Strategies Utilized by African Refugee and Immigrant Students
In Order to Persist in Post-Secondary Career and Technical Education Programs

A Dissertation
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Rosemarie J. Park

May 2013

Acknowledgements

I would like to say a heart-felt thanks to the many people who helped me make it through all of the coursework, exams, papers, and research (and doubts).

To my family, almost all of whom are or have been educators, who instilled in me a love of learning. And, I guess, thanks also for the Midwestern-Scandinavian-Protestant work ethic which wouldn't allow me to give up, no matter how many times I considered it!

To my husband, Pat, who kept encouraging me to continue and to not give up. However, this could have been so (a) I wouldn't bug him during football season and/or (b) he could retire early!

To my ESL students at Volunteers of America Adult High School who were so proud of me that they wanted me to be their family physician when I completed my "doctor degree".

To Morgon Mae who subbed for me at VOA while I was completing my coursework.

To my Anoka Tech students who were more than willing to have classes cancelled (even going so far as suggesting that I cancel classes) so I could finish my written prelims.

To my Anoka Tech co-workers who (a) encouraged me to keep going, (b) helped me to count down the days until I was dissertated, defended, and graduated, and (c) let me hang out in their offices when the butterflies attacked!

To the faculty, staff, classmates, and friends at the University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development who helped make this a wonderful adventure.

To Dr. Rosemarie Park for being my faculty advisor throughout my Master's and Doctorate programs. You helped me better understand *why* educating adults is so very important. You also taught me *how* to be a better educator of adults so they are able to maintain their dignity in a very humbling situation.

Dedication

To my students:

Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not; the world is full of educated failures.

Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

Calvin Coolidge

30th President of the United States

ABSTRACT

STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY AFRICAN REFUGEE AND IMMIGRANT STUDENTS IN ORDER TO PERSIST IN POST-SECONDARY CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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This research study was a constructivist case study designed to elicit the strategies utilized by African refugees and immigrant students in order to persist in their post-secondary career and technical education programs. The eleven students interviewed were currently enrolled in or recently graduated from a technical college in a suburb of the Twin Cities.

The interview questions focused on the strategies these students have employed in order to persist academically: Which programs and/or services were utilized? What support networks were found to be beneficial? What kept these students motivated to continue in their studies? The findings which emerged from the analysis of the interviews indicate that the students felt challenged by the academic nature of the English language utilized in the classroom and course material as well as the time required to comprehend the course material. The students had little hesitation when asking for assistance from their instructors or lab assistants; however they tended not to use most of the academic and social programs and services offered on campus or in the community.

Each student mentioned having a busy life due to juggling multiple life-roles, but few knew how to effectively manage their time. Finally the students reported receiving encouragement from many sources which kept them motivated to persist. These findings had two main implications: critical thinking skills were not being developed and there may be a reliance on impractical strategies.

Several recommendations include (a) encourage students to be more proactive in initiating conversation with their U.S.-born classmates, (b) utilize lab assistants to help with the development of critical thinking skills, (c) hire non-U.S.-born peer-tutors, (d) offer summer bridge courses to teach background scientific concepts and technical vocabulary, and (e) develop an information scavenger hunt to introduce on-campus resources. Recommendations for future research include expanding this study to include other demographics to gain a better understanding of the persistence strategies utilized in post-secondary career and technical education.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAS   Associates of Applied Science

ABE   Adult Basic Education

CNA   Certified Nursing Assistant

ELL   English Language Learners

ESL   English as a Second Language

GED   General Education Development

LPN   Licensed Practical Nursing

RN   Registered Nurse

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In Chapter One I present the foundation for this dissertation. I begin this chapter with the background to the research problem. I then provide the purpose of this study, the statement of the problem, and the research questions. The relationship between previous research and this current study is introduced in this chapter and will be more thoroughly examined in Chapter Two. A significant portion of Chapter One is a discussion of three topics pertinent to the understanding of this research: adult education, career and technical education, and immigration. These key topics, as well as other terminology critical to the mutual understanding of this study and the ensuing discussion, are then briefly defined in the definitions section. Chapter One concludes with the qualifications of the researcher and a brief discussion of the design and context of the research study.

Background to the Problem

Currently there is anecdotal evidence but no data-driven evidence on successful English language learners who, although struggle academically, persist in and graduate from a technical and career preparation program. In my first semester teaching at Technical College, I was approached by the Dean to develop a course for English language learners, incorporating reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension. It was assumed that the technical programs at the institution had students who were struggling due to inadequate English skills. My proposal never made it to the Academic Affairs and Standards Council for preliminary discussion, although many program faculty still insist this type of course is needed. There has been a reluctance to investigate what may be assumed to be a poor performance record by the institution to offer additional

developmental courses to assist these students to improve their academic performance. The assumption is that many of the non-native English speaking students are not graduating, or if they do graduate, are not being well-placed in occupations for which they have studied. There is no hard evidence to support this assumption. We can determine the potential barriers our students face based on research conducted with non-traditional populations (e.g., single parents, older or returning students, displaced workers, immigrants) at community colleges and 4-year institutions. However, to date, there has not been any systematic data gathered on the immigrant or refugee population in a technical college. We do not know, even *anecdotally*, which strategies may be utilized by these students who are persisting in their studies in career and technical education.

Immigrant and refugee students from countries that are considered war-torn or politically unstable have a higher likelihood to face other, interrelated, and less explicit challenges in addition to the language and cultural barriers. These are the increased psychological, social, and educational challenges which stem from the trauma of the refugee experience (e.g., Gebre, 2008; Grove & Zwi, 2006). A substantial amount of research has been conducted on the public health and mental illness aspects of the refugee experience (e.g., Almedom & Summerfield, 2004; Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman, 2002), and there is a growing body of knowledge on working with refugee youth in an educational setting (e.g., Rana, Qin, Bates, Luster, & Saltarelli, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008). However, there is a paucity of research on how the refugee experience affects an adult learner in a university setting, much less at a technical college. Although, the affects of psychological trauma stemming

from the refugee experience on academic persistence is beyond the scope of this study, it is a factor that must be considered as a likely obstacle to academic success when analyzing persistence strategies used by immigrant and refugee students from war-torn or unstable countries.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to discover which type of strategies for academic success are utilized by students who are immigrants or refugees from Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Somalia in order to persist in their career and technical education program. Strategies can include (a) programs and services offered by the institution such as English language programs, counseling, academic advising, or tutors, (b) social capital such as familial, peer, or culture-based social networks, and (c) intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. The discovery of the strategies most utilized by this group of students, as well as an understanding of the rationale for the strategies selected, will better assist technical colleges serving a similar population to determine which support programs and services can be targeted to better assist this particular group of adult students to persist in post-secondary education. This knowledge has three potential benefits. First, with a decrease of available funds and a hesitancy to continue to raise tuition, programs (both academic and counseling) need to be able to prove a rationale for their continued existence. Second, there is some evidence that targeted interventions (i.e. support strategies initiated by colleges) appear to be effective. Taffer (2010), in her study of what adult refugee students need in an academic environment, recommended that programs such as mentoring and career counseling be designed specifically for refugees. Third, this study could become an adaptable template to inquire into the persistence strategies

utilized by other nontraditional student populations enrolled in post-secondary career and technical education programs.

Statement of the Problem

Refugee and immigrant students face multiple barriers in the pursuit of post-secondary education. In light of the increasing drop-out rates, we do not know which strategies are being utilized by refugee and immigrant students who persist academically. As a result, there is a gap in the current research and writing which addresses the strategies utilized by refugee and immigrant students in order to persist in post-secondary education in general, and in particular, career and technical education programs.

Research Question

The abovementioned gap in the literature is highly contextual in nature and exquisitely complex. This gap can only be lessened by the teasing out of individual strategies in order to construct an understanding of the whole case. Therefore, the over-arching question that guides this study is what strategies do African refugee and immigrant students utilize in order to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs?

By examining these strategies, more light can be shed on both the academic strategies the students have utilized in order to persist in their educational program and on the programs or services offered by Technical College which the students have found useful. In addition, whether the students have taken advantage of the social capital found within their own communities such as community-based programs, services, and other social networks needs to be determined. Finally, some insight must be gained on the motivators which keep the students in school.

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Relationship of Previous Research to the Current Study

At this time, there does not appear to be any research which comprehensively examines all aspects of my question: the strategies that have been utilized by immigrants and refugees from unstable or war torn countries as they persist in their career and technical education programs. There is, however, a substantial amount of literature which focuses on the various, individual aspects of this research question: the *success strategies* (or *barriers to success*) and *support networks* utilized by *adult immigrants* (or *refugees*) from unstable or war torn countries who are *persisting* in a *post-secondary* career and technical training program. Therefore, I believe that my particular combination of factors is unique and adds to the growing body of knowledge of academic persistence and retention.

Discussion of Contextual Topics

In this section I will discuss the following three topics: education of adults, career and technical education, and immigration[1]. These concepts have too many facets and the richness would be lost were I to offer only a concise definition. Ostrom, Martin, and Zacharakis (2008) wrote that "definitions help provide order and establish paradigms that make common cause possible" (p. 315). However, they also warned that a definition can become too restrictive if it ignores the "fundamental aspects of the vast and shifting networks of relations making up the larger world in which the field organizes itself and finds identity" (p. 315). Therefore, my intent for this section is to provide a contextual background for this study through a discussion of the aforementioned key topics: education of adults, career and technical education, and immigration.

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[1] For definitions of terms, please see page 21.

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Education of Adults

Education of adults is distinct from the education of children. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) stated that "learning in adulthood can be distinguished from childhood learning by the way in which learner, context, and some aspects of the learning process blend in adulthood" (p. 399). Adults have richer life experiences and additional social roles than children, which translates into a motivator for further education, as well as both a resource and an obstacle to learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). The practice of educating adults is commonly referred to as adult education.

Adult education is an umbrella field encompassing disciplines as diverse as community education, post-secondary education, human resource development, military training, work-force education, and vocational education. Adult education also includes a variety of philosophical traditions such as behavioralism, humanism, constructivism, and social learning (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Zepke, 2005). Thus, adult education cannot be neatly defined in one or two sentences, or even in twenty-five words or less. An examination of several concepts that comprise adult education is required. I will first briefly discuss the terms adult and adult learner. I will next examine the assumptions of andragogy and the definition of social capital. I will conclude with a discussion of the various definitions of adult education in the United States.

Adult. An adult is generally defined as an individual over 18 years of age and has taken on the responsibilities and duties commonly associated with adulthood (Bee & Bjorklund, 2004). These duties and responsibilities include social roles such as employee, community member, parent, or spouse. Because age distinguishes an adult from a child, there is also a set of behavioral expectations that are ascribed to an adult

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(Merriam & Brockett, 1997). Finally, it is the aggregate of life experiences which sets adults apart from children and differentiate adult peer-groups from one another. Experience is what fundamentally makes the adult who he or she is (Brookfield, 1986; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; "What is Adult Education?", 1955).

Adult learner. An adult learner is an individual, over the age of 18, who participates in a regular or special, formal or informal, planned or unplanned course of study in order to develop new or improve existing skills, knowledge, or qualifications. Beliefs, world assumptions, or aspects of the self may also be elaborated or revised through educational activities. Life experience is often the result of a learning situation (Brookfield, 1986; Cranton, 2006; Merriam & Brockett, 1997).

Andragogy. Merriam and Caffarella (1999) used Malcolm Knowles' terminology, andragogy and pedagogy, to distinguish between adult learning and childhood education. Andragogy, is "the art and science of helping adults learn" while pedagogy is "the art and science of helping children learn" (p. 272).

Knowles' andragogy is based on five assumptions of the adult learner. First, an adult learner is self-directed. Self-directedness has been compared to individual autonomy, in which the individual becomes increasingly capable of making his or her own decisions about his or her own education while becoming less dependent on the teacher. This autonomy can include the self-identification of educational needs and goals as well as the finding of his or her own resources for learning. The second assumption is that an adult learner has rich life experiences from which to draw in order to make meaningful connections to the lesson. Experience, however, can also be a barrier to an individual's participation or success in educational activities. The third assumption is

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that readiness for an educational activity is based on the adult learner's current social, work, or personal roles. The fourth assumption, closely related to the third assumption, is that adult learners experience an immediacy of application of the educational outcomes. Therefore the outcomes should be competency-based or performance-centered. The final assumption is that adult learners are more motivated by internal rather than external factors (Brookfield, 1986; Cranton, 2006; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Rachal, 2002).

Social capital. Social capital is a conceptual tool combining two opposing contexts for action: (a) action as existing within and governed by the social situation, which includes norms, values, and obligations; and (b) action as the maximization of utility within the actor's own self-interests. Social capital consists of a social structure, and for members of that particular social structure, certain actions are made possible. The social structures that comprise social capital are complex networks of relationships in which obligations, expectations, norms, values, and trust are embedded. Finally, social capital is productive and highly contextual (Coleman, 1988).

In an educational context, social capital is the social networks or the cues the K-12 school administrators expect the parents and the students to have. This is, at the most general, the knowledge that U.S.-born and raised, middle-class, White, educated adults take for granted: how to determine which are the best schools and then how to enroll our children in these schools, the significance of a parent-teacher conference, how to act (including the questions to ask) in a parent-teacher conference, what a parent-teacher organization is, and how to get "homework help" for our struggling children, just to name a few examples. There is the belief that the greater the access an immigrant youth has to social capital, the greater chance for success he or she will have in school. Finally, social

capital is holistic; the school cannot be separated from the community, and that community includes the family (Perez, 2009; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Zhou & Kim, 2006).

Social capital in a higher-education context is similar to that of a K-12 context. It can be the simple task of knowing whether the internet booksellers offer a better price for textbooks than the campus bookstore. Social capital can also include understanding how to ask about the instructors so the student can register for the instructor who may have a teaching method better suited to his or her own learning style (or is an easier grader). The importance of social capital was explored by Garcia (2010) and Araujo (2011). They described initiatives implemented to assist Hispanic students more successfully navigate the challenges of registering for college courses and attaining financial aid, and providing individualized support when needed. Garcia's development of intrusive advising and Araujo's College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) are two examples of social capital in post-secondary education.

Defining adult education in the United States. Adult education in the United States began during the colonial period, when the "colonists were learning through participation in town meetings, colonial legislatures, and other government activities, to use the tools of liberty and self-government" (Knowles, 1955, p. 66). However, it was not until the early 1950s when scholars in the American Association for Adult Education began a concerted effort to define what adult education is. Knowles suggested that this effort was due to several factors: (a) the increasing rate of change in skills, technology, and ideas that permeated every aspect of daily life; (b) increasing longevity of the

population; (c) more leisure time due to shorter workweeks; and (d) availability of telecommunications and printed matter for the regular person.

In 1954, several of the leading scholars in the field of adult education were requested to write a working definition of adult education. Their responses were published as the article, "What is Adult Education? Nine 'Working' Definitions", in the Spring, 1955 issue of *Adult Education*. Their views suggested that adult education:

- is voluntary

- is not accidental

- is a purposeful and organized supplement to a main responsibility in daily life

- should emphasize problem-solving to help develop the individual's potentialities

- enriches and makes the life of the learner more meaningful

- constantly expands the learner's experience

- offers means of coping with change.

Merriam and Brockett (1997) saw adult education as a response to the changes that have permeated modern life at an organizational and societal level: the global economy, the growing ethnic diversity, the shift from an industrial to a service and information-based economy, and the technological advances. Adult education has become a method for individuals to learn to cope with and/or adapt to these changes. Merriam and Brockett included in their overarching concept of adult education any activity designed for adults that generate learning which can be aligned with specific content (e.g., aerobics, literacy, or community activism). Thus, their definition is purposefully vague, "activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about

learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults" (p. 8).

Other definitions of adult education include the National Center for Education Statistics' 1980 definition: "courses and other educational activities, organized by a teacher or sponsoring activity, and taken by persons beyond compulsory school age" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 5). Bryson defined adult education as "an intervention into the ordinary business of life – an intervention whose immediate goal is change, in knowledge or in competence" (as cited in Merriam & Brockett, 1997, p. 7). Mezirow believed that the main goal of adult education and adult educators is to foster transformative learning, in which the student utilizes education to alter his or her view of the world (Mezirow, 1978, 1990).

Zepke (2005) wrote about the complexity in defining adult education. One source he cited listed six philosophical traditions within adult education, while Zepke himself identified adult education as having four overarching visions. These visions include individual personal development within a non-critical context and using social learning to facilitate change towards a more just society (p. 170).

