrong also thinks lack of discipline is at the root of a lax or negative attitude towards education and offers advice:

   Discipline has to start from home for any child to succeed. They must start disciplining them at home to let them understand that education…. Like my father used to tell me, ‘Sky's the limit.’ I remember when I was very small; he would look out the window and tell me, ‘The sky is your limit,’ If I could do well in my academics. And that’s not what I see in most places here. Parents here don’t, really…. most people do. I don’t know how they are brought up, and they don’t impart discipline to their children. But what I think they can learn now is to encourage their children and do everything possible to make sure they understand that education is for their good and use. That if they succeed, they succeed for themselves. As my parents made me understand, if you do well, when you start getting your salary, you are the one that will benefit from it. If you decide to give them anything, you are just doing it out of your goodwill. But here I see kids think they are going to school for their parents or their teacher. They are very lazy; they don’t want to do work, which is different from what it used to be then.

Another first-generation respondent, Ugomma, a female, characterized the interaction with teachers as an “obedient relationship.” Ugomma said:

   Our relationship with teachers was like a master and servant. So, for us to come to school, whatever the teacher says, we must do it. We don’t argue with teachers; that is not something we do. You just have to come to class, sit down before the teachers come in, and do what the teacher asks you to do. So it was that kind of relationship, not fear, but a respectful relationship. We have to obey our teachers at all times.
Philomena thinks these attitudes of deference to teachers are rooted in culture and have served the people who observe them well. She said:

My cultural background that respects educators helped me to behave well in school, to accept responsibility as a student, to know that students also have a responsibility. As a student, it motivates me to know that in our culture, educators are respected. They are almost taken as your next parents. We respect them more than we respect our parents. The teacher better not come to your parents and say you didn’t do your homework or didn’t do what you should do. They better not come to your parents and say you disobeyed or didn’t do what you should do. You get a whipping! Culturally, however, so for that reason, I saw educators the same as our second parents. They are there to help you achieve your goal. They are there to help you reach your goals and accomplish what you have set out to do.

Evelyn also spoke about the respect and cultural factors in student-teacher interactions relating to school attitudes. She said, “Respecting others is ingrained in our culture. That was one of the first culture shocks when my students called me by my first name. That’s unheard of where I came from; it’s all related to respect.”

First-generation credit their success in school and continued positive attitude to school to the cordial relationship between them and their teachers. Philomena said:

Our generation generally interacted well with teachers knowing that teachers were the source of your information; we were very respectful to our teachers, we listened and paid attention to what they were showing to us or the information they were giving us, and we knew that having our teacher on our side and we on the teacher side will help a lot in our education and in being able to accomplish what we set out to do in the course.
Uzoechi agrees with Philomena’s view:

Teachers were the people we looked up to. The teachers taught us everything. We had the utmost respect for them and looked at them almost like gods because we knew we needed them to get where we needed to be. So, teachers were respected and almost adored, and we paid attention to what our teachers taught us. They were our guardians in so ……at a time.

Ekua, another first-generation female, said, “We were very respectful with teachers. You go to teachers when you have important things to say to them, and you respectfully interact with them”. Mariama, who comes from a French-speaking West African country, recalls her experience interacting with her teacher in high school here in the U.S.:

Mine was interesting because I came from a non-English speaking country. But I did have a French teacher that was instrumental and made it easy for me to learn English. I would stay after school, I would take all my homework there, and she would explain it to me, and I would do the homework. Even though I didn’t speak English, within three months, I could learn a lot. And I used 24 hours to practice everything that I had learned. I was determined.

Attitude and learning in school. The first-generation participants pointed out persistence and working hard as important skills they acquired due to their positive attitude toward school and that it has its benefits. Moses, a first-generation, articulated it this way:

For the most part, African immigrants work above and beyond their American peers. So, the pressure is always there to succeed. You don’t want to travel almost ten thousand miles to come and fail. So that itself is a pressure to do the best you can, he continued, “We West Africans always kept our eyes on the ball – if we can get this degree, we can
get a job, raise a family, buy a house, and buy automobiles. So, the result or outcome overpowers every negative consideration.”

Another first-generation Christopher said:

I’ve always believed in hard work. It was a lot of hard work at school. I went to a boarding school at age 13, and all my teachers were from Scotland. They held us to a different standard. That hard work stayed with me in high school and university. Even here during my Ph.D.! That drive came from my early years of schooling in Africa.

Mariama, a first-generation female, dwelt on the importance of working hard and the skill to resist bad influences that could detract from the work. She said:

I didn’t have any pressure as far as friends were concerned because I was self-regulated. If I had homework to do, I did it. I only have friends who did what I did. I didn’t have friends who didn’t take their work seriously. My time was limited.

According to her, there are ways to stay focused on the work without letting friends distract the individual. She offered the following advice:

They [second-generation West Africans] can learn that a lot of the ways to create our success is to decide what is important for us. And if they can learn to make decisions to choose their world and not let themselves be influenced by others. Then it won’t deter them from doing what they need to do to be successful. By doing so, peer pressure will not be a problem.

Student-student Interactions.

In an article published in The Atlantic titled “The Origins of the ‘Acting White’ Charge,” John McWhorter (2019) argues it is not true that high school African American students are socially isolated from academically smart peers for being smart as is portrayed in the research literature.
McWhorter blamed it on the way issues of school and achievement have been presented to American society as a race issue in which being White is synonymous with achievement. According to him, even research claims that racial diversity promotes achievement, a claim made by proponents of school busing during the school-desegregation era, does not meet critical scrutiny. In Ogbu’s (1998) research, student disengagement and the “acting White” phenomena featured prominently as a possible interpretation for that disengagement. In this research question, I aim to determine the schooling experiences of the participants, especially those who attended high school in the U.S., and how their attitudes impacted how they interacted with peers or made friends. I focused on those who attended high school in the U.S. for this subsection. Those who attended high school in Africa almost exclusively went to schools populated by Black Africans. There were no White students. So, even “acting White” would be considered out of place. I did not ask the participants or reference the “acting White” phenomena, and I inquired about how they interacted with their peers in high school. I presume here that if they were ostracized because they were performing well in their academics (something that would be similar to the “acting White” phenomena) would suggest they never allowed such social isolation to distract them from their set goals.

On the other hand, if they do not report such experiences, it could indicate that most students were partially or even fully focused and appear to share a common goal of striving to excel without the fear their peers will hold them to scorn.

