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“Failure Is Not an Option”: Sub-Saharan African International Graduate Students’ Experiences in U.S. Higher Education Institutions

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“FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION”: SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS’ EXPERIENCES IN U.S. HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The rapid growth of international students, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, in U.S. higher education institutions calls for more critical research to understand their nuanced experiences in these institutions. So often, international students are homogenized and put under one umbrella, which shadows their unique experiences, especially those from developing countries and regions like Sub-Saharan Africa. Moreover, the paucity of literature on these students makes it even harder to hear their voices. Therefore, there is the need to disaggregate international students to become aware of some of their subtle challenges.

This study aims to explore the experiences and community cultural wealth (CCW) that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw upon to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education. The few studies about Sub-Saharan African international students show that they face majoritarian tales, overt and covert forms of racism, financial hardships, difficulty adjusting to the U.S. higher education system, and issues with English proficiency and accent. These experiences can have a devastating effect on Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' academic and social affairs. This study utilizes the theoretical frameworks of community cultural wealth and African critical theory to explore the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students.

This study adopts critical narrative research as the methodological tool to provide the space for Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' voices to be heard, particularly their narratives relative to their persistence in U.S. higher education institutions. Critical narrative research is a powerful methodological approach for minoritized groups to make their voices heard. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews and online surveys, nine Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in six U.S. higher education institutions recollect their

unique stories in continuity. From the analysis of the data, five major them emerged that are (1) Supportive academic environment for growth, (2) Challenging experiences inside and outside academia, (3) Recruitment strategies, (4) Adapting to the U.S. higher education system, and (5) Community cultural wealth. The findings indicate that although Sub-Saharan African international graduate students discover a collaborative classroom environment facilitated by supportive professors, they face many challenges that could negatively impact their academic success. However, the findings demonstrate that they draw from their community cultural wealth to persevere and persist.

Keywords: Sub-Saharan African international students, community cultural wealth, higher education, Globalization, internationalization, colonialism, narrative inquiry, qualitative study, critical multicultural education, community cultural wealth.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Personal Connection to the Study

In my early years as an undergraduate student in Ghana, West Africa, I had always wanted to further my education in the U.S. This was because in my country, people who had degrees from the Western world, like the U.S., were perceived to be more knowledgeable, occupied higher government positions to inform policies, and were highly sought after by employers. These and other factors such as my personal aspirations pushed me to apply for graduate school in the U.S.

As a student who came to the United States on an F-1 visa, I understand some of the experiences of international students. Some of my experiences drew my attention to other immigrant students and made me want to know more about their experiences. This led me to my interest in studying more about international students from Africa. Academically, I have had to confront assumptions made about me that I felt were due to my race. Being Black-African, I have been perceived as unintelligent due to my non-American accent. I sometimes get "compliments" after speaking, such as "oh, you speak so well," "where did you learn English?" This could be a result of my British-Ghanaian accent or misconceptions about Africa held by the perpetrators. Some faculty members have underestimated my capabilities and almost discouraged me from pursuing a doctoral degree, while others encouraged and supported me. Also, I have often encountered American classmates who have ask if I was really from Africa due to my wardrobe. This is because I had a lot of nice clothes neatly hung in my closet. While I took these lightly and sometimes laughed over or educated my peers, these experiences and others have shown me that some Americans have a myopic view of Africa and Africans as a deplorable continent with poor people. The intersection of my identity as Black and African has

affected me negatively and positively. Firstly, this intersection has denied me of certain opportunities, which I believe would have been granted to Americans with normative American accents. In some situations, I was expected to have a U.S. white accent to fit into the mainstream.

On the other hand, the intersection of my international student status and identity as an African with a good academic performance gave me some opportunities, such as gaining an unexpected assistantship to complete a degree. Whether this was due to the interest convergence of the higher education institution or not, I assume it was for a worthy cause. Interest convergence refers to the idea that the institutionalization of Black liberation was in the interest of U.S.-based white supremacists who were interested in improving the United States' global image (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). As an international student restricted to work only on campus, I faced financial hardships, common with many international students. Through all these experiences, I always persisted and focused on my dreams and aspirations. Encouragement from family members back home gave me the urge to soldier on despite challenges. My aspirations in life continued to compel me not to give up. These cultural capitals have helped me in "dealing with changing, and often difficult, social, and economic circumstances" (Moll et al., 1992, p.133; Yosso, 2016). I am aware that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students might face similar challenges in U.S. higher education institutions. As a result, this study explores to understand their experiences and how their community cultural wealth contributes to their persistence in U.S. higher education institutions despite challenges.

Problem Statement and Background

Adjusting to a new culture on its own can be arduous for international students, especially Sub-Saharan African international students who face prejudice and discrimination due to their skin color and, even so, the negative stereotypes portrayed about the continent of Africa

in the Western world, specifically in the United States of America (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011; Lefdahl-Davis & Perrone-McGovern, 2015). These acts of anti-Blackness can be traced to the early 16th century when white Europeans, in their quest to expand their territories, invaded and enslaved people from the African continent (Nuby & Smith, 2012). From this earlier encounter with Africa, the colonizer conceptualized false and dehumanizing notions about Africans as not civilized, less human than white people, and savages. These false conceptions have been perpetuated and reinforced through the media, curriculum histories, and majoritarian narratives (George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011**)**. Likewise, Native Americans suffered similar experiences when their lands were taken from them, and their children were forced into boarding schools to learn trades that would serve white Americans (Au et al., 2016; Nuby & Smith, 2012). These experiences brought about the 'otherness' associated with Black folks and People of Color.

The media and these master narratives continue to exacerbate the various challenges Sub-Saharan African international students face in U.S. schools, even when higher education campuses are filled with racially and ethnically diverse students. Unfortunately, the challenges faced by Sub-Saharan African international students in U.S. higher education have long received limited attention in the literature. To add to the voices of this population in U.S. higher education and expand the literature on Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' experiences, I utilize a critical narrative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of their experiences and explore the community cultural wealth they bring to U.S. institutions of higher education that help them to persist in the face of academic and social challenges.

Globalization and Internationalization of Higher Education

Over the years, higher education has continuously been a domain and subject for global and international exchange, relations, and corporations (Machekhina, 2016). This process is influenced by globalization, which prioritizes market expansion and the free movement of people, knowledge, technologies, goods, and the like. This includes the movement of students across the globe as clients of higher education, and education as an international commodity (Knight, 2008; Liebert, 2011). Important to globalization are elements such as an international knowledge society and a world market economy that relies on the internationalization of higher education to meet these needs. As a result, the world is now increasingly leaning towards a knowledge-based economy, which holds higher education institutions accountable for producing the knowledge and the global workforce to meet the demands of the economy (Knight, 2008; Mertova, 2013; Schugurensky, 2013). The pressure to meet the demands of the knowledge-based economy and the quest to attain international status drives universities to attract and retain international students from other countries worldwide, including Sub-Saharan African students. That is, globalization and internationalization of education have contributed to the proliferation of international students' mobility globally and the creation of university branch campuses (Altbach, 2015; Song, 2017; Tierney & Lanford, 2015).

A plethora of research on international students' mobility has shown that international students' mobility is influenced by push-pull factors (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Fakunle, 2021; Magbondé, 2021). Factors such as lack of employment, unavailable desired programs of study, and the low value of education in sending countries are a few of the push factors that send international students from their home countries to pursue higher education abroad (Gbollie & Gong, 2020; Magbondé, 2021). These factors manifest in developing countries. On the other hand, pull factors include high quality and value of education degrees, the multicultural nature of

the host country, availability of funding and other scholarships, the receiving country's safeness, availability of information on the country's education system, and the belief to get better jobs after graduation (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Beine et al., 2014; Fakunle, 2021; Magbondé, 2021). These are factors that influence and pull international students to a particular country to study. In particular, the highly perceived image of the U.S. as the epitome of freedom, democracy, and political stability makes it a one-stop study abroad destination for many Sub-Saharan African international students (Magbondé, 2021). Other studies revealed that international students perceive the U.S. as a country that welcomes immigrants, offers the best quality education, and provides better employment opportunities after graduation (Han et al., 2015; Lambert et al., 2019; Tan, 2015).

Sub-Saharan African International Students in U.S. Higher Education

Each academic year, U.S. institutions of higher education receive millions of international students from all over the world, with higher numbers coming from countries like China, India, and South Korea (Institute of International Education [IIE], 2020). For example, in the 2019/2020 academic year, the number of international students studying in U.S. institutions of higher education was 1,075,496. Although there is no data available on the geographic locations of Sub-Saharan International students in the U.S., data on international students shows that the top 25 percent of higher education institutions for international students are in the West Coast, Northeast, Midwest, and Southern regions of the U.S. (IIE, 2020). Also, one out of three international students in the U.S. studied in California, New York, or Texas (IIE, 2020). Out of the total population of international students, international students from Sub-Saharan Africa constituted 41,697 representing 3.9% and a 3.5% increase from the previous year (IIE, 2020; ProJet Atlas, 2019). These figures and other research projections reveal that Sub-Saharan African

international students are among the fastest growing, suggesting that the next generation of international students may be coming from the Sub-Saharan African region (Hernandez, 2012; Tobenkin, 2019). However, there is a paucity of literature that focuses on their experiences, especially how they are recruited and retained, their academic and social experiences, and what supports and systems, such as community cultural wealth impact their persistence. The few studies on Sub-Saharan African international students show that this group faces more prejudice and discrimination than their European and White counterparts (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Lee & Opio, 2011).

Studies reveal that Sub-Saharan African international students' academic experience is affected by English language skills or accents (Aurah, 2014; Coleman, 2018; Kim, 2011). For example, due to the negative stereotype of having a different accent, international students may withhold their participation in class and spend more time rehearsing their English instead of focusing on course content. This may also negatively affect their sense of belonging (Coleman, 2018; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Kim, 201; Yao, 2016). Other studies on Black-African international students revealed that they encountered racism in the form of microaggressions, prejudice, and discrimination (Constantine et al., 2005; Fries-Britt et al., 2014; George-Mwangi, & Fries-Britt, 2015**;** Macharia-Lowe, 2017). This experience may affect international students' academic focus and cause them to feel alienated (Fries-Britt et al., 2014; Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). Some of these negative experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students were highly influenced by the negative perceptions and stereotypes portrayed about Africa in the Western world (George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011). Other studies found that the negative experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students were a result of their skin color, being Black (Constantine et al., 2005). Instead of helping international students feel

welcomed and integrated, some of these negative experiences force Sub-Saharan African international students to forego their cultural identities.

Although there are studies that focus on international students, much of the scholarship on this population tends to put them under one umbrella: 'international students.' This homogenization makes it difficult to explore the nuanced experiences of international students, affected by educational level (graduate or undergraduate), country of origin, race, or continent. By disaggregating international students, this study explores the subtle and unique experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students.

Additionally, Sub-Saharan African international students continue to persist and focus on their studies despite their negative experiences (Asante et al., 2016; George-Mwangi et al., 2019). How do Sub-Saharan African international students face all these negative experiences and keep their resilience high? What cultural assets do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students possess and bring to U.S. higher education that enables them to persist? These are some of the questions that guided my curiosity. Some scholars have utilized Yosso's community cultural wealth model to study other minoritized students to answer similar questions (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Gonzalez, 2019; Jimenez, 2020; Kolano, 2016). The community cultural wealth (CCW) model was first applied to the assets that Latino children and their families possess and bring into the classroom (Yosso, 2005). Other studies have used this model to explore the cultural capital of underrepresented groups like Asian students, African American students, and Mexican students (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Gonzalez, 2019; Jimenez, 2020; Kolano, 2016). However, there is currently no research on Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' community cultural wealth. The body of literature on international students, particularly Sub-Saharan African international students, focuses more on identifying

international students' developed coping strategies that help them adjust to their new country. While these are helpful for international students, they do not fully disclose the already acquired community cultural wealth that international students possess and bring to U.S. higher education institutions. Using the community cultural wealth model of Yosso (2005), I seek to utilize critical narrative inquiry to explore and understand the lived experiences and the community cultural wealth that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students possess and use to persist in higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, critical narrative research was to explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. institutions of higher education, specifically in the West Coast, Northeast, Midwest, and Southern regions of the U.S. (IIE, 2020). The exploration includes their personal lived experiences (academic and social) and the CCW they possess and use to persist in U.S higher education institutions amidst challenges. Much of the existing research on international students' experiences are limited to students from the popular and larger sending countries and perceive international students as a homogenous group. Besides, the limited studies on Sub-Saharan African international students focus more on the coping strategies they develop to adapt to the host country. For this reason, there is the need to disaggregate international students to allow a deeper understanding of the experiences of sub-groups within the 'international students' domain to serve them better. Therefore, this study adopts critical frameworks and narrative research to explore the nuanced lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and examines how they utilized their community cultural wealth to persist in U.S. higher education institutions.

Research Questions

This study explores the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How are Sub-Saharan African students recruited into U.S. higher education institutions?
2. How do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate and adapt to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How do they negotiate their African identity within an African American Black identity context?
3. In what ways, if at all, do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw from various forms of cultural capital to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education institutions?

Brief Review of the Theoretical Frameworks: Community Cultural Wealth & African Critical Theory (AfricanCrit)

To conduct this study, I adopted the community cultural wealth model (CCW) developed by Yosso (2005) as the theoretical framework complemented with AfricanCrit, which I developed from critical race theory (CRT). Community cultural wealth draws on the knowledge and assets minority students bring to school as valuable tools that help them to succeed in education. Yosso's CCW model challenges interpretations from Bourdieu's cultural capital theory perceived mostly through the knowledge acquisition possessed by the upper and middle classes (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). That is, Yosso used the CCW model to challenge the conventional conception of cultural capital. The traditional interpretations of Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) cultural capital theory suggest that the dominant group, the upper-class, and

the middle class possess special knowledge and skills (cultural capital) that grant them access to institutionalized capital, which helps them to achieve upward mobility in social institutions. This explanation perpetuates and legitimizes the reproduction of the dominant culture in higher education. According to Yosso (2005), the original notion of Bourdieu's theory is often used to explain why People of Color are less successful than their white peers. This is because the upper and middle-class members in every society possess the most valuable cultural capital that dominates educational institutions (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). In her framework, Yosso (2005) utilizes the Critical Race Theory to counter this deficit view on People of Color's cultural capital by presenting the CCW model as an alternative concept to the Bourdieuean cultural capital theory. By this, she explains community cultural capital as an "array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The community cultural wealth model challenges deficit views about minority groups' cultural capital and focuses on the knowledge and skills possessed by socially marginalized groups that often go unrealized. It opposes the misappropriation of cultural capital, which mostly sees the dominant group, middle-class, and white people as culturally wealthy and perceives Communities of Color and minorities as culturally poor. In this model, Yosso (2005) identified six different forms of cultural capital: aspirational capital, social capital, navigational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). These six forms of CCW are explained in detail in chapter three of this study. Using the CCW model helps to understand the cultural wealth that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students bring to U.S. higher education institutions that helps them to persist in their graduate education despite challenges.

African Critical Theory (AfricanCrit)

To fully understand Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' experiences, I propose African Critical Theory (AfricanCrit) as a supplemental framework to community cultural wealth. Using AfricanCrit as a complementary framework, the study uncovers some of the nuanced experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students as People of Color in U.S. higher education institutions. This framework is informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education, which illuminates educational inequalities relative to the intersection of race and other social categorizations in areas such as the curriculum, instruction, and assessment. CRT grew out of the Critical Legal Studies movement (Ladson-Billing, 1998). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), "the critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 3). It furthers the cause of traditional movements like the civil right in "redressing historical wrongs" and transforming social inequities through activism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). CRT was introduced to education by Ladson-Billing and Tate's (1995) article *"Toward a Critical Race Theory in Education",* which argued that critical race theory needed to be well theorized to investigate the role of race, racism, and power in education (Dixon & Anderson, 2018; Mensah & Jackson, 2018; Ross, 2019). Since its introduction to education, CRT has been used as the umbrella theory to address racial inequalities faced by different minoritized groups using sub-categories such as LatCrit for Latinx, AsianCrit for Asian, TribalCrit for Indigenous communities, and BlackCrit for African Americans (Coles, 2021; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Dumas & Ross, 2016; Kolano, 2016; Ross, 2019). These narrowed versions of CRT help to study the nuanced experiences of the target group in detail much more than using the umbrella theory: CRT. Although Sub-Saharan African international students automatically and indirectly become part of the Black race in the American community, their experiences are vastly different

than their African American counterparts and need a more narrowed version of CRT to understand their unique experiences. Hence, the introduction of AfricanCrit, specifically to explore the racial inequalities of African students studying or living in western countries. This provides a critical theorization of 'Africaness' in addressing the inequities faced by Sub-Saharan African international graduate students.

Methodology: Critical Narrative Inquiry

The study combines narrative research with critical reflections of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' experiences to create a critical narrative inquiry that uses an AfricanCrit and CCW model. This approach is necessary to explore and understand the complexities and nuanced experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students that are seldom addressed by other research methodologies (Mertova & Webster, 2020). Narrative research "provides researchers with a rich framework through which they can investigate the ways humans experience the world depicted through their stories (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 1). It explores the experiences of people to understand how their stories were constructed and positioned in the world (Hickson, 2016). Critical reflections work to deconstruct what is already known, including assumptions and how they were developed (Hickson, 2016). Critical narrative inquiry has become a methodological tool for deconstructing and constructing knowledge and experiences (Hickson, 2016).

To unmute the voices of the margins, early CRT scholars (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings, 1998) focused on how the 'voice' is used as a tool to discover the self because minority groups "speak with experiential knowledge about the fact that our society is deeply structured by racism" and anti-blackness (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 13). That is, CRT uses voice as a way of

linking “form and substance in scholarship” (p. 13). Through critical narrative, silenced voices are lauded to understand subtle experiences.

Scholars have increasingly used critical narratives in the form of counterstories and testimonios (Bell, 1987; DeNicolo et al., 2015; Ryu, 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Trombetta, 2019). In some studies, “testimonios functioned as a collective counternarrative that challenged the majoritarian tale of Spanish being of lesser value than English and Latina/o students being less academically capable” (DeNicolo et al., 2015, p. 241). In addition, counternarratives have been used to deconstruct the racialized experiences of teacher candidates (Fránquiz et al., 2011). Through counternarratives, other studies have revealed the nuanced financial challenges faced by some international students, countering majoritarian tales that all Chinese international students are rich (Liu, 2017).

To explore the nuanced and unique experiences, and community cultural wealth of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students, I adopt critical narrative research. The use of narrative research has been thoughtfully selected because of its ability to collect stories of participants' personal lived experiences found in single or multiple episodes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It also helps to address the research questions stated above without following a “lockstep approach,” but a more fluid pattern (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 71). This is because narrative research is used “as a fluid inquiry, not as a set of procedures or linear steps to be followed” allowing the researcher to explore the detailed lived experiences of a single or a small number of people who have a story to share about an event (Clandinin, 2013, p. 33). Through narrative research, I gain a deeper and fuller understanding of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students’ experiences and other factors that help shape those experiences, such as how they negotiate their Black identity within the Black American context. This study is guided

philosophically by postcolonial ontology, which reveals the reality and legacies of colonialism and how it exists in our current society (Glesne, 2011). As a result, this study centers the voices of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students to deconstruct the legacies of colonialism that work to create false master narratives about African people and the Sub-Saharan African region (Glesne, 2011).

The sample population for this study is international graduate students from the Sub-Saharan African region enrolled in an accredited four-year institution in the U.S. This includes graduate students pursuing a master's degree or a doctoral degree at the time of the study. The sample population was drawn from higher education institutions across the U.S. using snowball sampling and maximal variation sampling techniques of purposeful sampling.

This study utilized three methods of data collection to gather data from eligible participants for analysis. These include interviews, online surveys, and memo writing. The online surveys included participant demographic information. Participants had the chance to indicate their willingness to participate in a one-on-one interview. Additionally, the semi-structured interview focused on questions that address the research questions. Lastly, memos were kept to document and reflect on emerging thoughts and occurrences as the study progressed. In chapter three, I discuss in detail the nature of the study.

Significance of the Study

With the rapid growth of international students from Sub-Saharan Africa, it is important that higher education institutions become more knowledgeable about this population to meet their needs and capitalize on their community cultural wealth for better education (Hernandez, 2012; Tobenkin, 2019). This can be achieved in part through research on this population, which is one of the aims of this study. This study illuminates the nuanced understanding of Sub-

Saharan African international graduate students' experiences and the use of their community cultural wealth to persist in U.S. higher education institutions. That is, U.S. higher education institutions, researchers, and readers will gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and how they use community cultural wealth to persist in U.S. higher education. This study also serves as a source of reference for schools and departments like the International Students Services to know more about the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students and the significance of their community cultural wealth in persisting in higher education.

In addition, this study will provide information on culturally responsive recruitment and retention of this population. Another contribution of this study is to add to the limited literature of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' experiences. It will also fill the gap in the literature on how international students from Sub-Saharan Africa use community cultural wealth to persist through higher education. Much of the studies using the community cultural wealth model focus more on other minoritized student groups, like Latinx and African American students (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Gonzalez, 2019; Jimenez, 2020). Thus, this study brings Sub-Saharan African international students into the community cultural wealth landscape. Lastly, this study serves as a point of reference for new and future Sub-Saharan African international students on some valuable information about the experiences of other students and how they persisted.

Operational Definitions

Sub-Saharan Africa refers to the region in the African continent that lies below the Sahara and consists of 48 countries (The World Bank, 2021)

Globalization refers to the worldwide phenomenon that capitalizes on market expansions and free movement of people and commodities, affecting nations and institutions in different ways (Knight, 2008; Liebert, 2011; Mertova, 2013).

Internationalization refers to the worldwide expansion of government, organizations, and higher education institutions to meet the pressing needs of globalization (Mertova, 2013; Schugurensky, 2013; Wit, 2020).

International students are students who travel outside their country to study in another country on student visas.

Critical multicultural education is an idea, concept, and movement that ensures that all students, irrespective of background, succeed in school (Banks, 2020; Nieto & Bode, 2018).

Critical narrative research combines critical reflections, stories, and explores the nuanced experiences of marginalized groups through the narration of their personal lived experiences.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed my connection to the proposed study, highlighting how past experiences as an international student influenced this study. I also gave a brief background to the study and discussed the purpose. This was followed by outlining the research questions that guide the study. Furthermore, I explained the nature of the study and the theoretical frameworks within which the study is situated. I concluded the chapter by explaining how the study will contribute to the existing body of literature and its anticipated significance to stakeholders. Chapter 2 focuses on the review of seminal and contemporary relevant literature that informed this study. This includes literature on globalization and the internationalization of higher education and reasons for student mobility. In addition, it reviews the literature on the

experiences of international students, critical multicultural education, and narrative inquiry as a methodological tool. Chapter 3 outlines and discusses the methodology and research design for executing this study. This includes the philosophical assumption that guides my curiosity, the use of narrative inquiry, data collection methods, population and sampling, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 presents the major themes and findings from the participants' narratives. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the findings in relation to higher education, internationalization, and critical multicultural education.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Chapter one offered a general overview and background of the study describing my personal connection that led to this study. Also, chapter one briefly provided a review of the relevant literature related to the study as well the related methodological literature. I explained the purpose of the study and gave a systematic description of the nature of the proposed study followed by the research questions. The theoretical frameworks of community cultural wealth (CCW) and AfricanCrit were also reviewed. Lastly, I explained how the study contributes to the body of knowledge on Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and how it will be significant to higher education institutions, international student services, educators, and new international students from Africa and other parts of the world.

In this chapter, I review literature on international students in the U.S. and narrow it down to Sub-Saharan international students. This chapter begins with the procedures used in identifying the relevant literature for the study. The chapter discusses the relevant literature on globalization and internationalization of higher education. This will be followed by the description of the demographic trend of international students in the U.S. including visa classifications, field of study, and enrollment. The chapter also discusses the contributions of international students to the U.S. economy and higher education. After which I delve into the relevant literature of the experiences of international students and narrow it specifically to those from Sub-Saharan Africa.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative, critical narrative inquiry is to explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. institutions of higher education, specifically in the West Coast, Northeast, Midwest, and Southern regions of

the U.S. (IIE, 2020). This research explores their personal lived experiences (academic and social) and the CCW they possess and use to persist in higher education amidst challenges. Much of the existing research on international students' experiences are limited to students from the more popular and larger sending countries and international students are often depicted as a homogenous group. Besides, the limited studies that do exist on African international students focus more on the coping strategies they develop to adjust in the host country. For this reason, there is the need to divide international students to allow a deeper understanding of the experiences of sub-groups within the 'international students' domain to serve them better. Therefore, this study adopts critical frameworks and narrative inquiry to explore the nuanced lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and examine how they utilize their cultural capital to persist in U.S. higher education institutions. The study is intended to answer the following research questions and sub-questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How are Sub-Saharan African students recruited into U.S. higher education institutions?
2. How do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate and adapt to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How do they negotiate their African identity within an African American Black identity context?
3. In what ways, if at all, do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw from various forms of cultural capital to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education institutions?

Approaches to Identifying Relevant Literature

I identified related research for this review using research databases that were accessed through the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) library. I initially began my search with key-search words such as *Sub-Saharan international students, international students' experiences, Black African international graduate students, and international students' challenges,* on databases such as Education: SAGE Journals, ERIC, and ProQuest. This search produced thousands of results ranging from fields like economics, medicine, and education. I searched for data on Sub-Saharan international students from reports from the Institute of International Education, Open Doors, and U.S. government websites. Results from the searches were sifted to include only peer-reviewed articles, full text, and books. Reviewed literature included works, from 2011 to 2021 with few relevant seminal works that were inevitable to the purpose of this study. Although the searches yielded numerous on international students in general, there were few on Sub-Saharan international students. As a result, the relevant literature reviewed in this study consists of international students' experiences in a broader perspective and then narrowed to Sub-Saharan African international students' experiences. The experiences of international students were limited to the U.S. context.