The editor of "What is Education?" (1955) believed that it was not necessarily a limitation to have very little repetition in the definitions of adult education that were received. "Diversities in perspective, in focus of interest and attention … are both inevitable and desirable among representatives of a field that has developed in response to independent and often unrelated initiatives in many areas of American life" (pp. 131-132). In the readings I have done, the lectures I have attended, and the discussions in which I have partaken for course work as diverse as Adult Literacy, Organization

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Development, Immigrant Youth Education, and even Refugee Mental Health, I have learned that adult education can take place in almost any situation, on almost any topic, and for almost any purpose. To limit adult education to one concise definition would open up the possibility that a fundamental aspect of adult education is excluded.

Career and Technical Education

In the Fall, 2001 issue of *New Directions for Community Colleges*, Bragg wrote in the "Editor's Notes" that, "vocational education has been an integral part of community college education since the early twentieth century" (2001a, p. 1). However, as Bragg pointed out, the role, purpose, and focus has changed over the past 100 years.

Hyslop-Margison (2000) wrote that in 1910, the American Federation of Labor joined the National Association of Manufacturers who, for a long time, had pushed for vocational schools as a method to "help American manufacturers compete in expanding international markets" (p. 24). This alliance led to President Wilson commissioning a study to determine the feasibility of granting federal aid to vocational education. One of the authors of that study, Charles Prosser, reported to Congress that "vocational training was the best available way to help non-academic students secure employment after completing high school" (p. 24).

Today, career and technical education is just one category of adult education. Career and technical education can also be called vocational education, vocational education and training, workforce education, or work-based learning (Anderson, Brown, & Rushbrook, 2004; Bragg 2001b, 2002; Bragg & Layton, 1995; Mupinga & Livesay, 2004). At its most general, career and technical education prepares students for skilled employment in the workplace (Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Mupinga & Livesay, 2004).

Career and technical education is generally located in two-year colleges, more commonly referred to as community colleges, community and technical colleges, or technical colleges. The mission of a two-year college is two-fold: to offer educational programs (a) that can transfer to further education (e.g., an Associate of Arts degree or an Associate of Applied Science degree) or (b) that are focused on job training, such as a technical certificate in computer repair (Bragg, 2002; Mupinga, Wagner, & Wilcosz, 2009).

Career areas that traditionally fall in the category of career and technical education can be classified as manufacturing, service, health and life sciences, and business and marketing. Specific programs of study include accounting, auto mechanics, child care, computer repair, construction technology, electronics, medical assistance, plumbing, and surgical technology (Bragg, 2002; Mupinga & Livesay, 2004; Mupinga et al., 2009).

Doolittle and Camp (1999) and Bragg (2002) determined that students who are enrolled in career and technical education programs fall into four worker groups. The first group is the emerging workers, or the students who are of traditional college age and are preparing for entry-level positions. The second group is transitional workers. This group includes displaced workers, workers who are changing careers, or individuals coming off unemployment. The third group is the entrepreneurial workers who are seeking to start or operate small businesses. The final group is the incumbent workers who enroll in the program to upgrade their current skill level.

One key difference of modern career and technical education as opposed to career and technical education of the early 1900s lays in what Bragg (2001b) and Dare (2001)

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term the new vocationalism. New vocationalism is seen in the highly diverse nature of approaches to education for work. The focus of education centers on the growing ubiquitousness of the internet as well as the increasing sophistication of computer technology, the ever-changing market demands and standards of a global economy, understanding the rapid product life-cycle, and a gestalt view of the work environment.

A second key difference is seen in the switch from behaviorism to constructivism. In the former, the student learns to form links between stimulus and response in a competency-based learning curriculum with pre-determined performance objectives. In the latter, the learning environment is one in which the students derive knowledge from experience and interaction in a project-based, meaningful curriculum. Constructivism tends to support some of the assumptions of andragogy, including an authentic or real-world learning context, relevant content and skills, knowledge and skills situated within the learner's prior knowledge, and instructors as facilitators and guides. This switch in philosophical perspective is due to the increasing need for higher-order cognitive skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and collaborative work skills (Doolittle & Camp, 1999).

Immigration

The United States was founded by immigrants. The reasons for immigrating included escape from war or tyranny, family reunification, or religious freedom. There was plenty of land available, but not enough voluntary immigration to work the land, so "pardoned" prisoners, indentured servants, and slaves were brought over from Europe and Africa to colonial America (Dugan, 2000). It was not until the American colonies

gained independence that there was any legislation created to give guidelines on who could and who could not enter the United States.

In this section, I will first provide an overview of key pieces of immigration legislation in order to present a concise historical background on United States immigration law. Then I will discuss the non-concept of war-torn and unstable countries.

Key pieces of immigration legislation. The following is from a 2007 collaborative interdisciplinary project undertaken by students at the University of Washington – Bothell, under the supervision of Dr. Sarah Starkweather. The objective of this project was to "provide a comprehensive source of information about American legislation pertaining to immigration and immigrants" (U.S. Immigration Online, 2007).

The 1790 Naturalization Act was the first piece of federal legislation to determine who can be allowed into the United States, who can become naturalized citizens, and who cannot. The 1864 Immigration Act, in an effort to encourage immigration, honored employment contracts made between US companies and immigrants prior to the individual's arrival. However, it was later repealed in 1885 with the Contract Labor Law. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act was the first piece of legislation that excluded a specific nationality. The prohibition of additional Asian nationals, as well as other "undesirables" (e.g., idiots, alcoholics, criminals, anarchists) was legalized with the 1917 Immigration Act. This act also required a literacy test for all immigrants over 16 and who were not fleeing religious persecution. The Chinese Exclusion Act was finally repealed with the 1943 Magnuson Act.

The 1921 Emergency Quota Law imposed temporary quotas based on country of birth, and the 1924 Immigration Act limited quotas to specific countries that were not in

the Western Hemisphere. The 1948 Displaced Persons Act granted permanent residency to individuals who were victims of Nazi persecution. The 1952 Immigration and Nationalization Act (also known as the McCarren-Walter Act) shifted the focus from nation of origin quotas to denying immigration to those who were immoral, diseased, Japanese, or Communists and accepting individuals who were willing to assimilate into the United States socio-political structures. This act also accepted the "good Asians" or the Chinese.

The 1965 Immigration and Nationalization Act (also known as the Hart-Cellar Act) abolished the quota system and replaced it with a system that focused on individual skills, family reunification, and a restriction on visas issued per year. This act was meant to increase immigration from Eastern Europe, but actually opened the doors to professionals from outside Europe. The 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act was the first law enacted to approve both large-scale relocation and financial assistance for resettlement for war refugees.

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (also known as the Simpson-Mazzoli Act) allowed unauthorized immigrants the opportunity to gain legal status if they met set requirements, which included minimal English language requirements. This act did not cover Cuban or Haitian immigrants. The 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act established a lottery system for visas to encourage diversity. To be eligible for the lottery, the individual must have a high school diploma (or equivalent) and work experience. The 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act solidified the government's role in both providing for assistance for authorized immigrants and the practices for removing unauthorized immigrants. After the

September 11, 2001 attacks, the intelligence and law enforcement agencies were unified

under the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act. This act was

designed to increase the border patrol and reinforce immigration security. Visa

applicants were mandated to be given interviews, individuals who had ties to terrorist

organizations could be detained or deported, and those who were caught transporting

unauthorized immigrants were punished by prison time. The 2005 Real ID Act defined

terrorist and established national standards for driver's licenses and identification cards.

What is notable about these acts is that they do not specifically address temporary

humanitarian immigration in terms of natural disasters (e.g., the 2004 Indian Ocean

tsunami, the 2010 Haitian earthquake, the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami). These

acts also do not address temporary immigration for individuals fleeing war-torn or

unstable countries (e.g. the Yugoslavian and Somali civil wars or ethnic cleansing in

Burma, Congo, or the Sudan). The individuals in these categories are usually involuntary

refugees, who had no time to prepare, either mentally or physically, for resettlement

elsewhere. Research on the psycho-social aspects of the uncertainties inherent to asylum

seeking process has suggested that there is a significant impact on an individual's, or an

entire family's mental health (Gross, 2004; Mann & Fazil, 2006; Sourander, 2003; Weine

et al., 2004).

War-torn and unstable countries. The United Nations High Commissioner for

Refugees (UNHCR) (http://www.unhcr.org) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)

(http://cia.gov) websites were unable to provide a definition for "war-torn or unstable

countries". A Google search of these terms yielded primarily newspaper and news-

magazine articles with the terms in the headlines, but no definitions. However, the

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)

(http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis) explained two categories of foreign nationals

who have been authorized to reside temporarily in the United States: temporary protected

status and deferred enforced departure. The asylum claims submitted to UNHCR and

demographic data for the state of Minnesota provide a data-driven discussion of war-torn

or unstable countries.

Temporary Protected Status. Groups of individuals may apply for temporary

residency in the United States in situations such as an environmental disaster (e.g., the

2010 earthquake in Haiti) or ongoing armed conflict (e.g., Syria). Individuals with

temporary protected status can be authorized to find employment and cannot be removed

from the United States. As of May 2013, the Secretary of Homeland Security has

designated El Salvador, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and

Syria as nations with temporary protected status ("Temporary Protected Status", 2013;

Wassem & Ester, 2011).

Deferred Enforced Departure. As part of his foreign relations role, the President

is authorized to grant a special immigration status, deferred enforced departure, due to

humanitarian concerns. These individuals cannot be subject to deportation from the

United States for a designated period of time. They may also register for authorization

for employment. Currently, Liberia is the only country with deferred enforced departure

status, upgraded in 2007 from temporary protected status (since 1991) by President Bush

with the cessation of armed conflict but the continuation of widespread and transnational

civil unrest. Liberia's deferred enforced departure was granted an 18-month extension by

President Obama on March 15, 2013, and will expire on September 14, 2014 ("Deferred Enforced Departure," 2011; Wassem & Ester, 2011).

Data as definition. The UNHCR provides annual reports regarding asylum claims to 44 member nations (including the European Union, the United States, Japan, and Australia). I cross-checked the ten countries of origin submitting the most claims for asylum from the UNHCR ("The Refugee Story in Data and Statistics") with the country description on the CIA's World FactBook website (https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/), which is updated weekly. The section entitled transnational issues provided a brief understanding of the country's current situation. I also visited the introduction section for a more historical overview. According to the CIA World FactBook, most of the top ten countries I checked are experiencing a prolonged period of political instability and/or ethnic violence.

Immigrant Patterns. For 2012, there were 479,300 claims for asylum to the UNHCR (Asylum Trends, 2012). 46% of these claims originated from Asia and 25% were from Africa. Table 1 lists the top ten countries submitting asylum claims (by the number of claims submitted) to the UNHCR for 2012. The asylum claims received by the United States in 2012 do not duplicate the general trends reported by the UNHCR. In 2012, the United States received approximately 83,400 applications, with approximately one-third originating from the People's Republic of China. Table 2 lists the top ten countries submitting asylum claims (by the number of claims submitted) to the United States for 2012. Despite the fact that this data did not provide a concrete statistical description of which nations could be designated as war torn or unstable, I gained a better general understanding of the state of asylum seekers on a global scale.

Table 1

Countries of Origin for Asylum Seekers Reported to the UNHCR in 2012

Countries	Claims
Afghanistan	36,600
Syria	24,800
Serbia	24,300
China	24,100
Pakistan	23,200
Russian Federation	21,900
Iraq	19,600
Iran	19,100
Somalia	17,800
Eritrea	11,900

Table 2

Countries of Origin for Asylum Seekers to the US in 2012

Countries	Claims
China	15,900
Mexico	11,100
El Salvador	4,600
Guatemala	4,200
Egypt	2,300
Honduras	2,100
India	2,000
Nepal	1,700
Haiti	1,600
Ecuador	1,400

Minnesota Patterns of Immigration. The demography website for Minnesota provides a table listing Persons Obtaining Legal Permanent Resident Status by Region and Selected Country of Birth, Minnesota, 1990-2010, and US, 2010 (Admin Minnesota, 2010). The immigrant status for 2011 or for 2012 has not yet been posted. Nine of the top ten countries of birth for both 2010 and the period of 2000 – 2010 are the same, as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

What this disparate data suggests is that when compared globally, with both a US focus, and a state-level focus, there is not a lot of evidence to numerically suggest which countries can be considered war-torn or unstable. This data, however, when combined with the information from the CIA and UNHCR, assisted me to determine, on a case-by-case basis, which student fits the description of having come from a war-torn or unstable countries.

Table 3

Immigrants Admitted to the United States with Minnesota as Intended Residence: 2010

Country of Origin	Number of Individuals
Somalia	1,188
Ethiopia	1,026
Kenya	792
India	725
Liberia	693
Mexico	652
China (PRC)	650
Burma	564
Viet Nam	482
Thailand	354

Table 4

Immigrants Admitted to the United States with Minnesota as Intended Residence:2000-2010

Country of Origin	Number of Individuals
Somalia	20,807
Ethiopia	10,597
Mexico	7,697
India	7,319
China (PRC)	6,381
Liberia	6,358
Viet Nam	6,011
Kenya	5,680
Thailand	5,283
The Philippines	4,380

Definition of Terms

In this section, I will briefly define several key terms to ensure mutual understanding within the context of this particular study. The terms to be defined include persistence, strategy, social capital, adult education, career and technical education, and common terms used in the discussion of immigration.

Persistence

For the purposes of this study, I define persistence as an attribute of a student who, despite challenges and obstacles, makes continuous progress for the duration of the academic program (Gebre, 2008; Geisler, 2007; Glazman, 2008). The student utilizes

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available resources to attain an educational goal. In the most simple of terms, the student does not give up.

Strategy

I broadly define strategy as any method a student utilizes to persist academically. A strategy can include programs and services offered by the educational institution, such as English language programs, targeted mental health counseling, academic advising, or tutors. Peer groups, study circles, family relationships, and other social or cultural networks can be considered strategies as well. Finally, individual attributes such as determination, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, and hard-work are also strategies (Boulanger, 2009; Gebre, 2008, Geisler, 2007, Rana, Qin, Bates, Luster, & Saltarelli, 2011; Reynoso, 2008).

Social Capital

Social capital is membership within a highly contextual network of relationships. Values and trust, as well as obligations and expectations, are embedded within these relationships and through this network of relationships certain highly socially desirable actions are made possible (Coleman, 1988).

Adult Education

For the purpose of this study and its specific focus on post-secondary career and technical education, I propose the following definition of adult education. Adult education is the voluntary and purposeful enrollment in a facilitated activity designed to enhance the adult individual's understanding of and competence in a particular subject area (Brookfield, 1986; Merriam and Brockett, 1997; "What is Adult Education?", 1955).

Career and Technical Education

Career and technical education is generally located in two-year colleges and prepares students for skilled employment in the workplace. Specific programs of study which fall into career and technical education include auto mechanics, child care, electronics, and medical assistance (Bragg, 2002; Doolittle & Camp, 1999; Mupinga & Livesay, 2004; Mupinga et al., 2009).

Immigration

Common terminology regarding the concept of immigration used in casual conversation, even when explaining legislation to lay folk, is often at odds with the legal definitions. For this reason, I will briefly define the most common terms used when discussing immigration.

The definitions for the terminology in this section are drawn from many sources. These sources include the websites for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (http://www.unhcr.org), the United States Department of State (http://www.state.gov/), the United States Citizen and Immigration Services (USCIS) (http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis), and Grantmakers Concerned with Immigrants and Refugees (http://www.gcir.org). Except where cited, the definitions provided are my summaries of the sources consulted.

Alien. An alien is any individual who is not a citizen of the United States. This category includes immigrants, refugees, illegal aliens, and undocumented workers.

Immigrant. An immigrant is any alien who has moved permanently to the United States. This status does not include individuals who are here in specific nonimmigrant categories (e.g., students, temporary workers, and employees of foreign

governments) and individuals who entered the United States without authorization (often called illegal immigrants).

Permanent resident alien. Permanent resident alien is a less common name for immigrants who have entered the country legally and reside in the United States permanently.

National. A national is an individual who pledges his or her loyalty to a specific nation, but is not a citizen. Currently, only residents of American Samoa are recognized as United States nationals. Individuals who are currently residing in the United States under temporary protected status or deferred enforced departure are considered foreign nationals.

Refugee. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) established the accepted definition for *refugee* in 1951. A refugee is someone who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html).