Idika, a first-generation male, recalled his classmate respected him and never tried to socially isolate him as one of the top students in his school. He said:

For one thing, I was one of the stars in the class. So, my classmates looked up to me for assistance. Whenever the teacher wanted the students to work together, he would tell
them to ask me some of their questions. I kind of cherish it. I never was pressured or bullied or anything like that. So, I loved school. Those around me loved me for that.

He clarified, “Everybody around me wanted to do the same thing I was doing. We all shared the same goals and aspirations or wanted to study.”

Khadija, a female first-generation, says adherence to specific rules related to culture helped moderate students' behavior, including their relationships with peers. She said:

My interactions with my friends in school were great. When it came to pressure, everything in my school was under control. Culturally, there were things we couldn’t do. So, such things kept me on board in school because there were things we couldn’t do. Everybody was there to supervise and monitor us. So that helped me a lot to be who I am.

Mariama, a first-generation female, stated about her experience:

I didn’t have any pressure as far as friends were concerned because I was self-regulated. If I had homework to do, I did it. I only have friends who did what I did. I didn’t have friends who didn’t take their work seriously. My time was limited.” “They [second-generation West Africans] can learn that many ways to create our success is to decide what is important for us. And if they can learn to make decisions to choose their world and not let themselves be influenced by others. Then it won’t deter them from doing what they need to do to be successful. By doing so, peer pressure will not be a problem.

Some respondents in this research had bad experiences with peers and were not accepted within groups they thought they rightfully belonged or had difficulty making friends. Although it did not deter them from succeeding academically in school, they nevertheless had a lasting negative impact. Luke, a male, first-generation engineering graduate, was ostracized by his
peers. Although he said he was a high-achieving student, it was not clear why he was ostracized by his peers. He stated:

African Americans see us as outsiders, so once people you associate with don’t see you as part of them, you learn to dissociate yourself from them. When I was in college in Pennsylvania, I used to go to the Black students' unions meetings, but when I found out they didn't even see me as Black, I stopped going because I saw that they just used me as a quota to up whatever they get from the school. However, when intermingling with them, they tell me, “You are not from here; you’re from Africa.” After that, I stopped going to their meetings. So, if you went through that kind of trauma that you’re not even accepted by people you call fellow Blacks, it does affect how you identify yourself. So, wherever I go then, I write Nigerian, or I write Black Africa.

Stella, a female second-generation who came to the United States before she turned 12 years old, also stated that she was ostracized by her classmates. She said:

At some point, it became frustrating because some people believe that maybe because I’m African, I shouldn’t speak English that well. People asked me all sorts of demeaning questions. It makes one feel like an outsider; you are different. Sometimes, people would ask me whether I lived in a tree or had seen a car before. It makes me wonder how Africa is portrayed on TV and what they see to make them form these perceptions. These questions were ignorant, especially since being in high school, you should have some type of knowledge of the world around you.

Second Generation

Second-generation participants in this research started and completed their K-12 education in the U.S. Others started in their native countries in West Africa and completed them
in the U.S. The goal is to understand how their attitude affected their interactions with their peers and the overall school milieu. Their responses may shed light on whether they experienced the “acting White” phenomena and how their attitude to education helped them to navigate it. Kevin, now practicing law in Los Angeles, said he learned to “weed out the friends I didn’t need because they can be a big distraction.” According to him, there were more positive sides to his relationship with peers, although he couldn’t entirely discount the negative part, which he said he did overcome. He said:

The positive side was that my friends helped me a lot during school. They helped me with where I needed to go; they helped me to stay focused. But there were some negative stuffs that I wish didn’t happen that kind of held me back a little bit. But I pushed through that, and I tried to make the most, to make everything as positive as I can, as I got older.

A second-generation male Ahmed said peer interactions in high school were positive, and:

I don’t think it was negative at all. I think the way we were raised was to be very independent. So, I didn’t go to school to count on friends. I was already very independent. Friends in school were like an addition to something I already had. But it was positive for sure.

Yetunde, a female, did not hint at any incident like the “acting White” phenomena; instead, she narrated support and encouragement from her peers:

I did better when I had people around me to encourage me because when we put our heads together, we achieve more. For example, me helping somebody with something he/she doesn’t understand and vice-versa. I think it is necessary to have people around you.
Kingsley, a corporate attorney practicing in Los Angeles, was very pointed on how the attitudes of his peers affected his whole school experience. He said, “It made me want to learn more, to do well in school because my friends were doing well. I wanted to do well also, and that graduating with a certain degree was achievable for me as well.”

The second generation’s self-awareness of their identity as children of immigrants with expectations about behavior appears to bring their attitude about education to bear on their various school experiences and relationships, including learning and related functions to be successful in school, like course registration and sheer grit. This is how Adaeze, a housewife with a master’s degree, stated it:

As a second-generation, you have parents who are already educated in Nigeria. They just keep telling you that you have to do well, not fail—encouraging you. When it comes to course registration, they make sure they are part of choosing your classes. My parents were part of doing those things. So that’s one thing I learned from them, the structure, the way they trained me to be responsible and manage my time. You know, things like that. Those experiences certainly influenced my positive attitude towards education.

Another second-generation with a master’s degree and a career professional in foreign service expressed self-awareness of her identity when she navigated experiences in school. She stated:

Being from an immigrant family means that you don’t have that mindset of being limited, and you don’t have that mindset of society trying to hold you back. You know, at the end of the day if you want something, you go after it. That’s basically what it boils down to. If you want it, go after it, and don’t try to limit yourself by trying to allow other people to have control of your destiny or what you do.
**Summary of Research Question 3**

Participants in this research think that their attitude towards education helped them to have a positive school experience because they put into motion their tools for surviving situations, even a hostile one - community resource (see Figure 1). Those tools include staying focused on schoolwork and respect for teachers, parents, and other authority figures in school. In return, they got help from teachers, and they cherished those relationships with their teachers. The assistance from teachers included checking on the students about their attendance and offering study skills in language, especially the two first-generation students who came from Francophone or French-speaking countries. The positive attitude also helped them to effectively steer relationships with their peers to achieve maximum, mutually beneficial interests like encouraging and helping one another in their studies and striving for a common going of going to college.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative research explored the differences in attitudes toward education of first-generation and second-generation West Africans in Los Angeles County, California, and if they exist, in what ways, and how it affected their education in positive or negative ways. An analysis of the interview data shows a strong positive attitude towards education by both generations. Specifically, both generations mentioned parental influence, economic rewards, and an ingrained culture of embracing achievement attitudes like working hard, persistence, and resilience in the face of whatever difficulty they face. They also lean strongly toward their religious faith as they negotiate the challenges of living in the diverse multi-ethnic communities of Los Angeles County. All the above influences their attitude to help form the ecosystem of their community forces, a tool for survival. These key findings and the other results from the data indicate implications for teachers, administrators, and policymakers and provide recommendations for further research.