Globalization and Internationalization of Higher Education

According to Knight (2008) "Internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization" (p. 1). This quote helps to explain the inextricable connection between globalization and the internationalization of higher education. Seminally, Knight (2008) defined globalization as "the flow of people, culture, ides, values, knowledge, technology, and economy across borders resulting in a more interconnected and interdependent world" where worldwide events can affect local policies (p.

4). This suggests that globalization is a worldwide phenomenon that can impact nations in a variety of ways including education and the movement of people, which is a key feature of international education (Mertova, 2013; Spring, 2015), Globalization is considered a way of market expansion that is moved by the desires of the economy. That is, globalization of education can be understood as a way of marketizing education on the global market (Liebert, 2011).

The process of globalization was expedited after the collapse of the Soviet Union and communism, which opened national borders for the free market. As Friedman and Mandelbaum (2011) put it, “the end of communism dramatically accelerated the process of globalization, which removed many of the barriers to economic competition” (p.17). Some scholars argue that the opening of the market and borders relative to higher education gives the wealthiest education institutions more access (Altbach, 2015). As a victor of the cold war, the U.S. became the world model for capitalism by which other countries looked to emulate. This paved the way for the free movement of people, goods, capital, and services to other parts of the world (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011).

At this time, the establishment of universities in the U.S. accelerated and opened to students from all over the world to learn American principles, especially that of liberation and freedom (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011; O'Rourke & Williamson, 2004). As a result, the U.S. opened branch campuses in other parts of the world such as the Middle East. This in part was due to the difficulty in obtaining Visas to study in the U.S. In addition, there are other independent universities that mirror the American education system to students from all over the world. All of these are ways in which education has been globalized (Noori, 2014). In the concluding part of his analysis of the processes of globalization of education, Machekhina (2016)

argued that “today, in the developing knowledge economy, education will gradually become the leading industry comparable to advanced research and production of high-tech equipment” (p. 4). Relative to the development of education, Machekhina (2016) sees globalization and competencies as becoming “the benchmarks, from the point of view of which the future of specific national and, indeed, the continental educational system as a whole is determined” (p. 1). Globalization and the rise of a postindustrial economy, which depends on knowledge for productivity to happen, has put pressure on higher education institutions to produce the workforce needed to meet the demands of the knowledge-based economy (Schugurensky, 2013). Even so, “from approximately 1980–2007, the phenomenon of globalization was largely driven by the desire of individuals and nations for financial growth” (Tierney & Lanford, 2015, p. 284).

Globalization and International Student Mobility

Some scholars (Knight, 2008; Mertova, 2013; Schugurensky, 2013) refer to globalization as having key elements such as: (1) an international knowledge society; (2) an information and communication technologies; (3) a world market economy; (4) English language’s role; and (5) changes in national structures. On the other hand, internationalization is seen as systems and initiatives put in place by governments, organizations, and higher education institutions to react to the needs of globalization and includes: (1) students studying abroad; (2) faculty mobility; (3) branch campuses overseas; (4) internationalization of the curricula contents; and (5) partnership and agreements between institutions (Mertova, 2013; Schugurensky, 2013; Wit, 2020).

According to Altbach (2015), “the world is moving toward internationalizing higher education by using the energies of academe and responding to market needs” (p. 5). Besides, globalization has contributed to the high rise of all forms of transactions in international education, including the increasing number of students studying abroad, the established global

market for educators and researchers abroad, and the establishment of branch campuses (Altbach, 2015; Tierney & Lanford, 2015; Wit, 2020). As a result of globalization, higher education institutions are crossing borders to provide services to students.

One important indicator of internationalization of higher education is the mobility of students across borders, which has become one of the categories for judging an institution as a 'world class' university (WCU) (Song, 2017). According to Rhoads et al. (2014) a "consequence of the global push to build WCUs is the way today's universities have compromised the mission to serve the public good by adopting behaviors heavily influenced by a marketized and commercialized ideal" (p. 37). The 'market' of international students has therefore become so important to countries and institutions of higher education all over the world with the U.S. as the number one study destination for international students. Globally, the number of international students has increased tremendously from 2 million in 2000 to over 5.3 million in 2017 (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2019).

Reason for International Students Mobility

Student mobility refers to "international students who are taking a full degree abroad or students who are participating in a short-term, semester or year-abroad program" (Knight, 2012, p. 24). International student mobility (ISM) is the visible elements and the hallmark of international education and a measure of the internationality of any higher education institution, which dominate the discourse on internationalization of higher education (Fakunle, 2021; Knight, 2012; Song, 2017). Even so, higher education institutions' ability to enroll international students into their programs is one of the many indicators of a higher institution's reputation, and when the experiences of international students are taken into consideration by institutions of higher education, they can work towards increased enrollment (Lee, 2010). Also, the importance

of ISM is visible in the detailed national strategy of countries (e.g., China, Australia, and Germany) for recruiting international students. For example, a major facet of UK institutions in terms of policy is the comprehensive strategy for international student recruitment (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Fakunle, 2021).

Although the U.S. does not have a comprehensive national policy or strategy on recruiting international students, some U.S. states have enacted their own policies in recruiting international students (Becker & Kolster, 2012; NAFSA, 2020). The absence of a national strategy for recruiting international students, according to Becker and Kolster (2012), could be a result of the autonomy that U.S. states have relative to higher education institutions and the different federal agencies that have duties affecting the education of international students. Examples of U.S. state policies include the Global Michigan Initiative and the Alabama Council for international programs (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Onk & Joseph, 2017; Tobenkin, 2020;). Becker and Kolster (2012) argue that despite the lack of a national policy on student recruitment, the United States has created a national-level higher education recruitment initiative such as the Education USA, which is focused on branding with more than 400 consulting centers in 134 countries. Although reasons for ISM vary across international students, a careful review of literature reveals two major factors: push and pull factors.

Push Factors Influencing International Students' Mobility

Push factors refer to domestic reasons, personal or environmental, that motivates students to travel to study in foreign countries (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Fakunle, 2021). The push factors take place in the source or sending country where the student decides to study abroad due to factors that include but are not limited to lower quality education, lack of employment, unavailability of preferred programs, value of education degree, and personal aspirations (Becker

& Kolster, 2012; Facunle, 2019). For example, in a study that explored the push-pull factors that motivated African and Asian international students to study in China, Gbollie and Gong (2020) found that international students perceived education in their home country was of low quality. In their qualitative findings, participants, from Africa and Asia, expressed that the degree and quality of education in their home countries could not be compared to that of China, their study abroad destination. They also mentioned that China offered them their desired education program, which was unavailable in their prospective countries.

Similarly, in a study that assessed the factors that motivate Sub-Saharan African (Beninese) students' choice of study abroad destination, Magbondé (2021) found low standard in education and insufficient infrastructure such as computers and internet as factors that pushed Sub-Saharan African students to travel to other countries to study. The author concluded that the desire of the participants to study outside their country (Benin) was not economic-driven, but due to their desire to access a quality education in a society where there is minimal risk and uncertainty relative to investing in higher education. Other push factors include international students' aspirations to study abroad to become change agents within and outside their societies to help others (Fakunle, 2021).

Pull Factors Influencing International Students' Mobility

The pull factors refer to the factors that attract students to travel to another country for the purpose of education. These factors are based on certain conditions that make the host or receiving country more favorable and desirable for students than other destinations. The pull factors include but are not limited to high quality education degrees, available financial aid, safety in the country, employment opportunities, and availability of information of the country's educational institutions (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Beine et al., 2014). In the Gbollie and Gong

(2020) study, the authors found the availability of scholarships and opportunities as the main pull factors. Participants explained that they chose to study abroad due to the availability of aid in the form of scholarship and their belief of better opportunities after graduation.

Also, Magbondé (2021) found that quality of education and higher education institutions in the host country were main factors. Participants explained that their decision to study abroad is influenced by quality infrastructure like libraries, computer labs, and study rooms as well as high performing faculty and researchers, which enables international students to compete globally. Another pull factor was the high value of degrees associated with Western universities, which would give students better job opportunities. Also, Fakunle (2020) found that one of the reasons for students' mobility is connected to the multicultural nature of their study destinations that enable them to experiment to broaden their horizons.

International Students' Attraction to U.S. Higher Education Institutions

America's image as the land of freedom plays a pivotal role in international students' decision to study in a U.S. institution of higher education where they can have full democratic freedom and experience political stability (Magbondé, 2021). Also, the U.S. is perceived as a nation that has welcomed immigrants over the years and served as home to many immigrants (Lambert et al., 2019). Also, the education system in the U.S. is seen as the best by many countries and is perceived as prestigious by international students although this is not always the case in reality (Tan, 2015).

In their qualitative study, Tan (2015) found three main factors that influenced international students' studying abroad in the U.S: perception, influence, and opportunity. Participants for the study were international students from Africa and the Middle East. The study showed that participants perceived the U.S. as offering quality education and the prestige of

having a foreign degree motivated them. They also explained that family, friends, and the media influenced their decision to study in the U.S. Lastly, the participants expressed that opportunities such as available programs of study and learning the English language were major influences for them. Also, in comparison to international students' home country, many perceived the American education system as one that provided better career opportunities and knowledge in their fields of study (Han et al., 2015).

Globalization and Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa: Knowledge-Based Economy's Brain Drain

Sub-Saharan Africa is the region of Africa that falls below the Sahara. There are 48 countries constituting the Sub-Saharan African region (The World Bank Group, 2020). Higher education in Africa is perceived as a critical catalyst for regional and national development and has attracted major parts of national funds (Samoff & Carrol, 2013). Over the years, African higher education has been massively influenced by international processes and organizations. The regions' education has been influenced by Europeans in all aspects. According to Woldegiorgis (2017), "African higher education institutions have historically been linked to European higher education institutions in terms of academic structure, governance, curriculum, assessment, quality assurance processes and language of instruction" (p. 189).

Inspired by processes such as the Bologna process of the European Union, African higher education has moved towards harmonization of higher education signed in 2007 by the third Conference of Ministers of Higher Education of the African Union (COMEDAF III) (Woldegiorgis, 2017). This followed the world-wide move to a knowledge-based economy from an industrial society (Sum, & Bob, 2013). Like the Bologna declaration, the aim to integrate higher education in Africa is not only geared toward student's mobility but also to promote

competition, meeting the demands of the knowledge-based economy (Sum, & Bob, 2013; Woldegiorgis, 2017). This initiative to harmonize higher education extended the course of globalization. In addition, African higher education has been influenced by international 'super-structures' like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization, whose educational policies mirrors that of the Western world, and eradicates all barriers to international free trade, serving the interests of globalization (Dzvimbo & Moloi, 2013; Samoff & Carrol, 2013). The activities of the 'super-structures' put African higher education at a disadvantage while favoring the rich and powerful nations, who have the resources to succeed in the realms of globalization. Thus, perpetuating the already existing inequality between the rich nations and the low-income nations (Dzvimbo & Moloi, 2013). Studies have shown that the initial goal of students studying abroad and returning home to contribute to their nations' growth is no longer the case as host countries strive to retain students' brain power (Knight, 2012). This suggests that sending nations and continents, including Africa, continue to suffer brain drain as a growing number of its students do not return home after studying abroad (Knight, 2012).

Through globalization and internationalization, rich and powerful nations continue to attract and retain young, talented students from low-economic continents like Africa and Asia to meet the knowledge economy workforce needed to boost their economy. While beneficiaries of higher education internationalization might see this as a 'brain sharing,' developing countries and regions like Sub-Saharan Africa might experience a total 'brain loss' (Knight, 2012). There is therefore the need to reframe internationalization of higher education in a manner that "acknowledge[s] the economic rationales yet balance them with the social and academic outcomes necessary for all students to develop the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary for

effective participation as professionals and citizens in increasingly multicultural and global contexts" (Garson, 2016, p. 19).

Demographic Trend of International Students

The United States is considered the top country with the highest economy and the highest number of international students from across the globe. According to Becker and Kolster (2012), the U. S. "receives the highest number of international students in the world, but on a per capita basis, its performance is modest, despite the fact that it has many of the best and richest universities in the world" (p. 34). According to a report by "Open Doors," the total international students in the U.S. for the 2019/2020 academic year was 1,075,496 including the 223,539 Optional Practical Training (OPT) students (Institute of International Education, 2021). OPT is "a program that allows international students to stay in the U.S. to work for up to three years after graduating while staying on their student visas" (Redden, 2019, para. 3). However, the total enrolled international students for the 2019/2020 was 851,957 comprising 419,321 undergraduates, 374,435 graduate students, and 58,201 non-degree seeking students (Open Doors, 2021).

In comparison to previous years, there has been a decline in the total number of enrolled international students. For example, in the 2018/2019 academic year the total number of enrolled international students was 872,214 including 431,930 undergraduates, 377,943 graduate students, and 62,341 non-degrees (Open Doors, 2021). With a total of 223,085 OPT students, the total number of international students during the 2018/2019 year was 1,095,299. This number shows that there was a -2.3 change in enrollment of international students in U.S. higher education from 2018/2019 to 2019/2020 academic years (Open Doors, 2021). Furthermore, international students come to the U.S. to pursue different programs with the top five including Engineering,

Math and Computer Science, Business and Management, Social Sciences, and Physical and Life Sciences (Open Doors, 2021).

International students including Sub-Saharan African students come to study in the United States as F-1, M-1, or J-1 (also the categories for their visas) nonimmigrant students. F-1 students are international students who come to the United States to pursue a full academic program at all levels in any school approved by the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP). M-1 students are those who come to study at any vocational or non-academic institution approved by SEVP (Students and Exchange Visitor Program, 2020). On the other hand, J-1 college and university students are one of the 15 categories of the Exchange Visitor Program, which allows students to come to the United States to pursue a full academic degree, non-degree, or internship program (Exchange Visitor Program, n.d.). International students migrate to the U.S. using the F and J student visa categories. Also, international students from Africa are more likely to enter the U.S. on F student visas while their European counterparts are most likely to do so using the J student visa category (Thomas & Inkpen, 2017).

Demographic of Sub-Saharan African International Students

The number of Sub-Saharan African international students in U.S. institutions of higher education has increased tremendously over the years and is considered one of the fastest growing in the United States (Hernandez, 2012). A report released by "Open Doors" shows that there were 41,697 Sub-Saharan African international students in the United States during the 2019/2020 academic year. This represents 3.9% of the total 1,075,496 international students in the United States and shows an increase of 3.5% from the previous year, which was 40,290 (Echeverria-Estrada, & Batalova, 2019; Open Doors, 2021). According to the same report, there were 20,732 undergraduate and 13,548 graduate international students from the Sub-Saharan

African Region. Besides, there were 1,120 non-degree and 6,297 OPT international students from this region (Open Doors, 2020). The increase in the number of international students from Sub-Saharan Africa can be partly attributed to the population increase in the region, specifically among the youth (Thomas & Inkpen, 2017).

Contributions of International Students: Financial and Cultural Diversity

Although studies have shown that in the United States, the primary aim relative to international student recruitment is focused more on attracting the best and the most talented students and increasing diversity over generating revenue (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Kisch, 2012), the financial benefits that international students bring to the U.S. economy cannot be overlooked (Beine et al., 2014). For example, international students along with their families contributed $24 billion to the US economy during the 2012/2013 academic year. In addition, international students have contributed to about 313,000 jobs in the U.S. (Schulte, & Choudaha, 2014). These contributions of international students increased tremendously in 2019 to about 41 billion to the U.S. economy and over 458,000 direct and indirect jobs (NAFSA, 2020). In addition, international students provide academic and departmental assistance to their programs. Özturgut (2013) argues that "international students do not only contribute to the U.S. economy, but also serve as research and teaching assistants in many fields, mostly in the fields of science and technology. In such areas, many academic programs rely on them" (p. 2).

Also, studies have shown that international students bring cultural diversity to the host country. Sawir (2013) found that international students benefited faculty members as well as domestic students. The study revealed that international students served as a great educational and cultural resource for teaching and learning. Participant-teachers commented on how international students provided specific cultural examples from their cultures enhancing the

learning experience and helped in diversifying the curriculum. Also, the study revealed that international students enriched domestic students' intercultural learning experiences, such as tolerating other cultures. Besides, Tian and Liu (2020) found that international students promote cultural exchange and to a larger extent could represent the host country as cultural ambassadors back in their home countries.

International Students and Citizenship

In most attempts at citizenship education, the U.S. aims more on assimilating international students in the mainstream culture than integrating them (Laanen, 2019; Lee & Walsh, 2017). According to George-Mwangi et al. (2019), "when assimilation into the dominant campus culture is held up as the ideal for mitigating negative and discriminatory experiences, it removes the responsibility from universities to change their negative campus climate" (p. 57). On the other hand, when integration (which is more multicultural-oriented) is prioritized, immigrant students maintain their cultures while also learning the culture of the dominant group through interaction. Assimilation, on the other hand, only strips international students of their cultures and languages and exposes them to the mainstream culture to have stronger connections. This, from society's perspective, is seen as a melting pot (Banks, 2016; Berry, 2008; Laanen, 2019; Lee & Walsh, 2017). According to Banks (2016), assimilation is supportive of the universal conception of citizenship which does not recognize the differences within a group. It opposes the differentiated concept of citizenship which, on the other hand, helps minoritized groups and people of color to attain recognition.

When international students are required to alienate themselves from their cultures and languages to be recognized and fit into the mainstream culture, they become 'failed citizens' because they feel excluded from the cultures and systems of the host nation-state (Banks, 2017).

According to Valenzuela (1999) within a Latinx context this process is known as *Subtractive Schooling.* In his *Citizenship Typology,* Banks (2017) argues that "failed citizenship exists when individuals or groups who are born within a nation or migrate to it and live within it for an extended period of time do not internalize the values and ethos of the nation-state, feel structurally excluded within it, and have highly ambivalent feelings toward it" (p.2). For example, for any international students to enjoy the full educational benefits in the U.S. such as the PELL grant, they are required to gain the recognition as permanent residents or as legal citizens (Federal Student Aid, n.d.). That is, despite the indispensability of globalization in 21st-century education and the several international initiatives such as UNESCO's Global Education First Initiative (GEFI), which emphasizes global citizenship as one of its key goals, international students are refused certain privileges that often come with legal citizenship (Tawil, 2013). International students oftentimes struggle with which state or nation they are most strongly associated with while higher education institutions have the ability to establish a community where all people including African international students have a sense of belongingness, to feeling part of the *we* (Waters & LeBlane, 2005).

Defining citizenship as a matter of having papers or not excludes international students from fully "participating in a democratic, pluralistic, and egalitarian society" (Lee & Walsh, 2017, p.198). Such limitations negatively impact Sub-Saharan African international students' sense of belongingness (Glass, 2018). Inspired by the Greek Stoic views on global citizenship, Nassbaum (1997) explains global citizenship as giving our foremost patriotism or loyalty to humanity wherever we find ourselves in the world.

Experiences of Sub-Saharan African International Students

Over the years there has been a rapid increase in the interest of recruiting international students by higher education institutions across the globe with several aims including but not limited to increasing institutions' reputation and boosting financial gains. International students bring to U.S. higher education campuses diversity, that is, exposing host faculties and students to new cultures and ideas (Choudaha, 2015; Kisch, 2012). The internationalization of higher education along with the passage of immigration acts such as the Hart-Cellar Act of 1965, the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, and the Immigration Act of 1990 have opened the door for the influx of larger number of international students such as Sub-Saharan African students into U.S. institutions of higher education (Asante et al., 2016). It is important to note that studies reveal that Black-African international students' academic experiences are affected by factors such as English language skills or accent, financial difficulties, master narratives, racism, and the difference in educational systems between their respective countries and the U.S. (Aurah, 2014; Coleman, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005; Fries-Britt et al., 2014,).

Victims of Deficit Mindset about African Culture

International students, especially Sub-Saharan Africans become victims to the pervasive stereotypes and deficit views about Africa (George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011)**.** In a study to understand the experiences of Black-African international graduate students, George-Mwangi et al., (2019) found that Black-African international students felt disdain due to certain assumptions about Africa. In their findings they explained, under the theme: *Some People Make It Sound Like They Saved You* that Sub-Saharan African graduate students received unfriendly comments from some White American faculties reminding them of the opportunity they have as graduate assistants being paid for by the university and complains from host students about their acquired positions such as editors for the writing center. According to their findings, these were

due to the negative portrayals of Africa as a "deplorable" and non-English speaking continent. In their own words, "U.S. society's representational narrative of Africa as a region of poverty and instability intersects with the intersubjective arena to impact African graduate students experiencing education in the United States as paternalistic and prejudicial" (p. 61). Due to these negative stereotypes about Africa, African students often must re-prove their capabilities and credentials to professors and even at the workplace. These stereotypes even cause some African international students to hide their African identity due to the fear of being mocked for their accent (Osikomaiya, 2014; Coleman, 2018)

Similarly, in a study that explored the challenges facing African student-athletes in U.S. higher education, Lee and Opio (2011) observed and interviewed 16 African students with the majority coming from Sub-Saharan Africa. Findings from the study indicated that African students faced negative stereotypes and discrimination due to the negative portrayal of Africa in America. For example, some African Muslim students were automatically presumed to have had an idea about a bombing incident. Also, some participants expressed how they were perceived as dumb, and underestimated by some professors due to the fact that they are from Africa. The negative stereotypes made the participants feel unwelcomed.

Also, in a study that explored the cultural adjustment experiences of international students from Sub-Saharan Africa, Constantine et al. (2005) found that African international students got frustrated when faced with racial prejudice and discrimination due to the color of their skin and their background as Black-Africans. Intermittently, other African international students when faced with prejudice took the time to educate others.

Experiencing and Becoming Aware of Racism

International students encounter racism in U.S. institutions of higher education (Constantine et al., 2005; Fries-Britt et al., 2014; George-Mwangi, & Fries-Britt, 2015; Macharia-Lowe, 2017). In a qualitative study (and part of a five-year research project) exploring the perceptions of immigrant students on race in the U.S. context, Fries-Britt et al. (2014) collected data from 15 immigrant students from Africa and the Caribbean using focus group interviews and one-on-one interviews. Their interview protocols focused on the experiences of the participants including but not limited to their communication with faculty and students, how they perceived race, and whether that had any impact on their academic success. Findings from the study indicated that immigrant students, like other minority groups, encountered racism in forms ranging from microaggressions to the use of racist words. For example, the use of the N-word towards Black-African immigrant students. Despite their resistance and resilience to the issue of race in the U.S., their direct experience with racism forced them to pay attention to race and racism. They assert that when Black immigrant students face racism, they "begin to consider its impact and ways that they have to consider how others perceive them racially" (p.10). Likewise, Kohli and Solórzano (2012) argue that "often unconscious and unintentionally hurtful, when these comments are made to students of color, they are layered insults that intersect with an 'othering' of race, language, and culture" (p. 448). This experience, according to Fries-Britt et al. (2014), distracts immigrant students from pursuing and focusing on their intended dreams.

In a similar study that explored the cultural adjustment of 12 African students from Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya, Constantine et al. (2005) reported that some African international students experienced prejudice and discrimination. Participants expressed how they were sometimes confronted with racial slurs by white Americans even in front of an entire class which led to one of the participants dropping out of the class. Participants further reported being

perceived as unintelligent by some Americans due to their skin. Also, the study revealed that some of these prejudices and discrimination were received from Black Americans as well.

Also, George-Mwangi and Fries-Britt (2015) found that Black immigrant students, from Africa, face the problem of having to adjust to the status of racial minorities. Their findings revealed that some of the students who had come from countries where Blacks are either the majority or half of the population now had to deal with seeing themselves as part of a racial group (African Americans) that is considered a minoritized group in the U.S. This contributed to the nervousness on the part of the immigrant students. The second theme was dealing with racial and ethnic otherness. That is, students from developing countries in Africa were sometimes seen as inferior due to the wrong perception that host students and faculties had on their race. According to Asante et al. (2016), when African international students must deal with adjusting to the status of a racial minority, they often insist on their identity as African as a "negotiating strategy to resist existing racial politics in the United States that categorizes Black people as a monolithic group" (p. 375).

In another study that employed a mixed-methods approach to explore the experiences of Black-African international students, Macharia-Lowe (2017) collected information through online surveys, interviews, and documents from 10 participants from Sub-Saharan Africa. The researcher found that Black-African students experienced discrimination on campus. According to the findings, participants explained being stopped by the campus police several times and being asked by campus security to show their identity cards when two accompanying white students were never questioned. Other studies on international students show that these experiences are not just faced by Sub-Saharan African international students alone but other

international students such as Chinese students who are considered the largest of all international students.

In a study using a phenomenological approach to qualitative research, Yao (2018) found that Chinese international students experienced racism. The study explored the experiences affecting first-year Chinese international students. Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher recruited and interviewed 21 participants in the first-round interview and 17 participants in the second-round interview. The findings indicated that Chinese international students face neo-racism and otherness. They found that participants were subtly discriminated against by domestic students through gestures, throwing things at them, and the use of the 'f' word on Asian people, which made them feel humiliated and defensive around white-American students. The body of literature shows that not only is racism experienced by U.S. minoritized groups, but also students from outside the U.S. Also, racism is present even within groups such as among Black students.

English Proficiency

International students' academic capabilities are judged based on their accent or limited English proficiency (Aurah, 2014; Coleman, 2018; Kim, 2011). Kim (2011) found language to be a source of difficulty for some international students. Using grounded theory, the study explored the struggles of five international graduate students from Asia. It was discovered that international students with English as a second language had difficulties completing tasks apart from limiting their ability to express their thoughts in class. Also, due to the negative stereotypes associated with limited English proficiency and different accents, students often spent more time practicing how to express themselves in English than on the content itself during activities like presentations and group discussions. He added that "professors and other native students often

did not understand the opinions of international graduate students, nor did they see the need to include them in the discourse" (Kim, 2011, p. 287).

In another qualitative study that explored the academic experiences of two Black-African international graduate students, Aurah (2014) found that English language proficiency influenced their classroom and social participation. They explained how participants first felt awkward when their expressions were not understood or when they did not understand professors due to differences in accents although they had learned primarily in English throughout their schooling years in their home countries. In addition, some participants were forced into intensive English language programs before starting the actual program they had come to pursue.