The United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has added to the UNHCR definition that the individual must be a member of a group that is of special humanitarian concern to the United States, not yet "firmly resettled in another country" and cannot be anyone who "ordered, incited, assisted, or otherwise participated in the persecution of any person on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion" ("Refugees," 2011).

Asylum seeker. UNHCR has defined an asylum seeker as "an individual who has sought international protection and whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined" (2011, p. 4). However, the Immigration and Nationality Act considers the definition for an asylum seeker to be essentially the same as the definition of a refugee, except that an asylum seeker has already reached the United States and a refugee is still abroad (Wasem & Ester, 2011).

Humanitarian concern. For both groups and individuals, humanitarian concern involves the well-founded fear of persecution should the person(s) remain in or return to the nation of origin. For these persons resettlement is the most feasible solution.

Qualifications of the Researcher

Due to my graduate coursework and my employment, I am well-positioned to conduct research into the success strategies utilized by adult immigrants in post-secondary career and technical programs. My coursework at the University of Minnesota has provided a solid foundation in theory, history, and practice in adult education as well as an introduction to the particular needs of the immigrant or refugee adult learner. My job history has offered experience in both work-place training and classroom instruction with a variety of non-traditional student populations.

Employment

I have held a variety of positions which, upon first glance, do not appear to have anything in common with each other. I was an enlisted supply clerk and maintenance administration officer in the United States Navy, and after resigning my commission, I worked as a hotel banquet manager. After 9/11, I worked at the University of Minnesota's Disability Services. After earning my Master's degree in Adult Education,

I taught writing at an adult high school. I currently teach developmental reading at a technical college. The uniting theme throughout each career is that I was an educator, either formally or informally. In addition, the adults with whom I worked were considered non-traditional in age (over 21), educational background (did not earn a high school diploma), instructional methodology (required the use of adaptive technology to access course material), or non-English speaking.

United States Navy. I enlisted in the U.S. Navy with the intent of utilizing my foreign language skills in the intelligence community. Six and one-half years later, I resigned as an Aviation Maintenance Administration Officer. In between, I was unable to get a security clearance because I traveled to "undesirable nations" (e.g. the former Soviet Union) during the 1980s so the Navy made me an aviation supply clerk. My duties included training my subordinates in aircraft supply, cross-training my peers to be both supply clerks and maintenance desk clerks, and tutoring my enlisted co-workers in their advancement exams and warfare qualifications. In addition, I rewrote the training manual for the maintenance department accounting system and, respectfully, taught the pilots how to (and how not to) requisition fuel in foreign airports.

I graduated first in my Aviation Maintenance Officer class because I realized it was not feasible to memorize every thing about every maintenance system of every aircraft. Instead, I learned how to utilize the manufacturers' publications to obtain the required information. At the squadron, I wrote a manual on how to manage the training requirements of the maintenance department's enlisted personnel. At the wing, I collaborated on developing an aircraft component requisition system and subsequently wrote the manual for its use and upkeep.

Hospitality. Upon resigning my commission, I entered the hospitality industry. I again did a lot of informal workplace training. For a social club's accounting department, I wrote a training manual to streamline the processes and clarify the procedures. My final job in hospitality was a banquet manager. My staff was all immigrants from Mexico, the Americas, and Africa. As a result, a lot of break-room discussion focused on topics relevant to the workplace, pay, culture, and customs.

Disability Services at the University of Minnesota. I was hired to work in document conversion at the University's Disability Services office. My responsibilities were to convert printed course material into alternative formats (e.g., electronic, Braille, audio) for students, staff, and faculty. As the program grew, I became responsible for training the student workers. I also learned how various types of adaptive technology assisted students to become academically successful. I became particularly interested in cognitive disabilities (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD], anxiety, learning disabilities) and how they affect classroom performance and academic success.

While employed at Disability Services, I realized I was skilled at breaking complex concepts into more manageable and understandable "chunks" in order to better explain the concept. In addition, I realized that in every position I have held, I was involved with training, either formally or informally. More importantly, training was a responsibility I enjoyed. I was accepted into the Master's of Education (Adult Education) program at the University of Minnesota. Although I still was responsible for document conversion, my focus shifted to understanding how anxiety and learning disabilities affect adult education.

Volunteers of America (VOA) Adult High School. Over the past six years, I taught an English language learner population at an adult high school. The students were primarily Somali civil war refugees and Ethiopian immigrants. As a result, I became increasing aware of the impact the psychological toll of the refugee experience has on the adult education classroom. Derived from years of deprivation and hardship rooted in fleeing a civil war, this psychological toll manifests itself in subtle ways in the student, primarily in how successfully the student is able to comprehend, apply, and retain the course material. I had considered drawing my research sample from the student population at VOA. However, the students are too transitory because of the open-enrollment policy inherent to many adult education programs.

Technical College. In the two years I have taught developmental reading at Technical College, many of the students who are persisting in their academic programs have completed my class. In addition, some of these students are taking full advantage of the support services and social programs offered by the school, while others do not. I wished to discover what adult students do, in terms of institutional and extra-curricular programs and services utilized, support networks relied upon, internal and external motivators, and other strategies employed, in order to persist in their studies.

For the parameters of this dissertation, my committee deemed the Technical College student population to be too broad. They encouraged me to select a more manageable target population. There are two rather distinct student populations to whom I teach developmental reading skills. The first is a broad population, consisting of non-traditional students. This population comprises students who are older, first-generation college students, single parents, returning veterans, displaced workers, recovering

addicts, non-US born students, or a combination of the aforementioned attributes. The second, distinct, population I teach is a sub-set of the non-US born population. There is a fairly substantial, stable, and growing, immigrant population from the war-torn or politically unstable African countries of Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Liberia. It is on this population that I focused my research.

Summary. The variety of work experiences I have had in work-place education and developmental literacy has led me to realize the truth of systems theory: that no single educational program, curriculum, or even teaching method can fit the needs of all the students due to their varied life experiences. Life experience and personal preference of learning styles affect the efficacy of the program, curriculum, or teaching method. Therefore, to be an effective educator, no matter the context, one needs to be adaptable and flexible. The educator also needs to look beyond the surface and discover what is truly affecting the student's learning process.

Design

This study was a qualitative case study within the constructivist paradigm. Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews of eleven African immigrant or refugee students currently enrolled at Technical College, I have constructed a consensus of strategies that have been successful for this particular sample of students to persist in their technical education programs.

Context

The purpose of this research was to gain insight into what a student, who resettled in the United States from an unstable nation of origin, does in order to persist in the academically challenging environment of a post-secondary career and technical education

program. I selected a technical college to situate the research because of the scarcity of research conducted in a technical college. I selected Technical College in particular because in recent years, there has been a decline in non-U.S. born students who have persisted in their educational programs through to graduation. In addition, until recently, a majority of the non-U.S. born students have been Liberian. In the past several years, there have been increasing numbers of Somali, Ethiopian, and Eritrean students attending Technical College. One factor these students have in common is that their respective nations of birth are considered war-torn or politically unstable countries. I want to learn what these students do to persist in their education despite the multiple barriers (e.g., family, culture, language) they face.

Summary

In Chapter One, I discussed the background to this study, as well as provided the research problem, purpose of the research, and the research questions. I also introduced briefly how previous research in persistence strategies is related to this current research study. Finally, I discussed relevant concepts and terminology, including adult education, career and technical education, and immigration. In Chapter Two, I will more deeply examine the previous research conducted in persistence and how it is related to my focus on African immigrant and refugee students in post-secondary career and technical education. I will also discuss the theories which provide the foundation for this study. I will conclude Chapter Two with a description of how my research fills a gap in the student persistence knowledge base.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

The current literature on student persistence and retention focuses on barriers experienced by the student. The findings of this study build qualitatively upon the existing knowledge base of student persistence. This is accomplished by narrowing the field of inquiry to a specific population, African immigrants and refugees who come from war-torn or unstable nations (i.e., Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Somalia), and are persisting in a post-secondary career and technical education program. In this chapter I discuss literature relevant to the current study, the theoretical underpinnings of this study, and demonstrate how my research fills a gap in the persistence literature.

Chapter Two is organized as follows. I first explain the rationale for my initial research focus on the investigation of the barriers faced by adult immigrants from unstable and war torn countries in adjusting to career and technical training. Then I discuss my shift in focus from barriers to strategies for success utilized by adult immigrants from unstable and war torn countries in adjusting to career and technical training. In the section entitled Search for Relevant Research, I briefly introduce literature covering the various aspects of my research question, the strategies utilized by African refugee and immigrant students to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs. The following section, Selected Relevant Articles provides a greater discussion on the research that has been conducted on the topics relevant to the current study: barriers to educational and occupational achievement, barriers to cultural adjustment, barriers faced by English language learners in general, and psychological barriers faced by immigrants and refugees from war-torn or unstable countries. I also

discuss the institution itself as both a barrier and success strategy. The section entitled Theoretical Foundations explores the various theories which provide the structure for this research study. Theories on attrition, retention, and persistence are discussed as well as systems theory and resiliency theory. Finally, in the summary, I demonstrate how my research provides additional knowledge for a specific niche: the strategies utilized by African refugee and immigrant students to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs.

Barriers to Success

There are several reasons for my initial focus on barriers to academic success. First, a substantial amount of the current research focuses primarily on what the students could *not* do and the factors that were holding the students back. This was true whether the study examined the educational success of immigrant youth or adult students (see for example, Becerra, 2010; Lee, 2011; McWhirter, Torres, Salgado, & Valdez, 2007; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007). In addition, studies demonstrating or explaining the best practices for teaching immigrant students, again both youth and adult, focused on what the students could do, without necessarily exploring ways to circumvent the obstacles which may be holding the students back (see for example, Curry, 2004; Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Szelényi & Chang, 2002).

A second reason is that I have heard on numerous occasions from different sources that there has been a drastic reduction in numbers of foreign-born students enrolled at Technical College over the past several years. I have been invited several times to dialogue with key faculty and administration regarding the future role and responsibilities of general education (including the Minnesota State Colleges and

Universities (MnSCU) Developmental Education and Student Success Conference in February, 2012). Anecdotal evidence from these dialogues suggested that non-US born students begin their studies in general education but do not often progress into their technical programs in a timely manner, or not at all. However, there was no empirical evidence to explain why these students were not progressing, or persisting. As a result, I intended to explore the factors that are hindering these students' academic success.

Moving from Barriers to Success

I first became cognizant of a shift in focus to success strategies while I was reading Merriam's (2009) discussion on developing a theoretical framework. Merriam stated that one way is to reflect on the discipline into which you have been socialized, including the language, concepts, and theories. In retrospect, I have tended to focus on education with marginalized populations. For example, I worked primarily with students who have cognitive or visual disabilities at the Office of Disability Services at the local research university, with both English language learners and students of color at an adult high school diploma program, and with students enrolled in the developmental reading courses at Technical College. At each institution, methods to bypass the barriers in order to better assist the student to succeed were actively sought out.

Searching for a concept that could provide validation for my shift in focus, I remembered hearing about *deficit thinking* in relation to working with students with disabilities. This concept was informally defined to me as: because of X disability, it is impossible for the student to learn/do Y (i.e., let us not find a different approach to the situation because the student will not be able to learn/do it because he or she is missing something or something is not normal). Deficit thinking was also a theme in the

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literature on the non-success immigrant families experience with schools in the United States. Deficit thinking in this context referred to the fact that if a student is poor, a minority, or a non-white immigrant, the student will not be academically or economically successful; therefore it is not worth the effort to work with that student. An example of deficit thinking in this context can be found in López (2002), "even the most school-oriented students invariably learned that the education of low income, Latino, immigrant students was not important, as they were not expected to amount to much" (pp. 1191-1192).

Lee and Sheared (2002) discussed a form of deficit thinking associated with adult basic education called *cultural discontinuity*. It is especially common among immigrant students and other students who do not belong to the dominant culture. Cultural discontinuity is the gap that exists between the student's home culture and their school culture. This gap "often causes a student to feel marginalized, confused, and isolated… [and] has been found to affect the development of student self-concept and academic performance and has been used to explain low academic performance" (p. 30). Cultural discontinuity is in itself neutral. It is how the instructor views and manages this cultural gap that determines the level of potential injury. For example, if the instructor views the student's home culture as inferior, then the student may feel incompetent and the student's academic performance may be negatively affected.

Success not Barriers

As a result of this paradigm shift, this study focused on the strategies utilized by immigrant and refugee students from unstable or war torn countries in order to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs.

Search for Relevant Research

After a fairly extensive search through Google Scholar and the Academic Search Premier database utilizing keyword phrases such as 'immigrant or refugee' or 'educational attainment' I found very little research that examined multiple aspects of my research question, the strategies and utilized by African refugee and immigrant students to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs, within the same study. I did, however find a substantial amount of literature which focused on the various, individual aspects of my research question: the *success strategies* (or *barriers to success*) and *support networks* utilized by *adult immigrants* or *refugees* from unstable or war torn countries who are *persisting* in a *post-secondary* career and technical training program.

Previous Research

As previously mentioned, my original literature searches focused primarily on the barriers to academic success. The studies usually only examined single types of barriers experienced by students, for example either educational barriers (e.g., Lee, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007), or cultural barriers (e.g., Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007).

Four studies looked at resilience and factors for academic success. One of these studies examined African refugees (Rana et al., 2011) while a second looked at African immigrants (Gebre, 2008). The third study focused on Dominican English language learners (Reynoso, 2008) and the final study examined first-generation college students (Próspero, & Vohra-Gupta, 2007). Several factors these studies, and others, uncovered which influenced academic success include individual attributes such as internal and

external motivation (e.g., Gebre, 2008; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Santos, 2004), determination (e.g., Boulanger, 2009; Rana et al., 2011), and hard-work (e.g., Rana et al., 2011). Social supports such as peer groups (e.g., Boulanger, 2009; Reynoso, 2008), family (e.g., Geisler, 2007; Reynoso, 2008), and the community (e.g., Rana et al., 2011) were also found to aid academic success. Finally, the institutions themselves provided several success factors in the form of academic advising (e.g., Brilliant, 2000; Fiebig, Braid, Ross, Tom, & Prinzo, 2010; Garcia, 2010; Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010), faculty support (e.g., Boulanger, 2009; Rana et al., 2011; Reynoso, 2008), tutoring (e.g., Boulanger, 2009; Reynoso, 2008), and institution-led systemic academic integration (e.g., Araujo, 2011; Garcia, 2010; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Another set of studies focused on international students (e.g., Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007), others on immigrant students (e.g., Gebre, 2008; Stebleton, 2012), and thirdly, refugee students (e.g., Lee, 2011; Taffer, 2010). These three groups of students each have their own unique obstacles to overcome. First, refugees arrive in the United States unprepared, unemployed, processing the psycho-social effects of the flight from their nation of birth due to conflict or unrest, and with the understanding that they will not be able to return home without fear of persecution. Immigrants may have either fled their native country due to unrest as a refugee or applied for a visa, in which case, there was an opportunity to prepare for the resettlement. International students arrive with the support of their nation's political leaders and have the freedom to return home (Lee, 2011; Stebleton, 2012; Taffer 2011). Second, refugees and immigrants, upon arrival, are supported by family members or sponsors who assist them in adapting to their new home by helping find employment and acting as advocates

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and guides (Gebre, 2008). International students, on the other hand, arrive at their four-year institution with little support beyond a list of resources available, an orientation, and the institution's expectation that if assistance is needed, the student will take the initiative and seek it out (Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007). Third, refugee and immigrant students often experience the difficulty of transferring their previous educational experiences to the post-secondary educational institutions upon resettlement. As Gebre (2008) stated, individual institutions have their own criteria when evaluating foreign transcripts and credentials. Whereas international students arrive at the educational institution after going through the admissions process (Constantine et al., 2005).

These three groups of students have also tended to develop unique persistence strategies. Gebre (2008) and Lee (2011) reported resiliency as a persistence strategy for immigrants and refugees. Resiliency was developed through the challenges of having fled their country of birth due to political conflict. Constantine et al. (2005) reported that international students develop support networks with other international students on campus.

In addition, two studies (Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman, 2002; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007) highlighted the fact that psychological issues may be heightened in students who are refugees from a war torn or unstable country. The psychosocial effects of the refugee experience on academics are addressed in Gebre (2008), Lee (2011), Stebleton (2012), and Taffer (2011).

<center>**Selected Relevant Articles**</center>

This section examines articles I consider to be relevant to my research question, what strategies do African refugee and immigrant students utilize in order to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs? The articles are organized into three broad categories: barriers, the institution, and factors for academic success.