Participants also admit to some challenges, including dealing with racial stereotypes from peers at school, classroom teachers, and even administrators. Some participants, not all of them, say they also suffered the burden of low expectations. This is not unexpected because the Eurocentric American public perceives some non-European immigrants as low achieving, at risk of dropping out of school, and more likely to be poor, an assertion that is well documented in research (McDonnell & Hill, 1993; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rong & Brown, 2001). For some, their status as immigrants made them a target for discrimination due to their accents or xenophobia, another claim that is not entirely new in research (Matsuda, 1991). Nevertheless, most participants perceived their school experience in favorable terms. This positive attitude toward school may explain their relative educational achievement, career attainment, persistence in
school, and resilience to achieve success captured in some research (Anderson, 2017). As stated earlier, the influences may help explain West African immigrants' engagement in schools and why they are sometimes called the model minority. The research here evolved to support the concern that there are differences between first and second-generation West African immigrants’ attitudes towards education. Specifically, it is to examine their attitude towards education. The findings from this study raise implications for policy for curriculum planners, administrators, and local school districts to exploit in designing curricula for similar demographics to plan academic programs that can support students' achievement. It also creates implications for a pathway for more research.

**Key Findings**

*Education as Pillar of Success*

A recurring point opined by the participants was that education was the pillar of all success. For that singular reason, generations of West African immigrants pinned their present and future success on themselves and their children acquiring as much education as possible. The families and the community assume that any issues distracting from that focus must be minimized. According to them, going to school was a plausible way out of poverty as a key to a better life. Because they have personally seen or experienced the economic and other merits of being educated, their attitude was generally positive. This positive attitude is grounded and manifested itself in the ways family or parents were involved in shaping that attitude, the way social relations, classroom teachings, relationships with their peers, their culture and social mores like respect, the way they want to be seen versus how they see themselves, all interacted. The participants also spoke of the influence of religion and their beliefs being grounded in self-efficacy (Bandura, 1994) and the environment the individual is raised in.
**Significant Role of Religion**

Religion and faith continue to play a significant role in the lives of most West African immigrants. The findings from this research parallel previous documentation in literature, including a Pew Research Center survey from 2021 that found African immigrants are “more religious than U.S.-born Black adults” (Diamant, 2021, p. #). The same survey found that 54% of immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa attended services weekly, a figure far higher than the 32% of U.S.-born who say the same. Also, 72% of African immigrants in the U.S. claim that religion is “vital to them, compared with only 59% of U.S.- and Caribbean-born” Black people. The survey further indicates fewer African immigrants claim to be atheists - a mere 6% (Diamant, 2021). These statistics show that issues of religion and faith factor heavily in the personal lives of West African immigrants. My respondents claim that their religious faith, including their belief about the indispensability of a higher being and the omnipresence of the higher being, shapes their worldview, environment, and attitude to education. They claim prayers and supplications are at the root of their being. This close attachment to religion and faith is visible in Los Angeles County, the location of this research, where many churches and mosques have large West African congregations. All the participants in this research expressly stated the strong influence of their religious faith on their attitudes and how they perceive the world around them. They were also very comfortable declaring their faith affiliation - whether they were of the Christian or Islamic faith. They were directly asked questions about their religious faith, and they also volunteered the information to explain the various influences on their attitudes.

**Family is Central**

Family is central to a typical West African immigrant’s life. My respondents indicated that individual decisions are often premised on what the consequence will be for the family. The
burden to preserve the family’s name, refrain from actions that may tarnish it, and engage in acts that will elevate it, including through educational attainment, is highly prioritized. One of the ways to demonstrate an individual’s commitment to preserving a family’s name and raising its social capital that may potentially translate to economic prosperity, a consequence of well-paying jobs, is to cater to the family's welfare. For example, my respondents claim that it is a common experience to see many West Africans making remittances to their immediate and extended families living in their countries of origin. Remittances are “the cross-border payments that migrants living and working outside their country of origin send back home to loved ones (Diamant, 2021).

The remittances serve the primary purpose of helping cushion the effects of poverty made worse by lack of food, a direct consequence of the war between Russia and Ukraine. This region, currently at war, supplies 85% of the wheat needed in Sub-Saharan Africa (Ratha et al., 2022).

It is estimated that diaspora Africans in the United States and other Western countries, including the United Kingdom and France, remitted $47 billion and $49 billion in 2019 and 2021, respectively (Allen, 2021; Gupta et al., 2009). In Africa, where 85% of the population lives on less than $5.50 a day (Castaneda et al., 2019), the remittances sustain families, help families to pay for education, health services, shelter, and, whenever possible, invest (Allen, 2021; Gupta et al. 2009).

**Gender Roles**

My respondents say that although they respect the traditional gender roles in families in which the male works to raise the economic status of the family and the female takes care of the children (Diamant, 2021), some respondents say they also favor equal responsibility, a practice that is mainstream here in the United States. Some female respondents said a woman
participating in the financial well-being of the family is empowering and helps break down expected restraints of remaining silent and ceding all decisions, including a more substantial influence on their children’s attitude to school to the adult male partner.

The equal sharing of family responsibilities, including financial support, has given most West African immigrant women a stronger voice in making family decisions, including shaping their children’s attitudes toward school. The earning power of West African immigrant women in the family has significantly raised their profile in the family. It is not uncommon to see that many West African women occupy mid-level or senior positions in the healthcare sector, thereby making them the principal income earner in the family. Experiencing a shift in family-income dynamics, as stated here, definitely influences how children in the family process these experiences and how it affects their attitude to education. This is consistent with the social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), in which Bandura states that individuals acquire attitudes through imitation and observation. Children growing up in West African family units observe the successes of their parents and that the successes were made possible by their parents being educated imitated their parents' attitude and are influenced to have a positive attitude towards education.