Also, Coleman (2018) found that speaking English as a second language or with an accent was a barrier to academic engagement. Using an interpretive phenomenological approach to understand the acculturation process that Black international students go through, the researcher conducted four focus group interviews with Black international students. Findings indicated that participants felt frustrated when they were not understood due to their accent and as a result remained quiet in class sometimes. As argued by George-Mwangi et al. (2019) "perceived limited English-language proficiency can negatively affect international students' overall sense of belonging, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation (p. 53).

These findings were also common in an earlier study conducted by Yao (2016) that explored factors affecting Chinese international students' sense of belongingness in their college residence halls. Using in-depth interviews, the researcher interviewed 21 first-year Chinese international students in a large university. Findings from the study showed that participants' sense of belonging and their interpersonal connection with American students were influenced by their English language proficiency. They explained that participants felt hesitant in

approaching their American counterparts or joining American students' conversation due to lack of confidence in the English language and how intelligence is associated with speaking “good English” with a white American accent. Despite these challenges that are posed by students’ limited English proficiency, other researchers have found that some international students improve their English naturally through course readings and also through interaction with native students on campus. Others, through support from faculty who are responsive to the backgrounds of international students (Andrade, 2009; Aurah, 2014).

Academic Difficulties

International students go through difficulties adjusting to the American education system (Aurah, 2014; Wu et al., 2015). In a study to explore the issues of adaptation faced by international students, Wu et al. (2015) conducted a qualitative study on 10 international students from Asia, Middle East, and South America. The authors discovered that participants faced academic difficulties. These difficulties were associated with interaction and communication as participants complained about how difficult it was for them to fully understand the U.S. English language due to different accents, rate of speed, and pronunciation of words that is different from the English they learned back home. Also, the researchers found that international students perceived interrupting a professor disrespectful and so they usually raised their hands to be called on by the professor whenever they had to contribute or ask questions. They found that these participants got worried when they were not recognized, especially when host students spoke without raising their hands.

In the case of African students, Aurah (2014) found that some Black-African international students on their arrival in the U.S. found it difficult to meet the needs of the American education system. They explained how difficult it can be for newly arrived

international students to adjust to student-centered activities like a class presentation, class discussion, and other student-oriented teaching formats due to their familiarity with the teacher-centered method of instruction, such as lecturing. However, participants added how the process became easier with the help of professors who understood their differences. Participants in both studies experienced difficulty adjusting to the American education system because of the difference between their country's education system or culture and that of the U.S.

Financial Challenges

International students also faced financial hardships (Coleman, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005; George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Mcfadden et al., 2012). Studies have shown that international students often consider funding as a key concern when selecting or choosing schools for enrollment. In a study to determine the factors that influenced international students' choice to attend a U.S. institution of higher education, Mcfadden et al. (2012) found that international students, both undergraduate and graduate students, rated funding as a significant factor when deciding to study abroad. They assert that "institutions can offer aid in the form of graduate assistantships, scholarships, and tuition waivers" to assist international students (p.1610).

In a qualitative study to examine the Black international students' experience with acculturation, Coleman (2018) found that Black international students like other international students face financial difficulties due to federal restrictions on international students' employment. Using a phenomenological approach, the research recruited and interviewed 11 Black international students mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa with one from Barbados. Their findings revealed that despite the high tuition paid by international students, there are limited or no funding opportunities (e.g., scholarships, student loans, grants) for international students because of their status as nonimmigrant aliens.

In addition, the study by George-Mwangi et al. (2019) found that Black-African international students lacked the fundamental support needed to succeed in their academic pursuit. This according to their findings was due to federal restrictions on international students (e.g., F-1 visa restrictions), which does not allow international students to work like their native counterparts. Participants of the studies lamented how these restrictions make it challenging to survive during summer vacations when most on-campus jobs are no longer available. This often caused some African students to rely on food banks referred to by friends.

Also, participants in the Constantine et al. (2005) study experienced financial hardship. Findings from the study indicated that although most of the participants had their tuition paid for by their families or government, they expressed concerns about their inability to cater for primary expenses. This suggests that a lot of Sub-Saharan African international students, including those fully funded by their government or family, still face financial difficulties in one way or another. As noted by Schulte and Choudaha (2014), "financial challenges multiply the problems their visa status causes by making international students ineligible for many financial-aid opportunities and by restricting work prospects that could help them cover the cost of education while gaining work experience" (p. 54).

The body of literature reveals that international students continue to face challenges in U.S. institutions of higher education that can impede their success in the host country. These and other challenges call for more critical studies about international students. One such critical perspective is critical multicultural education, which has become necessary due to the increasing number of international students who mostly get lost in the minority student body of U.S. higher education institutions (Kumi-Yeboah & James, 2011). Critical multicultural education can

mitigate some of the challenges arising from the majoritarian narratives about international students by focusing on their unique experiences.

Critical Multicultural Education

Over the last decade, critical multicultural education has emerged to challenge and analyze the various forms of oppression and the power relations that exist in our institutions (May & Sleeter, 2010). This was followed by the belief that current multicultural education standard has compromised on its social justice aims and "is mired in liberal ideologies that offers no radical change in the current order" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 62).

Through affirmative action, critical multicultural education has contributed to an increase in the representation of minoritized groups such as students of color and women in higher education (Kellough, 2006). The early 1960s, the same era as the civil rights movement, saw a rise in the recruitment of women and minorities relative to equal employment following the executive order by President J. F. Kennedy in 1961. This equally advanced the enrollment of people of color into higher education (Banks & Banks, 2016; Kellough, 2006;). And now, more than ever, multicultural education has become a necessity in higher education, considering the general increase in minority student populations and the influx of large numbers of international students in U.S. higher education campuses. (Kumi-Yeboah & James, 2011). In this regard and through counter-hegemonic disciplines, critical multicultural education has contested the used-to-be Eurocentric nature of higher education programs and contributed to the inclusion of multicultural education courses and programs with some of them required for teacher licensing. Vavrus (2010) adds:

> The struggle to incorporate multicultural perspectives into the higher education curriculum, including teacher education, was met with stiff resistance from Eurocentric

> privileging of access and knowledge. The fight for academic studies with explicit counter-hegemonic content such as Black, Chicano, and Indigenous studies paved the way for eventual calls for the inclusion of multiculturalism in higher education. (p.19)

In a qualitative study to examine White-majority pre-service teachers' responses about unearned privileges at the end of a mandatory critical multicultural education class, Whiting and Cutri (2015) found that participants comfortably acknowledged and had a deeper understanding of the privileges they enjoy because of social and racial factors. Their findings revealed that more than half of the total percentage of the participants identified their social class (e.g., parent income and education) and their white/European heritage as unearned privileges. This reveals how a critical multicultural discipline contributes to self-reflection that can help "us to examine our own socialized stereotypes and assumptions about marginalized groups to which we do not belong, and how this socialization shapes our relationships with those groups" (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010, p. 99).

Furthermore, critical multicultural education over the years has contested majoritarian narratives in higher education (Fránquiz et al., 2011; George-Mwangi et al., 2019). Majoritarian narratives require international students to assimilate into the culture of the mainstream instead of institutions establishing methods to help them integrate and recognize their unique identities. Another aspect of this narrative is seeing all international students as a homogenous group often labeled as foreign students. This disregards the cultures and the identities of international students including those from Sub-Saharan Africa as they are one out of the many international students and the fastest growing group (George-Mwangi et al., 2019). Critical multicultural education challenges these false narratives and urges all, including nations, institutions, and individuals to examine themselves, and their interconnection to others. Also, critical

multicultural education “asks us to connect ourselves to uncomfortable concepts such as prejudice, privilege, and oppression. It challenges the self-delusion in simplistic platitudes such as, *I don’t see color* and *I treat all my students as unique individuals*” (DiAngelo & Sensoy, 2010, p. 102). According to Vavrus (2010), “a critical multicultural curriculum is the one place in higher education where the dispossessed are no longer marginalized” (p.29).

Lastly, critical multicultural education stands to advocate for the representation of other cultures, people, perspectives into the mainstream curriculum. It challenges the Eurocentric content of the curriculum that excludes non-western culture and histories from textbooks and distorts the existing ones. Likewise, testing procedures and curriculum reflect the values of whites, and Anglo-Saxons (Gay 2002, Mercer 1973). Writing about the importance of the content of textbooks, Gay (2018) commented on how most instructional textbooks that are used in schools reflect the authorities of European Americans. She argued that the personal experiences of these authors are represented as the neutral and unbiased truth that is worthwhile. Moreover, these Eurocentric subjective depictions are established “further by the exclusion of certain information about the various racial minorities and social classes in the United States" (p. 145). Additionally, key contributors to curriculum theory and history have been omitted due to their race. This has resulted in a one-race, Eurocentric curriculum, history, and theory. To this point, Au et al. (2016) asks, “what does it mean when a field of curriculum studies is thoroughly committed to issues of social justice while strangely missing the mark in the area of curriculum history?” (p. 2).

As the international student population continues to increase in U.S. higher education campuses, it is necessary now more than ever to embrace multicultural education in its fullness to reject deficit ideologies and master narratives about African students and other international

and minority students. Critical multicultural education continues to advocate for equitable participation of all students irrespective of their backgrounds, ensuring all students' academic achievement. Additionally, schools are empowered to create a welcoming environment that ensures the success of all students. Despite the dominant culture's attempt to assimilate minority students like Sub-Saharan African international students, critical multicultural education, on the other hand, works to integrate and sustain their cultures, languages, and histories (Paris & Alim, 2017). Critical multicultural education challenges the deficit mindsets created about Africa using counter-narratives.

Narrative Inquiry as a Methodological Tool for Learning Educational Experiences

Narrative inquiry is a cross-discipline qualitative research method that "originated from literature, history, anthropology, sociology, sociolinguistics, and education" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 68). Over the last three decades, the use of narrative has surged in different disciplines, which include, but are not limited to philosophy, theology, medicine, economics, and environmental science (Mertova & Webster, 2020). That is, narrative inquiry has a long history inside and outside education and as asserted by Connelly and Clandinin (1990), "the main claims for the use of narrative inquiry in education research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). In the conclusion of their book, *The need for story: Cultural diversity in classroom and community*, Genishi and Dyson (1994) wrote that:

> Stories help to make sense of, evaluate, and integrate the tensions inherent in experience: the past with the present, the fictional with the 'real,' the official with the unofficial, personal with the professional, the canonical with the different and unexpected. Stories

> help us transform the present and shape the future for our students and ourselves so that it will be richer or better than the past. (pp. 242-243)

The above quote helps to understand the interconnectedness of people and stories and why statistical figures and results cannot fully explain the complexities in the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students (Mertova & Webster, 2020). Thus, "narrative allows researchers to present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness" (Mertova & Webster, 2020, p. 9). Therefore, narrative inquiry is a subjective construction and reconstruction of experiences as told in part or full by the individual and restructured by the researcher to make substantial meaning (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Mertova & Webster, 2020).

Narrative can be viewed both as a phenomenon and as a method. The former meaning that narrative can be the event under study such as a narrative of pain. The latter refers to the process of collecting and analyzing the stories told by individuals (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The use of "narrative inquiry is not simply storytelling; it is a method of inquiry that uses storytelling to uncover nuance" (Wang & Geale, 2015, p. 198). That is, in this study, narrative will be used as a method to describe the lived experiences of international graduate students from Sub-Saharan Africa by collecting their stories and writing narratives of their experiences. This is because "experience happens narratively" and that "educational experience should be studied narratively" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.19).

Narrative Inquiry in Education

Narrative enquiry was first used as a methodology by Connelly and Clandinin (1990) to study and describe the personal experiences of teachers. The development of narrative inquiry as a methodology was informed by the seminal work of Dewey (1934, 1938). As an educational

philosopher, Dewey based his concepts on the personal, social, temporality, and place as the important characteristics of any experience. That is, Dewey saw experience as that which takes place in a social context, with one experience modifying subsequent experiences. This means a person's experience happens when there is an equal interaction with the social, and it is situational. For Dewey experience, interaction and situation cannot be separated (Dewey, 1938).

Dewey's (1934, 1938) work on experience and education was founded on three principles: interaction, continuity, and situation. These principles connote that to understand the individual fully, there is the need to study both their personal experience and interactions with the society including people. It also suggests that experience is not static and that there is the need to recognize past, present, and future experiences. Dewey's three principles of experience had a significant effect on the practice of narrative inquiry to which Connelly and Clandinin (1990) formulated narrative inquiry as a methodology for educational research. Based on Dewey's work, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) developed the three dimensions of a narrative inquiry namely interaction (personal and social), continuity (past, present, and future), and place (situation).

Interaction consists of the personal and the social conditions which contribute to one's experience. Personal conditions refer to the hope, feelings, desires, reactions, and moral dispositions of the storyteller while the social conditions explain the surrounding people, things, factors that form the context of the experience. Continuity or temporality entails the past, present, and future of the experiences or told stories. This dimension suggests the evolving nature of every human experience. The third dimension, place or situation, is the physical borders within which the experience takes place or happens. It is important that the researcher

identifies specific location in the storyteller's narrative that could give meaning to the experience (Clandinin et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Wang & Geale, 2015)

The Use of Narrative Inquiry in Education

Since its inception, narrative inquiry has been used by many researchers and in different forms such as counterstories (Bell, 1987; Ryu, 2018; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and testimonio (DeNicolo et al. 2015; Trombetta, 2019). Within the educational setting, narrative inquiry is used by researchers as an emancipatory tool for people who are usually or historically underrepresented to tell their stories. It is used to bring out the omitted voices and experiences of minority students as well as teachers (DeNicolo et al., 2015; Fránquiz et al., 2011; Liu, 2017).

In a study that examined the ways that students engaged in writing personal narratives to reflect on their cultural and linguistic lives in and outside of the classroom, DeNicolo et al. (2015) found testimonio (personal narratives) as a useful methodological, pedagogical tool for identifying students' community cultural wealth such as aspirational, navigational, and linguistic capitals. In the study, the researchers conducted observations and interviewed ten third grade Bilingual students of Mexican descent during their writing units in which their teacher included testimonio in the curriculum. Through their written personal narratives, participants identified diverse ways they made use of the many kinds of cultural capital in their homes and communities. In the words of DeNicolo et al. (2015) "testimonio was a way to model for students how they could draw from multiple forms of knowledge to create a narrative while also highlighting their knowledge and strengths" (p. 233). Through personal narratives, students' hidden community cultural wealth became visible. Other studies have used narrative or counterstories as a pedagogical tool for teacher to deconstruct majoritarian tales.

Fránquiz et al. (2011) used counterstories as a pedagogical tool for identifying and deconstructing the racialized experiences and tales that teacher candidates of color bring to teacher preparation programs. The study recruited three teachers in an urban teacher-preparation program in the Southwest, West, and Midwest parts of the U.S. The study collected firsthand stories from the participants using a journey box. A journey box or memory box is a collection of "items that trigger memories of important times, people, and events" that tell a story (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 114). The use of counterstories in the study helped teacher candidates to reflect and bring out majoritarian narratives they had internalized, which enabled them to construct counternarratives regarding "their work as a bridge between home and school literacies" (Fránquiz et al., 2011, p. 296).

In the realm of international higher education, narrative inquiry has been employed as a methodology to gain the full and nuanced experiences of international students most of whom are minoritized in higher education. Liu (2017) used narrative inquiry as a methodological tool to explore the lived experiences of Chinese international students in Canada with focus on how the intersectionality of their gender, race, and class shape their social and learning experience. The study conducted narrative style in-depth interviews with five Chinese international students. Through this method, Liu was able to shift from interview procedures that ask general experiences to one that invites participants' specific stories. Through narrative inquiry, the study revealed nuances financial challenges experienced by Chinese international students who are mostly homogenized as rich. The study's findings serve as a counterstory to the majoritarian narrative that all Chinese international students are rich. That is, narrative inquiry serves as a counternarrative tool for minority students to challenge master narratives told or perceived about them (DeNicolo et al., 2015).

Addressing Gaps in the Literature

From the plethora of research on international students, there is less doubt of their contributions to U.S. higher education institutions. This ranges from economic benefits to the U.S. economy to diversifying university campuses. Yet, the body of literature on international students revealed that although U.S. institutions of higher education spend time and resources to recruit and admit international students from Sub-Saharan Africa, institutions do less to improve their academic and social adjustment experiences. Their experiences are characterized by unfavorable encounters within the host nation.

Also, much of the literature on international students focus on coping strategies and adjusting to the culture of the host country: the U.S. While this is helpful, they overlook the community cultural wealth that Sub-Saharan African students possessed and utilized in their graduate school experiences. This also prioritizes assimilation which requires international students to alienate their cultures and capital to fit into the mainstream. Studies have shown that when assimilation becomes the norm, it does not challenge higher education institutions to change their negative campus climate (Banks, 2016; George-Mwangi et al., 2019).

The focus on international students coping strategies also does not allow for a deeper understanding of their whole experiences, but only a part of it. This study will look fully into Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' experiences to explore their nuanced, often-fail-to-notice experiences.

The literature also shows a lack of critical lens to study international students. Much of the literature utilizes theoretical and conceptual frameworks related to acculturation and coping. This does not allow for a deeper analysis and understanding of international students' experiences from a critical perspective such as how certain social categorizations intersect with

race to create a complex experience for international students. In their *Implications* section, George-Mwangi et al., (2019) recommended the use of critical theories in studying and understanding the nuanced experiences of Sub-Saharan international graduate students. This study utilizes frameworks grounded in CRT to gain a full understanding of the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students.

Methodologically, much of the literature does not capture the full experiences of international students because much of the methodological approaches (e.g., phenomenology), which focuses on participants' experiences with a specific phenomenon, limit the full lived experiences of international students. This study utilizes critical narrative inquiry to explore the deeper and nuanced experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a review of the relevant literature related to the experiences of international students with a focus on Sub-Saharan African international students. First, the chapter explored the globalization and internalization of higher education and their effect on international students, including international students' mobility and push-pull factors that influence their mobility. It then provided a detailed review of relevant literature on international students' experiences such as their experiences with racism, challenges related to the English language, academics, and finances. Then, I reviewed seminal and contemporary literature on multicultural education and critical multicultural education. Finally, this chapter discussed the use of narrative inquiry as a methodological tool for exploring and understanding the nuanced experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 1 provided a personal connection, background, purpose, and the nature of the proposed study. In chapter 2, I presented a comprehensive review of the relevant literature on international students' experiences, multicultural education, and narrative inquiry. Chapter 3 describes the methodological approach to the study. First, I give a rationale for choosing a qualitative approach and explain the philosophical assumptions underpinning this study. I also describe narrative inquiry in more detail and provide a reason for using a qualitative approach for the study. Secondly, I define my role and positionality as the researcher. Afterwards, I present and explain the theoretical frameworks for the study: community cultural wealth (CCW) and AfricanCrit. This chapter also describes the design of the study by defining sample participants and the criteria for including or excluding a participant. I also explain the procedures that were used to collect data and how the data was analyzed. Lastly, I talk about the ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions, specifically in the West Coast, Northeast, Midwest, and Southern regions of the U.S. (IIE, 2020). The exploration includes the participants' personal lived experiences (academic and social) and the cultural capital they possess and used to persist in higher education amidst challenges. Much of the existing research on international students' experiences are limited to students from larger sending countries and perceives international students as a homogenous group. Besides, the limited studies on Sub-Saharan African international students that do exist focus more on the coping strategies they develop to adjust to the host country. For this reason, it is necessary to

disaggregate international students to allow for a deeper understanding of the experiences of sub-groups within the 'international students' domain to serve them better. Therefore, this study adopts critical frameworks and narrative inquiry to explore the nuanced lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and examine how they utilize their cultural capital to persist in U.S. higher education institutions.

Research Questions

This study explores the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How are Sub-Saharan African students recruited into U.S. higher education institutions?
2. How do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate and adapt to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How do they negotiate their African identity within an African American Black identity context?
3. In what ways, if at all, do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw from various forms of cultural capital to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education institutions?

Approach to the Study: Rationale for Qualitative Study

To thoroughly answer the research questions of this study, it was necessary to utilize a qualitative research approach to understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students and how they draw from various forms of community cultural wealth to navigate and persist in U.S. institutions of higher education. According to Creswell (2013),

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and place under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns of themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (p. 44)

As implied in the definition above, qualitative research allows the problem to be studied in the context of the sample population, which helps the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the problem from the participant's perspectives. I chose a qualitative research approach because the purpose of this study is not to measure and compare variables, but to explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students. A variable is a "characteristic or attribute of an individual or an organization that (a)researchers can measure or observe and that (b) varies among individuals or organizations studied" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 112). Qualitative research is concerned with understanding the experiences of people and communities to answer the what, how, and why of the event rather than answering the how many and how much in the case of quantitative research (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2014). The use of what, how, and why in qualitative research helps to understand the real-life personal experiences of the sample population.

Through qualitative research, researchers can uncover hidden complexities about participants' experiences which are difficult to decipher through quantitative research (Glesne,

2011). Qualitative research is the right fit for this kind of study because there is inadequate research and theories that address the complexity of the challenges faced by international students from Sub-Saharan Africa. According to Creswell and Poth (2018) "we conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between a researcher and the participants in a study" (p. 45). The quote echoes the power of qualitative research in giving the participants the channel to write their own narratives, a step that makes them partners in the creation of true stories and reconstruction of false narratives.

Postcolonial Ontology

This qualitative study will be situated in postcolonialism as the ontological framework. Postcolonialism focuses on heritages of colonialism and how they work to oppress marginalized populations based on their race and geography (Glesne, 2011). Postcolonialism, as an ontological framework, is concerned with the reality of colonialism in our societies today and the various forms of its existence. That is, it works to center the voices of the marginalized while criticizing western ideologies that dominate the lives of minorities (Glesne, 2011, p. 13).

Postcolonial ontology urges us to question "what we know as well as what we do not know, how we come to know as well as how we come not to know" (Takayama et al., 2017, p. 19). This study focuses on the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and the community cultural wealth they possess; however, the cultural wealth (e.g., language) they possess is devalued, and their experiences are affected by master narratives and prejudices formed by the colonizers (George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011). Thus, as argued by Thomas (1993) a study like this guided by postcolonialism provides the space for Sub-Saharan African international graduate students to challenge and deconstruct the colonial legacies that

work to create and to conceptualize false narratives and images about Africa, which in turn affect 'her' people (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Narrative Inquiry

The qualitative genre adopted for this study is narrative research. Narrative research gathers participants' stories about their lives or experiences of a phenomenon (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). That is, this study utilizes narrative inquiry to explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students, how they navigate U.S. institutions of higher education, and how their community cultural wealth helps them to persist in higher education. Narrative inquiry as a methodology was conceptualized under the influence of the work of Dewey (1938) who saw the experience of the child as influenced by both personal and social circumstances. This provided the philosophical root to narrative inquiry conceptualized by Clandinin and Connelly (1990) and has since gained popularity in educational research (Clandinin et al., 2007; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Through narrative inquiry, the personal stories of participants are gathered and analyzed by the researcher (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As argued by Clandinin (2006), "narrative inquirers studied the individual's experience in the world, an experience that was storied both in the living and telling and that could be studied by listening, observing, living alongside another, writing and interpreting texts" (p. 46). Through narrative inquiry, I was able to listen to the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students, which in turn, make them feel the significance of their stories. By sharing their stories, Creswell and Guetterman argue that (2019) participants in a study like this feel they are heard and that their narratives are vital. The focus of this was not gathering participants' entire life histories, but their personal stories in different circumstances related to

higher education, such as their stories about how they were recruited, their experience in the U.S. higher education classroom, and how they use their community cultural wealth to persist. Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that "a life history portrays an individual's entire life, while a personal experience story is a narrative study of an individual's personal experience found in a single or multiple episodes, private situation, or communal folklore" (p. 71). A narrative inquiry does not only value the participant's experience, but also allows "for an exploration of the social, cultural, linguistic, familial, and institutional narratives within which each individual's experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted" (Clandinin et al., 2013, p. 45). That is, as this study intends to place value on the participants' experiences, I am able to explore other factors that shaped those experiences, such as their academic and social interactions, culture, and how they negotiate their Black African identity within an African American identity context.

A narrative inquiry also helps to explore and report participants' lived experiences in the order of occurrence, such as from their recruitment through their first few days on campus to their classroom experience. This is guided by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) three dimensions of a narrative design: continuity (past, present, and future), interaction (personal and social), and place (situation). Continuity entails the past, present, and future of the event under study. This means that the process is always evolving. The second dimension, interaction consists of the personal and the social conditions which form the participant's experience. Personal conditions refer to the hope, feelings, desires, reactions, and moral dispositions of the researcher and the participant. Social conditions mean the surrounding people, things, factors that form the context of the experience. Lastly, the third dimension, place, is the physical borders within which the event takes place or happens (Clandinin et al., 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). In narrative

inquiry, it is essential that the researcher becomes sensitive to the context of the experience. Using narrative inquiry, I am able to situate the work in context: Sub-Saharan Africans who are international graduate students in the U.S. (Creswell & Poth, 2019).

Role of the Researcher

I approach this study as both a researcher and learner (Glesne, 2011). That is, as a researcher, I engaged in collecting relevant information about participants' lived experiences and "accessing others' interpretations of some social phenomenon and of interpreting, themselves, other's actions and intentions" (Glesne, 2011, p. 8). Through this, I contribute to recentering the voices of the marginalized while countering the master narratives of the west and finding answers to the research questions (Glesne, 2011; Hills & Dao, 2020). As a learner, I did not engage the participants as an authority but as a curious student to learn from and with them as they constructed their own realities (Glesne, 2011; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). This helped me listen to participants' lived experiences and made them feel comfortable to open up wholeheartedly.