Barriers

In this category, I will discuss literature that examined obstacles faced by students in their pursuit of higher education. These studies focused on both youth and adults in a variety of contexts. The articles are categorized into broad themes: barriers to educational achievement, barriers to occupational achievement, cultural adjustment as a barrier, barriers unique to English language learners (ELL), and psychological barriers.

   Barriers to educational achievement. Four articles and a book explored the barriers to educational achievement by students transitioning to or are enrolled in post-secondary education.

The first study (Becerra, 2010) looked at how perceived barriers affected college enrollment and degree completion. The research sample was 1,508 self-identified Latino or Hispanic adults living throughout the United States who participated in a telephone survey conducted by the Pew Hispanic Research Center in 2003. Becerra conducted a multinomial logistic regression analysis of how the individual's socio-economic status, generational status, and linguistic and academic acculturation affect perceptions of barriers to education and degree completion. Key findings included that linguistic acculturation (preferred language) is most related to perceived barriers. For example, the more English is preferred, the less likely cost of tuition is perceived as a barrier, but the

more likely discrimination is perceived. A second finding is that with less academic acculturation (amount of school completed) the need to work to earn money and the importance of staying home to be close to family rather than going away to college are perceived as barriers. Becerra stated that university administrators, K-12 educators, family members, and the community need to collaborate to "address Latinos' perceptions to higher education" (p. 197).

In the second study, McWhirter, Torres, Salgado, and Valdez (2007) surveyed 140 Mexican-American and 296 White high school students to determine if perceived barriers will affect their post-high school plans. McWhirter et al. sought descriptive information regarding perceived barriers to post-secondary education, questioned whether any relationships between internal and external barriers and post-secondary educational plans exist, and examined any differences between perceived barriers due to parental education, gender, or ethnic group. High school juniors and seniors at two schools, one in the Midwest and one in the Southwest, took part in the survey. Key findings included that Mexican-American youth anticipated having more barriers related to ability (e.g., ability, self-confidence, talent), preparation and motivation (e.g., having the necessary study skills, not being able to get into program of interest), lack of teacher support, and separation barriers than their White peers. The Mexican-American youth also anticipated that these barriers would be harder to overcome. There was no ethnic difference for perceived educational barriers due to pregnancy, gender, or racial discrimination. McWhirter et al. suggested that transitional programs targeted toward Mexican-American youth may be helpful in mitigating some of the perceived barriers to post-secondary educational plans.

Poyrazli and Grahme (2007) examined the needs of international students to adjust to the campus community at a semi-urban university. They interviewed 15 multinational students within an ecological, or holistic, framework and determined there were several broad areas (social, academic, and cultural) that international students found to be barriers to adjustment. Barriers specific to academia included lack of basic information communicated by the university (including transportation to and from the campus, finding housing, meeting times and locations), adjusting to the academic life on a college campus in the United States, learning center not offering assistance in broader disciplines, unhelpful advisors, and unmotivated instructors. Poyrazli and Grahme offered several suggestions for further research to determine if international students at other campuses face similar issues.

The final study (Lee, 2011) looked at the differences in education assimilation between three refugee and three non-refugee students at a community college in Nashville, Tennessee. She utilized interviews within a segmented educational assimilation framework, or how background factors such as various forms of capital, family acculturation patterns, previous barriers experienced, and educational expectations may predict different methods of overcoming barriers and produce different educational assimilation outcomes. Lee found that for non-refugee immigrants, the family structure (especially the mother's proficiency in English) is an advantage, but the student's own proficiency in English and previous educational experiences are no more of an advantage for either group. She also found that the experiences unique to being a refugee provide greater resiliency when the student is faced with educational barriers upon resettlement.

Because this study was the pilot study for a larger project, Lee did not focus on making recommendations or implications.

In their book, *Learning a New Land: Immigrant Students in American Society*, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) reported the results of a longitudinal study that examined the factors affecting the success/failure trajectory of educational achievement of over 300 immigrant youth. From their data, the authors developed a model to demonstrate how the following factors can influence academic achievement: family structure, parental education and employment, student's gender, school context (e.g., staff turn-over, perceived violence, neighborhood poverty level), student's English-language proficiency, cognitive engagement, relational engagement (attitudes toward school, emotional well-being, and academic self-efficacy), and behavioral engagement (student's effort and participation).

Barriers to occupational achievement. I found three articles which examined barriers to occupational achievement in a post-secondary educational setting.

Crockett and Hays (2011) conducted a content analysis of peer-reviewed studies which focused on career counseling international students on United States college campuses and were published within the last 10 years. Crockett and Hays coded topics and key phrases in the articles and three themes emerged: (a) career placement needs of international students, (b) individual factors which mediate an international student's career needs and barriers, and (c) help-seeking behaviors. Several key findings that emerged for career placement needs included a need for guidance with the career planning process itself. This involved developing goal setting skills, locating employment opportunities within the desired field, writing résumés, and the interview

process. Individual factors consisted of familial and community obligations. The level of an individual's acculturation also was found to play a role in vocational challenges. A higher level of acculturation was found to be associated with fewer incidences of cultural difficulties but an increased need for obtaining career information as well as solidifying a vocational identity. They also found that international students were less likely to seek counseling assistance, although they tended to be at a higher risk of significant population-specific vocational obstacles (e.g. networking perceived as nepotism). Crockett and Hays suggested more specialized career counseling available of college campuses.

Stebleton (2012) used Gadamerian hermeneutics as a theoretical framework to understand and interpret the meaning of work for immigrant adult college students pursuing a four-year degree. He interviewed seven African immigrants (five self-identified as refugees) at a Midwest urban university to develop work narratives. From the work narratives, Stebleton determined that the construct of work is shaped by contextual (e.g., civil unrest) and cultural (e.g., gender role expectations) factors from Africa. There is a strong connection to the family and community which was expressed by sending monthly checks to family members still in Africa and a desire for working in the service to others. In addition, the findings showed that the student's identity evolved as he or she struggled to understand new work roles, adjust to a new work culture, and balance school-work-life responsibilities. Stebleton concluded by offering several recommendations for a college career counselor, including the importance of being open to considering contextual factors when working with African immigrant students.

The third study (Fiebig et al., 2010) examined vocational planning with Hispanic community college students. The authors surveyed 219 Hispanic students taking pre-college level courses at a Hispanic Serving Institution in California. One of the five surveys given was the Career Development Inventory, which is used to measure the student's "level of planning, involvement, and knowledge possessed regarding future careers" (p. 853). Fiebig, Braid, Ross, Tom, and Prinzo (2010) used multiple logistical regression analysis with several demographic characteristics and found that, except for first-generation females, females have explored future career options and made more plans than their male peers. First-generation males, on the other hand, scored higher in career planning. Second-generation males and females tended to have less career knowledge. Fiebig et al. suggested that counselors utilize interventions that remind students how their families and community can play a role in vocational planning.

Cultural adjustment. Poyrazli and Grahme (2007) not only examined educational barriers in their interviews with 15 international college students, they also examined cultural barriers these students may face. The barriers faced in adjusting to the culture of their college campus centered on meeting other international students as well as American students. One reason mentioned was of the lack of opportunity for casual interaction (e.g., planned activities). Another cause was the fact that there is a dearth of on-campus housing, therefore the majority of the students are commuters, thus they are on campus only for classes. Another obstacle to cultural adjustment was the lack of connection with the community outside the campus, including the ethnic communities. The authors suggested that the college work with its international student office or

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student activities office to plan social events to bring international and American students together socially.

A second study (Constantine et al., 2005) examined the cultural adjustment experiences of African international students at a large university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The authors interviewed 12 international students from Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana about their pre- and post-sojourn perceptions and their cultural adjustment experiences. Prior to arriving in the United States, the students believed the U.S. offered many academic and personal opportunities unlike what they could get back in Africa. This included a better educational system. However after arrival, the students believed that White Americans hold educational power, as evidenced by the White cultural values found in education and Eurocentric teaching styles. The cultural adjustment issues raised by the students were incidences of prejudice and discrimination. The authors suggested that, because of the strong link between perceived prejudice and negative physical and mental health, campus counseling centers need to have strategies to address such experiences. Another challenge brought up in the interviews is that the students tried to deal with problems directly or with forbearance so as not to be a burden on others. The authors noted that both of these tactics, especially in the presence of multiple stressors, could again impede psychological health, which could in turn negatively affect academic performance. A cultural adjustment strength that the students mentioned was the presence of strong family and peer support networks. Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, and Utsey (2005) recommended that college counselors be aware of the nature of these support structures when working with African international students.

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English language learners. Two studies discussed barriers experienced by English language learners (ELL) at community colleges in general.

Prior to enrollment. Szelényi and Chang (2002) looked at barriers affecting English language learners at the community college level which stem from the student's prior education. ELLs usually are ill-prepared for the level of academic writing and reading expected. English as a Second Language (ESL) courses taken by most immigrants focus on the individual's story and culture (e.g., narratives about how they got here and writing out recipes from home). The ESL courses do not focus on how to turn the narrative story into an academic essay or the recipe into a process paper. In addition, material from which ELLs learn to read generally do not incorporate the increasingly complex grammatical syntax, sentence structures, and word choices that are utilized in college-level textbooks.

Within the college. Both Curry (2004) and Szelényi and Chang (2002) examined barriers faced by international students once admitted to a post-secondary institution. These barriers include placement testing, remedial courses, and tuition. Colleges rely on placement testing to determine a student's level in reading, writing, and math. As noted previously, many ELLs are not proficient in academic English so are placed in remedial (also called basic or developmental) courses. These courses have been designed to quickly teach the basics of academic reading and writing and have devolved to discrete drills to practice decontextualized skills. Remedial courses are often taught by part-time, adjunct instructors who do not have a chance to become part of the campus community. Finally, many international students, especially those who attend college in a secondary resettlement site, need to pay out-of-state tuition, which even at a community college, can

become prohibitively expensive, thus increasing the student's reliance on financial aid. Unfortunately, many remedial courses are noncredit courses and are thus excluded from financial aid awards.

Psychological barriers. Underlying all of these barriers may be psychological issues which are often heightened in non-US-born students, especially if these students are refugees or immigrants from a war torn or unstable country. Poyrazli and Grahme (2007) mentioned that due to the need to develop new social networks, international students can be more likely to have the more common academic stress that may "lead to stress-related illnesses such as depression or anxiety" (p. 31).

Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, and Goldman (2002) cited loss as the number one stressor coming from the psychological aspect of the refugee experience. Loss of family, home, employment, social position, and social network combined with the physical deprivations of refugee camps and the social isolation after resettlement can affect the psychological well-being of an individual. Psychological issues can show up as forgetfulness, anxiety, despair, diminished concentration, and depression. When experienced in an educational environment, these issues can result in feelings of failure. This feeling of failure can lead to the individual declining to return to the school.

A considerable number of studies focus primarily on the underlying mental illness stemming from trauma, physical and/or psychological, experienced during an individual's refugee experience. Representative studies, with a key theme noted, include the following:

- Almedom and Summerfield (2004) wrote that recovery from a catastrophe (e.g., war and the resultant displacement) comes with the resumption of life

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and is not a discrete process. Recovery after trauma is found in the resumption of the "practical and unspectacular" (p. 386) activities of daily life within the context of the family, religion, economy, and culture.

- Goodkind (2006) explained how the need of refugees to be appreciated for who they are, "people with strengths and resources who were caught in horrible situations" (p. 78). She also stated that the knowledge and experiences from "home" are indeed valuable and should not be marginalized or deemed useless as the refugees begin the process of resettlement.

- Grove and Zwi (2006) discussed how the theory of othering perpetuates the "us versus them" attitude between the nation of resettlement and the refugees. The individual or the group "being 'othered' experiences this as a process of marginalisation [*sic*], disempowerment and social exclusion" (p. 1933).

- Husni, Cernovsky, Koye, and Haggarty (2002) wrote that the total separation from the familiar creates a substantial amount of psychological stress. Through their research, the authors found that the refugees' need to assimilate rapidly to their new country compounded the psychological burden.

- Momartin et al. (2006) researched the psychological impact of holding temporary refugee visas. Their evidence suggested that the uncertainty associated with holding a temporary refugee visa can lead to greater incidence of deterioration of mental health.

- Simich (2003) realized the importance of social networks for refugees as they begin the process of resettlement and how bureaucracy could potentially hinder the support provided by these networks. Because government

programs often do not have the capability to understand "how family and friends actually help refugees adjust during the resettlement process … refugees *must* [emphasis in the original] rely on additional sources of social support and information to meet critical needs" (p. 588).

- Stepakoff et al. (2006) wrote of a local, thus self-sustaining, initiative to assist the recovery of survivors of war atrocities within a refugee camp setting. Their program has at its basis the belief that recovery is a process that must be accomplished in stages. Beginning with the re-establishment of trust and the creation of support networks, the individuals learn to rely on their own personal strengths.

These studies do not discuss actual barriers to educational achievement. They do, however, provide a background for the psychological implications which may generate potential barriers to learning. These implications, I feel, need to be taken into consideration when examining the strategies immigrant and refugee students utilize in order to persist in their education programs.

The Institution as Context

This section examines literature relevant to my research from an institutional context. First, I will describe the location of the studies conducted. Then, I will examine several institutional programs designed to assist students. Finally, I will revisit two studies discussed previously (Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007). This time, rather than examining the barriers experienced by the students, I will discuss the studies from the perspective of the institution.

Type of institution. Most of the studies relevant to this research were situated at a four-year university (e.g., Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007; Stebleton, 2012) or a community college (e.g., Fiebig et al., 2010; Gebre, 2008; Lee, 2011; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Taffer, 2010). Although many community and technical colleges have merged or aligned, the core mission of a technical college remains quite different from that of a community college. A technical college focuses on educating a student for immediate placement upon graduation into a specific career, usually within the community. Community colleges offer developmental and general education courses leading to an Associate's degree, some occupational programs, and attract students who plan to transfer to a four-year college.

Institutional programs. Two studies in this theme discussed institutional needs (Garcia, 2010; Taffer, 2010). And, a third article discussed a university counseling center (Yakushko, Davidson, & Sanford-Martens, 2008).

The first study identified the needs of adult refugee students at four community colleges in Maricopa County, Arizona (Taffer, 2010). This quantitative dissertation surveyed 427 refugee students using the Community College Survey for Student Engagement. Taffer used regression analysis to identify criteria specific to adult refugee students to better assist future development of programs designed to increase retention and student success. The findings suggested that due to their inability to return to the country of origin, refugees "extend themselves and produce a *high quality of effort* [emphasis in the original] (Pace, 1982) in their learning and toward understanding the new culture and social system in which they live" (p. 142). The findings also found that adult refugee students bring an abundance of cultural capital assets despite the multitude

of basic needs they have upon resettlement (e.g., legal, health, disability, food, shelter, clothing). Taffer concluded her dissertation with a list of eight recommendations for college leadership to make the transition to college easier for adult refugee students. These recommendations included an orientation targeted to refugee students, mentoring programs, and a partnership with resettlement agencies.

A second study that examined institution-wide programs was a qualitative study done at a community college in New Mexico (Garcia, 2010). As part of an effort to lessen barriers faced by first-generation Hispanic college students (in this context, first-generation refers to the student as being the first individual in his or her family to attend college), the college student success center called 467 first semester Hispanic college students to welcome them to college and to offer guidance and/or assistance. Garcia's study discussed the concerns of 124 of the respondents, who were first-generation and had institution-based issues. Several key issues involved the financial aid office. For example, inquiries regarding status of financial aid or when to apply for aid for the next semester go unanswered. The process of filing for financial aid, including timelines was found to be largely unknown to this group of students. An on-line registration system was perceived by the students as intimidating accompanied by the belief that they were no longer allowed to register in person or with their advisors. Finally, the lack of skills necessary to navigate the college bureaucracy in general was found to present a barrier to these students. Garcia recommended a need for knowledgeable advisors who are trained as with the same knowledge and skills as retention coaches. She also demonstrated the positive role for intrusive advising as a way to minimize damage caused by undiscovered academic problems.

The final study in this section (Yakushko et al., 2008) examined archival data for trends and patterns in the use of the university counseling center by international students at a large public university in the Midwest. Client files for 132 students spanning a five year period were analyzed. Findings showed that 36% of the students attended one session only and the most common form of termination was a no-show for the next appointment. The two most common reasons for seeking assistance were relationship issues and depression. Perhaps the key finding was that, in general, international students were reluctant to seek out professional counseling and selected culturally appropriate options first: friends, family, health care provider, or religious leader. The authors' suggestions included peer counseling, outreach services to focus on adjustment issues, and a better understanding of factors that influence the use (or non-use) of campus counseling services.