Educational Attainment Among Diaspora West Africans

The internalized view of education among the West African diaspora is that education is supremely essential in positioning an individual to remain competitive in the labor market and to command premium remunerations. They see educational attainment not only as a self-preservation for economic uncertainties but as a way to achieve higher social recognition in the community and a gateway to leadership positions. Just as the economy continues to shift from manufacturing to a knowledge-based economy where intellectual capital is most valued as in
science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), many West African say they seize the available incentive to sharpen their skills as the expanding United States economy is ready to absorb them (The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2022).

Although most immigrant West Africans are gainfully employed, my respondents say they have to prepare twice as much to apply for job vacancies because they are aware they are underpaid relative to a native-born applicant with the same or even lower qualifications due to credentialing issues and “racial discrimination in the U.S. labor market” (Capps et al. 2012). My respondents say it is common knowledge to see many West African immigrants returning to school, sometimes into new fields of programs that may lead to a career change to remain eternally employable. This is important, although many first-generation respondents referenced how their parents, many of them not educated but who understood the power and prestige education confers on those who possess them in their communities. Some of the first generations say their internalized positive attitude to education arose from the early interaction with the White missionaries who came to the coast of West Africa intending to evangelize to win converts to Christianity. To help with their conversion mission, they built schools, and those who embraced the missionaries and got educated in Western education saw they had more power, prestige, and respect from the community. In the process, their socio-economic status changed for the better because the colonialists who were in charge of federal, regional, and local jurisdictions put the educated Africans in charge of low-level positions, but which nevertheless raised their social, economic, and political capital in the eyes of the community. This experience cements in their minds that going to school is essential and has been ingrained in their psyche.
Selectivity of West African Immigrants

All the first-generation participants in this research had obtained a minimum of a first postsecondary degree before immigrating to the United States. Some have even completed their doctoral degrees or are pursuing post-doctoral fellowships. Others had settled in their careers or just beginning before deciding to come to the United States to live. This indicates that those choosing to go to the United States to settle down have the financial ability to afford such an expensive journey or have a family who sponsored them. In contrast, those who did not journey to the United States needed the financial ability to do so. When West African immigrants come to the United States, they are likely to come in with appropriate travel visas, well-educated, with professional degrees, and the advantage of proficiency in written and oral English by those from Anglophone or English-speaking countries like Nigeria and Ghana. The West African immigrants from Francophone or French-speaking countries, like Senegal and Cote D’Ivoire, do not have the English proficiency advantage. Those advantages the West African immigrants bring with them - proven job skills, education, and facility in the English language help them to assimilate rather quickly than other immigrants without the advantages. These immigrants may take menial jobs in the interim to support their immediate families and to remit money to the families they left behind in their origin countries. Still, they often consider such jobs as temporary. The trajectory towards education and formed positive attitude towards education often continues and may help explain the behavioral component of their attitude towards education.

Capital of Having Educated Parents

Some second-generation immigrant students from West African families say they relish the social and economic capital of having educated parents, which further helps to explain their
attitude towards education. Many second-generation students stated how their parents’ education was the main reason they had the benefit of a middle-class lifestyle of residing in choice-safe neighborhoods or communities, attending K-12 schools in respectable or top-ranked school districts, could afford family vacations, going to summer camps, and successfully graduating from college. Other second-generation immigrants said their parents could not afford residences outside the inner cities, even though they were educated. Sometimes they had to attend poorly resourced schools with high teacher turnover and perennially low-test scores in the old South-Central Los Angeles. However, that did not dampen their positive attitude towards education. Their parents nevertheless adopted a positive attitude and took a keen interest in their education by helping them with homework and enrolling them in after-school programs. The parents attended parent-teacher conferences and maintained good relationships with the school administration and the teachers. My respondents said they engaged in volunteering opportunities and attended West African ethnic-group-specific themed events sponsored by members of that ethnic group in local universities, helped to prepare and position those students for college work, and when they are out of college, the way they create their network.

**Social mores**

Notably, in some topics, the two generations express similar attitudes. For example, attitudes related to social mores, like respecting people, shape one’s view about education. Both first and second-generation participants readily state that they respect people, especially anybody older than them and that they defer to teachers in almost all situations because they command authority. The participants state that their communities find a disrespectful person objectionable and attest to the attitude of respect, translating to a positive view of education. Some narrated how their parents came specifically to their schools to verify that they were being respectful to
the teachers. Going by the number of participants who spoke about the significance of respecting people, it is not an overstatement to claim that parents consider respect just as important as academic grades. In some others, they differed based on their experience.

**Ethnic Enclaves and the Role of the Church**

West Africans are concentrated in South Los Angeles, especially Inglewood and Compton. They reside and own businesses in these cities and can authentically stand as an ethnic enclave for the population. Many West Africans own restaurants here, fashion boutiques, art galleries, bookstores, medical offices, medical equipment businesses, insurance, barber shops, and children's and adult daycare facilities. West African immigrants have established and operated houses of worship like churches and mosques with predominantly West African congregations. The houses of worship in these enclaves play a crucial role. In these places of worship, the priest or the imams help to provide moral and spiritual teaching, act as judges in disputes, role model community-acceptable behaviors, and lay down moral codes to guide their followers. But beyond these, the church was the center of teaching and reinforcing the ethnic identity of congregants and, at the same time, strengthening their assimilation in the United States. In the churches, most of the second-generation born in the United States were dedicated inside the church or those brought to the country when they were children, attended Sunday school, and participated in biblical play adaptations of Bible stories. They become youth ministry members and learn the adaptation strategies to succeed in school, attend college, and have successful careers. The first-generation and the second-generation in my research spoke powerfully about the benefits of their family’s active participation in church activities and how it helped them develop close relationships that were beneficial in college and proven instrumental to their success. This is consistent with Bankston and Zhou's (1995) findings, whose research
showed that “religious participation consistently makes a significant contribution to ethnic identification, which, in turn, facilitates positive adaptation of immigrant adolescents to American society” p. 523. It increases the chances that their children will excel in school, aspire for subsequent education encounters, and avoid pitfalls.

For the first generation, the church was one practical element of their lives from their original countries, and it acts as a bridge for the second generation to maintain close membership to their ethnic group. This statement is true for the participants in this research and many West Africans in Los Angeles County. Many West Africans are readily seen attending church services in native attires, especially the women in their signature headgear. Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Methodist congregants hold church services in the Igbo language with Igbo hymnals and songs. In these religious spaces, these immigrants form associations to help their community. More than the church-related associations, parents join other ethnic organizations independent of the church ones. These outside associations have had an impact on the second generation because it is in those spaces that they meet other ethnic community members, and they recall often being asked about school and told to be serious about school and celebrate their ethnic identity. Some of them sometimes find their lifelong spouse during these association meetings. Bankston 111 and Zhou (1995) stated that parents’ membership in ethnic community associations has a consequential effect on school performance and promotes their adaptation.