Also, the collaborative nature of narrative inquiry makes the researcher's own experience an important facet of narrative research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Thus, narrative research allows both the participant's voice and the researcher's voice to be heard (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As such, it is important that I reflect on my experiences as a former international student from Sub-Saharan Africa, specifically Ghana. As a result, I engaged in reflexivity through memo writing to disclose and guard against my biases and prejudices (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, I am aware that Sub-Saharan African international students face a lot of challenges in U.S. higher education, and I am interested in gaining an in-depth understanding of their experiences and how they draw on Yosso's (2005) CCW framework to examine the various

forms of cultural capital that Sub-Saharan African International students utilize to navigate and persist in higher education. Despite my own experiences, it is important that I approach this study with an idea that the participants' own experiences and challenges may be totally different. Although an insider, I am also an outsider as a current resident of the U.S. To be continually aware of how my insider-outsider positions impact this study, I engaged in reflexive writing (Hills & Dao, 2020; Zhao, 2017).

Theoretical Frameworks: Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) and African Critical Theory (AfricanCrit)

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)

The study is situated in a Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework developed by Yosso (2005) which applies an asset-based lens to focus on the skills, knowledge, and talents possessed by minoritized students which helped them to persist in their educational pursuit despite challenges. According to Yosso (2005), community cultural wealth refers to the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (p. 77). This framework acknowledges and validates the cultural wealth that communities of color possess. Yosso (2005) developed the community cultural wealth framework to specifically counter the deficit views about communities of color in education.

Yosso's CCW model challenges the interpretations of Bourdieu's assertion that cultural capital is defined mostly through the knowledge acquisition that is possessed by the upper and middle classes (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). According to Bourdieu (1986) Cultural capital exists in three forms: (1) the embodied state, which is "in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body"; (2) the objectified state, which takes the form of cultural goods (e.g.,

pictures, books, dictionaries, and instruments) and manifest in material objects; and (3) the institutionalized state, in the form of "academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture" (pp. 47-50). Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) cultural capital interpretation suggest that the dominant group, the upper-class, and the bourgeoisie possess these forms of capital that helps them to attain upward mobility in social institutions. This theory perpetuates and legitimizes the reproduction of the dominant culture in higher education. According to Yosso (2005), the interpretation of Bourdieu's cultural capital is often used to explain why People of Color are less successful than their white peers. The notion behind such theory is that if People of Color only had access to the cultural capital of the elite, they could achieve upward mobility. Inherent in this argument is the assumption that People of Color fail or do not perform well in schools due to their lack of cultural capital possessed by the elite. In her framework, Yosso (2005) utilizes Critical Race Theory to counter this deficit view by presenting the Community Cultural Wealth model as an alternative concept to the Bourdieuean cultural capital theory. Minoritized students come to higher education institutions with rich cultural wealth such as aspirational capital, social capital, navigational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, and resistant capital.

Aspirational capital entails students' ability to share their hopes and aspirations: their desire to obtain a better education and a better life. They can maintain hope even in the face of challenges where there may be no immediate means of making it happen (Yosso, 2005, 2006). Social capital refers to the various networks including people and community resources that contribute to the success of People of Color (Yosso, 2005). Through networks of peers, members in religious bodies, and other community members, People of Color can gain opportunities and then give back to their network via useful information needed for upward mobility (Yosso,

2006). Navigational capital involves the capability of being able to maneuver through social systems and institutions such as the American education system, which was established with Anglo-American culture in mind (Yosso, 2005). As asserted by Lee et al. (2017), the discourse on U.S. education for People of Color especially low-income students "ranges from disheartening to infuriating" (p. 43). With navigational capital, People of Color are able to find their way through a system that was not created for them and are able to attain high academic achievement despite the stressful conditions that may surround them (Yosso, 2006). Linguistic capital is the skill that communities of color acquire through communicating in their native languages. Minoritized students mostly come to the U.S. classroom with skills like memorization, paying attention to details, and switching tones learned from cultural-linguistic activities like storytelling, parables, and oral histories (He et al., 2017; Yosso, 2005, 2006). According to Bucholtz et al. (2017) "linguistic repertoires of youth of color must be sustained in educational contexts because language is a crucial form of sustenance in its own right", and which serve as the fundamental platform for people to identify themselves (p. 44). Familial capital refers to the cultural knowledge that is shared and transferred within the family. Through strong family bonds, younger generations learn to sustain good and healthy community relationships. This also includes how the family offers emotional and physical support to its members (Yosso, 2005, 2006). Hersi (2011) pointed out that immigrants' close ties, support from their families, and support from the school environment majorly contribute to their resiliency.

Lastly, resistant capital refers to the skills and knowledge about systems of racism and oppression that help Communities of Color to oppose and counter inequalities. These are cultural assets possessed by minoritized students that help them in "dealing with changing, and often difficult, social and economic circumstances" (Moll et al., 1992, p. 133). These forms of capital

are not “mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). For example, this can be seen in how the family’s aspirations are passed onto the younger generations and how the families nurture their children to be resistant. That is, the familial capital connects to aspirational and resistance capitals.

The Community Cultural Wealth model, since its inception, has been used by many researchers to understand minoritized students (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Gonzalez, 2019; Jimenez, 2020). For example, Gonzalez (2019) used the community cultural wealth model to study how minoritized first-generation college students persisted in graduate schools. The study collected data from 47 Black and Latinx students using questionnaires and conducted 12 interviews with selected individuals from the sample. The findings indicated that minority first-generation students used all the six different forms of Yosso’s (2005) community cultural wealth model. Also, through participatory critical ethnographic research, Jimenez (2020) used the community cultural wealth model to study Latinx immigrants’ experiences and the practical application of CCW in the classroom. It was found that participants’ use of CCW and immigration capital helped to create counter-narratives towards deficit ideologies. These findings show how minority students’ community cultural wealth helps to ameliorate their education experiences. On the other hand, it shows that there is a gap in the literature on how Black-African international students use their community cultural wealth to persist in U.S. higher education institutions. This study is therefore intended to contribute to filling this gap.

African Critical Theory (AfricanCrit)

In addition to the Community Cultural wealth model, the underlying assumptions and master narratives about Africa calls for a more critical theory that helps to understand the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students. Hence, this study is also situated in a

concept I have coined as African Critical Theory or AfricanCrit. AfricanCrit is a conceptual framework that is propounded from Critical Race Theory (CRT), which sprang from an earlier movement, the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement as well as critical studies, ethnic studies, sociology, history, and radical feminism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005). That is, "the critical race theory movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3). In addition, an AfricanCrit framework serves as an extension of Black Critical Theory (BlackCrit), which started in the 1990s and 2000s with early proponents like Stephanie Philips, Hope Lewis, and Dorothy Roberts (Dumas & Ross, 2016; Ross, 2019). AfricanCrit is concerned with understanding the inequities faced by Africans in the diaspora due to their race and the misrepresentation of their race in media and school curricula. For example, Sub-Saharan Africans have to struggle with both "the negative depictions of Africa in the media, and the mis-portrayals about African societies in the school curriculum" (Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011). AfricanCrit is necessary in the study of Sub-Saharan African international students because their race and the master narratives surrounding their race significantly contribute to what they experience in U.S. higher education institutions. Unfortunately, conversations about international students often fail to analyze how race and racism affect the unique experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students. Similarly, early CRT activist and scholars (e.g., Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Kimberly Crenshaw, etc.) felt that the work of CLS was limited in the sense that it did not include conversation about race and racism. Early CRT scholars also claimed that CLS failed to see the role that race, and racism played in building the legal foundations of the U.S. (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Below, I outline the tenets of AfricanCrit.

Colonialism

The racial stereotype and prejudices that Sub-Saharan Africans experience could be explained in part or full by the legacies of colonialism and the master narratives about them by the colonizers (George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011). Inequality in its different forms, as experienced by Africans along with other People of Color, is built on the colonization and enslavement of Africans. These legacies of colonialism have placed many Africans in a racial otherness and they have suffered negative stereotypes and exclusion from participating in democratic citizenship (Masemann, 2013; Au et al., 2016). These stereotypes are perpetuated through racial ideologies such as white supremacy which assumes that "white people, white culture, and things associated with whiteness are superior to those of other racial groups" (Bell et al., 2016, p. 138).

Intersectionality

AfricanCrit recognizes that race intersects with other social categorizations such as one's immigration status, to create a new form of racism for Black-African international students. The term intersectionality was first used by law professor and CRT scholar Kimberly Crenshaw to denote "the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employments experience" (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1244).

Centrality of Race and Racism

Racism is ordinary in the U.S. because it is not acknowledged and as a result incurable (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). According to Yosso (2005) "Racism overtly shaped U.S. social institutions at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues, although more subtly, to impact U.S. institutions of socialization in the beginning of the twenty-first century" (p. 70). Racism is endemic in American culture and is consciously ingrained historically to shape

systems, structures, and the way people think (Parker & Lynn, 2002). As a result, Sub-Saharan African international students, who are obviously non-American citizens, experience racism and prejudices. Also, race is socially constructed because it is not objective and there is no biological basis to prove it. (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

Colorism (light-skin) as privilege

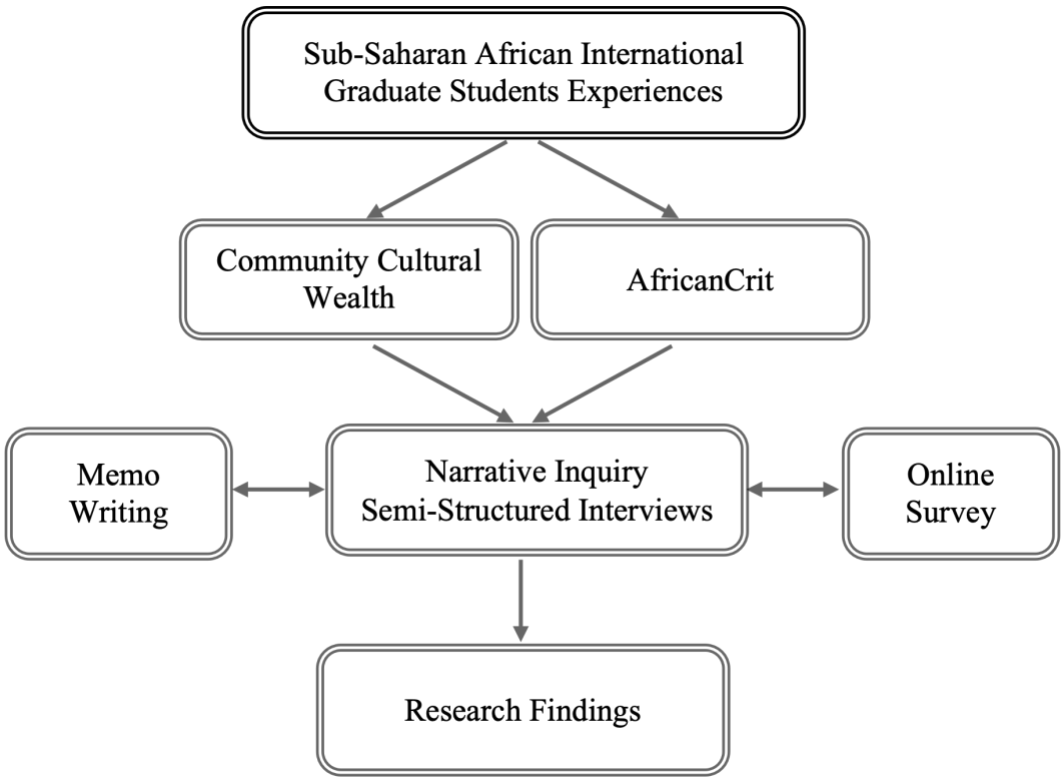
CRT recognizes that, in the United States white people enjoy social and institutional power that gives them privilege over People of Color (DiAngelo, 2016). In AfricanCrit this recognition extends to light-skinned individuals. AfricanCrit recognizes that in the U.S. and other parts of the world, not only white, but also light-skinned people enjoy certain privileges that are scarce for those with darker skin. Black-African international students receive more discrimination than their European and White-African counterparts (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Constantine et al., 2005; Lee & Opio, 2011).

Voice or counter narratives

Like CRT, AfricanCrit research centers the narratives told by People of Color to write a counter story (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012). To understand the racism, prejudice, and discrimination faced by Black-African international students, their stories, experiences, and cultural capitals are valued and upheld in high esteem to produce knowledge that challenges the false narratives about Black-Africans.

Figure 1

Theoretical Frameworks as a Lens



Research Design

Participants and Sampling

According to a recent report by University World News, Sub-Saharan students have become the world's most mobile tertiary students (Kigotho, 2020). Sub-Saharan African international students are one of the fastest growing international student populations in the U.S. The 2019/2020 academic year recorded 41,697 students from this region (Hernandez, 2012; Tobenkin, 2019). This number represents 3.9 percent of the total number of international

students in the U.S. and a 3.5 percent increase from the 2018/2019 academic year (Institute of International Education, 2020; ProJet Atlas, 2019).

This study includes nine Sub-Saharan African international graduate students who were enrolled in six U.S. institutions of higher education at the time of the study. For narrative research, this number is considered a "larger pool of participants" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). The participants consist of eight males and one female. This disparity in gender could be understood from the findings of other studies that showed that enrollment at the tertiary level in the Sub-Saharan African region is skewed towards men. Furthermore, females face more challenges that push them out of the education system, especially in higher level of education (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013; Dube, 2015, Ntinda, 2017). To qualify for the study, participants had to have spent at least a year as an international student and/or up to ten years as international students at the time of the study. Participants for this study attended a four-year public research institutions across different regions of the U.S. at the time of the study, particularly in the West and South regions.

I employed qualitative purposeful sampling to intentionally select nine participants who would help inform the understanding and exploration of the experiences and the community cultural wealth of Sub-Saharan Africa international students. I recruited the participant using two purposeful sampling strategies: maximal variation sampling and snowball/network sampling.

Firstly, I used maximal variation sampling to increase the possibility of having findings from divergent views, which is quintessential in a qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Thus, I recruited participants who differ in country of origin, gender, and higher education institution. Also, I used snowball/network sampling to locate other students who are international students from Sub-Saharan Africa (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Snowball sampling increases

access to populations that are hard to find. It is also a suitable means through which counter-narrative stories can be told (Woodley & Lockard, 2016). Snowball sampling was useful in this study because the participants were not in one setting but multiple sites. That is, I reached out to my network of international students in different states who served as informants and introduced me to other international students from Sub-Saharan Africa who could qualify for this study. In addition, a recruitment flyer was designed and distributed on social media platforms like Twitter and LinkedIn, which was also reposted by friends. I also reached out to faculty members through email with the flyer attached to share with their international students who could be eligible to participate in this study. In all, I recruited and interviewed nine participants for this study.

Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

Participants for the study include international students from Sub-Saharan Africa enrolled in a master's or doctoral degree program in a U.S. institution of higher education. The study focused on recruiting participants enrolled in the top regional destinations in the U.S. for international students' enrollment (i.e., West, Northeast, Midwest, and the South). To qualify for this study, participants had to be current international students on F1 or J1 visas. They must have been in the U.S. for at least one year or more. In addition, the participants must have been pursuing either a master's or doctoral degree at the time of the study. International students who fell within the aforementioned criteria were recruited for this study. Also, participants must have been residing in the U.S. at the time of the study.

On the other hand, this study excluded international students from Sub-Saharan Africa who were on M-1 visas. This is because students in this category are usually enrolled in non-academic institutions, such as vocational institution. The study did not recruit Sub-Saharan African international students who were in the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program

during the time of this study. OPT is “a program that allows international students to stay in the U.S. to work for up to three years after graduating while staying on their student visas” (Redden, 2019, para. 3). Also, Sub-Saharan African international students who were enrolled in community colleges were not considered eligible for this study. Lastly, the study did not recruit Sub-Saharan African international students who had obtained permanent residency in the U.S. at the time of this study.

In the end, nine eligible Sub-Saharan African international graduate students participated in this study. The sample included three international students from Ghana, three from Nigeria, one from Mauritania, one from Rwanda, and one from Uganda (See Table 1). All participants were between 18 to 35 years old and attended a four-year public research university in the West and South regions of the U.S. Six participants were enrolled in a doctoral program, while three were master's students. In addition, four of the participants were pursuing an Engineering-related program, three participants were in the Social Sciences, one participant in the Physical Sciences, and one participant in a Technology-related discipline. On average, participants spent five years and two months in the U.S. with a minimum of a year and a maximum of ten years. All participants were on F1 student visas.

Table 1.

Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Degree	Field of study	Region of School	Country of Origin	Years in the U.S.
Diplomat	Male	Doctorate	Social Sciences	Northwest	Ghana	6
Biyo	Female	Doctorate	Physical sciences	West-Mountain	Rwanda	10
Kajjumba	Male	Doctorate	Engineering-related	West-Mountain	Uganda	4
T.T.	Male	Doctorate	Engineering-related	West-Mountain	Ghana	4
Cross	Male	Master's	Engineering-related	West-Mountain	Nigeria	7
Sidi	Male	Doctorate	Social sciences	Southeast	Mauritania	3
Jago	Male	Master's	Technology-related	West-Mountain	Nigeria	4
Shaka	Male	Master's	Engineering-related	West South Central	Nigeria	8
Bakayoko	Male	Doctorate	Social sciences	Southeast	Ghana	1

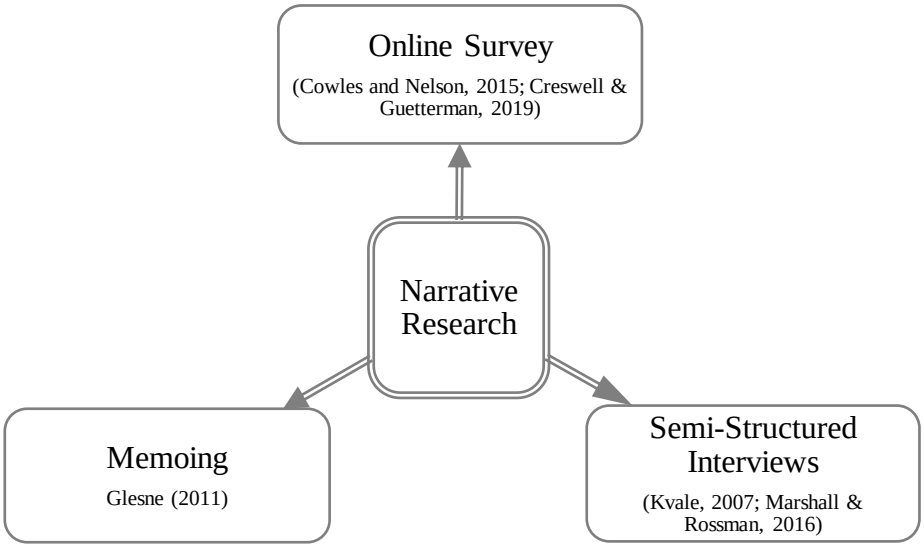
Data Collection Procedures

To explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students, I conducted virtual semi-structured interviews, an online survey, and used reflexive memoing as the main procedures for collecting data. By triangulating multiple forms of

data, trustworthiness was achieved relative to the collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 46). As stated by Cowles and Nelson (2015) triangulation help researchers to use data from distinct sources gathered through different data collection procedures.

Figure 2

Data Collection Procedure



Online Demographic Survey

At the beginning of every research are questions that need answers and one of the channels through which answers to research questions are obtained is survey (Cowles & Nelson, 2015). Prior to the in-depth semi-structured interviews, I collected an online demographic data from participants through questionnaires that were accessible to the research subjects through Google Forms, an online survey software. Through survey, the researcher can collect

information that describes the participants characteristics or behaviors (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Using closed-ended and open-ended questions, the online survey was prepared to solicit demographic information about eligible participants such as their names, institution, program of study, degree, and age range. The survey also provided a space where participants could ask a question and share any concerns. A hyperlink connecting to the online survey was embedded into the recruitment flyer, recruitment emails, and individual scheduling emails that were sent out. A request for further interviews was included in the survey to get those who were willing to be contacted for an initial interview through web-based video call (i.e., Zoom). The survey contained 12 items with four closed-ended questions and eight open-ended questions that required short responses. This number was intentional as "asking too many questions will hurt the response rate" (Newcomer & Triplett, 2015, p. 362).

In-Depth Semi-Structured Interviews

The primary qualitative source of collecting data for this study were the in-depth semi structured one-on-one interviews with participants to explore their current and immediate past experiences as international students from Sub-Saharan Africa (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Creswell and Guetterman (2019) define a one-on-one interview as "a data collection process in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time" (p. 218). An interview is a great way to get participants to provide a detailed description of their experiences relative to the phenomena under study, especially when the researcher cannot observe the participants. According to Sahu (2013) "interview is a method of exposing the hidden factors at the heart of the respondent" (p. 65). Through interviews, knowledge is constructed from the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Kvale, 2007). After identifying and having

the eligible participants consent to an initial interview, I sent an interview scheduling email to them to arrange a suitable date and time that would be convenient to the both of us. Through the one-on-one interviews with the participants, I was able to explore their experiences and identify the community cultural wealth using the semi-structured questions that were developed based on the research questions, and the literature. As noted by Marshall and Rossman (2016), interviews are flexible to conduct, but the researcher should prepare and go into the interview with a set of questions to serve as a guide. During the interview, I probed for additional information from participants when needed. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) assert that "probes vary from exploring the content in more debt (elaborating) to asking the interviewee to explain the answer in more detail (clarifying)" (p. 222). On average, each interview lasted 45 to 80 minutes. Each interview was audio-recorded using the in-app audio recording feature on Zoom with permission from the participants. Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to mask their real names and to protect their real identities.

Memo Writing

Throughout the process of data collection, I took reflection notes at the end of each interview session to analyze relevant information that would be useful for the study. A notebook was kept throughout the study to document any emerging thoughts as they occurred in the data collection process. After each interview, I spent about an hour reflecting and writing down key thoughts that emerged from the interview. This reflexive action helped me to rethink every question in the interview protocol as well as any ideas relative to the research process. Through memo writing, I reflected on the things that worked and those that needed to be modified to enhance the study. According to Glesne (2011), "these comments and thoughts recorded as field

journal entries or as memos are links across your data that find their way into analytic files" (p. 189). Memoing also helped me bracket my biases as a researcher.

Data Storage

The recorded interviews were uploaded to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) issued Google Drive account through my UNLV issued and password-protected computer using private Wi-Fi. Recorded audio files were uploaded within 24 hours of collection. The audio data files were immediately deleted from the Zoom account after it had been properly uploaded to the University-issued Google Drive account. All information was stored on the university issued Google Drive account recommended by the College of Education IT specialist which is secure and encrypted. To protect the data, I did not use any public Wi-Fi to connect to the internet from any device on which the study documents/data were viewed. Additionally, all computers that were used to review or analyze data were password protected and I only accessed the internet through password-protected Wi-Fi connections. Furthermore, I did not collect any information that directly linked participant pseudonyms to their real identities by having participants select a pseudonym after they consented to participate in the study. From that point, participants have only been referred to by their pseudonyms. No key has been maintained. Digital consent documents were also stored in the UNLV issued Google Drive account. All audio-recorded interviews were transcribed by me. Lastly, folders were created to store each participant's data files.

Data Analysis

Once all interviews were conducted and transcribed, I began the thematic analysis of the data using NVivo software. In this approach, the primary concern was generating thematic categories across participants' personal stories about their experience and community cultural

wealth rather than focusing on the structure of the story or how the stories are produced–also known as dialogic analysis (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Riessman, 2008).

Firstly, transcripts from each participant's interview were uploaded into the NVivo qualitative data analysis software. To get an in-depth understanding of all the participants' stories, I listened, read, and reread each transcript several times. As Creswell and Poth (2018) put it, "rapid reading has the benefit of approaching the text in a new light" (p. 188). The rereading process also helps to reorganize the participants' narratives by re-storying and reconstructing their personal stories in a chronological order to identify some key elements such as how they were recruited, early U.S. higher education experiences, and any cultural wealth that influence their persistence. During the process of reading and rereading, I also wrote notes and memos that represented emerging themes and helped in the initial exploration of the data. This was followed by developing data codes or categories that formed the primary themes that are central to this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). As explained by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) "Coding is the process of grouping evidence and labelling ideas so that they reflect increasingly broader perspective" (p. 214). Codes were generated both deductively and inductively. Deductive codes were developed based on the literature and the theoretical framework. In addition, inductive codes were generated from the transcribed interviews and memos as themes emerged.

After coding, I then explored themes based on the generated codes to see how the codes are represented in the personal stories of the participants while also taking note of any hidden or extreme cases. Themes from each participant were cross-compared to find any emerging questions which would take me back to the data or participants for clarification and confirmation (Glesne, 2011).

Ethical Considerations

The guidelines and procedures of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed to develop the data collection and analysis approaches that protect the sample population from any harm. All research activities and procedures were carried out only after the IRB had approved the study. Before collecting any data from the participants, I thoroughly explained the study's purpose to them in plain English, as all participants of this study spoke and understood English. I then welcomed and answered any questions the participants may have had concerning the study. Also, I communicated clearly to participants that they could opt out of the study at any point without any consequences. All participants who agreed to participate in this study were sent a written (typed) consent form that explained the study in simple terms to electronically sign. This study required all participants to append two signatures; (1) consent to voluntarily participate and (2) consent to be audio recorded for transcription purposes. The consent form was sent to all participants through Odoo business management software using the email address provided by the participants. Also, I informed participants of the minimal risks associated with the project, and that they could, at any point in time, withdraw from the study.

To protect each subject's privacy, all participants were given the authority to decide to use either pseudonyms or their real names (orthonyms) due to the cultural significance of names in some cultures (Lahman et al., 2015). In addition, all virtual interviews were conducted with the participants at their choice of location that was private to them without any interference by a third party. As a result, there were no other persons present at both ends during the interview sessions.

To ensure confidentiality of the subject's information, I transcribed all interviews to prevent others from accessing participants' information. Also, I used a password-protected Zoom account that was issued by my academic department. Likewise, each of the study participants were required to use a personal Zoom account that requires a password to log in. Participants' contact information that was used for communication, such as scheduling interviews, is not included in any part of this study. All names of participants used in this study are their pseudonyms or preferred names chosen by the subjects themselves.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

To increase credibility and trustworthiness in the outcome of this research, I first employed methodological triangulation. Triangulation means "gathering data from multiple sources, through multiple methods, and using multiple theoretical lenses" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 46). That is, I gathered data using different methods such as interviews, survey questionnaires, and memos. Additionally, I used data source triangulation to collect data from different sources. This means data was collected from different participants attending different higher education institutions in different regions across the U.S. (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Another way of increasing trustworthiness in this study is through member checking. As narrative research involves storying and restorying participants' stories known as field texts, I provided the participants with the re-written field texts and preliminary themes and codes to gain their feedback (Clandinin, 2013). Throughout the process of data collection and analysis, I collaborated with the research subjects to check and negotiate the meaning of the data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Participants' feedback helped to filter and polish the stories, codes, and themes of this study.