These studies suggest that institution-wide programs need to acknowledge both the specific cultural attributes as well as the barriers faced by various student populations.

Perspectives on barriers to cultural adjustment. Two studies, Constantine et al. (2005) and Poyrazli and Grahme (2007), examined the perceptions of staff or students regarding barriers faced by international college students. Constantine et al. offered the college counselor perspective on cultural adjustment barriers faced by African international students. Through semi-structured interviews, the authors learned that these barriers included pre- and post-sojourn perceptions, which led to feelings such as disappointment, resentment, or depression. Cultural adjustment barriers included perceived acts of discrimination, feelings of loneliness, and financial worries. The interviews also disclosed which strategies the students utilized to minimize the barriers.

The most common strategy was social support through networks of family and friends. These networks were primarily culture-based. The authors also found that, despite a "strong link between perceived racist events and negative health-related and psychological outcomes" (p. 63), the students were not open to voluntarily seeking the assistance of counselors.

Poyrazli and Grahme offered a student perspective on barriers to adjustment. Through focus groups, the authors sought to determine whether the institution was providing adequate resources to meet the specific adjustment needs of international students. Poyrazli and Graham learned the students faced multiple barriers to academic success beginning at the initial transition to the institution (e.g., official correspondence, housing, transportation) and academics (e.g., competency in the English language, interactions with classmates and instructors), and non-academic life (e.g.,. healthcare, finances, discrimination). They discovered that in order to assist the students to succeed academically, an ecological framework, or entire context approach, must be utilized. Institutional-based programs or services cannot just target a single aspect of a student's lifeworld.

Although these two studies looked at cultural adjustment barriers from two different perspectives, Poyrazli and Grahme had a student perspective and Constantine et al. had the college counselor perspective, both studies focused on international students, not on immigrants or refugees. The three groups each have their own unique needs as was discussed in the previous section, Institutional Programs.

Factors for Academic Success

Four studies comprise this final theme of resilience and factors for academic success. Two studies examined African refugees (Rana et al., 2011) and immigrants (Gebre, 2008). A third study examined Dominican English learners (Reynoso, 2008) and the final study examined first-generation college students (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Rana, Qin, Bates, Luster, and Saltarelli (2011) conducted a retrospective qualitative study on the factors related to educational resilience among Sudanese youth (the Lost Boys) in Lansing, Michigan. The authors interviewed 19 youth and 20 parents to determine the risk factors to educational achievement as well as the factors that assisted these refugee youth to succeed. The risk factors varied from limited English skills, to technology in the classroom, schools not prepared for an influx of refugee youth, teachers having low expectations for the youths' academic achievement (i.e. wanted to make things easy after such terrible experiences), and mental health issues associated with fleeing civil war and life in a refugee camp. The factors found to have assisted these youth to persist in their education included individual characteristics such as motivation, hard work and determination, survival optimism, development of biculturalism (not forgetting own heritage as some American culture is adopted), adaptability, and self-efficacy. The youth also had relationship support from their foster families, teachers and school support staff, American and Sudanese peers, the psychological presence of their birth parents (even if they were no longer living, the thought was that the youth did not want to disappoint them), and their caseworkers as

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culture brokers. Despite a plethora of barriers, the refugee youth persisted due to a combination of individual factors, relationships, and community resources.

The second study (Gebre, 2008) examined the factors adult African immigrants perceive contributed to their academic persistence in an English as a Second Language (ESL) course in a large community college in the Mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This was a qualitative study, in which 21 students were interviewed, ESL classes were observed, and documents analyzed. Similar to the findings in Rana et al., Gebre's study found many of the individual resiliency factors stemmed from surviving a civil unrest, war, and poverty in Africa. These resiliency factors included self-motivation, perseverance, independence, problem-solving, not losing hope, and a positive attitude. The students also reported familial support and having good relationships with their professors and tutors. They also reported that working in warehouses and wanting to improve their English skills in order to find a better job were key motivators in persistence. Gebre suggested, as a topic for further study, examining the factors leading to the *non*-persistence of African immigrants in a community college.

Reynoso (2008) examined the factors contributing to academic resiliency among Dominican English-language learners at Bronx Community College in New York. His grounded theory study involved interviews with six Dominican immigrants and document analysis (e.g., diaries, essays, and transcripts). Reynoso found that loneliness and separation from family and friends, the inability to communicate due to poor English skills, financial obligations, and loss of a familiar way of life were the foremost barriers to educational achievement. However, the support of faculty and tutors, an orientation seminar facilitated by a campus counselor, self-motivation, family and peer support, and

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the development of a bicultural identity were factors that contributed to the academic

resiliency of these students. Reynoso found that barriers and resiliency occur in two

stages: the first is coping with immigration and the second stage is coping with the

educational challenges.

The final study (Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007) analyzed the motivation,

integration, and academic achievement of multiethnic first-generation college students at

a community college in the Southern region of the United States. In this study, first-

generation college students were the first to attend college in their families. Their parents

did not attend college. Utilizing two theories of student retention and attrition (the

Intergrated Model of Student Retention and the Self-Determination Theory of

Motivation) as the theoretical framework for their study, Próspero and Vohra-Gupta

surveyed 197 first-generation college students and 80 nonfirst-generation college students

on their views of motivation (intrinsic and extrinsic) and integration (social and

academic) variables. Correlation statistics and multiple regression analyses were

conducted to determine if any of the variables were found to be predictors of grade point

average (GPA), a method of determining academic achievement. Key findings included

there were no significant differences in levels of motivation and integration between first-

and nonfirst-generation college students. However, for first-generation college students,

motivation and integration were significant predictors of academic achievement. In

addition, for first-generation college students, "one of the strongest correlations found

was the significant positive relationship between intrinsic motivation and academic

integration (r = .446, $p < .001$). These findings suggest that [these factors] may be

significant contributors to the academic success" (p. 972). The authors discussed, as a

limitation of their study, that there were no qualitative data to provide further explanation for the meanings behind their quantitative findings.

Theoretical Foundation

I have discussed the practical framework of my study in terms of who (African immigrants and refugees), what (persistence strategies), where (Technical College), and the rationale for my shift in focus from barriers to success (deficit thinking). In this section, I will look at the theoretical underpinnings of this study. Merriam (2009) succinctly defined a theoretical framework as "the underlying structure, the scaffolding, or frame of your study" (p. 66). While Durbin stated that "a theory tries to make sense out of the observable world by ordering the relationships among elements that constitute the theorist's focus of attention in the real world" (as cited in Torraco & Holton, 2002, p. 130). There are three aspects of my theoretical framework that I would like to explore in this section: the theories of student persistence, retention, and attrition, systems theory, and resiliency theory.

Student Persistence, Retention, and Attrition

In order to examine the reasons why students persist in higher education, or conversely why students drop out, there must be a theoretical structure or a framework upon which to systematically build understanding. In 1975, Tinto published a model, developed from the research previously conducted on student attrition, to explore why students in higher education drop out. His model examined the interaction between the individual and the institution. Researchers, including Tinto himself (1982), grew to realize that the differences in type of institution (e.g., 4-year universities and 2-year community colleges) and student demographics (e.g., traditional and nontraditional) may

significantly affect the findings of the model used in the investigation. As a result, since Tinto's model was published, other models have been developed (e.g., Bean & Metzner, 1985; Cabrera, Nora, & Castañada, 1993; Donaldson & Graham, 1999;) to further refine Tinto's original theory in order to account for these variations in institution and student population.

Student Integration Model. In developing his model to investigate why students in higher education drop out, Tinto (1975) drew heavily from Durkheim's theory of suicide and from the field of economics. Durkheim's theory of suicide created the connection between the student's integration into the academic and social systems of the institution and the likelihood of dropout. Economics provided the cost-benefit foundation of the student deciding on whether the value of higher education is worth the costs.

Tinto discovered that the individual's family background (e.g., familial support, level of parental education, socioeconomic status), his or her own attributes (e.g., gender, ethnic background, academic ability), and pre-college schooling (e.g., high school grade point average, high school environment) affect the individual's commitment to his or her educational goals and commitment to the institution. The student's commitment to his or her educational goal affects both intellectual development and grade performance which in turn influences the student's academic integration. Similarly, the student's commitment to the institution affects his or her interactions with peers and faculty (e.g., friendships, mentors, other support systems, extracurricular activities), which in turn impacts the student's integration into the school's social systems. Finally, the individual's academic and social integration influences his or her commitment to the institution and education goals, ultimately affecting the decision to persist or drop out.

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Utilizing the economic theory of cost-benefit analysis, Tinto suggested that events both internal and external to the institution can influence the student's integration into the school's social and academic systems. He stated that "individual decisions with regard to any form of activity can be analyzed in terms of perceived costs and benefits of that activity relative to those perceived in alternate activities" (p. 97). This can be understood to mean that the individual determines whether the benefits of higher education (e.g., academic achievement, friendships, personal satisfaction) outweigh the costs (e.g., time, money, academic failure) of persistence. Often times, the current economic climate (i.e., employment prospects) is an important factor in the decision to drop out as well.

As researchers continued to study attrition and persistence in higher education, Tinto realized his original model had several limitations. He published an article (Tinto, 1982) addressing four shortcomings which he believed needed to be explored in future research. The first limitation addressed the different roles finances play throughout the student's educational career. The second limitation introduced the fact that institutional dropout may in fact be transfer to a different institution and not complete withdrawal. He believed the differences in behavior leading to transfer or to withdrawal need to be explored further. The third limitation Tinto found lay in the resulting inaccuracies of not differentiating between the educational experiences stemming from student demographics, gender, ethnic background, and/or socioeconomic status. Finally, Tinto realized that his model did not take the specific attributes of two-year colleges into consideration, therefore the variations in student behavior leading to dropout or persistence decisions were being overlooked.

Student Attrition Model. Bean and Metzner (1985) realized that very little research in the field of student attrition was devoted to nontraditional students, in particular older, part-time commuter students. After an analysis of the literature, they found that out of hundreds of studies, only four "specifically examined attrition for part-time commuter students and just five provided separate analyses for older commuter students" (Metzner & Bean, 1987, p. 16). They also found that, although there is a growth in the numbers of non-traditional students attending higher education, there is also a growing attrition rate among this same student population. As a result, Bean and Metzner developed a model to examine the variables affecting the decision of nontraditional students to dropout of their higher educational institution.

A nontraditional student has been described in the literature as a student ranging from 18 to 80, of various ethnicities or socioeconomic backgrounds, of part-time status, or not living on campus. Bean and Metzner realized that all of the distinctive student groups who were included in this very vague definition had one outcome in common: there is a lessened social interaction with peers and instructors. As a result, Bean and Metzner defined a nontraditional student as a student who

> is older than 24, or does not live in a campus residence (e.g., is a commuter), or is a part-time student, or some combination of these three factors; is not greatly influenced by the social environment of the institution; and is chiefly concerned with the institution's academic offerings (especially courses, certification, and degrees). (p. 489)

In addition, due to the lessened social integration experienced by nontraditional students, Bean and Metzner realized that it was a variable only possibly effecting attrition and persistence, unlike previous models (e.g., Tinto's Student Integration Model).

Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of student attrition and their later revision (Metzner & Bean, 1987) found several variables which have an effect on dropout decisions. The first is the background and defining variables (i.e., age, hours enrolled in classes, educational goals, high school performance, ethnicity, and gender). The background and defining variables directly affect academic (e.g., study habits, advising, absenteeism) and environmental variables (e.g., finances, employment, familial responsibilities). Academic variables impact the student's academic outcome (i.e., GPA) which directly affects both the intent to leave and the decision to dropout. The academic variables as well as the environmental variables affect the student's psychological outcomes (e.g., satisfaction, goal commitment, stress), which again directly impact both the intent to leave and the decision to dropout.

Regarding nontraditional students, Metzner and Bean (1987) found that the decision to dropout was a direct result of an individual student's academic performance and commitment to the institution.

Integrated Model of Student Retention. Conducting empirical research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the college persistence process, Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) discovered Tinto's Student Integration Model and Bean's Student Attrition Model were complementary to each other, rather than mutually exclusive as originally hypothesized. Their findings suggested that persistence in an institution of higher education is a "product of a complex set of interactions among

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personal and institutional factors…[and] that Intent to Persist is the outcome of the successful match between the student and the institution" (p. 158).

Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda (1993) merged Tinto's Student Integration Model, Bean's Student Attrition Model, and integrated their previous findings (Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992) into a model emphasizing the importance of environmental variables to goal commitment and the commitment to the institution. Tinto had limited the role of environmental factors to indirectly influencing the student's commitment to his or her educational goals and to the school. However, Cabrera and associates found that, as Bean had previously asserted, environmental factors (e.g., employment, finances, family responsibilities) directly affect the student's academic experiences and social integration, which in turn affect his or her persistence or attrition. Bean originally constrained the role of encouragement from friends and family as merely an aspect of environmental factor. However, Cabrera and associates found that familial and peer encouragement greatly influences social integration and goal commitment which has a direct affect on the persistence process.

Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda (1993) developed their theoretical model for practitioners (e.g., college administrators) to understand "the interplay among individual, institutional, and environmental variables in the college persistence process" (p. 136). They suggested that intervention strategies in enrollment management must take into consideration the complex relationship of the student support services to address student attrition and not consider the variables individually as a means for retention.

Summary. Twenty-five years after Tinto first published his model to understand why students dropout of a higher educational institution, he revisited the current

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understanding of factors influencing student retention (Tinto, 2010). He asserted that retention is not the mirror image of departure; why students stay is not the same as why students leave. In addition, persistence may be the result of leaving the institution. Departure may be the transfer to an alternate institution and not necessarily the complete withdrawal from higher education. Persistence, when defined as degree completion, may not occur in its entirety at a single institution. Tinto also maintained that much of the current research focuses on events external to the institution when examining student retention. Finally, Tinto acknowledged that there is not yet a comprehensive model to explain how institutional practice, in its aggregate and not piecemeal, can assist students to persist and graduate from that particular institution (as opposed to transferring to a different institution).

Tinto suggested that for an institution to assist a student to persist academically, the retention effort must encompass the educational community in four key areas: expectations, support, feedback, and involvement. He stated:

> Students are more likely to succeed and continue within the institution when
> they find themselves in settings that hold high expectations for their success,
> provide needed academic and social support, and frequent feedback about
> their performance, and actively involve them, especially with other students
> and faculty, in learning. The key concept is that of educational community
> and the capacity of institutions to establish supportive social and academic
> communities, especially in the classrooms, that actively involve students as
> equal members. (2010, p. 73)

Tinto warned that the absence of one of the four areas (expectations, support, feedback, and involvement) weakens the effectiveness of the other three. This is especially relevant when working with nontraditional or under-prepared populations. Tinto concluded by suggesting that, despite all the research conducted in the fields of attrition, persistence, and retention, the resultant models and the proposed theories are merely part of a continuing conversation. There are still too many questions that remain unanswered about institutional practices, policies, and policies to create a model for institutions to utilize for the implementation of a retention initiative. In effect, the theoretical scaffolding is still being constructed.

Relationship of retention, persistence, and attrition to this study. Tinto's (2006) article noted the current trend is for low socio-economic-status students to attend two-year schools with a part-time status. Tinto cited research to demonstrate that "where and how one goes to college influences the likelihood of college completion" (p. 11). For further research, he suggested to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences (including the utilization of assistive strategies) of low-income students and how those experiences and strategies affect persistence in the pursuit of a college degree. Through open-ended interview questions, the student-participants in my study spoke of the strategies utilized to persist in a higher education environment.

Systems Theory

Kauffman (1980) defined a system as a "collection of parts which interact with each other to function as a whole" (p. 1). There are three key components to systems theory: (a) collection of parts, (b) function as a whole, and (c) interact with each other.

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Collection of parts. Kauffman explained the first component as individual units placed in a proper order, working together to perform a particular function. If arranged in an improper order, the system fails. By themselves, the units may be useless, or may even be systems themselves. Kauffman used the example of an automobile's cooling system to explain this concept. Among other parts, the cooling system has a radiator and a water pump (both systems themselves), a fan, a hose, and a clamp. He stated that to move the end of the hose just a bit from where it needs to be, would cause the cooling system to fail.