The participants in this research said they hold community meetings to teach the young ones the cultures and mores of their different communities. For example, in these meetings, their community values like respect, the ceremony surrounding the breaking of cola nut among the Igbos of Nigeria, the reason and importance of pouring libation, and the histories of their communities are revealed. The participants described how the enclaves helped them as centers to
facilitate events that ensured they passed on their cultural mores to the next generation. They
hold ethnic association meetings in which they discuss strategies to protect their culture while at
the same time maintaining strategies to cope with challenges here in the United States. The
ethnic enclaves also serve as centers to introduce the second-generation West Africans to their
African roots. For example, a grade school camp meeting for second-generation Igbo youths is
held at a local university campus in South Los Angeles. The students play games and are
introduced to works by famous Igbo artists and authors, including Chinua Achebe’s novel Things
Fall Apart. Other West African ethnic groups organize similar activities where they learn about
other prominent and respected individuals from their country or ethnic group. It is common to
see different West African country associations organize events like music, dances, and
traditional masquerades to mark their country’s independence from colonial rule from the British
and the French. The organizers present these events compellingly to communicate to the youths
that they come from a dynamic background of hardworking people who continue to make a
difference in the community.

**Accent and Identity**

Some first-generation participants stated that how people reacted to them because of
their accents affected their attitudes towards education. For example, Moses pointed out during
the interview how fellow West Africans literally shut down during class because they did not
want to draw attention to themselves because of their accents during class instruction. He
narrated how such attention made the individual develop low self-esteem but that it never
deterred them from working harder on their academics, even though they would have felt more
fulfilled contributing verbally in class. As for himself, he said he constantly reminded himself
that Henry Kinsinger, the erstwhile U.S. Secretary of State, had an accent and still managed to
reach the height of his career. As for Philomena (F003), she said she took reactions about her
accent in stride and dealt with it by making herself visible in school activities and that socializing
the way she did made her peers pay less attention to her accent, but it nevertheless occasionally
bothered her. As for the second generation, none complained about being made fun of about
their accent except Stella (F0028), who came to the U.S. before she turned 12 years old. She
spoke about the mental anguish she suffered from taunts directed at her by her peers. according
to her, they were even surprised she could speak English. Regina (F0034), born in Los Angeles,
noted during the interview that she always had to defend some of her friends in grade school who
were new arrivals from Nigeria at the time from the taunts of other students because of their
accents. Although they did not complain about teachers making them uncomfortable, they did
not mention any sort of intervention from teachers or administrators. It is important to note that
none of the interview questions related to accents. One question did ask if language affected their
attitude or the role of language as it relates to their attitude towards education. The first
generation defaulted to speaking about accents and the associated negative perception of
speaking with a heavy foreign accent (Foucart et al., 2019). Foucart et al. (2019) note that a
foreign accent affects the visual perception of a speaker, even when the person is not speaking.
The first-generation participants say such perceptions created emotional pain. The second-
generation West Africans born in the U.S. did not express any accent-related issues.

According to first-generation participants, the feeling that they are seen as different
because of their accent created both emotional pains on the one hand and the other hand, an
attitude toward using education to mitigate this perceived deficiency. A similar experience may
be what U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris (Yam, 2020) meant when she related her Indian
mother’s experience in the U.S. According to the Vice President:
My mother, who raised my sister and me, was a proud woman. She was a brown woman. She was a woman with a heavy accent. She was a woman who, many times, people would overlook or not take her seriously. Or, because of her accent, they assume things about her intelligence. Now, every time my mother proved them wrong.

In telling this story, it is possible the Vice President was hinting at the stereotypes about foreign accents, especially for people that are not European that are perceived and seen as less credible (Sethi et al., 2020). For first-generation West Africans, this experience is most true. The first-generation West Africans say they saw this stereotype as an asset to explore and exploit through embracing education and attitudes correlated to educational achievement, including working hard, grit, and resilience. First-generation respondents said accent affected their attitude towards education during their time living in the U.S. None of the second-generation respondents expressed a negative attitude directed to them that is related to language or how the English language is spoken. Some respondents categorized as second-generation in this research were born in the United States, and English is their first language, spoken both in school and at home. For others who came to the United States as infants or preteens (1.5 generation) and were categorized as the second generation in this study, they did not report negative attitudes directed to their manner of speaking except one who arrived in the United States as a preteen and reported that her peers in school often expressed curiosity that she even spoke English. She said she interpreted that curiosity as part of a larger attempt to demean her since, according to her, the same people asked her if she, her family, and people in her country lived in trees in her native country.
Implications

The findings from this research have implications for teachers, teacher training institutions, and school districts.

Implication for Teachers

Although students from West Africa immigrant families who are the focus of this study generally express a positive attitude towards school, teachers must be alert to their concerns. The teachers must incorporate values about community, caring, and the virtues of the extended family because these attributes form the pillars of a typical West African family (Ghong et al., 2007). Being sensitive to these issues in the curriculum can work conjointly while the teachers also teach the concepts embedded in the American culture - individualism and emphasis on the nuclear family. West African immigrant students come from communities and families where the culture of sharing is valued and taught daily. There is unnecessary dissonance when the students hear two distinctly disparate values at home and school. As Gay (2002) puts it, “The academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when taught through their own cultural and experimental filters” (p. 106-16).

Some students from West African immigrant families are proficient in other languages in that region. Teachers must value, validate and harness any strength from this additional language skill, view it as value-added for the students, and maximize it for them in accessing the curriculum (Kiramba et al., 2021; Ruiz, 1984; Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007; Ghong et al., 2007). The teachers can explore areas in research they can leverage the students’ multilingual skills in academics to help tamp down the condescension some students from West Africa immigrant families say they suffer because their peers and teachers consider their facility with the English language insufficient solely because of their backgrounds as students from immigrant families.
Utilizing the multilingual capital of the West African immigrant student is another pedagogical pathway to respect, tolerance, and valuing cultural differences (Kiramba et al., 2021; Agyepong, 2013). Compared to other immigrant groups in the US, immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa hold enormous capital in the English language. As much as 26% of U.S. citizens claimed English was the language, they spoke at home in 2019 (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). Lorenzi and Batalova (2022) also claim that about 25% of people five years or older who immigrated from Sub-Saharan Africa possess limited proficiency in English compared to 46% of the general population who claim the same in the United States. Teachers can help them to harness this advantage in other classroom activities maximally.