Furthermore, I engaged in peer debriefing with my research committee chair, members, and academic colleagues who are not affiliated with my research. Engaging in member checking helped provide neutral and honest feedback on the study. I periodically met with my academic advisor for review and feedback on this study. The use of triangulation (methodological and data source) together with member checking and peer debriefing increase the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Chapter Summary

In chapter three, I outlined and described the methodological approach used to execute this study. It included restating the research purpose and the research questions. Also, the research approach, type of approach, and the philosophical assumption underlying the study were explained with rationale for selecting a qualitative approach and narrative inquiry. The chapter also explained community cultural wealth and AfricanCrit as the theoretical framework for studying the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students. Additionally, the chapter described the sampling and data collection procedures employed to select participants and collect data. Potential ethical issues such as protecting the privacy of participants and ensuring confidentiality were also discussed, while capturing the ways to ensure credibility and trustworthiness. Lastly, the chapter specified the limitations and delimitations of this study.

Chapter 4: Findings and Implications

In Chapter 1, I discussed my personal experiences that connect to the study. This was followed by a discussion of the problem statement, background of the study, purpose, research questions, overview of theoretical frameworks, a summary of the methodology, and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 explored and discussed related literature on globalization and internationalization of higher education, experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students, critical multicultural education, and narrative inquiry as a methodological tool for understanding educational experiences. Chapter 3 delineated the methodology and research design selected for executing the entire study. I also explained my role as a researcher and discussed the study's theoretical frameworks. Finally, this chapter presents the major themes and findings that emerged from the research subjects' narratives.

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education. This study employs narrative inquiry situated in critical theories to disaggregate the international student population to delve deeper into learning about their unique and unrecognized stories and how they form community cultural wealth to persist in higher education outside their home country. Despite their challenges, Sub-Saharan African international graduate students who participated in this study shared unique stories of their experiences, challenges, and persistence strategies grounded in their community cultural wealth.

Research Questions

The following research questions and sub-questions guide the study:

1. What are the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How are Sub-Saharan African students recruited into U.S. higher education institutions?
2. How do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate and adapt to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How do they negotiate their African identity within an African American Black identity context?
3. In what ways, if at all, do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw from various forms of cultural capital to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education institutions?

Overview of Participant Profiles

A total of nine participants, who are international students from the Sub-Saharan region of Africa, participated in this research study. All nine participants were enrolled in six different public research universities in the U.S. (See Table 2). In this section, I provide a summarized overview of the participants. The names of the participants used in this study are pseudonyms chosen by them.

Diplomat. Diplomat is a Ghanaian between 31-35 years and identifies as male. He is a Ph.D. student in the social sciences at a four-year public research university in the Northwest region of the U.S. He holds a master's degree in the humanities from a public research university in the West-mountain part of the U.S. Diplomat came to the U.S. in 2015 for his master's degree. Prior to that, he had applied to different schools in Europe, specifically the UK, France, and Nordic countries. Although he gained several admissions from these countries, he was not

offered the full scholarship that would enable him to attend and complete his schooling. So, in 2015, he applied and got a full scholarship to pursue his master's degree in the U.S. after a friend who had graduated with a Ph.D. from an American university advised him.

Biyo. Biyo is a female international student from Rwanda who is between 26-30 years old. She is pursuing her doctoral degree in the physical sciences at a four-year public research university in the West-mountain region of the U.S. She came to the U.S. in 2011 for her bachelor's degree at a private Christian university in the West-pacific region of the U.S. She also holds a master's degree in the life sciences from a public university in the same region. She was first recruited by a U.S. institution of higher education that had traveled to her home country to recruit high school graduates who performed extraordinarily in the nation's final exams for high schoolers. Biyo happened to be one of the students who got higher scores on the national exam and was admitted to study in the U.S.

Cross. Cross is a male international student from Nigeria between the ages of 18-25 years and pursuing a master's degree in an engineering-related program at a four-year public university in the West-mountain region of the U.S. He came to the U.S. in 2014 for his undergraduate degree, also in an engineering-related program, at the same university in the same region. He applied with a friend who was already a student of this institution and got admitted.

T.T. TT is a male international student from Ghana between the ages of 26-30. He is a doctoral student in an engineering-related program at a four-year public research university in the West-mountain region of the U.S. He arrived in the U.S. in 2018 to attend a university in the East South-Central region of the U.S., where he obtained his master's degree in an engineering-related program.

Kajjumba. Kajjumba is a male international student from Uganda. He is a fourth-year Ph.D. student studying an engineering-related program at a four-year public research university in the West-mountain region of the U.S. His plan to study in the U.S. was inspired by the personal initiative to pursue his doctoral degree in an American university. After making all the necessary preparations, he applied to several schools globally, including the U.S. He also reached out to professors in those universities he had applied to who had similar research interests. After gaining admissions to more than five universities and receiving positive replies from some professors, he decided, together with the help of his family, to join his current school. Before the U.S., he had lived in Europe, which he described as helpful to adjusting to the U.S. system. Kajjumba is 31-35 years old and has been in the U.S. for four years.

Jago. Jago identifies as male, and he is an international student from Nigeria. He is between 18 and 25 years old and arrived in the U.S. in 2018 for school purposes. He is a master's student in a technology-related discipline at a four-year public research university in the West-mountain region of the U.S. Before his education in the U.S., he had gone to school and lived in the U.K. and the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, an experience that made him more accustomed to being in diverse cultures. Therefore, studying outside his country was not just about inspiration but also broadening his scope to acquire more knowledge and gain different perspectives of what he was taught back home. Prior to his application to study in the U.S., he had applied to other schools in Canada and Australia.

Bakayoko. Bakayoko is an international student from Ghana between 26-30 years old and identifies as a male. He is a doctoral student in the social sciences at a four-year public research university in the South Atlantic region of the U.S. He also has two master's degrees in the social sciences from two different countries in Europe. His experience in Europe helped him

smoothly transition into the U.S. higher education system. Bakayoko had a strong interest in an African studies discipline with a focus on elections, and this drove him to search and find schools with strong scholars in that field. His curiosity led him to follow and check the profiles of several professors, which resulted in his application and admission to his current institution in the U.S.

Sidi. Sidi is a doctoral student in the social sciences at a four-year public research institution in the U.S., specifically the South Atlantic region. He is from Mauritania and identifies as a male between 31 and 35 years old. After his master's degree in 2015, also in the U.S., he had to go back to Mauritania to teach. Still, he had always desired to get his Ph.D., so he finally decided to apply and got admitted to his current school, which was recommended to him by a friend who is a professor at a school with a strong African study related program. Aside from his desire to obtain a Ph.D. to become a professor, the other factor that led to his education in the U.S. is that the professional life back home was a challenge.

Shaka. Shaka identifies as a male and is between 18-25 years old. He is an international student from Nigeria pursuing his master's degree in an engineering-related program at a four-year public research university in the West South-Central region of the U.S. He came to the U.S. in 2014 for his undergraduate degree. His desire to study in the U.S. was personally motivated by his family, who wanted him to attend the same university as his brother.

Overview of Findings

The findings of this study are grouped into five broad themes with each theme having sub-categories (See Table 2). These themes represent the unique stories told by the participants according to multiple episodes of their lives as international students in U.S. higher education intuitions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While participants narrated their stories in multiple episodes

following research protocols, their narratives were also situated in (1) the past, present, and future, (2) the personal and social environment, and (3) the place where the experiences took place (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These three dimensions of narrative research guided the experiences shared by the participants as they narrated their stories. Some of the stories told are past experiences as international students in previous universities and as current students still in international student status.

Overall, participants' experiences revealed joyous and favorable moments such as a welcoming and supportive environment. Nonetheless, their stories also divulged negative and challenging situations like racism and financial difficulties narrated through emotions and laughter as they unfolded. Based on the analysis of participants' narratives, five themes emerged: (1) supportive academic environment for growth, (2) challenging experiences inside and outside academia, (3) recruitment strategies, (4) adapting to the U.S. higher education system, and (5) community cultural wealth.

Table 2

Summary of Findings by Themes

Themes	Sub-themes
A supportive academic environment for growth	• Collaborative learning environment • Supportive, resourceful professors

Challenging experiences inside and outside academia	• Accent as a challenge
	• Academic work-life balance
	• Discovering racism
	  • Vicarious racism
	  • Exposure to microaggressions
	• Insufficient financial support

Table 2

Summary of Findings by Themes (continued)

Themes	Sub-themes
Recruiting strategies	• Self-initiative • Recommendation from friends
Adapting to the U.S. higher education system	• Challenges didn't change, I changed • Mentorship of friends • African identity matters
Community cultural wealth	• Aspirational capital • Familial capital • Resistant capital • Social capital • Linguistic capital • Navigational capital • Persistence capital: Failure is not an option

Findings by Themes

Theme 1: Supportive Academic Environment for Growth

Although the academic experiences of international students–especially those from Sub-Saharan Africa–can be daunting, most of the participants were very positive about their overall initial experience in U.S. higher education institutions. Most of the participants of this study overlooked their challenges to see the brighter side of their educational experiences, which enabled them to share their experiences of how the U.S. higher education system supported their ambitions. These experiences are seen through a collaborative learning environment, available academic resources, and supportive professors. These findings resonate well with the pull factors

that attract international students to pursue their degrees in several host countries like the U.S. (Fakunle, 2021; Gbollie & Gong, 2020; Magbondé, 2021). These experiences are what participants referred to as different than what they were accustomed to back home.

Collaborative learning environment.

Participants found the U.S. classroom environment as more collaborative and interactive than the learning styles in their respective home countries. From the analysis of the data about their academic experiences and their past and current graduate education, most of the participants, notably Diplomat, Shaka, and Sidi, expressed their experiences in the classroom with more positivity regarding the student-teacher interaction and relationship between the teacher and the students. In sharing their general initial experience with the U.S. education environment, participants loudly claimed that the U.S. classroom experience differed from what they were used to in their countries. Most of them described the classroom experience in their country as more teacher-centered. For example, Diplomat observed that knowledge construction in the U.S. classroom is co-constructed and not just imposed on the students. He shared:

> You know, in Ghana, the class atmosphere; the structure of the class is centered around the teacher. The teacher is considered an embodiment of knowledge. So, they come and teach, and you take notes, and that is it, but when I came here, I realized that it is a different dimension. It is more interactive, more like co-construction of knowledge. It's more like the collaborative and team-building type of classes, instead of one-dimensional or one-directional, where the teacher gives the students knowledge and then reproduces.

For Diplomat, these learning styles that he was exposed to helped him learn through knowledge application rather than rote memorization, something he was used to in his home country. Bakayoko added, "for us [his country], our education kind of, they didn't train us to produce knowledge. They train us to reproduce what knowledge we've been given." In addition, Shaka also shared a similar experience relative to his exposure to a more collaborative classroom atmosphere in the U.S.:

> It [the U.S. education] is much more friendly compared to back home, where we have a more rigid relationship between teachers and students. I'm not saying there weren't nice teachers there, but it was more like a barrier, like a student-teacher barrier, but here, it is more like a collaborative kind of education, and you get a lot more resources in terms of even outside classes. So, for example, there are structures that do like extra lessons and all that, at least at the basic level of your university education, like with math and English.

In comparison, to a more barrier-like relationship between the student and the teacher in education back home as described by Shaka, he appreciated the collaborative nature of the U.S. classroom because to him working in isolation could be difficult coming from an engineering background. In another narrative, the cordial relationship that exists between the teacher and the students was reiterated by Sidi, who also stated that:

> In terms of the relationship between the professor and the student back home, it was completely different. I feel like here [the U.S.], there is a better relationship between the professor and the student; maybe it's because of the way professors are recruited or maybe because if the students don't like you, they don't take your classes or whatever. I don't know, but I like the fact that professors here are more invested in the students.

Evidently, Sidi also found a more improved teacher-student relationship in the U.S. classroom, as mentioned by the other participants. The collaborative learning described by the participants is what Freire (1970) and other scholars like Beckett (2013) consider a dialogue approach and a cooperative learning environment where students understand the knowledge construction process (Banks, 2020). While these experiences helped the participants to become more collaborative, they were also able to learn concepts more practically and experientially.

Supportive, Resourceful Professors

Many of the participants of this study commended the professors in their schools for being more supportive and liberal. Although from the data some participants expressed an initial conflicting experience between the long-year exposure to teacher-centered styles of learning in their home country and the student-centered approach they found in the U.S., they gradually adjusted and transitioned to the more democratic nature of the U.S. education system where they

learned to approach professors for help. They shared accounts of professors being supportive, welcoming, and resourceful making their learning experience better. For example, Kajjumba narrated how supportive his advisor had been by always looking out for him. He expressed:

> When I just came in, I think I'll give credit to my advisor. She has always been there for me. She's always interested in what I have done and what I'm missing. And before you know, she will always be in my email; she will be like, I think that you may not have signed this contract. Can you check your email to make sure that you have signed this contract?

Biyo also shared how trust from professors encouraged her. She said:

> For us, students, getting that trust from the professor that you can be a TA for his students, or you can solve a question boosted our confidence. And then, at the end of the first year or the second year, you will be at the level where you can even ask a question in the classroom and feel more comfortable even defending yourself, explaining why you made that choice, different choices, and why. And even trying to know different professors and trying to build a future in academia, they support you more in opportunities like conferences, presentations, and poster presentations.

Bakayoko added:

> At least, based on my experience with them, they are all understanding and more open to engaging with students. I have also come to understand that most of the professors here are more liberal and tend to provide more help when you approach them in their office. So, seeing them at the class level is more superficial, but when you tend to engage them more outside the classroom, you tend to kind of get a deeper insight into them than just seeing them and interacting with them in class.

Participants found their U.S. professors to be more helpful in guiding them through their academic and professional journeys. Also, although participants reiterated that they sometimes felt hesitant to approach professors because they did not want to appear too challenging, they learned to approach them during their office hours to have a one-on-one conversation and get needed support.

Theme 2: Challenging Experiences Inside and Outside Academia

As previous studies on international students reveals, they face numerous challenges, although they are usually initially excited about their new experiences (Coleman, 2018; George-

Mwangi et al., 2019; Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). These challenges come hand-in-hand with the enjoyable opportunities that they were able to experience, acknowledge, and appreciate. Similar to findings from this study, literature on Sub-Saharan African international and Black immigrant students over the years continues to divulge the challenges they go through amidst the opportunities. They disclose some of these challenges such as language/accent barriers, academic majoritarian narratives, racism, low expectations, financial challenges, and others (Asante et al., 2016; Aurah, 2014; George-Mwangi et al., 2019; George-Mwangi, & Fries-Britt, 2015; Wu et al., 2015). In this study, all nine participants indicated that they had faced some kind of a challenge in their academic and social experience, of which some chose to ignore or find ways to mitigate. Analysis of participants' lived experiences showed that they experienced challenges such as accent barriers, workload, racism in different forms, low expectations, limited opportunities, and financial hardships.

Accent as a Major Challenge

The findings revealed accent was a major challenge for Sub-Saharan African international graduate students. The difference in accent between the English language spoken by participants and Americans was mentioned by all participants as a hindrance to effective communication in the classroom, including interaction with professors and classmates. Participants noted that transmitting their thoughts and suggestions sometimes became very difficult due to the different pronunciations of certain words, making it difficult for the receiver of the conversation to comprehend and vice versa. While previous studies have shown that English proficiency is a challenge for international students (Aurah, 2014; Bucholtz et al., 2017; Coleman, 2018), most participants in this study did not see proficiency as the main challenge but accent. This is because some participants even stated how they are constantly told that “their

English is so good." Also, most participants (e.g., Cross, Bakayoko) mentioned that English had been their first language or the primary mode of instruction in their home countries throughout their life. For example, Bakayoko shared,

> The language could be a factor, but for me, I don't think it's a major factor because, in Ghana, I had all my education in English, so all my thinking is more fundamentally grounded in English. However, we still are examined on English language, so it's like, yeah, we cannot claim to be perfect. And when you interact with these people [Americans], you see their levels even in the English. So, of course, that is like a factor, but I wouldn't see it as a major factor, at least not for me.

Participants (e.g., Biyo, Sidi) from French-speaking countries or a country where English was neither the first nor the second language acknowledged the challenge of transitioning to English. Still, even with that, they mentioned that because they are in a science field, which is more universal, they did not find it so hard. Biyo shared:

> I should mention that I was in a French system, so everything that I studied was mainly in French. I took English as a class. So, switching from French to English wasn't that easy. But since I was in science, and science can be somehow universal, it wasn't that hard for me to adjust, and even my friends, it wasn't that hard to adjust. I think in the first semester, we didn't know what to expect because we were all nervous. But I think after we realized that it's mainly the same thing that we learned back home in high school, it was easy for us.

As seen, participants did not have much of a problem with the content of the English language itself because they have been taught in English or the content of their academic major is the same regardless of the language, making it easy to adjust. However, the major challenge most participants talked about related to the conflict in accent, especially word pronunciation, meanings, and pace of speaking. The accent challenge occurred in two ways where either international students did not understand what Americans said or Americans did not understand what international students said. For example, T.T. shared:

> Sometimes you say something, and someone doesn't get it. So, you have to try and repeat, which makes you feel like you're not doing your best to communicate. Although you are doing all your best, the person at the receiving end is not used to that. So, you have to try to develop some strategy. You have to ask people if they struggle to understand me. And

> then you try to take it a little bit slower. There may be instances when I'm using a word, and the person I am talking to doesn't understand what I said because of the pronunciation, so I have to take my time or even spell it or something like that. I mean, it's a process, and you don't expect people to get you right from the beginning, the same way when you first come to the U.S., it is difficult to hear them out when people talk. So, sometimes when people talk, you kind of understand what they are saying only after completing the whole sentence, but not just from word to word, because it's difficult to make the word out.

Bakayoko added:

> So here, I have this professor who speaks very fast, and when he's talking, you kind of have to be extremely alert to follow what he says. And he is so good like when you go to his class, you enjoy it so much, but you have to be likewise attentive to follow what he says. So sometimes you know that the guy is talking, but you just can't figure out what he is trying to say. And also, because of the whole thing of wearing a mask now and all of that, it also kind of tends to create a bit of discomfort in hearing what people say more attentively.

An interesting revelation from Bakayoko's narrative is the wearing of a face mask because of the spread of COVID-19 at the time of the study. To him this made it even more difficult to hear and understand his professors who spoke at a faster pace. COVID-19 was once a pandemic caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus that spread to the U.S. and most parts of the world in early 2020 (World Health Organization, 2022). This required everyone, including students to wear a face mask as a measure to mitigate spread of the virus or getting infected. In another perspective, participants shared an experience where the professor is not an American but still found it difficult to understand. In addition, participants shared how these differences in accent made them feel when communicating with others with different accents, especially when they are not understood.

Kajjumba also stated:

> For example, on a personal basis, I find it very hard to understand African Americans, like when they're talking at a faster pace, it is so hard for me. And also, for some professors, I find it the same way. So, for example, I recently took a class, and I had this professor who was from a certain area, and then he was trying to teach, but sometimes I find it hard to understand him not because he wasn't speaking good English but because the accent was hard for me to get, and the fact that he was putting on a mask, made things so worse because it was in class and then he was supposed to put on a mask. So, it was so hard, trust me.

Shaka expressed:

> A little challenge that we faced was language and accent. For example, word pronunciations to spellings, coming from Nigeria where we use the British system. We spell color as c-o-l-o-u-r but here [America], it's like c-o-l-o-r, so just getting accustomed to those things. It's not that difficult, but it just takes a while. Initially, you get a lot of 'what are you saying?,' 'What, I don't understand,' and you're like, man, it's that simple, why don't you understand? You might get frustrated sometimes.

School-Work-Life Balance: No Social Life

Participants in this study shared that finding a balance between their academics and work-life was challenging. For most participants, getting acclimated to the U.S. education system can be challenging and time-consuming, but becomes even worse when they have to add graduate assistant positions, family responsibilities, and academic work. Also, several participants mentioned that their assistantship positions required them to do more than the hours they were supposed to work, which puts extra pressure on them. Combining these with their academic work and family responsibilities, they noted that they did not have a social life because they had to do away with friends and minimize their sleep time. Despite participants' lack of a social life due to the workload, they also noted that they had to compromise due to the fear of losing their funding opportunities if they do not perform satisfactorily. Kajjumba shared:

> Another thing I just remembered is the workload in terms of being a T.A. or a G.A. You find that someone tells you, you have this contract, and you're going to be putting in 20 hours per week. But you find that you have this class, for example, that you are grading, and the class has over 30 to 50 students. And you have this advisor who continues to give them homework almost on a weekly basis. And you cannot tell me you're going to be putting in 20 hours, so you find that you're putting in so much time if you are a T.A. or G.A. So basically, I think they need to revise that as a university. And given the fact that most of us are international students, sometimes you feel like you don't have so much to complain because you are like, if I complain, and then I'm out of this contract, then what will happen to my academics? So basically, you have to compromise. You are between two roads, and you don't want to push, but at the same time, you are overworked.

In addition, Diplomat said:

> My first time, it was actually my first semester. So, in my first semester, I'm teaching, I'm taking other classes, I'm taking that class, I'm getting acclimatized to the U.S. system.

> And, I had to do all this, so I was literally not sleeping, and that was really not a good experience for me. And, yeah, besides that and my own emotions, I think I had other classes, you know, that went well.

Bakayoko added:

> I don't seem to have a social life. I spend all my time behind my screen in the office because I have this fear that if I don't make a certain academic score, I could lose my funding. So, you're thinking about that as well, and then your assistantship also puts you under pressure to deliver a certain workload. So, although you are supposed to work for 20 hours, in reality, you could do more than that. Also, almost every week, you have some paper to write or something to present, so it's like you are just caught up in this constant cycle of workload, and you just never get finished.

As seen in some participants' narratives, a key factor is the stress from studies and being overworked. In addition, participants noted how the fear of losing their funding put them in a more compromising situation that led them to not having a social life. Based on the literature on stress and stress management, these experiences tend to have some long-term stress implications associated with students' health and relationship with family and friends (Beban & Trueman, 2018; Burston, 2017). In addition, the experiences confer on students an additional emotional and mental load that may prevent them from focusing on their academic work (Beban & Trueman, 2018; Burston, 2017).

Discovering forms of Racism

Findings from this study indicate that international students from Sub-Saharan Africa experience several forms of racism, ranging from microaggressions to the use of racially derogatory words. Racism is a form of discrimination directed towards a person or group due to their race and can have a harmful effect on them (Nieto & Bode, 2018). These findings are in line with the literature on racism that international and immigrant students face when studying in the U.S. (Fries-Britt et al., 2014; George-Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Macharia-Lowe, 2017). Participants' encounters with racism and microaggressions stemmed from both first-hand

experience and the experiences of others. For example, Shaka explained his encounter with direct racism in the U.S., making him think about being Black in America. He said:

> I'd say the outright one [racism] I've experienced was being called like the N-word. I was happy it happened to me because coming from Africa, we are like, 'it just that word,' but when you're called that word, it makes you understand the Black American struggle. It kind of makes you understand racism, to an extent. And that's still just a very small part of it just being called the N-word, but I'll say that has been my worst experience so far.

For Shaka, although being called the N-word was a terrible experience, it also made him realize the difficult endeavors that Black people go through in the U.S. For some participants, their encounter with racism occurred in the form of (1) prejudice, which refers to the misconceptions about and negative attitudes towards certain cultures and its people (2) and discrimination, an unjust behavior towards certain people as a result of their race, gender, accent, or other difference usually based on prejudice (Banks, 2020; Nieto & Bode, 2018). Some of these experiences caused participants to become more reserved in their interaction with people in their academic circle. Kajjumba recalled some of his experiences relative to this:

> When I was in the other parts of the world, I think it wasn't so much there, but when I came to the U.S., you realize that you even talking to someone, some people will just look at you and be like, what are you saying? First of all, they will be like; I didn't understand your accent. And then sometimes they will be like, who are you to do this? Even if you're doing something, someone will be like, "do you think you are smarter than me? I think I'm smarter than you. So, you're not even supposed to talk about that." So, this kind of things, and although I consider myself to be so aggressive, ever since I came to the U.S., for the last maybe one or two years, I've kind of [been] put down, because before you mentioned something or put it out there, someone is going to criticize it, not because you know it and they don't know it, but because of who has said that. It has happened to me a couple of times, but I was trying to ignore it. So, for example, you suggest a solution to be done, but because it's you who suggested it, people are not going to react to it or respond to it. But someone different from you suggests almost the same idea, and everybody will be like, okay, I think that one would work out. So, living in this kind of environment, racism or whatever, has just taught me one thing, just watch your space. If they decide to do something, let them do it. If it doesn't turn out to be okay, then maybe they will listen to you. If it turns out to be okay, then that's good.

The noticeable thing about Kajjumba's narrative is that he was discriminated against because of his accent and negative assumptions about his race. This could be understood through

colonialism as a tenet of AfricanCrit where legacies of colonialism create stereotypes that discriminate people of African descent from participating in democratic societies, like schools where their contributions to knowledge are despised (Masemann, 2013; Au et al., 2016). Similarly, Biyo recalled a situation where she and other African international students would be singled out in the classroom by a professor who reminded them of their opportunity as students in a U.S. school. She recollected:

> There was actually one class that we took, and the professor was from another country. And then because we were in that class, he used to tell us that that's a big opportunity for us, so we have to work hard more than other students to prove that we deserve to be there. And it was not a good thing because he would tell us in front of everyone. And then we would look at each other and be like, okay, so does that mean what we're doing is not enough and treating us as if we are different? So, I could say that I could feel different in that class.