Function as a whole. Kauffman used a social organization to illustrate this component. In a social organization, the larger the group, the more necessary is the division of labor into smaller work groups and the more important communication becomes between these smaller work groups. Without a division of labor and communication, Kauffman stated that the social organization would be a mob – a disorganized group.

Interact with each other. This final component, units interacting with each other, ties the theory all together. The concept of communication between the work groups is analogous to a feedback loop inherent in a system. As each unit in a system interacts with another, information is provided as to whether an adjustment needs to be made or not in order to keep the system operating efficiently and effectively. Kauffman used learning to ride a bike to illustrate the feedback loop. As the brain (a system) interacts with the muscles (another system) to make the bike go, the movement of the bike, or the amount of "wobblyness" alerts the brain that an adjustment must be made by the muscles in order to prevent tipping the bike over.

Relationship of systems theory to this study. The multiple roles enacted by the adult can be considered analogous to the collection of parts. Each role has a certain function: Wage Earner, Parent, or Student. Each of these roles works together to allow the adult learner to function. In the Wage Earner role, the Student role has money to go to school and the Parent role has money to feed the family. The children and spouse in turn (ideally) share household chores to allow the Student role to attend school and study. However, if the Wage Earner role loses his or her job (i.e. fails), then the Student may need to quit school or take a reduced credit load and the Parent role may need to alter his or her responsibilities. As a result, the failure of one role affects the functioning and effectiveness of the other roles. When looking at an adult learner through the lens of systems theory, it is apparent that all roles as well as their interactions must necessarily be considered to understand the individual's experiences as a student.

Resiliency Theory

One approach to understanding how a student, despite tremendous obstacles, persists academically is through the theoretical framework of resilience.

Definitions. Resilience is contextual as it changes over time in response to the situation, the successful (or non-successful) completion of tasks, and the complexity of tasks (Gordon, 1996). Gordon (1996) defined resilience as "the ability to thrive, mature, and increase competence in the face of adverse circumstances or obstacles" (p. 63) in her work with Hispanic youth. Masten's work with war trauma and disaster survivors formed the basis for the definition both Rana et al. and Reynoso used for resilience: "successful adaptation of an individual in the face of adversities and trauma" (Rana et al., 2011, p. 2085; Reynoso, 2008, p. 394). Finally, Gebre (2008) wrote that "resiliency is

the ability of individuals to draw strength from protective forces and survive difficult circumstances" (p. 47) in his examination of academic persistence of African immigrants in an English as a Second Language (ESL) class.

A protective mechanism. Resilience is a protective mechanism developed by an individual and utilized to reduce risk (Winfield, 1991). Resilience is generally divided into three categories of resources (self-concept, relationships, and environmental factors). In a situation of risk, the resilient individual draws upon all of these resources. Winfield believed that self-efficacy is a key protective mechanism. Self-efficacy "concerns individuals' self-concepts and their feelings about their environment, their competence in handling life's obstacles, and their perceptions of control in determining outcomes… [which] develop in inter-personal relationships throughout the life span and through successfully completing tasks" (p. 8).

Self concept. The first category of resources, or protective factors, is self concept. Self concept includes the individual's personal attributes and a strong personal belief in his or her own abilities. Common attributes of a resilient student includes a positive outlook on education, the willingness to ask for assistance, maintain optimism despite set-backs, autonomy, motivation, goal-setting behavior, an internal locus of control, and strong cultural values (Gebre, 2008; Gordon, 1996; Rana, et al., 2011; Reynoso, 2008).

Relationships. A resilient individual develops multiple relationships at differing levels of intimacy. These relationships are not only with peers and family. Relationships in an academic setting include the support of faculty, mentors, tutors, and counselors (Reynoso, 2008). Relationships may not just be formed with the student, but rather with

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family members. Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) described a mentor relationship a student's mother developed with the professors for whom she cleaned house. These mentors allowed the mother to become an advocate for the student.

Environmental factors. Environmental factors can be thought of as community resources and opportunities such as social organizations and extra-curricular activities (Rana et al., 2011). Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) suggested that strong ties to an ethnic community or to a religious organization promote resiliency. Environmental factors can also be specific to an educational institution (Gordon, 1996; Rana et al., 2011). Both Gordon and Rana et al. suggested that a school which is accepting of the student's culture, and is in fact socioeconomically and ethnically diverse, assists in the development of resiliency. Other supportive factors include an appropriate curriculum which holds the students to higher standards, provides counseling services, administration encourages mentorship, and the staff fosters a sense of belonging.

Relationship of resiliency theory to this study. The student-participants I am interviewing for this study have been selected because their nation of origin (i.e., Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Somalia) is war-torn or politically unstable. The student-participants have experienced a lot of deprivation and trauma (physical, psychological, or both) in their sojourn to the United States. They have developed resiliency skills because, despite the obstacles, the student-participants have been accepted into a technical education program and are persisting. As Gebre (2008) stated:

> Immigrant students from non-English speaking countries are more likely to
> be resilient than similarly situated natives because they may be living in a
> more depressed and volatile economic and political environment.… They

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live in a strange place with financial hardship, homesickness, and other daily

stressors, yet manage to make the right educational choices that shape their

future. This is because they have the ability and the strength to survive and

increase their confidence in the face of adverse circumstances. (p. 49)

The Concept of Tenacity

Tinto (1975, 1982) and Bean and Metzner (1985) examined retention, persistence,

and attrition from the lens of integration and commitment. Kauffman (1980)

demonstrated how a system works, and I related it to how an adult is a system of roles

that he or she must continually enact and juggle. Resiliency was simply discussed as

overcoming obstacles to succeed. There is one last concept to discuss as part of the

theoretical framework, because I believe it ties the three previous parts together. It is the

concept of *tenacity*.

Hensley and Kinser (2001) define tenacity as a variation of persistence: "although

juggling work, family, and academic commitments may be detrimental to staying on the

traditional persistence track, students can learn to view these experiences as also

contributing to a different strand of persistence" (p. 99). The students Hensley and

Kinser viewed as tenacious were students who had stopped out of college multiple times,

yet reenrolled. They had left school previously for reasons such as finances, lack of

perceived academic ability, unable to successfully integrate academically or socially.

These are factors both Tinto and Bean suggest lead to the intent to leave school.

Additional reasons for previously quitting school involved the hardships of raising a

family (or caring for parents), working, and being a student concurrently. This can be

viewed in terms of a malfunction in a system. Finally, the fact that these students returned to school demonstrated resiliency, the ability to overcome obstacles and persist.

Tenacity is a concept that can be applied to my student-participants. They have had to drop out of school for financial reasons, unable to work and raise a family while going to school, and have felt disconnected from their peers. However, they have returned to school and are persisting despite financial issues, language issues, and multiple social roles being enacted concomitantly. My student-participants are indeed tenacious.

A Niche for this Research

I believe, after reviewing the available literature, there is a niche for this research topic: which strategies African refugee and immigrant students utilize in order to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs. In this section, I demonstrate how my research fills numerous gaps in the literature.

Who, What, and Where

Many of the studies I found focused on international students (e.g., Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007) who have different challenges than immigrant students (e.g., Gebre, 2008; Lee, 2011; Stebleton, 2012) or even refugee students (e.g., Lee, 2011; Stebleton, 2012; Taffer, 2010). The three groups each have their own unique needs and, consequently, their own unique success strategies. In addition, Poyrazli and Grahme offered a student perspective while Constantine et al. offered the college counselor perspective. For this study, I examined the strategies utilized specifically by African refugees and immigrants from the war-torn or unstable countries or Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Somalia.

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The majority of the literature looked primarily at the barriers to academic success. Except for Fiebig et al. (2010) and Poyrazli and Grahme (2007), the studies focused on only one type of barrier experienced by students, for example educational (e.g., Lee, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007) or cultural (e.g., Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007). I did, however, find several studies which looked at only the factors contributing to educational persistence (e.g., Gebre, 2008; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007).

Most of the relevant studies were situated at a four-year university (e.g., Constantine et al., 2005; Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007; Stebleton, 2012) or a community college (e.g., Fiebig et al., 2010; Gebre, 2008; Lee, 2011; Próspero & Vohra-Gupta, 2007; Taffer, 2010). Although many community and technical colleges have aligned (or merged), the core mission of a technical college remains quite different from that of a community college. A technical college focuses on educating a student for placement upon graduation into a specific career, usually within the community. The aforementioned studies were not situated in a technical college, so I would be interested to learn if immigrant and refugee students who attend a technical college have experienced similar barriers (cultural, educational, or occupational) or have utilized similar persistence strategies (e.g., family and peer networks, utilization of academic support resources, relationships with instructors, involvement with the local culture). In addition, because technical colleges concentrate on career preparation academics, as an avenue for future research, I would be interested to learn if the technical school students have similar views on the meaning of work (Stebleton, 2012) or have a similar aggregate

knowledge of the career planning process (Fiebig et al., 2010) as do their community college or four-year college counterparts.

How: The Method

The previous section provided a brief explanation of where several key components of my research problem were derived. Next, I would like to discuss the methods used to conduct my research and how these methods will augment the current body of literature.

The studies reviewed were both quantitative and qualitative, and one content analysis of the available literature. I conducted a qualitative study to discover which strategies my student-participants have utilized, and why they utilized these strategies, in order to persist in their educational program.

The qualitative studies were primarily interviews with the number of participants ranging from six to 39 (e.g., Constantine et al, 2005; Lee, 2011; Stebleton, 2012). One of the studies (Poyrazli & Grahme, 2007) utilized both interviews and focus groups. Another study (Garcia, 2010) evolved from an initiative in which welcome calls were made to new students in order to elicit conversations about perceived barriers and concerns regarding the institution. I conducted eleven interviews so I could capture my participants' stories first-hand.

Psychological Impact of Immigration Status on Educational Achievement

In addition, the laws that regulate immigration to the United States, including the numbers and kinds of visas allotted to individuals, and the perception of immigration (both documented and undocumented) are constantly changing. This fact adds to the complexity of my research. Immigrant groups who may be targeted as undesirable may

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become desirable with the passing of a future immigration act (e.g., the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Magnuson Act). The status of immigration does affect perceived and actual barriers to educational achievement, and as a result, persistence strategies as well. I suspect that my research may add to the body of knowledge in the field of the psychological impact of the refugee experience.

Summary

I have found that given the current state of retention and enrollment at Technical College in particular and MnSCU as a whole, a well-designed and well-researched qualitative study focusing on the success strategies of foreign-born students who persisted in a technical college, may be immediately applicable. Which, as an education scholar-practitioner, makes this research more meaningful. In Chapter Three, I will discuss both the methodology and the methods I used to develop and conduct my research study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three restates the research question and discuss the methodology used. I first explain the basics of qualitative research, the constructivist paradigm, and several attributes of the case study approach. I next describe my sample, including the selection process and general demographics. The primary method of data collection was the interview. I then describe my interview process and data analysis. I conclude with a brief discussion of the limitations of this study and the ethical issues.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to discover which persistence strategies are being or have been utilized by students who are immigrants or refugees from Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, and Somalia in order to remain academically successful in their technical education program.

Research Question

The guiding question for this research study was: What strategies do African refugee and immigrant students utilize in order to persist in post-secondary career and technical education programs?

Methodology

Wolcott (2009) distinguished between method as the specific techniques of inquiry while methodology is the "underling principles of inquiry" (p. 87). Van Manen (2007) referred to methodology as "the philosophic framework, the fundamental assumptions and characteristics of a human science perspective" (p. 27). This study is qualitative research within a constructivist paradigm. I used a case study approach, with the interview as the primary data collection method.

Qualitative Research

Merriam (2009) stated that "qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). This focus on the meaning ascribed to a phenomenon is what differentiates qualitative from quantitative research. Quantitative researchers seek to discover the "what is", the frequency or length of a phenomenon, or the facts of a given situation. Qualitative researchers seek to understand the interpretation the participants derive from their experience of the phenomenon.

"Qualitative research is quintessentially about understanding an empirically real or constructed particular in the fullness of whatever contexts are relevant" (Sandelowski, 1996, p. 526). Taking a case-oriented approach to qualitative inquiry, Sandelowski explained that qualitative researchers collected data from individual cases to determine how the various factors interacted with each other within the specific relationships and contexts. Using subsequent cases, researchers can then demonstrate how the same or similar factors interact differently, leading to different outcomes. Thus, gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the empirically real or constructed particular.

Creswell (2007) discussed multiple reasons why we, as researchers, conduct qualitative research. One reason was that "we need a *complex* [emphasis in the original], detailed understanding of the issue … [which] can only be established by talking directly to people … [and] allowing them to tell their stories unencumbered by what we expect to find" (p. 40). He also stated that qualitative research is often used to follow-up quantitative research to explain the "why". For example, to learn *why* the subject responded that way. Furthermore, qualitative research can be used to discover the

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thought processes and behaviors which resulted in that particular response within that particular context. Qualitative research is used to delve into the uniqueness of the individual subjects that is overlooked in the statistical analysis of the phenomenon.

Qualitative researchers seek to construct an understanding of an experience in the lived world. Through the process of interviewing multiple students, I sought to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the persistence strategies utilized by students from war-torn nations who are enrolled in a post-secondary career education program.

Limitations of qualitative approaches. One of the principal features of qualitative research is also one of its primary limitations, the lack of generalizability. Generalizability, or transferability as it may also be called in qualitative research, is the extent to which the research findings can be generalized or transferred to the larger population (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Swanson & Holton, 2005). As Leininger (1994) stated, "the goal of qualitative research is not to produce generalizations, but rather in-depth understandings and knowledge of particular phenomena" (pp. 106-107). It is due to this deep understanding of the particular phenomenon that the aspect of generalizability of findings to the larger population becomes a limitation, as the phenomenon under investigation is bounded by its context.

Constructivism

This research study was designed to describe and understand which strategies and support networks had been utilized by individual students in order to persist in a career and technical education environment. This study fits the constructivist, or interpretive design. Interpretivism is a term used interchangeably with constructivism. I will use the term, *constructivism*, throughout this dissertation.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) described constructivism as a research paradigm in which knowledge is created socially and experientially as the investigation proceeds. A key assumption of constructivism is that multiple, differing, realities exist and their form and content are both contextual and dependent on the individual holding the particular construct. Another assumption is the researcher and participant have a collaborative relationship in the construction of knowledge. "The aim of inquiry is *understanding and reconstructing* [emphasis in the original] of the constructions that people (including the inquirer) initially hold, aiming towards consensus but still open to new interpretations as information and sophistication improve" (p. 113).

Merriam (2009) more concisely explained the constructivist research design as describing, interpreting, and understanding the reality attached to an event. Each individual who experiences a specific event constructs his or her own reality through interactions with others. Therefore, for each event there are a multitude of socially constructed realities. When researchers seek to understand a phenomenon, they "do not 'find' knowledge, they construct it" (pp. 8-9) from the realities of the participants who experienced the phenomenon.

I sought to understand which persistence strategies have been successful in a select sample of students at a post-secondary career and technical educational institution. In order to construct a deeper understanding, I interviewed multiple participants to first elicit and later interpret their individual realities of struggling in an academic environment and the steps they have taken to persist. Together we created a consensus of strategies that have been successful for this particular group of participants.

Case Study

      To determine which strategies have been utilized by students who have persisted in their education, I used a case study approach which offers more insight than a larger-scale descriptive study.

      General definition. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined "case study research as (a) the in-depth study of (b) one or more instances of a phenomenon (c) in its real-life context that (d) reflects the perspective of the participants involved in the phenomenon" (p. 447). Merriam (2009) more concisely defined a case study as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 40).

      The case. Stake (1995) wrote that when a researcher concentrates on the *one*, he or she is engaged in case study. The *one* to which Stake referred is a *case*. He defined case as "a specific, a complex, functioning thing" (p. 2) of which the researcher seeks a greater understanding. A case can be a person from whom we wish to hear their unique story on how he or she functions in commonality and ordinariness. The emphasis of the case rests on its uniqueness, yet is also the basis for a "modified generalization" or a "refinement of understanding" (p. 7). Finally, because the case is a specific object (e.g., chef), not a general conceptual process (e.g., cooking), Stake suggested that the case is a bounded system.

      Unit of analysis. Merriam (2009) felt that the unit of analysis, the bounded system, is the characteristic that distinguishes a case study from other research designs. A bounded system is a case selected for study because it is situated within a context that is finite in terms of number of participants, duration of time, or area of space (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Cresswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). Examples of bounded systems

include one program, one process with measureable actions, one curriculum, two classrooms of learners, or five individuals. The importance of context in relation to a case was emphasized by Baxter and Jack (2008), a true picture of the phenomenon under investigation would be impossible "without considering the context within which it occurred" (p. 545).