Related to language are complaints from some students from West Africa immigrant families who say they are mocked in class because they speak the English language with a heavy accent that is not American. The teacher is the best resource for instructing students that English is the most widely spoken language worldwide and, therefore, subject to regional accents. Therefore, the speaker’s first language or mother tongue often interferes with oral English. The same problems apply to students from West Africa immigrant families here in the U.S. as they struggle to acquire the American accent, which they assume is socially the most preferred. The awareness may stem ignorance and sometimes hostility directed at students who speak with an accent that is not American. Finally, correcting misinformation and disinformation and removing the stigma associated with speaking the English language with a heavy West African accent can minimize the social isolation some students suffer. Such measures can help to re-integrate them into the learning environment, sustain their engagement in the classroom, and improve and promote their achievement.
Implications for Teacher Training Institutions

Teachers must be aware of the cultural differences in their classroom to understand the context in which students from West Africa immigrant families operate. The knowledge about cultural competency must start from teacher training institutions by updating the curriculum to reflect this accommodation. In addition, professional development training and refresher courses can be made mandatory to keep teachers abreast of new developments within the African immigrant community. More West African immigrant families with grade-school-age children born outside the United States are arriving in our communities and enrolling in our schools. Although some students speak English, they may need a more robust command of the language. This deficit may define them and make them vulnerable to mockery even though these students may be multilingual with its advantages. Teachers must help students build on that advantage. Teachers must remember that these West African immigrant students bring other strengths to the classroom, like the culture of working hard, determination, and grit, even if they demonstrate it differently.

Ignorance of cultural differences often leads to unnecessary tracking of the students. Some are held back and not allowed to take challenging classes like advanced math and advanced placement (AP). Although this research did not find any evidence, the potential exists when students are placed in lower-ability courses; they can become frustrated and, in the worst-case scenario, drop out of school, or if they continue in school, they may attend non-competitive colleges with the result of lower earning potential when they graduate.

Implications for Schools and Local School Districts

Schools and local school districts also have a role to play. They can bring visibility to the students from West Africa immigrant families by creating Black Africa heritage month in which,
among others, West Africa diaspora history, culture, language, literature, music, dance, and its people will take center stage in the classroom lessons. Lessons created and taught about Black Africa inform and educate the students about the commonality of human experiences like immigration, colonization, and even language. Although it is a welcome idea that some schools have adopted multicultural events, they may not be enough. West African immigrant students in my research reported that such events open them up for ridicule from their native African attire that is worn during the events, ceremonial regalia that are worn for dances to even the dance steps that are termed to be primitive because it deviates from the dominant American culture. They must work on restructuring their cultural competency to maximize inclusivity to mitigate the invisibility of West African immigrant students. Cultural competence may bother the notion of respect, as exemplified by one of the respondents in this research whose teacher wants to be addressed by her first name but which the immigrant student considers disrespectful to her teacher and did not comply.

**Implications for Research**

This research adds a new perspective in exploring the educational engagement of first and second-generation West African immigrants' attitudes towards education.

The percentage of immigrants from West Africa continues to outnumber those from other sub-Saharan African countries immigrating to the United States. In the coming years, many West African immigrant students will attend k-12 schools and enroll in colleges. Teachers need to be prepared to deal effectively with students from diverse backgrounds.

The research adds to the limited research about first and second-generation African immigrant engagement in education.
Model Minority Myth

This research brings further attention to the difficulties of first-generation and second-generation West African immigrants in the United States face in school and even in the workplace because they are sometimes labeled a model minority which carries with it the burden of over-expectation of their skills and abilities. When they fail to meet those expectations, society judges their academic performance or high economic standing as citizens. This over-expectation brings undue scrutiny and may result in shame and the individuals feeling inadequate about themselves, questioning their intelligence, and ultimately yielding to strengthen further stereotype threat with its negative consequence in Black student achievement.

This research adds to other findings in the literature about the misconception that immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, including West Africans, are not subject to disadvantages like disproportionality of punishment and discrimination native-born African Americans suffer. The data from this research suggest that West African immigrants experience the same issues but may be different from the extent native-born African Americans are confronted with those experiences. The only difference is that West African immigrants have a ready mitigation tool for dealing with such experiences - a frame of reference - that it could be worse if they were in another country.

African immigrants react to those experiences differently versus how native-born African Americans react to similar experiences. While native-born African Americans may vocally resist any action they perceive as discriminatory and challenge it, West Africans may resist the attempt to challenge such instances of discrimination and or what others may interpret as injustice. The reason is because of the differences in their cultural reference. Failure to recognize these
differences is possible because data is rarely disaggregated to account for the cultural, language, and social differences between West African immigrants and native-born African Americans.

This research also called attention to the dilemma of African immigrants in aligning their identities. Some first-generation West African immigrants stated they did not feel accepted in the Black student associations in the 1970s and 1980s. It appears there exists an unspoken hostility between the two groups even though it might not be apparent on the surface level. First-generation West African immigrants also stated they did not feel a sense of belonging in class as few classmates want to work with them in group class assignments.

**Community Forces**

This research helped refine our understanding of community forces at the utilitarian level by the people most impacted by its many benefits - West African immigrants. Looking from the outside, it is difficult to understand how West African immigrants confront and overcome their challenges in the U.S. Although all framework components (see Figure 1) work together to achieve success, they can also work independently. It is conceivable that some adverse events may disrupt any piece or component in the framework, especially in the internal forces compartment (see Figure 1). For example, a family may experience irreversible discontinuity as a result of divorce or the death of one or both parents, which alters the ecosystem of that component. The individual here is still expected to utilize other available components within the framework to continue and be successful. The expectation for the individual to succeed is never diluted; it is intensified as the fear of failing is strong within the community.

Although they are a vital fabric in the external forces compartment (see Figure 1), religious organizations, community organizations, and professional organizations can be bypassed by an individual without creating any discernable discontinuity that may be so
overwhelming to derail their trajectory to success. They can still mobilize roles and functions in the external forces compartment by exploring services outside their community. For example, religious leaders' mentoring roles, role models, and moral codes of conduct may involve personal relationships like going to pastors or imams to intervene as arbiters when family conflicts occur or between community members, but they are dispensable. Familial relationship is still the most potent form of relationship within the West African community, and individuals often choose what best for them, including the selective use of external forces as represented in the framework (see Figure 1).