Biyo and her friends, who were also international students from Africa experienced prejudice, which made them feel different, humiliated, and disdain due to the constant reminder of their opportunity to study in the U.S. In other narratives, some participants also share how classmates from different countries perceived them as not intelligent enough. For example, Diplomat shared his experience while pursuing his master's degree:

> When I came, we were four teaching assistants. And out of the four, three were ladies, and they were French. I was the only non-native speaker [of French], and I was the only male. So, our supervisor, in our first meeting, told us that she was going to come to each of our classes to supervise us twice in the quarter to know how we were teaching, what was working, and what was not working so that we could improve so that our students will have a positive learning experience. Then she came to my class, and she went to one other French lady's class and said that our teachings were okay, and we didn't need second supervision. And that got one of the French ladies outraged. She was like, "why? look at even Diplomat. Diplomat is not a native speaker of French, and you go to his class once, and you will say that his teaching is good?"

While Biyo received unfriendly comments from a professor from another country who repeatedly reminded them of their opportunity, Diplomat was faced with contempt by another international student classmate from the West. These confirm prior literature that shows that such

experiences of Black-African international students are fueled by racism and negative portrayals of Africa as a deplorable continent. In addition, legacies of colonialism, which portray everything that is African as inferior (Au et al., 2016; George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Lee & Opio, 2011).

Vicarious racism. Other participants also shared how the racial profiling of other Blacks in the U.S. made them more self-aware and conscious about their every movement and caused fear in them. For example, Bakayoko explained his worries:

> This constant fear of not knowing what's going to happen because coming to America, I've heard of these issues of race and police and all of that. So anytime I'm moving around, I have this constant fear of what could happen to me at night or what encounter I'm going to have as I spend most of my time in the office and go home late. So, these are like social things outside the classroom that keep me wondering what could happen to me.

Diplomat added:

> In the wake of George Floyd, or when there were a lot of mass shootings of Black people, it was traumatizing for me. Especially when I was approaching the police, I did not know whether to put my hands in my pocket or to remove my hands because I was really scared. Sometimes it would be cold outside, and I didn't want to put my hands in my pocket, and they'll think I'm bringing a gun to shoot them, and they shoot me. So that was a very difficult moment for me as a Black person in America.

These narratives of the participants show that they experience vicarious racism. Thus, the type of racism that is felt through the experience of another person or group of people, in this case, Black-Americans, similarly impacts Black-Africans (Museus & Park, 2015). While the participants were witnesses to this type of racism in the mainstream, they felt it could happen to them because they share similar characteristics as those who experienced it, making them feel unsafe in the host country. These experiences also reiterate the endemic nature of racism in America, which does not spare visitors who fall into one or another racial minority categorization (Parker & Lynn, 2002).

Microaggressions. Along with experiencing outright racism and vicarious racism, participants also discussed their experiences with microaggressions, which is a form of racism that is very subtle, daily verbal and non-verbal insults received by People of Color from others who might be unaware (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012; Sue et al., 2007). For example, some participants recalled how they were constantly asked where they were from, which connoted a feeling of an outsider. Diplomat remembered:

> So, sometimes they asked me, 'where are you originally from?' And that already gives me a way to identify myself as someone from West Africa and not from here [the U.S.]. And that question is always an important marker for me to identify myself and negotiate my position as a Black person from the continent [Africa] and not from here [the U.S.].

Bakayoko also shared:

> I get asked by people based on my accent, where do you come from? And by asking where I am from, they assume that I'm not one of them. And that's an assumption that is made based on race. So, once you are Black and don't speak like a typical American, they just assume that you are not one of them.

Although the question of "where are you from" made participants reclaim their Africanness, it also made them rethink their race in the unfamiliar environment. As pointed out by previous studies on the implications of microaggressions in clinical practice, this experience is seen as a microinvalidation, a form of microaggression that nullifies the thoughts and feelings of these students (Sue et al., 2007). Besides, other participants shared their experiences where they were complimented for their English language. For example, Cross stated, "most people would always ask why my English is good because when they find out you're an African, most of them assume you speak a different language, but they don't know that it's my first language." Aside from the microinvalidations received by the participants, some also narrated their experience with microassaults, a hurtful verbal or non-verbal communication through behaviors like avoiding interracial interactions (Sue et al., 2007). For example, Biyo shared how her American

classmates would avoid talking to her when they realized she was from a different culture. She said:

> So, my colleagues, my classmates, it was kind of similar. So, they will try to talk to you, and when they realize that English is not your first language or if you're coming from a different culture, they will see that you are different, and then they will distance themselves. But it will go back to how you do well in class, and then they will start coming back to you because they will need help from you.

For Biyo, this experience made her feel different from the mainstream students but also, the narrative changed once she performed well during class tests and other activities. Unfortunately, studies show that microaggressions have a devastative cumulative effect on the victim's academic confidence, behavior, cognitive, and social lives (Houshmand et al., 2017; Sue et al., 2007).

Insufficient Financial Support

Among the major challenges international students face, documented by a plethora of the literature, is financial difficulties (Coleman, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005; George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Mcfadden et al., 2012; Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). This is no exception to the findings revealed by this study. While participants who were financially supported by family and those who had relatives in the U.S. felt okay about their financial status, the majority of the participants in this study indicated insufficient financial support as one of their major challenges. Some of the financial difficulties experienced by the participants had to do with the restrictions on their visa (F1), extra pressure from family, insufficient graduate assistantship stipends, and limited scholarship and internship opportunities. Sidi shared his challenge:

> So, the Ph.D. programs are, you know, is a job at the same time it's, you know, you're a student. And that's difficult because it takes a lot of time but also, as an international student, you are on an F1 visa, and you're not allowed to work. You only have a stipend, and so if you have a family, it might be difficult. And, of course, as I said earlier, balancing all of these things: family and study.

As seen, Sidi, who had a family back home to take care of, found it difficult, depending on the stipend from his assistantship, to support himself and his family back home. While he mentioned the limitations on work placed by their visa, Shaka also added how some of these limitations challenged him:

> So, we are only allowed to work 20 hours a week, and we are only allowed to work on campus. So, that was already like a competitive thing, and we don't get that much money from our parents to keep up with ourselves, so it is like sometimes you have to just endure being broke because there's nothing you can really do. You can't try to break the law-making money. So that was definitely a challenge for me, just like I bet for everybody.

Kajjumba added:

> And in terms of finances, yes, but that one I think cuts across to every international student in terms of finances, you'll find that we live on a penny. For example, here at the College of Engineering, Ph.D. students are given a net of approximately 1600, which goes to your account. And when you look at the current trend, for example, just the rent only is around $1,000. So basically, more than three-quarters of the money you get is almost going to that rent. You are left with 600 to survive. That is if you have a car to pay the insurance, pay for the car, and to take care of yourself. So, basically, you'll find that in terms of finance, we are almost living at that collapsing stage. You are always waiting to see how you're going to survive the next day. I will say, on my side, it is kind of so frustrating and so hard, but I've been trying. I tried to apply for different scholarships, and I have been able to win different scholarships, so they have been able to help me cover some of the expenses. But regardless of the rest, I can't imagine other Ph.D. students who cannot even win scholarships. What they are going through is extremely, very tough.

For kajjumba, living and going to school in a city with high rent makes it even harder as the rent alone can take more than half of the stipend he received for working as a graduate assistant for his department. What differs from the previous literature on financial difficulties is that the challenge faced by the participants in this study relates more to taking care of themselves and supporting their families, and not paying their fees as most of them had their fees either waived as part of their assistantship or paid by the family.

Theme 3: Recruiting Strategies

As studies on international students indicate, the U.S. has no national policy or strategy for recruiting international students (Becker & Kolster, 2012; NAFSA, 2020), which suggests that international students, in most situations, would have to devise their own means and strategies to apply and gain admission into U.S. higher education institutions. In some cases, some U.S. States have their own established policies to recruit international students from all over the world (Tobenkin, 2020; Becker & Kolster, 2012; Onk & Joseph, 2017). Participants in this study narrated their recruitment process and how they got admitted into their respective schools in the U.S. Out of their narratives, most participants recalled that their application and recruitment to their schools were mostly self-initiated, and based on recommendations from friends,

Self-Initiative

For this study, nearly half of the participants remembered their recruitment process as self-initiated. The participants expressed how they personally took the step in looking and applying for the school. For example, Jago shared how he found and applied to his school:

> So, it was more like looking to transfer away from my American University in Ivory Coast. And so, it wasn't just about looking for different schools in the U.S., because I had already tried Canada and Australia, and it failed. So, it was just like, okay, let's try the U.S. And I had already found the school [his school] in 2016 when I was applying for schools in Canada.

For Jago, he was already enrolled in a school in the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, but he decided to transfer to a school abroad. This led him to explore and apply to different schools in Australia and North America, which eventually led him to his school in the U.S. Other participants started the process by preparing the required materials and contacting professors at different universities. Kajjumba said:

> So, after my Master's, I realized I wanted to go for a Ph.D., and specifically, I was looking to enter into the American University. And with that, I decided to do most of the requirements because you realize that for anyone to come into graduate school in an

> American University, rule number one, you are supposed to have GRE. So, I did GRE in preparation for the application. Then after that, I applied to different universities, not only in the U.S., but across the globe. I personally contacted different professors and different people who are at the universities. You could find each individual's profile based on their research. So those people aligned with the kind of research that I was interested in, I could write an email to contact them. And those who were kind of also interested in my profile contacted me back. So, good enough, one of the people who replied to me was from this university [his enrolled university]. That is my current supervisor. And yeah, we worked it out, and it went through. So, I joined her.

Bakayoko added a similar experience:

> I had an interest in African studies focused on elections particularly. So, I was looking for a school with very strong African studies expertise, like professors with an African studies background. So, I was basically following a couple of professors I know who followed a particular school, and then I started checking up the profiles of some of those professors, and then from there, I just got a feeling that this could be a good fit for me.

Recommendations from Friends

From the findings of this study, nearly half of the participants recollected that their schools were recommended to them by friends from their home country who were either in the U.S. as professors, students, or alumni of a school in the U.S. Sidi narrated how he got to know about his school to apply:

> For my current school, it was recommended to me for several reasons. First, it was recommended as a school with a good African Studies program. And then there was a professor who, a friend of mine, another professor knew, so he put me in touch, and he accepted to supervise my work. So, I decided to apply for it. I also applied for other schools, but I ended up going for this one [his enrolled school] because of the program and personal aspirations.

In Sidi's narrative, the professor who recommended the school to him was also from his home country, whom he had previously worked with on a project. Other participants had the U.S. recommended to them as a better host to international students than other countries. In this account, Diplomat shared his recruitment experience:

> In 2015, a friend of mine, who had graduated with a Ph.D., said to me, 'Diplomat, you should apply to the U.S. you know, In the U.S., they look at your potential and if you apply and then choose French because that's what you did, you are likely going to get in.'

> So, I listened to his advice, and then I applied to seven schools, got admitted into all seven schools, with five of them awarding me full funding.

Like other participants, Diplomat had applied to several schools in the UK, France, and the Nordic countries, but could not get suitable funding opportunities that would enable him to pursue his Ph.D. until he contacted a friend who recommended applying to U.S. school. Contrary to previous studies that focused on strategies U.S. schools use to recruit international students (Bruhn, 2016; Özturgut, 2013; Tobenkin, 2019), this study focused on what international students do to get into U.S. schools.

Theme 4: Adapting to the U.S. Higher Education System

As pointed out by previous studies on international students' experiences and adaptation strategies, it is not always easy for sub-Saharan international students to adjust to their new environment due to differences in culture, educational systems, acculturation stress, and stress associated with adapting to the status of a racial minority in the U.S., especially when they are the racial majority in their home countries (Asante et al., 2016; Aurah, 2014; George-Mwangi et al., 2019; George-Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015). Despite these challenges, participants in this study narrated how they adjusted to the U.S. education system to persist in pursuing and completing their education. Their adjustment strategies could be coded into themes like "challenges didn't change, I changed," mentorship of friends, and African identity matters.

"Challenges Didn't Change, I Changed"

Participants in this study shared how the challenges they face continue to persist and the need for them to change their approaches to viewing and doing things as they continue their educational journey in their schools. When asked how they adjust to the U.S. education system and culture, some participants indicated that they devise ways to work around situations. Bakayoko shared his ways of adjusting:

> I wouldn’t say the challenges have changed. I think I have changed. The thing is, once you get in here, you just get this mindset that other people have done it, so no matter what challenges you face, you just have to find your way around it. So, with time you realize that spending time to cry over it doesn’t change it. You have a lot of workloads, and if you cannot change them, you just have to find a way to work around them.

For Bakayoko, the idea that other people have done it inspired him to look past the academic workload to adapt to the situation rather than groan. He recalled one of the experiences that caused him to accept and adjust to the education system: He shared:

> I remember there was a time we went to class, and we had this statistics assignment that was so much work, so we had spent the entire weekend trying to figure it out. So, when we went to class, everybody was so mad and was talking to the professor. We ended up spending like two hours of the three-hour lecture to talk about the assignment. And then we went on and on, and then he said, ok, he was going to see what he could do about it. And then after class, he posted a new assignment for the next week. So basically, nothing gets changed, so there was no point arguing over it. You just have to find your way around how to work and just get done with it. So that kind of experience tells me that no matter how much I cry over it, it doesn’t change anything. I just had to find a way to work around it to make sure that I could equip myself with the ability to multitask and stick around and work rather than complain.

Biyo also shared a strategy that helped her to adjust:

> I think the challenges didn't change. I changed the way I look at it. So, my approach toward them has changed. If something is challenging to me, it's me who decides if it's just going to be a challenge to me or if I'm just going to look past it and then try to keep going. It doesn't mean that they don't exhaust me. I’m just in a place where I have to prove myself every time, and I just take whatever is given to me.

As challenging as their experiences could be, participants’ narratives showed resilience even in the face of adversity as they chose not to let those difficulties hinder their goals. For example, while Biyo envisioned the future if she were to spend more years as an international student to be more exhausting, she chose to determine what would be a challenge or not.

Mentorship of Friends

Other participants repeatedly recalled the guidance from friends as a strategy to learn and adjust to the U.S. higher education system. Most of the participants in this study mentioned how

their transition into the U.S. higher education was catalyzed by the mentorship they sought from friends both home and abroad. T.T. said:

> I mean when I was coming. I said I knew someone, but by the time I got to where I was going, the person wasn't there, but I knew I was in touch with someone from Ghana who I was talking to before I came. So, all I knew was coming to learn from the person and see the person as a sort of mentor and learn so that I could adjust. Indeed, when I arrived, the person was able to tell me some things that I found to be useful along the way because the person had had experience. So, it's always good to learn from someone who has had the experience. So that's how I ended up preparing to fit into the system, and then I think it helped, in a way, because at least the person told me some things. Although later on, things happened that I wished I knew them earlier, but it's all part of the learning experience.

Diplomat added:

> Those of my friends who were here I would always call them and ask questions about, you know if there's any, and even when I came, anytime I had an issue I would just take a phone and call one of my friends who would be in a different institution. And then ask, you know, and get some ideas. So, those were some of the things that I used.

The prevailing theme from the above participants' narrative is the guidance they received from friends who served as mentors to them. This finding confirms previous studies that found that immigrant students tend to rely on friends for guidance to help them navigate and succeed in their educational pursuits (Constantine et al., 2005; Gámez, 2017).

African Identity Matters

For many of the participants, the idea of falling into the danger of being Black and a foreigner in America was not something they had thought of until becoming international students in the U.S. (Changamire et al., 2021). Although these experiences were challenging to some participants, they realized the need to claim and hold on to their African identity as Africans. Some participants shared that the racial divide in America is inescapable, which forced them to just fall into a minoritized status as Blacks. However, on a personal basis, they usually identify themselves with their ethnicity or as Africans. Shaka narrated his view on how he identifies himself:

> I'd rather say I'm African than a Black, but it's like when you're in Rome, you act like a Roman. So, when you meet the Americans that look like you, identifying so much with being Black, you have to just accept that you're Black, and if it's color, then yes, I'm Black. I never had to say the word Black, maybe not even five times when I was in Africa, you know, because it was just like, all we cared about was maybe you're from this country, or you're from this ethnic group, but coming here there is so much of a color system like in terms of language, Black, white, and initially is like you're not even used to saying the word Black because it's like I'm just a Nigerian dude, but then you start learning about things that happen.

Despite finding it so hard to adjust to the word Black, they still find a way to accept the racial identity of Black in terms of color. However, they have a keen sense of their African or ethnic identity that they cherish, and they hold on to it in their inner self. Shaka continued to establish his sense of identity and how that strengthens him to stand up for himself:

> One thing deep down within me is carrying that Africanness. So, as much as I might have an American accent, I make sure to take that Africanness with me. So, the minority thing is merely a label, but if it starts getting in the way of my function and everything, I always use that opportunity to maybe not educate them, but just take a stance for myself and actually question them. And I find that I do that very well.

While balancing and negotiating their Africanness and the jeopardy of Blackness in America, other participants remembered how they utilized some of their African cultural assets as a strategy to adjust and be themselves. For example, Biyo shared how she would put on her cultural clothes to be more Rwandan:

> As an African, with my identity being a minority of minorities, instead of thinking about it, thinking about every aspect of my life that is so different from others, I chose just to be me. And do the best I can, and just leave it. So, actually, at school, there were times that I would just wear my African attire, my traditional attire just for that. Just because I felt like today, I want to feel like Rwandan. And I want everyone to see it.

While Biyo acknowledges the minority status, she automatically identifies as a Black African. The experience made her embrace her African identity when she stated, “actually it made me more African because it just showed me how being different can be a good thing.” Kajjumba also shares his claim for his ethnicity in America to educate other people who might be naive about his country and identity:

> I always identify myself as an African, but you always find that in any document that you'll fill, you'll never find African. It's always Black/African America. So, we are almost in the same boat. They would never differentiate that. So, I just say, I'm an African, that's it. I don't even say I'm African; I just say I'm a Ugandan. Then they ask me where Uganda is, and I tried to give them the coordinates. I'm like, Uganda is located along the equator that is zero degrees and 32 degrees east.

As seen, most participants, although unexpectedly fall into that racial minority of being black and foreigner in their host country, acknowledge their newly perceived identity and embrace their African heritage as a source of strength to adjust and persist through their studies in the U.S. These findings confirm how African international students tend to embrace and strengthen their African identity as a way of adjusting and resisting the politics of race in the U.S. (Asante et al., 2016).

Theme 5: Community Cultural Wealth

Sub-themes under this theme were deductively developed based on the community cultural wealth by Yosso (2005). Findings from this study indicate that participants possess all six forms of cultural capital outlined in Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth model. These forms of capital are not mutually exclusive but are connected and reinforce one another. Aside from the six deductive sub-themes, the study found one inductive theme that emerged from the participants' narratives. Studies show that these forms of capital help nurture the academic engagement of People of Color, empowering them to gain a deeper understanding of their identities (Gonzalez, 2019; Jimenez, 2020).

Aspirational Capital.

Through the narratives of participants, most of them shared family legacies and personal aspirations that pushed and motivated them to persist and maintain their hopes towards their academic pursuits. Through these aspirations, they believed they could break through their family's current situation and set new standards for others to emulate (Yosso, 2005). The

aspirations they shared transferred directly or indirectly to them from their families, which gradually found its way to participants' personal dreams. Participants like Cross and Jago shared how their parents and siblings inspire them to keep moving. For example, Cross said:

> Personally, I always want to be at the top better than everyone in my class and every course I take. So, I come from a family of academics. My dad is a Ph.D. holder. Pretty much all my siblings have at least a master's degree. So, it kind of sets the tone, the expectations, or the bare minimum. So having those people precede me means I need to do the same or better.

Jago added:

> I'll say for starters; it's family. I mean, I've got like a brother who's a doctor and another brother who is an electrical engineer, and when I was back in Ivory Coast, I was doing mechanical engineering before I came here and switched to information and science technology. So, it was just more on that basis of they've set up precedence for this is where you're going. And for us to be able to do it, you can also do it, and we will also be here to help you. So, it's just more like that driving force for me to aspire to do something greater than myself and for me to better myself.

These narratives show the connectivity between aspirational capital and other forms of capital, such as familial and navigational. Aside from Cross and Jago being more fortunate to have their families set a higher standard for them, others recalled how they learned about grandparents who were scholars years back. For example, Sidi stated, "as kids, we'll talk about this great grandfather who was a scholar and this and that." Other participants recounted how their family's status inspires them to persist. For example, Bakayoko narrated how his family inspires him:

> I think my biggest pull is I come from a family where we didn't have role models, so I want to go as high as I can so that anybody who comes after me will have an excuse not to aim higher because I didn't have anybody to look up to. So, I just want to go as high as I can so that other people who come behind me will look at my life and be also inspired to be able to go high.

For participants like Bakayoko, their inspiration is to inspire other family members who are coming behind them to become a role model to them. These experiences are not to say that participants did not have personal hopes and dreams they wanted to achieve for themselves. All participants had wonderful dreams that span from the personal, community, and national. For

example, Kajjumba shared his dream of contributing to clean water for his community back home and beyond, a way of using his education to give back to his community and create change:

> I come from this area whereby, even though we have water, you find that the water is not clean enough. However, there are no current promising technologies that can help us recycle that water in a very effective way that cannot cause problems to human beings. So I think if I'm able to contribute to that kind of knowledge gap, and I'm able to develop a system that can help us recycle water to communities, in a way that would remove the pathogens, and then at the same time, try to make sure that we recycle that water in the communities that don't have enough rainfall, I think it will be great.

Familial Capital

According to Yosso (2005), familial capital refers to all the cultural knowledge that is shared among the family and creates a sense of community that ensures the well-being of the members. These include the emotional and educational support provided by the family to the individuals. Participants in this study gave their families the highest accolade when it comes to being the support system that motivates them to push themselves even in the face of challenges. According to the findings of this study, familial support to the participants includes financial, emotional, spiritual, and social. For example, in one narrative, Jago mentioned his family's financial support to him:

> I mean, my parents support me financially. I don't try to depend on my family too much because as the last born, I mean there are other kids to be taken care of in the extended family, so I tried to take care of most of the things by myself, but the things that are out of my control, I let them know and how they can be of assistance to me.

Despite his decision not to burden his family, Jago could always count on his family for financial help when things got tough. For some participants, support from family is not necessarily monetary but cognitive. Diplomat viewed his family as: “they give you that psychological support and motivation. Not financial support but encouraging words and you know, you can do

it, that sort of encouragement and motivation are things that keep me going." Biyo also, like other participants, leaned on his family for spiritual strength. She said:

> In college, my parents will know that I have an exam. For instance, talking to my mom or my dad, and then, I'll be like pray for me because I have this big presentation, this huge exam that is coming up. You know, in terms of prayers, actually, they will see you as someone important because being out here trying to study, for them, it was kind of like, their pride.

From Biyo's narrative, it is important to note that her family sees her academic endeavor as something to be proud of. So, they are always there to support her with their prayers for spiritual and physical strength. Her narrative also reveals an important expansion: spirituality to familial capital, which shows that the African family does provide not only a sense of community or social support but also spiritual support to its members through prayers.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital refers to the intellectual and other social skills that minoritized students obtain by communicating in their native languages and dialect (Yosso, 2005). Through lessons from cultural-linguistic activities like proverbs and language expressions, participants shared how they persisted and connected to people based on their linguistic capital acquired through the speaking of their native languages (He et al., 2017). Findings from this study clearly show that most participants, in tough situations, relied on some of these proverbs to keep their focus because it encourages them to do so. An example of this is shared by Biyo, who reports that "There are some sayings like "it doesn't rain forever." It may be raining right now, and you feel like you're in a bad place, but eventually, it's going to stop. It's going to change. It doesn't rain forever." Wise sayings like this (for example, "bɛ" in the Akan tribe of Ghana) encourage her to look past her current situation and reimagine the future. T.T. also added:

> We have a lot of wise sayings and many proverbs that sometimes can relate to real-life situations. So, for example, when I am facing a challenge or something, and that proverb

> or wise saying comes to mind, I say to myself, no, I need to go on, I have to be determined. I mean, those are there to motivate and encourage you.

While these proverbs motivate them to not give up on their dreams, other participants recalled proverbs in the local language that teaches them time management and work ethics in general. For example, Diplomat shared an interesting proverb from his language that teaches him how to manage his time and life as a graduate student:

> There is a proverb that those who look for termites to feed their chicks and those who go to drink cannot have the same conversation. Meaning this person, the latter doesn't have an aim. What the person thinks about is just getting drunk on booze. But the former has an aim. And looking for the termites, when the sun rises, the termites go deep inside, so you have to go early. So, it tells me about work ethics, you know, the importance of not delaying and not procrastinating. And as someone who is a graduate student, these skills are very important because I have a 1000 and one activities: readings, assignments, grading, teaching, and all that. So how do I manage my time well? So, I think leaning on these proverbs is critical in helping me manage my time well, be on task, and have a positive work ethic.

These proverbs are shared and learned from elders through daily interactions and stories with family and other members of the community. This finding affirms previous studies on how minoritized families (e.g., Latino parents) and communities motivate their wards through proverbs, which serve as a "moral support" needed to succeed in education (Marrun, 2020, p. 164). Besides, some participants found their ability to connect and engage with people was influenced by the nature of their native language and how it is spoken. For example, Kajjumba recalled how they talk in their local language:

> So, the way you find the linguistic nature in Uganda is kind of more like a joking way. So, people would always talk in a joking manner, and I think that has helped me to maneuver everywhere I go. So, I always start to initiate conversations in a joking way, and so people will either laugh at me or smile at me. And also, the way we ask things in my original language in Uganda, you find that when you are asking, you have to be extremely polite.

For Kajjumba, some of these elements from his cultural language have helped him when interacting socially as he can capture people's attention so easily, contributing to his ability to navigate the U.S. higher education system, which also connects to navigational capital.