The unit of analysis I used in my case study were immigrant or refugee students from five war-torn or unstable countries in Africa enrolled in a career and technical education program at one specific institution. My case was bounded in number of participants (immigrant or refugee students from Somalia, Burundi, Ethiopia, Eritrea, or Liberia), in time (currently enrolled or recently graduated), and in space (a small suburban technical college.). The context for my case was the strategies utilized to persist in a post-secondary career and technical education setting.

An "issue", not a problem. Although I used the phrases *statement of the problem* and *research question* to identify the conceptual structure and focus of my research, I feel that Stake's (1995) use of the term *issue* is more apt (i.e., issue statement and issue question). Issue is more abstract than problem. Problem is more tangible. When referring to the issue of a case, it alludes to the case's complexity and highly contextual nature. An issue is "intricately wired to political, social, historical, and especially personal contexts" (p. 17). Stake proposed that an issue tempts the researcher to tease out the "problems of the case, the conflictual outpouring, the complex backgrounds of human concern… expand upon the moment, … see the instance in a more historical light, … [and] recognize the pervasive problems in human interaction" (p. 17). An issue is nuanced, dynamic, and holistic.

The phenomenon under investigation in this study is indeed an issue. The concept of persistence strategies is abstract, complex, and contextual. The strategies utilized by student-participants are tied to both their current and past socio-economic and political situations. The strategies are also dynamic, they change as the situation changes. In hearing the stories, I was tempted to tease out the details alluded to but which surpass the confines of this study.

Interrelated components. The case study was also selected because it has interrelated components that form the larger whole (Cresswell, 2007; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2009). A theoretical framework often cited in persistence studies (e.g., Boulanger, 2009; Geisler, 2007; Taffer, 2010) is Tinto's student integration model. Tinto's model, as well as Cabrera, Nora, and Castañeda's (1993) revision, the integrated model of student retention, both incorporate the various aspects of the multiple roles that adult students enact. Both models demonstrate that the role aspects interact with each other within the academic environment to influence the student's decision to persist or depart. These interrelated components can be used to determine what factors help students succeed in their education.

Rich description. The end result of a case study is a thick, or rich, description from which both the context of and the meanings inherent in the specific, bounded, phenomenon under investigation are interpreted and re-presented in order to be understood within the framework of the reader's own experience (Merriam, 2009).

Participants

I identified a convenience sample of eleven student-participants. Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) defined convenience sample as "selecting cases simply because they are

available and easy to study" (p. 185). Merriam (2009) and Corbin and Strauss (2008) recommended gathering data until redundancy or saturation is achieved, or the sample "results in… a new and richly textured understanding" (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 183) of the phenomenon. However, Creswell (2007) suggested no more than four or five cases in a case study. Although I had achieved redundancy in strategies utilized within the first cases, I elected to include eleven student-participants in order to develop a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between strategies utilized in order to persist.

Rationale for Sample

For several years, I have been very interested in the educational experiences of a very specific population, Somali civil war refugees. I have been fortunate to work with this population at two different schools. I wanted to learn more about how they have persisted in their education despite some incredible barriers that would both overwhelm and discourage most students. It was for this reason that I selected as participants in my research study, students who were recent immigrants from the war-torn or unstable countries of Somalia, Burundi, Eretria, Ethiopia, and Liberia who were either currently enrolled in a program of study at the technical college, or were recent graduates from the technical college. Due to the small size of the student population in general and the even smaller number of non-U.S.-born students, I did not feel the numbers of the students belonging to an individual nationality would yield the thick description needed to adequately explain the complex nature of the persistence strategies utilized by the students in their academic programs. Therefore, I decided to select my student-participants from a number of African nations that have experienced civil war or long-term political instability. Ten of the eleven students I selected to be participants in the

study had satisfactorily completed my basic Reading Skills class. The eleventh student I had the opportunity to get to know through an informal reading-skills tutoring program I facilitated in conjunction with a technical program.

The Context: Technical College

Technical College, where I conducted my research is part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system. MnSCU is Minnesota's largest post-secondary educational system, encompassing thirty-one institutions (24 two-year colleges and seven state universities). Technical College is aligned with a neighboring community college and is associated with a career and technical high school.

Technical College is located in the northern suburbs of the Twin Cities. Founded in 1967, five career programs were offered. Technical College now offers over thirty-five degree-earning programs in fields such as Occupational Therapy Assistant, Golf Course Grounds Management, Supervisory Management, Judicial Reporting, Gaming Information Technology, Construction Electrician, Mechanical Drafting, and Welding. Degrees offered are certificates, diplomas, and Associates of Applied Science.

The student population is 2400, with 64% enrolled in a full-time status. 37% of the students are male, 63% female, 55% are over 25 years old, and 73% are "first generation" (i.e., first in their family to attend college). MnSCU, and by extension Technical College, does not specifically track numbers of immigrant or refugee students. They do, however, track race as a demographic factor. Enrollment of students who have voluntarily identified themselves as "Black" at Technical College is currently 9% of the entire student population, while 81% self-identified themselves as "White". In

comparison, Anoka County is 5% Black, 88% White; Minnesota is 5% Black, 87% White; the United States is 13% Black, 73% White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Establishing Rapport

Participants in my research study had been students in my classes and were aware that I am a student myself, in addition to being an instructor. I have found that this disclosure makes it less daunting for students to approach me if they are having difficulties with their academics or their life outside the classroom. Boulanger (2009) found in her research into persistence strategies utilized by first generation adult college students at a community college that many successful students develop a mentor-like relationship with an instructor outside of the classroom. Trust and the "ability to know what it was like to 'be in their shoes,' suggesting [the instructor-mentor] understood and cared about the challenges faced by adults" (p. 265) were characteristics of these relationships. I hoped to be able to utilize the trust my former students have given me to further delve into their academic and private lives in order to determine what strategies they have employed, or are currently employing to persist academically in their chosen technical programs.

Criteria for Selection. To determine who would be eligible for this study, I found that I had taught approximately 41 students who were born in Africa. I immediately rejected seven students who I knew were no longer enrolled at Technical College, or were from nations considered stable. I sent out, via email, a letter of introduction to my research (see Appendix A) to 34 potential student-participants. I used the email addresses on record to contact the students, which turned out to be problematic. When the students finally contacted me, they often admitted that they do not check their

college emails on a regular basis. As a result, four weeks after the initial email, only 15 students had responded. After verifying country of origin, I set up interviews with all except for one, who had returned home. Five students did not show up for their interview. One student-participant showed up unexpectedly with another student-participant for her interview. The eleventh student-participant I approached in-person. I explained the study and gained his consent for an interview.

Sample Demographics

I interviewed eleven students who were immigrants or refugees from Africa. Regarding demographic variables, Sandelowski (1995) wrote "there is no mandate to have equivalent numbers of women or men or numbers of persons of each sex in the proportions in which they appear in a certain population" (p. 180). Sandelowski also stated that in qualitative research, participants are selected because they are good sources of a specific type of information that will result in the advancement toward an analytic goal. Consequently, I did not purposefully select participants based on age, gender, national origin, or academic program.

The students selected to participate in this study reflected current academic program enrollment data. Technical College has tracked enrollment data over the previous four semesters (Fall 2011, Spring 2012, Fall 2012, and Spring 2013). During this time, the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) Associates of Applied Science (AAS) degree had the third largest enrollment (8%) behind the eight emphases offered within the Information Technology AAS (15%) and the Medical Assistant AAS (9%). However, when the total number of students enrolled in the academic programs regardless of degree was considered, the LPN program has the highest enrollment (11%) and the Health

Technology Certificate program is the fourth largest program (9%). Students in enrolled in this certificate program are taking general education and science classes in preparation for the LPN, Surgical Technician, and Occupational Therapist programs.

Table 5. *Demographics of Student-Participants*

Name	Gender Age	Year and Nation	Children	Hours	Program
David	M 29	2009 Eritrea	None	25 hours per week	Licensed Practical Nursing
Eve	F 41	1989 Liberia	Girl – 18 Boy – 6	During the summer	Licensed Practical Nursing
Gemechu	M 37	2002 Ethiopia	None	F/T + overtime	Licensed Practical Nursing
Gloria	F 44	1999 Eritrea	Boy – 12	20 hours per week	Licensed Practical Nursing
Hani	F 25	2008 Somalia	None	Not this semester	Licensed Practical Nursing
Jim	M 19	2006 Liberia	Girl – 2	25 hours per week	Automotive Technician
Mugisha	F 37	1995 Burundi	2 girls 13, 11	Part-time on-call	Health Information Technology
Naomi	F 25	2003 Liberia	Girl – 4	Not this semester	Surgical Technician
Paye	M 39	2010 Liberia	2 boys 10, 2	21 hours per week	Licensed Practical Nursing
Sami	F 26	1999 Liberia	None	32 hours per week	Licensed Practical Nursing
Zab	F 32	1999 Ethiopia	4 + step daughter	40 hours per week	Licensed Practical Nursing

Table 5 lists the following demographic information for each student-participant: gender, age, year of arrival in the United States, nation of birth, gender and number of

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children living in the home with the participant, number of hours worked per week, and technical program.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

No ethical issues arose when my research proposal was submitted to the University of Minnesota's IRB: Human Subject Committee. Howe and Dougherty (1993) suggested that "research that is very low risk and aimed at evaluating and improving normal instructional practices" (p. 18) qualify for special exemption. 45 CFR 46 paragraph 46.102(i) defined minimal risk as "the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests". As my research focused on strategies utilized by students to complete an educational program as well as factors deemed necessary to be academically successful, I believed my research fit Howe and Dougherty's criteria of special exemption as well as 45 CFR 46's definition of minimal risk. The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined this study to be exempt (see Appendix B).

Voluntary Consent

When I approached all prospective participants, I stressed the voluntary nature of their participation in my study. I also ensured that they understood that either consenting or declining to participate in my research study will have no adverse affect on their relationship with me, Technical College, or the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota.

Although a signed consent form was not required by the IRB, I presented each student-participant with a consent form prior to the beginning of the interview. The

consent form (see Appendix C) included a brief description of the study, the notification that participation is voluntary, the fact that pseudonyms would be used and the data collected (interviews, transcriptions, and notes) would be locked up, and an advisement of how the results would be used. I felt this step was necessary, as one student-participant specifically stated that he or she had come from a situation in which data collected by an individual in a position of authority could potentially be used to cause harm to the individual and/or his or her family.

Confidentiality

All information collected for this study will remain confidential. Names were changed to a self-selected pseudonym in all documents and in presentations of the data. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. I transcribed the interviews myself to get an accurate and in-depth understanding of each. All information forms, tapes, transcripts, and notes taken during the interviews will be kept securely for five years following the conclusion of the study.

<div align="center">

The Interview Process

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I interviewed eleven students who were currently enrolled in (or, within the last year, graduated from) a career and technical education program at Technical College to determine which strategies they feel contributed to their continued academic success.

Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007) stated that the goal of a qualitative research interview is to "help respondents express their views of a phenomenon in their own terms" (p. 246). Thus, interviews are often utilized as a source of data in qualitative research because they are a process of "unveiling personal feelings, beliefs, wishes, problems, experiences, and behaviors" (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1994, p. 301). Merriam (2009) further explained an

interview as a purposeful conversation to obtain information that cannot be observed, such as feelings, intentions, past behaviors or actions, or meanings attached to what has been experienced. The final product of an interview and its subsequent analysis is a thick, rich, detailed description of the individual's experience of the phenomenon under investigation which can speak for itself (Merriam, 2009).

Preparing for the process of data collection, I planned that each student-participant would fill out an information form prior to the interview. The intent was that the individual, upon scheduling an interview, would have ample time to fill out the form, ruminating on the various support services offered by the college, and pondering the support and encouragement he or she has received from various support networks both within and outside the academic environment. The results would provide a basis from which to ask follow-up questions regarding the use, or non-use, of particular strategies. The interview itself would consist of carefully worded, and piloted, open-ended questions designed to elicit richly-detailed answers to the guiding question: what strategies do immigrant students utilize to persist in their career preparation programs? These answers would provide, as well, greater insight to the following five sub-questions:

1. Which academic strategies have the students utilized in order to persist in their educational program?

2. Which programs or services offered by Technical College have the students found useful?

3. Which programs or services outside Technical College have the students found useful?

4. Which networks (social, familial, academic) have the students found useful?

5. What motivated the students to persist in their educational program?

Unfortunately, this did not quite work as planned. Several student-participants arrived at my office door requesting to be interviewed, *right then*, due to impossibly busy school and work schedules as well as the incompatibility between their free time and my office hours. I also discovered, by the second interview, that the student-participants were either unaware of the services, or had utilized a service without knowing its name. As a result, the student information form became unreliable as a means of determining persistence strategies utilized by the students. May (1989) confirmed that, because interviewing in qualitative research is dynamic, questions asked in subsequent interviews are often refinements of questions asked in previous interviews, adjustments in structure and flexibility are continually necessary.

Consequently, I altered my interview process in order to obtain the necessary stories of my student-participants. Rather than utilizing the answers provided by the student-participant on the information form as a basis for follow-up questions, the student-participant information form became an interview guide. During the course of the interview, I went through each item individually, explaining the service in question. The resultant discussion provided an in-depth understanding of the complexity of persistence strategies utilized by the students. By reading through the guide line-by-line with each participant, consistency was ensured. May (1989) suggested that "consistency in a qualitative data set can be thought of as comparability, i.e., having enough information about informants and enough detail in their stories that the investigator can compare their major elements" (p. 176).

The Interview Guide

The interview guide (see Appendix D) consisted of two main parts. The first consisted of questions on basic demographic information. The second part regarded resources and services both currently offered by Technical College and external to the college, and persistence strategies that may have been used by the student-participant.

Demographic and background information. The data collected in the first section were basic demographics (see Table 5). These data included age, marital status, number and age of dependents living in the home, and if there were other family members living in the area. Education and employment data was also collected, including previous education (secondary and post secondary), employment status, job title, job duties, and length of employment.

Previous education. This section elicited the student-participant's previous education. I wanted to learn whether the student had the opportunity for an education prior to arrival in the United States, and if so, how much. Upon resettlement in the United States, I next wanted to learn if the student was able to take advantage of adult basic education or earn his or her GED.

Current education. I was curious to learn if Technical College was the student-participants' first experience with college. I also collected some general information about their educational career at Technical College: how long they have been attending the college, which program they are in or are wait-listed for, and their degree attainment goal: diploma, certificate, or Associate of Applied Science.

Employment information. Where do you work and what do you do there? How many hours a week, or pay-period, do you work? And what days and times is your

normal shift? These are questions I asked in order to gain a more comprehensive

understanding of the demands made on the time of my student-participants.

Refugee experience. In addition, I gathered information on the refugee

experience: the country of origin, when the participant left the country of origin and when

he or she arrived in the United States. I was also interested in learning if the participant

had lived in another nation prior to resettlement in the United States and if so, where and

for how long.

This information was collected in order to gain a general understanding of the

student-participant's personal characteristics. This knowledge was significant because an

adult plays multiple roles throughout the day, the most common of which are parent,

employee, community member, and student. The various aspects of one role affect the

functioning of the other roles, and if one role adversely affects the others, then this could

create an entry point for a success strategy, or an exit point for academic attrition.

Knowledge of potential entry or exit points and stressors helped me formulate interview

questions that led to greater insight into the participant's utilization of strategies for

academic persistence.

Resources, strategies, and networks. A major portion of the participant

interview guide was a checklist of potential strategies a student may have, or may not

have, utilized. For each item, the participant selected either *yes* to indicate that he or she

had utilized this strategy, or *no*, the strategy had not been utilized. There was also space

next to each strategy for the participant to make a comment. The original intent of this

portion of the guide was to provide a basis from which to ask follow-up questions

regarding the use, or non-use, of particular strategies.

Academic, social, and counseling resources. The first section is a list of programs and services offered by Technical College. These are academic, social, and counseling resources. Resources included the academic labs such as the Math Lab, Writing Lab, and Computer Lab. I explained in detail each of the different counseling and coaching services offered, disability services, adult basic education, the student senate. Because student life organizations have only recently made a return to the campus, I used the psychology instructor's biking club as an example to explain the nature of a student life organization.