**Contributions of West African Immigrants**

This research adds value to the contribution of West African immigrants, who are most impacted by the lack of representation in research studies about their attitude to education. Although West African immigrants as well as other African immigrants face challenges in the United States such as earning lower household income ($58,000 compared to $64,000 for other immigrant homes) and are more likely to be poor (17% compared to 14% for all other immigrant groups), West African immigrants constitute 42.2% of African immigrants to the United States and they are more educated and participate in greater rates in the U.S. labor market (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022). So, it can be argued that their greatest net contribution is in the economy. For example, immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa have a median age of 39 in 2019, a number lower than 46 years for all other immigrants in the U.S. Therefore, they continue to be a major factor to the current growth of the economy in the Biden Administration. The same data source shows that the higher levels of educational attainment by Africans of which West Africa forms a greater percentage are employed in management, business, science, and the arts thereby adding a significant boost to the economy (Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022).
Reason for differences

First and second-generation West Africans might be different in their outlook on issues that tend towards conservatism for the first generation and liberalism for the second generation, but they share commonalities too. The first generation is more religiously aligned to the old scriptural teachings of the mission schools most attended in their origin countries. In those schools, (see M006-Christopher and M041-Paulson), biblical teachings and precepts about the consequences of sin, the importance of forgiveness, redemption, and following the tenets set in the Ten Commandments still shape their attitude and their general outlook on life. Even those that are not of the Christian religious faith said religious teachings acted as moderation to their actions (see interviewee F008-Khadija). This attachment to conservative religious beliefs is understandable because some religious views closely align with traditional African beliefs, like views about same-sex relationships or even the subordination of women in the family.

Also, the first generation had different orientations regarding governance because some either grew up under a military regime or authoritarian civilian regimes. Military regimes or oppressive civilian regimes are often corrupt and implement extra-judicial policies. These varied political experiences may influence their voting attitude and political engagement in the United States. The result is that in some political or social issues, their views might differ.

Family ties are more important to the first generation than the second generation because the first generation believes in collectivism rather than individualism. Collectivism stresses community, but individualism puts excellent value on the concerns of a sole individual. The firm belief in extended family relationships forces the first generation to be as financially involved with their families in their origin countries as in their immediate families. This added
responsibility impacts their wealth-building capacity and personal savings. Therefore, the second-generation may be financially secure with higher family income than the first-generation because they do not have the responsibility to shoulder the financial needs of the extended family like the first generation.

Both generations agree that it is crucial to fortify their future with education attainment. There is no separation on this belief because it is already ingrained in their culture. In summary, the reason there might be differences between the first and second generations is that values might be different or diverge at some point. The values of religion, politics, social issues, and growing up in a different environment – the host country for the first generation and for the second generation – a birth country.

Further research

The purpose of this research was to shed light on the attitudes of first and second-generation West African immigrant students to education. The research examined the extent of internal forces, including parental influence; external forces, including the community and other structures in the community like religious institutions and finally, personal behavior affects the attitude. Research shows that African immigrants, including West Africans, possess and demonstrate in a robust way achievement behaviors like determination, persistence, working hard, showing respect, and resiliency, all qualities consistent with success in school.

Third-Generation

As stated earlier, the initial plan was to include the third generation, but the ones I found did not meet the age requirement. Future research on this population is warranted because they are unique. First, both of their parents were born in the United States, and their relationship with
the generation is wider apart than the second generation's relationship with the first generation. The first generation sees the third generation as defiant because the cultural expectation of absolute respect for elders and other authority figures the first generation observes is not as strong for the third generation. So, a bondage of authority inflicted by the first generation appears broken by the third generation. The third generation does not appear too inclined towards respect for authority figures, which is prevalent within the West African community. The separation the third generation tries to make is a worthy move because the level of first-generation parental involvement with their children can be overwhelming, with the potential to make the second generation powerless and lack the initiative and creativity to be truly independent. The independence the third generation craves from the immediate family members is warranted.

**Limitations of this study**

There are limitations to the qualitative methodology I used due to my level of access to the participants. First, all the participants were volunteers, and their families or friends referred some, so the potential for a self-selected sample must be considered. Utilizing the purposeful interview technique was very challenging in gathering data for this study. The challenge presented itself as finding participants to consent to individual interviews. Although conducting interviews is a staple of qualitative research like this one, a mixed method approach could have provided additional data. Quantitative methodology could also mitigate some inherent challenges in qualitative research. Adopting probability sampling and document review would be a worthy methodology to consider.

The sample applies to a specific experience of immigrants. I am analyzing the experiences of those who live in a large county in the United States that is very diversified. Other
immigrants from West Africa might have other experiences if they live in a small county in the United States. Finally, the small number of participants limits the generalizability of the results to some West African immigrants in Southern California.
References


https://www.hepg.org/her-home/issues/harvard-educational-review-volume-74-issue-4/herarticle/_38


https://documents.worldbank.org/pt/publication/documents-


http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/guinier/publications/preference.pdf


https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2008.05.007.


https://doi.org/10.2307/796694


http://sacausa.org/images/AfricanImmigrantsUSAMigrationInformation.pdf


https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/2006/MR103.pdf


https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682x.1999.tb00488.x


https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorrison/2020/06/18/black-graduates-twice-as-likely-to-be-unemployed/?sh=9ba0b4f77eb3


https://doi.org/10.1023/b:urre.0000042734.83194.f6


http://www.jstor.org/stable/3196181


success-story-japaneseamerican.html

Hispanic Trends Project https://www.pewresearch.org/wp-

https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/03/22/at-least-a-million-sub-saharan-africans-
moved-to-europe-since-2010/

Comparison of Their Engagement and Intellectual Development. *The Journal of Higher

achievement among disadvantaged children of immigrants. *The annals of the American
academy of political and social science, 620*(1), 12-36.


variants. *The annals of the American academy of political and social science, 530*(1), 74-
96.

among disadvantaged children of immigrants. *The annals of the American academy of
political and social science. 620*(1), 12-36.