Navigational Capital

Findings for the participants' narratives also confirmed their possession and utilization of navigational capital to persist in U.S. higher education institutions that were different from their respective country's education system. According to Yosso (2005), navigational capital refers to the maneuvering skills that minority, Students of Color possess and use to find their way through an education system built without considering Communities of Color. Despite the racially challenging campus environment that participants find themselves in, they can maneuver through and get what they need to succeed (Lee et al., 2017). Participants relayed that although navigating the American education system could be challenging, they had been through more demanding situations that taught them to be tough. Also, some participants communicated how their experience with several educational systems prepared them to easily find their way around the U.S. education system. For example, Jago, who had been through different education systems across the world, shares his experience:

> I'd say, navigating through it [U.S. higher education] is just more on the basis of navigating through other educational systems because I've been through the British school system, I've been through the Ivorian school system, which can also be considered the French system. I've been through the Nigerian school system also, which is a subsidiary of the British school system. So going through all those school systems has propelled me to be my own person to understand the work ethics you need to succeed in school life. So, me bringing those ethics has pretty much enabled me to better prepare for the U.S. system, which at first was sort of, okay, getting used to it, but now it's just more like lightning through it. And it is like I just know what to do and what to expect. I know how to meet deadlines and not put too much pressure on myself and everything.

As students with prior experience studying in different countries and navigating different education systems relied on those previous experiences, other participants found their cultural

upbringing as a source of their navigational skills. For instance, Sidi shares how life in his country prepared him to navigate the U.S. education system.

> Life in my country is difficult, you have to hustle, you have to fight. And maybe because we are used to fighting, this [U.S. higher education] is very easy because you have a support system, sources, and resources here. So, if you already have the spirit of fighting and the resources are here and available to you, then it's very easy to go through it.

While navigational capital recognizes and acknowledges the student's agency in the limitations of the education institution, it also links to the social aspect (Yosso, 2005). Participants' navigation skills reinforce the use of social networks such as friends, teachers, and communities to navigate complex systems which connect with social capital. For example, participants narrated how they sometimes relied on people around them to navigate the system. Students like Diplomat “go to the counseling center or teacher or maybe my advisor and get more information about a particular thing.” T.T. added:

> Definitely, there have been people from the same place I am from and are here. So, when issues come, and I need resources or that kind of help, I ask them, and then sometimes, when I'm asking, I know who to ask because you don't want someone to make the situation worse. So, I tried to ask the right people, the people I think can help. People who are ahead of me here, and even the authorities in my school, when need be, I try to search online, try to look for whoever is in charge of whatever resources, and try to call them. So, it's all about reaching out and then asking the right people in authority, and then also friends and people who are ahead of you.

As seen, participants draw from previous experiences and social networks to maneuver through the U.S. education system that was not built with minorized students in mind. Also, their cultural upbringing, which prepared them to be "fighters," enables them to navigate the U.S. education system easily.

Resistant Capital

Resistant capital refers to the ability of Sub-Saharan African international students to succeed amid social injustices and inequities (Yosso, 2005; Jimenez, 2020). Through resistant capital, minoritized Students of Color can deal with demanding situations and empower

themselves through seeking knowledge to become change agents for their communities. From the onset, all participants thought that their cultural upbringing taught them not to succumb to the pressures of life's challenges but to fight through to survive and thrive. They also shared their awareness of the inevitable inequalities in all spheres of life and how they have been trained to be tough. In one way or another, all participants attributed their toughness to the cultural upbringing they received back home. Bakayoko gave an example:

> I mean, when you grow up in an environment where nothing is given, you have to fight for everything. For example, you wake up in the morning, and then you have to go and sell, then fetch water from a kilometer [0.6 miles] away before you go to school. You come back, and you have to go through the same thing, and then you do that consistently for five days a week, and you have to go to school. And then you move into a new country where you just have to wake up, take a shower, and go to school; you see that you have navigated more difficult parts of your life than just waking up and going to school and studying. So that value, I feel like growing up, we were brought up with a lot of resilience because we have to navigate most difficult parts every single day, and although what you are studying here is difficult, it's not as compared to what we grew up going through. So, if we could walk like 5 kilometers [3 miles] to go to school and back, you could survive in an A.C. just sitting and studying. So those kinds of cultural values give me that extra edge because I have been through worst things than this could possibly be.

Through this narrative, Bakayoko acknowledges the values that his upbringing has instilled in him and how those values have taught him about life challenges. As a result, the challenges faced in his graduate education do not annoy him but push him towards his dream of contributing to the betterment of his country and community. Besides, others added how their parents always instilled in them the finish-it-attitude. Kajjumba stated, "The way I was raised; it was like when you start something you have to finish it. And those are the echoes that you would always hear from my mother and my father."

In addition, participants shared strategies they learned from their upbringing that help them deal with difficult circumstances. Some of these strategies include being patient and

reserving their strength, keeping a constant reminder of their journey, and not taking things personal. Biyo shares her strategy:

> It's not easy, but one strategy is not to take it personal. And I just tend to put it back to that person and be like, maybe they were having a bad day. So, that's one saying that I often use just to push the thought of the way the person is treating me. Also, to push it so that it doesn't get into my mind is, I say, like, you are what you give, you can only give what you have. So, if you give me that treatment, I see you as someone who needs help. Sometimes I can feel sorry for them and be like, oh, I'm sorry that's how you decide to treat someone, you must be miserable.

Despite the negative behavior received from other people, Biyo does not take them personally, but she puts it back to the perpetrator as the ones in need of help. For other students, patience, and the ability to reserve your strength are key. Sidi said:

> If you have in mind that life is just about challenges and that means you don't give up. There are challenges everywhere else in life, so to go around, that is just to explore the resources and support systems and be patient. And just when it's difficult, think about when it's over. So that's what I do. When it gets difficult, you think about in five or four years from now, I will be this, I will be that.

Kajjumba added:

> So, if I'm to advise anyone who wants to come to the U.S. to do their graduate school or to study here, I will always tell them: reserve your energy for the last marathon, otherwise, you are going to get so many setbacks in terms of your appearance, your speaking, and your accent. Your accent only is enough to put you at the back. Your color or just someone seeing you from a distance, and by you smelling differently, they could just raise that like you smell different from others, and you're like, okay, what should I do? So, you need to reserve your energy because you're going to encounter so many things. And if you put out your energy at once, you may burn out.

From the participants' experiences, they were able to persist through the academic and social inequities they encountered by relying on their resistant capital learned through their upbringing and lessons from parents. In addition, some of these experiences confirmed how Parents of Color instruct their children to enact attitudes that would keep them through social inequalities (Yosso, 2005).

Social Capital

The findings of this study also reveal that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students rely on their social capital to persist in U.S. higher education institutions. According to Yosso (2005), social capital refers to the different social networks, including friends, peers, religious communities, and members of the community that provide contributory and emotional support to minority Students of Color to succeed in their academic and social institutions. Findings show that participants draw on social networks like friends, academic cohorts, and religious communities for the different support systems. In terms of friends and peers, all participants acknowledge the support they receive from long-term and short-term friends. For example, Cross recalled the support received from his peer:

> I remember before I decided to go to grad school, I was then trying to apply for jobs, and she [his peer] was helping me out too. And she's given me a referral, and through that, I was able to get interviews. So, I'd say having a really useful friendship network is not just like you're partying or going out, it's something that could actually make your life better.

Diplomat went on to describe the established support system between him and his friend:

> I came with one other friend, and both of us were really in financial difficulties, and we relied on each other. Sometimes, even a few dollars, I would call that person to give me, and sometimes he would also call, which is how we supported and motivated each other thus far.

Other participants echoed the importance of having a supportive academic cohort. For example, Kajjumba remembered how the suggestions from his cohort landed him ideas that contributed to his research. He also was able to get funding through his cohort in the academic community. He shared:

> Actually, the community has impacted my research and even my goals moving forward. For example, when I came in here, I had this idea, water treatment. Then one time, I was sharing my idea with this group of people, and then someone was like, oh, but you realize that some water contains a lot of nutrients that if we are able to get those nutrients out, and then re-apply them into food production, we shall be able to boost food production. And I was like, wow, I think that will be a game-changer. When I shared that idea again through that same community, someone was like, wow, I think one of the communities here can sponsor that research. So, I wrote a research proposal with the help of my

> advisor, and it got funded by the community. So, through community engagement, I have been able to modify my research to suit the community's needs.

While Kajjumba was able to acquire knowledge and funds for his research project through the academic cohort, studies also show that as Students of Color utilize their social capital to maneuver the system, they also turn around to give that information back to others in their network (Yosso, 2005). For example, Jago reports how he gives back to other student friends:

> My friend who is doing his master's program is a TA for one of the majors he took, MIS 101, and I know I just met someone who's a freshman taking that class. So, it is just more like he is a T.A.; he can help you. He's been here, he's done this, so it's more like an incentive. And it's the same as my roommate because I am in I.T., and he's in MIS, and he's just starting his coding journey, and I've been coding since the first year, so it's just more on the basis of oh yeah, I can help. I mean, I don't entirely know the whole thing, but I know the physics behind it, and I can explain it to him.

Lastly, participants also found the religious community as a great social network. Participants narrated how their church community supports and gives them a sense of belongingness in their various regions. These churches were either the same or similar to their affiliated denominations back home. For some participants, the church gave them the emotional and psychological support they needed. For example, Bakayoko shared his involvement in the church he attends as a place to relieve some burdens: "the social things I have been more involved in is the church. I've been involved in church more than I have ever done in my life. And that's also because there's so much pressure, so this is like the only time to spend some time outside the academic circle." Biyo also added her social network with the church as a place where she feels more welcomed:

> In general, until you find that place, like the church. If you go to church, everyone, because of them being Christian, they don't necessarily see me as an international person; they see me, in general, as a human before asking me where I am from. So, they will embrace me in their specific community.

In all, participants' narratives show how they utilized the social capital available to them to find resources, emotional support, and professional development as they go through their educational journey.

Persistence Capital: "Failure is Not an Option"

Besides Yosso's (2005) community wealth model, there was a new prevalent capital that participants shared as part of the community cultural wealth that urged them to not give up on their dreams but keep soldiering on. For Jago, although no one wants to fail, "the drive of not failing is what keeps me going. It gives me like, yes, I'll do this. I'll pull up my effort to get this one." Biyo also remembered how her upbringing had taught her the culture of not failing:

> You grow up being told you have to work hard to achieve something, to get to where you have to get. So, nothing is granted actually. You have to work for it. And another thing is, back home, because life is hard, it's easy to see people fail in life, but then they keep going, so growing up, you know that failing doesn't really define you. You just keep going until you reach where you want to get. So, it's a culture of not failing.

Cross added:

> It's just not wanting to fail has been my major motivation. And I guess that's how I've kept going. I think Africans are built tough. This [U.S. higher education] is more comfortable than prior life experiences that have been rough. It's very doable compared to other life experiences. It could be worse. So, this is comfortable compared to anything else.

While Biyo's narrative is consistent with Mato's (2021) "finishing" capital, Cross' narrative reveals that U.S. education is more comfortable to them than previous experiences (p. 11). That is, despite their challenges in U.S. higher education, participants feel that their previous experiences have toughened them enough to persist and not fail. To them, failing does not only negatively affect them, but their families, friends, and the entire community they grew up in. This is in part due to the collective nature of the African community, where the family is prioritized over the individual (George Mwangi, 2014). Diplomat shares how failing will not only be a disappoint to me but other people who look up to him:

> Failing is not an option because you will not only disappoint yourself, but you're going to disappoint so many people. And so, failure is not an option, but it is going to be challenging. And I always believe that once someone has done it, you can also do it because you are also someone, and that person doesn't have two heads, you know, the person doesn't have four hands. So once someone has gone through it, you can also go through it. And even if someone has not gone through it, that's why we have history. That's why we have the first person to do this. So you can be that first person.

Participants' narratives show a consistent theme, a type of capital: persistence capital, based on the ides that failing is not an option, which stems from their inner self, personal aspirations, and community obligations to push themselves to be successful. This type of capital is common among immigrant students and pushes them to not only win for themselves, but their entire community (Gámez et al., 2017).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I outlined and discussed themes that emerged from the analysis of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' narratives. Through their narratives, I presented insight into their individual stories and their collective experiences that make them one: students from Sub-Saharan Africa. The discussion of their experience was categorized into five main themes with sub-themes in each broader theme. The themes include (1) supportive academic environment for growth, (2) challenging experiences inside and outside academia, (3) recruitment strategies, (4) adapting to the U.S. higher education system, and (5) community cultural wealth. Through these narratives, participants shared their stories in three dimension: (1) interaction, which constitutes their emotions, feelings, and desires in sharing these stories as well as the social context in which their experiences occurred, (2) continuity connects to their past experiences such as how they were recruited, the present experience in their respective universities, and the envisioning of their future experiences, and (3) place, which is made up of the different situations they encountered challenges. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of

the findings of this study while connecting them to the literature. It will also propose suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In chapter 1, I provided an overview and summary of this study, including my connection to the study, problem statement, purpose, research questions, theoretical frameworks, and the significance of the study. Then, chapter 2 reviewed and discussed all relevant literature relative to globalization and internationalization of higher education, experiences of Sub-Saharan international students, critical multicultural education, and narrative inquiry as a methodological tool. Chapter 3 discussed the study's methodology, including the research approach and rationale, sampling, data collection instruments, and analysis. Chapter 4 presented the findings of this study, tethering them to the literature and theoretical frameworks. In this chapter, I conclude by discussing the findings concerning Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' experiences in higher education and their implication for further research.

Research Questions

The study explores and finds answers to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How are Sub-Saharan African students recruited into U.S. higher education institutions?
2. How do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate and adapt to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions?
    - Sub-question: How do they negotiate their African identity within an African American Black identity context?

3. In what ways, if at all, do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw from various forms of cultural capital to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education institutions?

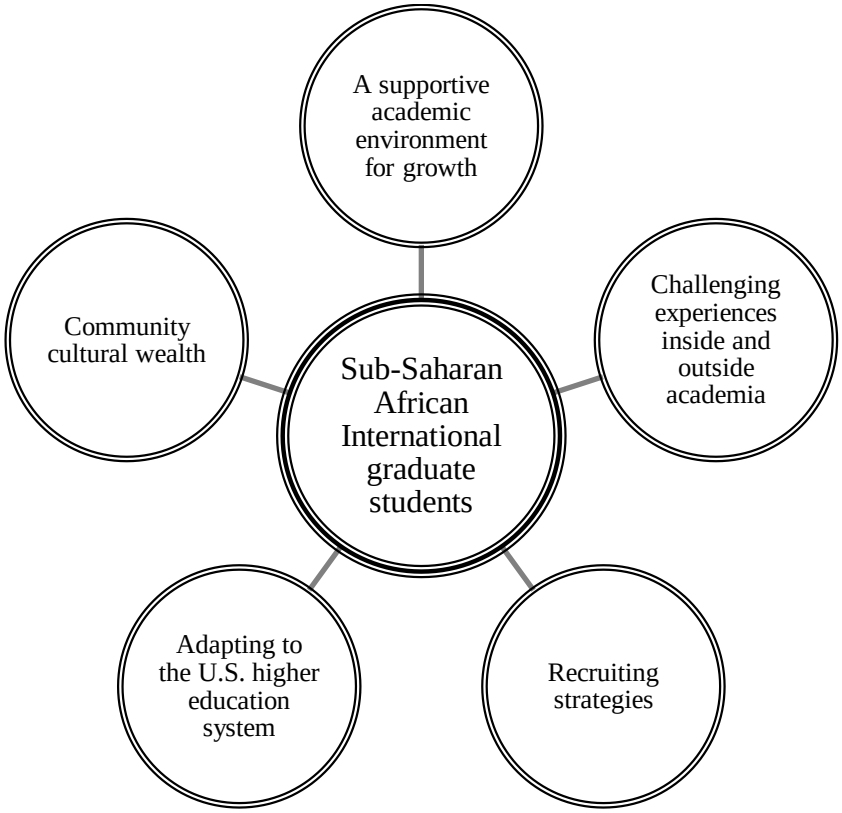
Discussion

As globalization and internationalization shape the higher education landscape, the proliferation of international students in advanced countries like the U.S. continues to soar, especially as many international students perceive its education system as the "best" across the globe (Knight, 2008; Mertova, 2013; Tan, 2015). For example, before the Covid-19 pandemic, 41,697 international students from the Sub-Saharan African region enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions (Echeverria-Estrada, & Batalova, 2019; Open Doors, 2021). This number represented about a 3.5 percent increase from previous years, asserting the U.S. as one of the preferred destinations for Sub-Saharan African international students. Nonetheless, despite the continual expansion of their presence in the U.S., there remains a limited amount of research on Sub-Saharan African international students, specifically those in graduate school. As a result, their experiences are also minimal if not missing in the panorama of higher education and need attention to maximize their academic success and social experiences during their stay in the U.S.

Through narrative research, this study provided an arena for Sub-Saharan African international graduate students to tell their nuanced and untold experiences in higher education institutions. From their narratives, participants revealed some of the challenging experiences they faced aside from their positive experiences (Aurah, 2014; Fries-Britt et al., 2014; Mcfadden et al., 2012). Despite the challenges, their narratives present a plethora of cultural capital they pull from to persist in higher education (Yosso, 2005). The findings (see Figure 3) from their narratives are discussed to directly answer the research questions.

Figure 3

Overview of Findings



Question 1: What are the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions?

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students face positive and negative experiences. Although they experienced challenging situations in U.S. higher education, participants also enjoyed an environment that was collaborative and liberal, with supportive and resourceful professors who were welcoming and willing to dialogue with students. This kind of environment creates a democratic education making students' learning more cooperative and experiential (Banks, 2020; Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970). Unlike previous research, which found

the student-centered approach as a challenge, the findings of this study show that participants found this teaching style to be a pleasure (Aurah, 2014). These findings also align with the pull factors influencing the mobility of international students (Becker & Kolster, 2012; Beine et al., 2014). Like previous research, this finding reveals that the U.S. situates itself as a welcoming destination for international students as it offers academic freedom, quality of education, and high performing faculty, most of whom are open to classroom dialogue (Han et al., 2015; Lambert et al., 2019; Magbondé, 2021). This finding could be understood from the contemporary critical multiculturalism and activism on university campuses yielding a more diverse educational setting more than ever considering the increased number of minority students in the nation's schools (Banks, 2020; Fakunle, 2021; Kumi-Yeboah & James, 2011).

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also go through demanding situations that tend to be challenging. These findings are consistent with previous research (Coleman, 2018; Constantine et al., 2005; George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Mcfadden et al., 2012). First, the findings indicate that participants experienced communication barriers due to conflicts between accents. While Sub-Saharan African students are proficient in English, they consistently received comments that undermined their English proficiency. They also experienced initial difficulties in understanding Americans and other nationals and the challenge of them being understood by others. While previous research found both proficiency and accents as challenges for international students, this study found only conflict in accent as the major challenge characterized by the difference in accent between participants and the mainstream students, difference in pronunciations, and pace of speaking as seen in previous studies (Wu et al., 2015). However, the findings show that this challenge did not hinder them from completing academic tasks, contrasting to previous research.

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also found the school-work-life balance as challenging. The job of being a graduate student and a graduate assistant became more challenging as participants struggled to find a balance between their academic work as students, performing their duties as graduate assistants, and dealing with family and friends. Therefore, besides the fear of losing their funding and the need to meet the demands of school and work, Sub-Saharan African international graduate students often have to sacrifice their relationships with friends and family despite the long-term implications associated with not having a social life (Beban & Trueman, 2018; Burston, 2017). Although this finding confirms the countless contributions of international students, such as contributing to research and teaching; and enriching university campuses with their diversity, their work and interest are often perceived as ancillary to the institution's interest (Changamire et al., 2021; Özturgut, 2013; Sawir, 2013; Schulte & Choudaha, 2014; Tian & Liu, 2020). That is, international students become assets working to meet the needs of host institutions without their interests being taken into consideration. This could be seen as serving the needs of the knowledge-based economy through the monetization of higher education, where students are perceived as commodities and assets (Changamire et al., 2021; Sum & Bob, 2013).

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students experience all forms of racism, including direct racism, vicarious racism, and microaggressions. Their experience with direct racism includes being called the N-word and being perceived as unintelligent. In addition, they were often singled out by professors who constantly reminded them of the opportunity to study in U.S. schools. Furthermore, Sub-Saharan African students experienced vicarious racism through fear and trauma seeing and hearing some of the horrible experiences of African Americans, such as the police brutality experienced by Blacks. Having the same race and skin

color as the victims, participants expressed fear that caused them to be extra conscious about their every movement in the U.S. In other situations, Sub-Saharan African international graduate students experienced microaggressions. They were consistently asked where they were originally from, told how good their English is, and were even avoided by others because of their accent and ethnicity. This finding confirms previous research on African international students' experiences with discrimination, racism, and prejudice (Boafo-Arthur, 2014, Fries-Britt et al., 2014; George-Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Okari, 2016). The finding also confirms the centrality of racism as a tenet of AfricanCrit, which sees racism as endemic in the U.S. system rejecting the mainstream notion of living in a post-racial society (Nieto & Bode, 2018; Picca & Thompson-Miller, 2020). As such, Sub-Saharan African students are assessed similarly to other minoritized populations in the U.S. and experience all forms of racism. That is, the intersectional experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students as immigrants and as racially Black in the U.S. compound their experiences with racism (Crenshaw, 1991).

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also face financial difficulties due to inadequate financial support. Although participants with relatives in the U.S. felt stable financially, those without relatives in the U.S. faced challenges living on the limited stipend they received from their graduate assistantship and struggled to support other family members back home. These challenges are posed by visa restrictions, less or no financial support from family, and pressure to support family back home. For example, regulations on F1 visas do not allow international students to work more than 20 hours or work off-campus (Boafo-Arthur, 2014; Coleman, 2018). This finding is consistent with other studies that showed that financial challenges faced by African international students were mainly related to sustaining themselves and supporting family back home (Constantine et al., 2005; George-Mwangi et al., 2019; Okari,

2016; Schulte & Choudaha, 2014). An important development of this finding is that participants' financial challenges are highly connected to non-tuition needs.

Sub-question: How are Sub-Saharan African students recruited into U.S. higher education institutions?

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students get recruited into U.S. higher education institutions through self-initiative. However, their aspirations had a major impact on starting, searching, and finding their intended programs in U.S. higher education institutions. Also, their keen interest in specific programs drove them to initiate the university application process by preparing the requirements and connecting with professors who might be interested in their area of research. Besides, Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also got recruited based on recommendations by friends either at home or abroad. Some of the friends who recommended schools and programs to participants tended to be alumni, students, or professors in U.S. higher education institutions.

These findings reiterate the absence of a national policy in the U.S. for recruiting international students, causing the recruitment process to be a puzzle for international students to solve (Becker & Kolster, 2012; NAFSA, 2020). As a result, U.S. higher education institutions use their own means to recruit. However, institutions that employ international recruiting agencies recruit international students from larger sending countries like China and India with minimal attention to those students from the Sub-Saharan African region (Lewin, 2008). These practices exacerbate the inequalities in higher education access and the master narratives about Africa as a “deplorable” and poor continent, implying that students from Africa cannot afford to pay tuition if recruited (Changamire et al., 2021). Hence, these findings signify that recruitment initiatives by U.S. higher education institutions tend to focus more on recruiting international

students from richer countries, leaving most African international students to find their own means of applying and getting recruited into U.S. higher education institutions.

Question 2: How do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate and adapt to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions?

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate and adapt to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions by changing their approaches to dealing with situations. Participants' change in their approach is influenced by their perception that challenges never change regardless of how long they complain. Hence, they devise ways to work around situations to persist. These approaches include (1) developing a tough mindset that once somebody has done it, they can also do it and (2) having the agency to decide what would be a challenge and what would not be. This affirms findings of some studies on cultural adjustment strategies of African international students, which found that they tried to manage the adjustment problems they encountered themselves, not putting their burdens on other people, although with possible psychological side-effects (Constantine et al., 2005). That is, despite the challenges they face, Sub-Saharan African students exhibit resiliency, develop a positive mindset, and assert their own agency to decide what challenges them or not. This also reveals how Sub-Saharan African international graduate students perceive their challenges as a motivation to adapt, enabling them to be more resilient amid the racial politics in the U.S. (George-Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015; Inyama et al., 2016).

Additionally, Sub-Saharan African international graduate students adapted to the culture of U.S. higher education institutions by seeking advice and guidance from friends who were already familiar with the U.S. education system. Participants were either already in touch with a friend before they arrived or after they arrived in their schools. These friend-mentors could be in

the same university as the participants or a different university in a different state of the U.S. In both cases, participants engaged their friend-mentors or networks while studying in the U.S. as a point of contact to obtain useful ideas and information that would enable them to adapt to the U.S. educational system. This contributes to the idea of how African students utilize each other as a support system to adapt to new and challenging situations (Inyama et al., 2016). Participants also consulted members of their academic cohort for constructive feedback, confirming the importance of healthy social support as a strategy for adapting to a new culture (Constantine et al., 2005; Yang, 2020). Critically, participants' reliance on themselves and these forms of social support could be used to question the internationalization of higher education under neoliberalism and what it means for institutions to support graduate students from Sub-Saharan Africa. In relation to serving and supporting African students, Changamire et al. (2021) under the theme *Enriching us, invisibilizing them* assert that "there is a pervasive sense that the benefits to them [African students] of being in the U.S. are so high the university has no further obligation to them" (para. 1). That is, these findings also raise concerns about institutions prioritizing their diversity needs over ensuring equity and inclusivity relative to recruiting and supporting international students.

Sub-question: How do they negotiate their African identity within an African American Black identity context?

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate their African identity by reclaiming and consolidating their African identity. Upon their entry into the U.S., most participants automatically fell within the racial politics of the U.S. and directly or indirectly experienced the challenges that Black people and other People of Color go through in the U.S. because of how they are racialized. Although participants found it hard to identify with the racial

category of Black, a term they seldom mentioned in their home countries, they accepted it because they did not have control over others' perception about them as Black. It was also to be in solidarity with African Americans, as one participant mentioned how being called the N-word helped him to understand their struggles (Asante et al., 2016).