Ukpokodu, O. N. (2017). African Immigrants, the “New Model Minority”: Examining the Reality in U.S. k-12 Schools. *The Urban Review, 50* (1), 69–96. [https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0430-0](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-017-0430-0)


https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sot049


Appendix A

The System and Community Forces

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“THE SYSTEM”</th>
<th>“COMMUNITY FORCES”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Societal Educational Policies &amp; Practices</td>
<td>DUAL STATUS FRAME OF REFERENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Societal Rewards for Educational Accomplishments or Credentials</td>
<td>Instrumental Beliefs about Interpretations of Schooling (e.g., Role of Credentials In Getting Ahead)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treatments of Minorities in School</td>
<td>Relational Beliefs about or Interpretations of Schooling (e.g., Degree of Trusting Schools &amp; Those in Control; Schooling as a Process of Subordination and Control)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Symbolic Beliefs about Interpretations of Schooling (e.g., Is learning curriculum, school cultural practices &amp; language a threat to minority cultural &amp; language identity?)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MINORITY EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES

SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT & ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

Appendix B

Mitigation Strategies to Counter the Barriers.

Appendix D

Informed Consent Letter

Subject: Participation in interview with First and Second generation West African immigrants.

You are being contacted to participate in a research project conducted by Toby Madubuko, a Ph.D. candidate in the School of Educational Studies, Claremont Graduate University (CGU). Additionally, you are requested to participate in this research because you have been identified as a cohort of new immigrants whose heritage is traced to West Africa.

PURPOSE: This research examines the differences between first, and second-generation West African immigrant attitudes towards education. The research will examine why the differences exist and what we can learn from it to promote school success.

ELIGIBILITY: To be eligible for this research, you must be 18 or older and trace your direct heritage within the past three generations to West Africa.

PARTICIPATION: During the research, you will be asked to participate in a face-to-face verbal interview with me. The interview will be 45 to 60 minutes long. The interview will cover your experiences in and out of school as a person from an immigrant family. I will contact you if there is a need for follow-up questions. You can also contact me if you have questions or concerns.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION: I do not envisage any physical risks to your participation in this research. But if the interview brings back unpleasant memories from the past, you are free to share them with me or withhold them. If desired, I will try to provide you with contact information for counselors in your community to help you resolve the memories. You have the right to decline to answer any question(s) at any time for any or no reason.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION: I do not expect the research to benefit you personally. However, the study may help shed some light on the challenges individuals from immigrant families face in the U.S. Knowing their strengths or challenges will help policymakers create policies that improve school success.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: Please be aware that your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any particular question without it being held against you. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future connection with anyone at CGU.

INTERVIEW LOCATION: The interview will take place in mutually agreed locations. Such locations include local restaurants, schools, or any other place most convenient for you.

CONFIDENTIALITY: Your privacy will be protected in all publications resulting from this research. The publications may include papers, workshops, conference presentations, or stories. Rest assured that this research will never use your real name in any form, auditory or written. It
is your choice to assume any pseudonym of your choice. I will alter identifiable names, places, and people mentioned to ensure confidentiality. In addition, I will destroy the recordings for this research after five years. The reason for destroying the interview record is to ensure that you (the participant in my research) are not linked to the research.

If you have any questions or want additional information about this research, please contact me, Toby Madubuko. My telephone number is (310) 483-6972. My email address is tmadubuko@gmail.com. You may also contact my faculty advisor Prof. Tom Luschei. His email address is thomas.luschei@cgu.edu

The CGU Institutional Review Board has approved this study. You will be given a signed copy of this consent form for record purposes.

CONSENT: Your signature below means that you understand the information on this form and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research.

Signature of Participant ______________________________
Printed Name of Participant ______________________________
Date ______________________________________________

Signature of Researcher ______________________________
Printed Name of Research ______________________________
Date ______________________________________________
Appendix E

Participants’ Interview Protocol

1. What are the attitudes of West African immigrants towards education?

- How important or not important do you consider education to your future? Explain.
- Explain why some African immigrant students or their children do well in school. Give examples.
- Explain to me why some African immigrant students or their children do not do well in school. Give examples.
- Tell me about classes some students consider challenging, like Advanced Placement and Mathematics courses. Do African immigrant students take or avoid them because they consider them challenging?
- How do African immigrant children relate with teachers?
- Reflect on your interactions with friends in school. Describe the pressure they put on you that could hurt your schoolwork. Did you yield to those pressures? Describe.

2. Do these attitudes differ across first and second-generation immigrants? If so, how do they differ?

A. How do you characterize your attitude towards education?
B. In what specific ways do your attitudes towards education differ from your parents? Explain.
C. Explain to me, first in positive terms and negative terms, how these attitudes affect(ed) your school experience.
D. What sets of school policies and/or relationships impacted these attitudes?
E. What aspects of your home life impacted these attitudes?
F. What do you think that somebody listening to you can learn from differences in attitude towards education that you just shared?

3. According to West African immigrants, how do these attitudes affect their school experience positively or negatively?

A. Describe to me the kind of neighborhood you grew up in for most of your childhood/adolescent life.
B. Describe to me in specific ways and times your parents impressed on you the belief that you must do well in school and stay out of trouble to save the family’s name.
C. Describe to me ways and times your parents impressed on you the importance of obeying, respecting, and being loyal to your family.
D. Describe to me the specific ways and how your parents made it clear to you in subtle or unsubtle ways the importance of doing well educationally, economically, and in a career to prepare you for the future and help the family later in life.
E. Do you feel your parents controlled you through how they disciplined you as a child? Describe it to me.
F. What roles did religion play in the family for most of your childhood/adolescence?
G. What is your parents’ involvement in communicating with your teachers about your school progress?

4. According to West African immigrants, what types of educational policies and practices can positively impact attitudes?

   A. To what extent does your African cultural background influence how you behave in school?

**Cultural transmissions**
- Do you facilitate or participate in cultural activities like traditional dances, music, and songs from your home country? Describe it.
- What role do these cultural activities play in shaping your attitudes towards school? Do they have any effects? Positive or negative effects?
- How often do you visit your home country and how well does it help/hinder in shaping your attitude towards school or your assimilation into American society?
- What do you do to maintain your cultural heritage in the U.S?

**Spirituality**
- What role does spirituality play in your attitude towards school or defining your identity?
- Does being spiritual, help you cope? How?

**Religion**
- What specific roles do religion/going to church/mosque play in your attitude?

**Language**
- What challenges do you face that are related to language? Describe it. How does language define your identity?
- Do you consciously try to learn or speak your native language at home?
- Do you try to teach your family members your native language?