Through identifying themselves as Africans or by identifying with their ethnicity, participants claimed their Africanness to withstand the jeopardy of the intersection of Blackness and foreigner in the U.S., which confirms the findings of other research on the idea that Black immigrants' "nativity and ethnicity were more salient aspects of their identity as compared to race" (George-Mwangi & Fries-Britt, 2015, p. 18). Besides, participants also showed off their African identity by putting on their cultural clothes, which made them feel more united with their African identity despite the challenges from their unexpected minority status in U.S. higher education institutions. Therefore, claiming their African identity inwardly and outwardly is a way that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students negotiate their identity within an African American context, sustaining their ethnic identity rather than assimilating into American culture (Berry, 2008, Paris, & Alim, 2017). A significant development from this finding is that participants' strong adherence to their African identity is not an escape route to distance themselves from African Americans but to resist the negative stereotypes ascribed to African Americans, in accordance with previous research (Asante et al., 2016).

Question 3: In what ways, if at all, do Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw from various forms of cultural capital to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education institutions?

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students draw from their aspirations as capital for persisting in U.S. higher education. In part, their aspirations come from family

legacies that set the standards for them to emulate. Some of these legacies were learned through stories told to them by the elders of their family about the achievements of great grandparents. Consistent with a study on how minority first-generation college students persisted in graduate schools, parents' high standards or hopes for them, served as a driving force that pushed participants to persist in their graduate studies, despite being far away from them (Gonzalez, 2019). On the other hand, some participants got inspired to set a family threshold for the younger generation because they themselves had no educational role models to look up to in the family. This idea of being the first to accomplish an important milestone that no one in the family or community had achieved, became an inspiration for laying new standards that would put the family in a more comfortable situation (Yosso, 2005).

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also drew from the support of their families to persist in U.S. higher education institutions. Participants communicated financial support, emotional support, spiritual support, and social support as valuable assets from the family that positively impacted their academic achievement. They used these support systems from the family as sources of motivation to persist when facing challenges in their educational pursuits (Yosso, 2005). For example, some participants at some point would call their family (e.g., parent) and ask them to pray for their success, which is a new development to familial capital, but also confirming how Africans tend to use diverse means, such as spirituality through prayers to deal with challenging situations (Constantine et al., 2005).

Another form of capital that participants utilized to persist in U.S. higher education institutions was linguistic capital, particularly in relation to communicating in more than one language, as the participants did in this study (Yosso, 2005). Most of the participants recollected those proverbs in their cultural languages inspired them not to give up on their dreams, but

instead persist. For example, these proverbs are known as “bɛ” in the Akan tribe of Ghana, West Africa, which are often quoted to advise people about life in general. These proverbs are mostly formed based on human experience or wit (Agyeman et al., 2015). Through other life-lesson-proverbs learned from their language, participants developed a good work ethic like time management and hard work, in addition to avoiding negative attitudes such as laziness and procrastination. Some participants attributed their ability to easily connect and communicate with people to certain vocal tones and rhythms in their cultural language. Contrary to the deficit ideologies that perceive African and other cultural languages as inferior to the English language, African students drew from the rich linguistic elements of their cultural languages to persevere in graduate school (Paris, 2012).

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also drew from their navigational capital to find their way through the U.S. education system. For example, participants described their African upbringing experience as tough and requiring great effort, where they had to hustle to survive and meet their needs. The upbringing of participants had a significant impact on developing resilience, which Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) discern as “a set of inner resources, social competencies, and cultural strategies” that enable them to persist and draw from past experiences to deal with subsequent challenges effectively (as cited in Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Likewise, participants also recognized their past experiences with other national education systems such as the British education system and the French education system as playing a major role in their successful maneuvering of the U.S. higher education system. Besides, the interdependent nature of their family system also impacted their ability to utilize their social network to navigate the U.S. education system that is not created with minoritized students in mind (Yosso, 2005)

Participants further discussed the role of their tough upbringing in resisting the challenges they faced in U.S. higher education institutions. Participants perceived that their daily activities and chores while growing up in Africa, made them become more aware of some of the challenges and inequities in life and the need to push through amidst demanding situations. In their academic pursuit in the U.S., teachings from parents always reminded participants to remain strong and finish up whatever they had started, consistent with what Jimenez (2020) found about how parents of minoritized students not only desire for their children to finish college, but also to empower themselves and become change agents for their communities. Additionally, the nurturing received from their upbringing taught them to be patient in the face of challenges, and to resist any barriers to their goals. That is, due to the cultural behavior acquired from how they were nurtured, participants were able to resist and challenge any inequalities they faced in their graduate education (Yosso, 2006).

Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also drew from social capital to persist in U.S. higher education. Participants acknowledged the benefit of having a good social network. They believed that being surrounded by positive friends and academic cohorts puts them in an advantageous position to achieve upward academic and social mobility (Ayala & Contreras, 2019). For example, participants got professional and financial support from their academic cohorts and friends, respectively. Besides, participants perceived the various church communities available to them as a support system that helped them to persist in U.S. higher education. This is also in line with Yosso's (2006) findings on how Families of Color meet and connect in other community gatherings like the church. That is, religious communities like the church serve as a place where they could get emotional and psychological support when feeling pressured by their academic activities.

Lastly, Sub-Saharan African international graduate students also pulled from a kind of capital known as persistence capital to persevere in U.S. higher education. This capital was engineered by their belief that failure is not an option. Participants discussed how their previous experiences and upbringing had taught them that failing is not an option. To them, failing to persist to achieve their dreams would not only be a disappointment to them, but also to the entire family who takes pride in their success. This affirms the collective and interconnected nature of the African family, which prioritizes groups over individuals (George Mwangi, 2014). Therefore, the sense that failure is not an option motivates the participants to move forward and persist despite challenges (Gámez et al., 2017).

As demonstrated in this study, Yosso's (2005) six forms of capital found in the community cultural wealth model are evident in participants' narratives and show how the various types of capital help them to ameliorate their graduate education experiences as international students from Sub-Saharan Africa. These forms of capital also help to reject deficit ideologies about minoritized students of color, which view them as lacking the capital needed to achieve upward social and institutional mobility (Jimenez, 2020; Kolano, 2016). These findings also fill the gap in the literature on how African students utilize their community cultural wealth to persevere and thrive in U.S. graduate colleges.

Conclusions

While international students are attracted to study in the U.S. by some pull factors and enjoy a more collaborative classroom, student-centered learning approach, and experience high performing faculty, these put African countries at a disadvantage as the continent suffers brain drain due to a growing number of its students not returning home after school (Knight, 2012). This situation exacerbates the existing educational inequality that favors rich countries over low-

income countries serving the interest of globalization and for that matter the internationalization of higher education in a knowledge-based economy (Dzvimbo & Moloi, 2013; Samoff & Carrol, 2013; Sum, & Bob, 2013).

Graduate international students from Sub-Saharan Africa face challenges but develop their own strategies to adapt and persist. This reveals the minimal support African international students receive from institutions and suggests that their presence in U.S. schools is perceived as a more beneficial and life-changing opportunity for the student, and as a result universities believe they have no further responsibilities to support them (Changamire et al., 2021). This perception towards Sub-Saharan African international graduate students puts them in a status of isolation to rely on themselves and close social support systems to adapt to U.S. higher education institutions.

Contrary to the extant literature on international students, the findings in this study reveal that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students heavily depend on their community cultural wealth to navigate and persist in U.S. higher education institutions. While there is significant literature on the use of community cultural wealth by other communities of color (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Gonzalez, 2019; Jimenez, 2020; Kolano, 2016), there was no study exploring Sub-Saharan African international graduate students' community cultural wealth and how they draw from these forms of capital to persist in graduate school. This study is the first to address this gap in the literature, laying the pathway for future research on the community cultural wealth of this population. Additionally, this study discovered spirituality as an expansion to familial capital.

In addition to the participants' community cultural wealth, this study revealed persistence capital as a form of cultural capital that participants depended on to persevere and persist in U.S.

higher education institutions. Failing, according to the participants, not only makes them feel disappointed, but would also disappoint the entire family and community.

Limitations

The purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the experiences of Sub-Saharan African International graduate students in U.S. higher education institutions. This includes knowledge on their recruitment and their use of community cultural wealth to persist in their respective schools. Since this research study uses a small sample size, the findings from this study are not generalizable to all Sub-Saharan African international graduate students, however, the findings provide significant and useful insights into their unique experiences (Glesne, 2011). Findings from this study may be applicable to other Sub-Saharan African international graduate students with comparable characteristics.

Although data were collected from Sub-Saharan African international graduate students, the study did not interview international graduate students from each country in the Sub-Saharan African region. In analyzing the data, I analyzed participants' stories as a collective unit and not as separate individuals from different countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Additionally, while the goal of this study is to explore the experiences of international students from Sub-Saharan Africa as a collective unit, the study also recognizes that participants come from a wide range of diverse cultures and tribes, which may have affected their experiences in different ways that is beyond the scope of this study. Finally, due to the small sample size, I did not separate the data by participants' differences such as school, program of study, duration of stay, gender, or degree. However, I acknowledge that there may be possibilities that these characteristics impacted their experiences.

Recommendations

Based on previous literature and findings of this study, it is obvious that the U.S. does not have a national policy for international students' recruitment, which give universities the autonomy to use their own strategies to recruit. While this enables universities to attract talents from across the world, less effort is made to recruit students from the Sub-Saharan African region leading to inequitable international educational access. Per the findings, most of the participants got recruited through self-initiative and recommendations by friends, suggesting that American universities do little when it comes to recruiting from Sub-Saharan Africa. I recommend that American universities reassess and reconsider their recruitment strategies to include more Sub-Saharan African students to improve and diversify their internationality.

Another important recommendation is pre-entry preparation for Sub-Saharan African international graduate students as suggested by previous studies (Constantine et al., 2005; Okari, 2016). As documented in the findings of this study, international students from Sub-Saharan Africa transition into a minoritized status as Blacks in America, a discovery that is hard for them to cope with. As such, I recommend that prospective Sub-Saharan African international students research and become knowledgeable about the U.S. system, especially the racial politics and the minoritized status of Black people and People of Color. This will help upcoming international students to be pre-informed of their imminent status as students in America. Likewise, U.S. higher education institutions should provide detailed information on these issues to newly admitted African international students before and upon their arrival.

Additionally, findings of this study reveal that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students usually relied on their own initiatives or friends to adapt to their unfamiliar environment which suggests the minimal effort on the part of American universities being intentional on helping these students adapt easily. As a university's ability to enroll international

students is perceived as one of the many indicators of its reputation, U.S. higher education institutions should make an intentional effort to support and make the adaptation process for international students smoother.

Lastly, this study's findings indicate that Sub-Saharan African international graduate students encountered prejudice, discrimination, and racism which poses a major challenge to them. This challenge calls for a greater attention to critical multicultural education. For example, universities could enact prejudice reduction methods of teaching to help mainstream students and other international students develop positive attitudes towards African international students. Also, universities could put measures in place to promote and ensure racial equity and social justice on their campus to help reduce the different forms of discrimination on their campuses.

Suggestions for Further Research

Though this study has revealed some of the positive and negative experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students, it also suggests different paths for future research studies. An example is a study that further disaggregates the Sub-Saharan international graduate student sample population to investigate the experiences of female students and how their gender intersects with their African identity and other differences to create unique experiences for them.

Also, as this study's focus is on the students, future studies could explore the different strategies that American universities enact to recruit international students specifically from the Sub-Saharan African region. A study like this could also explore some of the measures put in place by universities in helping the students adapt to the culture of the U.S. education system and living in America in general.

Although there have been few studies on the experiences of Sub-Saharan African students, a lot of these studies lack the use of a more critical lens in understanding their experiences. That is, I urge international and multicultural education scholars to critically explore the nuanced experiences of African international students using a more critical framework. Also, this study calls for more research on the community cultural wealth of Sub- Saharan African international students to gain a deeper understanding of the ways they pull from these forms of capital to persist in their American education and to help uncover other types of capital.

Chapter Summary

In chapter 1, I gave a general overview of this study including my personal connection, background, purpose, research questions, significance of the study. In chapter 2, I discussed the literature that is relevant to this study, which included globalization and the internationalization of higher education, experiences of Sub-Saharan African international students, critical multicultural education, and narrative enquiry. Chapter 3 delineated the philosophical assumptions, research design, and methodology suitable for exploring experiences of the sample population. Chapter 4 unveiled the major findings and sub-categories of this study. In this chapter, I discussed the findings of this study in relation to international higher education, community cultural wealth, and critical multicultural education I also made recommendations based on the findings and suggested directions for future studies.

Dissertation Summary

My curiosity to explore the nuanced experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and their community cultural wealth in U.S. higher education institutions led me to begin this study. Returning to my personal experiences in chapter one of this dissertation, I wanted to understand other international students' experiences and how they differ or connect to

my own experiences as a former international student from the same Sub-Saharan African region. With that, I also hoped to unearth the challenges of a population that is a minority within a minority group who have received minimal attention in the literature despite their enormous contributions to the higher education landscape. To accomplish these goals, I employed critical frameworks that not only focused on the deeper exploration and discussion of their experiences, but also helped to discover their community cultural wealth that enabled them to persist during challenges.

Using narrative research, I feel a sense of accomplishment, exploring and finding that Sub-Saharan African international students possess significant community cultural wealth that they draw from to persevere and persist in U.S. higher education institutions. Most of their capital highlighted the inextricable role of the familial, social, resilient, and persistence capital they pulled from to resist the different inequities they confronted. That is, this study has laid the groundwork for further studies on Sub-Saharan international students' community cultural wealth. Additionally, as I engaged with the international students through the course of this study, I found that they experienced a lot more challenges and barriers than positive experiences, which could impact their academic journey in the U.S. However, I found that despite the challenges, they were able to draw from their community cultural wealth to persist.

Therefore, this dissertation research study presents a more critical understanding of the experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students and the ways they utilized their community cultural wealth to resist and persist. These experiences serve as lessons for prospective international students from Africa, researchers, educators, and universities. Finally, despite the challenges faced by Sub-Saharan African international graduate students, failure is not an option.

Appendix A: Individual Interview Protocol

1. Tell me a little about yourself and why you decided to participate in this study?
2. Tell me about your recruitment process to your current school.

Academic and Social Experience

3. What was your initial experience in school and class?
4. Tell me about your classroom experience with professors and classmates.
5. What challenges do you face as an international student from Africa?
6. How has your experience changed/continued now?
7. How would you describe your future experience in your current school?
8. Tell me about your experience outside academia.
9. What challenges have you faced?

Black Identity Negotiation

10. How did you prepare yourself to adjust to the culture of U.S. higher education?
11. Tell me about how you negotiate your Black African identity within the Black-American context.
12. How do you racially identify? Why?

Cultural Capital (Community Cultural Wealth Model)

13. Tell me about the factors that have contributed to your persistence in your graduate school.
14. How has your family supported you in your graduate education?
15. What aspirations inspired you to pursue and persist in graduate school?
16. How have other people and communities outside your family supported you?
17. How do you navigate through the American education system?
18. How has your cultural-linguistic helped you in your graduate experience?
19. How do you resist the challenges you face?

Appendix B: Online Survey

Participants Demography and Eligibility Survey

Thank you so much for being so interested in participating in this dissertation study on Sub-Saharan African International Graduate Students' Experiences and cultural capital in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education. This research is supervised by Dr. Norma A. Marrun, UNLV faculty member and Principal Investigator.

To ensure that you meet the requirements for participating in the study, please answer the following questions. The first question asks for an email address; the email address you enter below will only be used to communicate with you individually/directly about this study moving forward. To protect your privacy, I recommend you enter a personal email address (i.e., not one that is school or job-related). As soon as I receive your completed survey, I will follow up with you via email to discuss your study participation further.

Note: In the event that you do not meet the study participation requirements, the data you enter on this form will be discarded.

Sincerely,

Alfred Acquah, UNLV Ph.D. Candidate and Student Investigator
acquaa1@unlv.nevada.edu

Norma A. Marrun, Ph.D., UNLV Faculty and Principal Investigator
norma.marrun@unlv.edu

*Required

1. 0. Email address *
   Please provide a valid personal email address

2. 1. Name/Pseudonym *
   You may provide your name or a nickname.

3. 2. What is your gender?: *

4. 3. Age: *

   Mark only one oval.

   - ◯ 18-25
   - ◯ 26-30
   - ◯ 31-35
   - ◯ 36-40
   - ◯ 41-45
   - ◯ 46-50
   - ◯ 51-55

5. 4. What is your country of Origin? *

6. 5. What degree are you currently pursuing? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Master's
- ◯ Doctoral

7. 8. What is your program of study? *

_____

8. 6. How long have you lived in the U.S.? *

_____

9. 7. What is the name of your current school? *

_____

10. 9. What is your current visa status? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ F-1
- ◯ J-1

11. 10. Would you be willing to participate in a 45-60 minute, one-on-one interview about your experiences and persistence in U.S. higher education? *

Mark only one oval.

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

12. Thank you for your time and interest in this study. For any questions or comments, please use the space below and I will follow up with you via email shortly. Click on the "Submit" button below to submit your responses.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix C: IRB Review Approval

UNLV Social/Behavioral IRB - Exempt Review
Exempt Notice

DATE:	July 27, 2021
TO:	Norma Marrun, Ph.D
FROM:	Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
PROTOCOL TITLE:	[1767415-2] SUB-SAHARAN AFRICAN INTERNATIONAL GRADUATE STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN U.S. INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: A CRITICAL NARRATIVE INQUIRY
ACTION:	DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS
EXEMPT DATE:	July 27, 2021
REVIEW CATEGORY:	Exemption category #2(ii)

Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this protocol. This memorandum is notification that the protocol referenced above has been reviewed as indicated in Federal regulatory statutes 45CFR46.101(b) and deemed exempt.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence with our records.

PLEASE NOTE:
Upon final determination of exempt status, the research team is responsible for conducting the research as stated in the exempt application reviewed by the ORI - HS and/or the IRB which shall include using the most recently submitted Informed Consent/Assent Forms (Information Sheet) and recruitment materials.

If your project involves paying research participants, it is recommended to contact Carisa Shaffer, ORI Program Coordinator at (702) 895-2794 to ensure compliance with the Policy for Incentives for Human Research Subjects.

Any changes to the application may cause this protocol to require a different level of IRB review. Should any changes need to be made, please submit a **Modification Form**. When the above-referenced protocol has been completed, please submit a **Continuing Review/Progress Completion report** to notify ORI - HS of its closure.

If you have questions, please contact the Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects at IRB@unlv.edu or call 702-895-2794. Please include your protocol title and IRBNet ID in all correspondence.

Office of Research Integrity - Human Subjects
4505 Maryland Parkway . Box 451047 . Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1047

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

Department of Teaching and Learning

TITLE OF STUDY: Sub-Saharan African International Graduate Students' Experiences in U.S. Institutions of Higher Education: A Critical Narrative Inquiry

INVESTIGATOR(S): Alfred Acquah (Students Researcher), and Dr. Norma A. Marrun (PI)

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Alfred Acquah at 667-216-4180, or Dr. Norma A. Marrun via email at norma.marrun@unlv.edu .

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 888-581-2794 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students in U.S. institutions of higher education. The exploration will include their personal lived experiences (academic and social) and the community cultural wealth (CCW) they possess and utilize to persist in U.S. institutions of higher education amidst challenges.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit these criteria: (1) current international student from Sub-Saharan Africa; (2) Enrolled in a graduate program in an accredited U.S. institution of higher education; (3) lived in the U.S. on F-1 or J-1 visa for one or more years; (4) over 18 years of age.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- Participate in one or two 45-60 minutes virtual online interview session by answering semi-structured interview question. The second interview will be an optional 45–60-minute interview.
- Choose a private location for your virtual online interview.
- Permit the student researcher to audio-record the interview(s). The audio recordings will be transcribed and only be used for the study's analysis. The audio recordings will be uploaded and stored on the UNLV issued Google Drive account through the student researcher's UNLV issued computer that requires password and only connects to the internet using private Wi-Fi. Audio will be uploaded and stored within 24 hours of collection. The audio recordings will be immediately deleted from the Zoom or Skype account after it has been properly stored in the UNLV issued computer recommended by the College of Education IT specialist, which is

secure and encrypted. The audio files will be accessible only by the student researcher who has password to the UNLV issued computer.

- Participate in an optional member-checking session. This will involve reviewing and editing your transcribed interview responses and themes developed by the researcher to ensure they reflect your original interview responses.

Benefits of Participation

There may be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. You may gain self-awareness of your hidden cultural capitals and how you can utilize them to achieve upward academic and social mobility. However, we hope to learn about your experiences in U.S. institutions of higher education and how you utilize your cultural capitals to persist so that future improvement on recruitment, retention and graduation of Sub-Saharan African international graduate students may be considered by higher education institutions and international students services.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks. You may feel uncomfortable narrating your academic and social experiences. The discomfort you may experience is anticipated to be temporal without any long-term harm. You can skip interview questions if they are uncomfortable.

Cost /Compensation

There will not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take 45 minutes to two hours of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be micro-shredded and destroyed.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

_____ _____

Signature of Participant Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Audio

I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

Signature of Participant Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Flyer

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sense of belonging in Chinese international students. *The Journal of College and University Student Housing*, *43*(1), 74–89.

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Zhou, J. (2015). International students' motivation to pursue and complete a Ph.D. in the U.S. Higher Education, 69(5), 719–733. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-014-9802-5

Curriculum Vitae

ALFRED ACQUAH
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EDUCATION

University of Nevada, Las Vegas 2018–2022
Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction
Cultural Studies, International Education, and Multicultural Education

The University of Texas at Austin 2021–2022
Post-Graduate Program, Data Science and Business Analytics

The University of Arizona 2016–2018
Master of Arts in Art Education
Community and Museum Emphasis
Thesis Title: *Creative expressions of hope and aspiration among Refugees in a community art program.*

University of Education, Winneba 2010–2014
Bachelor of Arts (Art Education)

PROFESSIONAL CERTIFICATES

- Google Data Analytics Professional Certificate, Google 2022
- Human Research – Social/Behavioral IRB, CITI Program 2021

EXPERIENCE

University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV 2018–Present
Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant

- Plan and lead an end-to-end research study; recruit and interview participants; transcribe and analyze data for trends and insights (Dissertation).
- Formulate specific, answerable, and practical research questions and interview protocols.
- Involved in collecting, reviewing, and analyzing literature for article publication.
- Assist professors and other administrative staff with research and other tasks.
- Teach and evaluate undergraduate courses as the instructor of record.

The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 2017–2018
Graduate Research and Teaching Assistant

- Planned and executed an end-to-end research study (case study) to explore the hope and aspirations of refugees. This included administering surveys to research subjects, observing participants, and conducting one-on-one interviews.
- Taught undergraduate courses in the Arts and supervised students work.

MTN Ghana Limited (Telecommunications), Accra, Ghana 2014–2016
Customer Care Consultant and Analyst

- Supervised the collection and collation of data on mobile money transactions and analyzed to create monthly reports.
- Achieved positive customer satisfaction through assisting customers with mobile internet configuration.
- Achieved over 20% increment in sales by promoting and selling products and services to customers.
- Offered general consultation service to meet customers' pressing needs.

ACADEMIC PROJECTS

- **Intercultural Effectiveness**
  The project involved using the ADDIE model to design a training program on intercultural competence for user researchers at Facebook.
  Skills: Need assessment, Training Binder, Training modules, Active training methods, and Training evaluation.

- **Star Hotel Project**
  Analyze the data of Star Hotels to find which factors have a high influence on booking cancellations, build a predictive model that can predict which booking is going to be canceled in advance, and help in formulating profitable policies for cancellations and refunds.
  Skills: EDA, Data Pre-processing, Logistic regression, Multicollinearity, Decision trees, Pruning.

- **ReCell Project**
  Analyze the used devices dataset, build a model which will help develop a dynamic pricing strategy for used and refurbished devices, and identify factors that significantly influence the price.
  Skills: EDA, Linear Regression, Linear Regression assumptions, Business insights, and recommendations.

- **E-News Express Project**
  The project involved Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) to find patterns in the data, statistical analysis (e.g., different hypothesis tests) to make inferences and recommendations based on the analysis.
  Skills: Hypothesis Testing, A/B Testing, Data Visualization, Statistical Inference, Python.

COMMUNITY SERVICES

President, National Art Education Association Student Chapter**,** School of Art, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 2017–2018

- Oversaw the work of other officers and ensured the effectiveness of the team.
- Scheduled and led monthly meetings.
- Organized fund raising to support the association.

Global Ambassador, University of Arizona, Global Initiatives, Tucson, AZ 2017–2018

- Gave study abroad presentations to students at various lecture halls on campus.
- Led and supervised students assigned to my group during programs.
- Planned outdoor and indoor events for new international students.

Intern Owl and Panther, HOPI Foundation, Tucson, AZ 2016–2018

This is a refugee organization in Arizona that works with refugee families who resettle in the Tucson area. Through expressive arts workshops and other outdoor activities, the organization offers a nurturing environment for refugee families to feel safe and to explore ways to express their ideas.

- Facilitated art workshops for refugees.
- Assisted and guided refugee children through write starts and other activities.
- Attended council meetings to plan programs for the foundation.

RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS

Acquah, A. (2021). Higher education finance between Ghana and the U.S. *Current Issues in Comparative Education, 23*(1), 90-108.

Stohlmann, M. & **Acquah, A.** (2020). New directions for technology integration in K–12 mathematics. *International Journal for Technology in Mathematics Education, 27*(2), 99-112.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Acquah, A. (2019, November 7). Valuing Cultural Wealth: Refugees and Immigrants in the U.S. classroom. *Decolonizing minds: Forging a new future through multicultural education.* NAME Conference, Tucson, Arizona.

Acquah, A. (2020). Economizing Education: Globalization of Education and its influence on American Schools. *Living multicultural education: Peace and justice thru the ballot box and activism*. NAME Conference, Virtual.

AWARD & HONORS

Outstanding Graduate Student -Alliance of Professionals of African Heritage. 2020
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Winner, Around the world in 7.5 minutes presentation. 2016
Global Initiatives and International Student Services (ISS).
University of Arizona