Less formal academic strategies. The second section contained less formal academic strategies. I asked about time management strategies in use, whether the student-participants felt   comfortable asking for assistance, and if they created study groups. The use of relaxation techniques, such as prayer, meditation, or exercise, was also asked.

Familial, social, and academic networks. In the final section I asked about familial, social, and academic networks the student-participants utilized. Familial networks included both immediate and extended family (e.g., aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews). Social networks included friends, co-workers, religious advisors, and social organizations outside of Technical College. Academic networks consisted of classmates, instructors, tutors, staff, and administrators. As I provided an explanation of the various roles and duties of the tutors and staff, lab assistants were considered by the student-participants to be a separate category apart from tutors, and closer to staff.

The Final Question

One final question that was neither on the participant interview guide nor on the original interview protocol was asked of each participant. The wording was somewhat modified to reflect each participant's situation, but was in general similar to:

> You are about ready to give up! The class is too hard and there is too
>
> much homework. The kids are too much to handle. You work too many
>
> hours at your job. There is too much cold and snow. You want to quit.
>
> - What do you do to keep going?
>
> - What keeps you motivated to come back to school the next day?

I used this question to wrap up the interview and to elicit any last strategies that were previously overlooked.

Interview Protocol

The original interview protocol (see Appendix E) consisted of twelve general questions and eleven follow-up questions designed to gather data to answer the guiding research question and the sub-questions of this study. Except for the initial interview, the interview protocol was not utilized due to the fact that these questions were answered in the course of filling out the student-participant information form.

Data Analysis

> Data analysis is the process of making sense out of the data. And making
>
> sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what
>
> people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it is the process
>
> of making meaning…. Data analysis is the process used to *answer your*

research question(s) [emphasis in the original]. (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176)

The analysis of my research data was inductive. I transcribed the interviews myself. In order to obtain an accurate verbatim transcription of the interview, I reviewed both the voiced and written words multiple times. These multiple reviews also allowed me to become familiar with the student-participant's story prior to the actual analysis.

For the first read-through of the separate completed interview transcripts, I read the transcript completely, without making any notes or memos, in order to immerse myself fully in the participant's story. This is a technique suggested by Corbin and Strauss (2008). For the second and subsequent readings, I reviewed the transcripts line-by-line, making memos in a separate notebook. These memos detailed my personal reflections of the material, hunches, ideas to pursue, and analytical methodology. In addition, I wrote margin notes commenting on the data and began coding chunks of text. Coding is a form of analysis in which chunks of text are labeled with a code, a shorthand designation which denotes a general meaning. Coding is also a means of retrieving and organizing text (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I did not use *a priori* coding, instead, I allowed the codes to naturally emerge from the data.

Constant Comparative Method

I used the constant comparative method initially developed by Glaser and Strauss (Merriam, 2009). Constant comparison is a process in which I began analyzing the data immediately after the first interview. The data derived from this initial analysis serves as the foundation for the following interview as far as gaining a better idea of data to collect

and refining the analysis process (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Merriam, 2009). Each interview was analyzed and then compared to the preceding interviews in order to identify as many aspects of the phenomenon as possible, to determine where data may lacking, and to ensure saturation (Morse, 1994).

I did not use a software program to code my data because it is better to code manually in order to ensure nuances (e.g., voice inflection, stressed words) are not missed. I made multiple back-ups and retained a pristine copy of each interview.

Researcher Positionality

One issue that I felt may arise is a common ethical issue in qualitative research conducted in the field of nursing: the blurring of roles of researcher and health care practitioner. Lipson (1994) referred to this issue as the interactional dimension inherent in nursing as a human service profession. Holloway and Wheeler (1995) wrote about the dilemma of intervention as the "reality of the health professionals' clinical roles" (p. 226). Robley (1995) linked the blurring of the practitioner and researcher roles to the question of to whom the research participant is giving consent: the familiar nurse or the nebulous researcher. The ethical issue emerges when the researcher is prevailed upon to provide clinical care or diagnosis during the course of the research intervention (e.g., interview or observation).

I strongly feel that this ethical issue may be applicable to educators as well, especially if the participant is familiar with the researcher as an instructor. Because I conducted my research at the institution where I currently teach and my participants were former students, the blurring of the line between researcher and faculty was an issue of which I was constantly aware. I did not wish to lapse into "instructor mode" and begin

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educating the student while conducting the interview. Unfortunately, by the second interview, I found myself explaining the various services offered by the college because I realized that the student-participant may have utilized the service but did not know its name. Although these explanations skirted the boundary of the role of an instructor rather than that of a researcher, I felt it necessary in order to ensure comprehension on the part of the student-participant which, in turn, would lead to obtaining a richer description of the strategies utilized.

Stake (1995) pointed out that one of the roles of the researcher is to be a teacher. Both researchers and teachers inform. However, in order to accomplish that, a teacher must be able to recognize the "conditions that will facilitate learning" (p. 92). By extrapolation, the researcher must be able to recognize the conditions that will facilitate storytelling. If the conditions are not met, then the lesson cannot not be learned, or the story cannot be told.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology of this study, a constructivist case study. The interview was the method of data collection and the constant comparative method was used to code the interviews. The following chapter will discuss the four themes which emerged from the data: the difficulty of school, finding services to utilize, time, and motivation.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I first introduce the eleven student-participants interviewed for this study. Then, I explore the four themes which emerged from the interviews regarding the strategies these student-participants used in order to persist in their educational programs. Appendix F displays the findings in table format.

Student-Participant Biographies

This section is an introduction to the student-participants whose stories provide the essence of this study. They are identified by their pseudonym.

David

David is a single, 29-year-old man from Eritrea. He lives with his sponsors, who worked with his father in Eritrea in 1974.

Back home, David graduated from high school and attended college for 6 months before he was drafted into the Eritrean Air Force as an administrative worker. David was selected for a Diversity Visa while he was still in the air force. He made the choice to leave the air force before his contract was up and to immigrate to the United States, meaning that he had to cross several national borders illegally. He went first to the Eritrean Embassy in Sudan to get his passport then travelled to the United States embassy in Kenya to conduct his immigration interview. He finally arrived in the United States in June, 2009. It is currently not safe for him to visit Eritrea to see his family, all of whom still live there. At the time of this writing, David's family has not been harassed by the Eritrean government and would be able to meet him in Kenya or Sudan.

David attended a local community college for two semesters before transferring to Technical College to take the Certified Nursing Assistant classes and to enter the

Licensed Practical Nursing program. He has been at Technical College for four semesters taking his health science prerequisite courses. David also works 25 hours per week in the evenings as a nursing assistant in a nursing home.

David mentioned several times the incredible opportunity he has been given by being able to live with his sponsors so he can attend college and not focus on earning money to for rent and other living expenses. He contrasted his situation to that of his countrymen, many of whom work more than one job in order to support their families:

> So they can't come to school. But I am lucky. So I don't want to give up from the school.

Eve

Eve is a 41-year-old woman from Liberia. She is married and lives with her husband and 2 children, an 18-year-old daughter graduates from high school in June, and a 6-year-old son.

Eve arrived in the United States in 1989, when she was 16 or 17, as she lamented, *I forget, too long!* She earned her high school diploma in Rhode Island, and then moved to Minnesota in 1999 after a brief stay in Maryland. She completed her diploma in cosmetology at a community college in the Twin Cities. Eve is a small business owner, renting out stations in her salon to other stylists. She is in the middle of her second semester at Technical College. Eve works as a hair stylist only in the summers when the salon is the busiest. Unfortunately, Eve's husband just lost his job, so she may need to work part-time during the Fall semester if he is unable to find work.

Although she is currently enrolled in courses for the Licensed Practical Nursing program, Eve hopes to transfer to the local research university in the fall to study Physical Therapy. When asked why, she replied:

> I was just going in there [the Licensed Practical Nursing program] because
> of the money, but it's not what I want to do. Like, I love working with my
> hands. And in physical therapy, I will be using my hands more.

Eve also mentioned that she likes communicating and building relationships with her clients, something that she has been able to do as a hair stylist and will be able to do as a physical therapist.

Gemechu

Gemechu is a college educated, 37-year-old man from Ethiopia. He is married and lives with his wife and sister.

Gemechu won the Diversity Visa lottery and immigrated to the United States in 2002. A year after arriving in the United States, his father passed away, making him the primary provider for his extended family both here and back home. As a result, his priority for his first three or four years in the United States was to work and earn money. Gemechu took English language classes and some of the general education prerequisite courses at a four-year college in the Twin Cities before transferring to Technical College a year ago. He is taking his last prerequisite course for the Licensed Practical Nursing program this semester and hopes to be admitted for the Fall semester.

Gemechu works 40 hours a week and often gets overtime hours on the weekends. He and wife work for the same company. He added, shyly, *sometimes we come in front with each other, face to face.* Gemechu's wife encourages him to keep studying. *Go to school! Get up! Go study!* They plan to have children after he graduates.

Gloria

Gloria is a 44-year-old woman born in Eritrea. She left Eritrea as a little girl and grew up in Ethiopia to escape the war. She moved to Toronto, Canada in 1987 where she

graduated from high school. Then, in 1989, Gloria moved to the United States on a

Diversity Visa, joining her sister in Minnesota. Divorced and raising a 12-year-old son

by herself, Gloria works as a nursing assistant in a nursing home.

In 2006, Gloria started attending a community college in the Twin Cities to earn

her Registered Nursing (RN) degree. Because she has had to work while going to school

in order to support her and her son, Gloria had to periodically quit school in order to

work. She said that sometimes her son asked, *Mommy, didn't you used to go to college?*

Why did you give up? To which she would reply, *oh, I didn't give up, I quit… because I*

need money. Gloria realized that the RN program was going to take too long so she

transferred to Technical College in 2009 for the two-year Licensed Practical Nursing

program. Finishing her general education and prerequisite courses, Gloria began her

program classes last semester. Unfortunately, she was so stressed by the course load that

she had to drop two classes. Unwilling to allow that to happen again, this semester she

decided to go to part-time and only work 20 hours per week.

Gloria said she misses Canada where she had a lot more free time, a lot more

friends, and a social life. However, she is highly motivated to finish her degree to

provide a better life for her son and to be a good example for him. Gloria admitted, *that's*

what keeps me go- go- going!

Hani

Hani is a 25-year-old woman born in Somalia. She is single, lives with her sister,

and depends on the bus for transportation. Hani is currently not working so she can

concentrate on her education.

Fleeing the civil war in her native Somalia at age 2, Hani grew up in Dadaab, a refugee camp in Kenya, considered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to be the largest in the world. She was finally able to start kindergarten at age eight or nine:

> Education was my passion so I used to really bug my mother to take me to school.

Hani arrived in the United States in 2008, staying for several months in New Hampshire then resettled in Minnesota in 2009 to live with her older sister. She earned her GED and has been at Technical College for three semesters. Hani is in the Licensed Practical Nursing program.

Originally considering attending a community college that enrolls a large portion of the Somali population, Hani changed her mind when her friends told her that she will not make it because the Nursing instructors say to the students, *you will not make it! Just quit while you are ahead.* Hani opted instead to attend Technical College and, apart from hating her Anatomy and Physiology class, likes the school and the instructors:

> Nope. I'm glad I stuck with Technical College. It's a good school.… The teachers are great!

Despite her struggles with Anatomy and Physiology, Hani will persevere:

> I'm not a quitter! That's one thing that makes me, that burns my blood! … I'm going to keep up!

Jim

Jim is a 19-year-old man, born in Liberia. Fleeing the civil war in Liberia with his siblings, Jim spent his youth "in exile" in Ghana and the Ivory Coast and was raised by his father's best friend. He had to leave his mother behind in Liberia. Because he had to constantly move from place to place, Jim did not receive much of a formal education

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in Africa. After a three-day flight, Jim and a sister arrived in the United States in 2006 and were reunited with their father and many other family members living in the Twin Cities. Jim graduated from high school on June 8th, 2012 and is in his second semester in the Automotive Technology program at Technical College.

Jim lives with his girlfriend and their 2-year-old daughter. He works 25 hours a week as a custodian at the YMCA. He states that he works on the weekends so *it doesn't have to interfere with my schooling*. A photographer in his free-time during high school, Jim had to put most of his photography equipment away at the suggestion of his program instructor who told him that:

> You have to put your heart into something that you really want, instead of trying to do three things at once, because it usually won't work.

He is, of course, considering unpacking his photography equipment after he has graduated.

When asked what he does when the coursework becomes too much, Jim again takes the advice of his instructor, *when everything is getting so overwhelming, you should just take a break*. Walk away and then come back to it. And he does, usually to get a coffee from the cafeteria, then back down to the shop. Jim does not give up.

Mugisha

Mugisha is a 37-year-old woman from Burundi. The ethnic fighting caused her to flee to Benin where she lived for six months before arriving in the United States in 1995. Mugisha moved from Texas to Florida with her sponsors. Then, in Florida she found a husband and in 1996 resettled in Minnesota where he was living. Apart from her cousin and her cousin's mother, Mugisha's relatives are all still back in Burundi. She has two

daughters, a 13-year-old, and an 11-year-old. Mugisha was divorced until one week after

I interviewed her, when she got remarried.

Even though she had gotten her high school diploma from Burundi, Mugisha

started taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes when she first resettled in

Minnesota. She soon decided to take GED classes in order to progress academically:

> My English was just, just horrible English… then I was taking this ESL
> thing. I go every morning… I go every day…. Then I make a decision just
> to do this GED… And I found out the only thing which was hard for me was
> the English. Otherwise the math, the science, the thing was just regular thing
> I can do.

Mugisha earned her GED in 1998. She graduated May 2012 with an Associate of

Applied Science in Health Information Technology from Technical College. At the time

of her interview, Mugisha was half-way through the training program for a billing

specialist job, which is in her field.

When asked if she had any advice for newcomers wishing to go to college,

Mugisha suggested taking college classes almost right away, after only two or three

years, rather than *spending ten years learning English as a second language.* When

asked to explain, Mugisha believed that:

> To me it is like wasting your time…. English as a second language [ESL],
> ABE stuff is good, but it is not taking you anywhere. It doesn't give you a
> certificate. It doesn't give you a degree…. [Take ESL] maybe 3, 4 years, get
> the knowledge of the language and you can understand and person can
> understand you. You can speak, stuff like that. Then take one class at
> college ... Once you take one of your classes in college, then combine it with
> the little English you have, you find the class you pass there is not waiting for
> you the next semester. So it is both together.

It is a challenging way to learn English, especially comprehending the material for a

technical program, but Mugisha had determination and she did it.

Naomi

Naomi is a 25-year-old woman from Liberia. She is single and raising a 4-year-old daughter by herself. Naomi is in her fourth semester at Technical College in the Surgical Technician program and is planning to graduate in December, 2013.

Naomi figured she completed the 6th grade in Liberia before she arrived in the United States in approximately 2003. She settled initially in Ohio with her father, brother, sister, and step-mother where she completed the 9th grade. The following year she moved to her aunt's house in New Jersey, where she graduated from high school. Around 2007, Naomi moved to Minnesota with her boyfriend. Naomi has several aunts, uncles, cousins, and a niece living in the Twin Cities with whom she gets together often.

Naomi had been working 37 hours a week as a nursing assistant for the past five years. Unlike so many others who work as nursing assistants and feel like they receive no respect, Naomi takes a more philosophical view:

> I don't even care if people say my job is boring or lax. I feel like I'm coming in to give care. I'm giving care to people who cannot care for themselves. I am very important to them. I feel like I am doing a very important job.

However in January, at the beginning of this semester,

> I had to give up working. Because I got into the [surgical technician] program. The program got harder.

Naomi hopes to be able to find a job in a hospital soon and is polishing up her résumé.

Naomi joined Sami for a joint interview.

Paye

Paye is a 39-year-old man from Liberia. He is married and lives with his wife and two sons, aged 10 and 2. Paye arrived in the United States in 2010, joining his wife who has been here since 2002 and his son who came over four years ago.

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Paye works 21 hours a week on the weekends as a nursing assistant in a nursing home. Worried about not bring in more income, his wife told him:

> Go right with your studies. Take less working hours and do your studies because the money you're looking for today, if you do well with your study, you'll get it tomorrow.

Currently in his third semester at Technical College, Paye is focused on earning his AAS in the LPN program. Paye's wife, also an LPN, is very encouraging, telling him every day, *you need to study.* Or if he sleeps in, she asks, *it's 5:00 are you going to read a little?* Meanwhile, Paye's 10-year-old son is very protective of his dad's study time:

> Dad has been working so hard. He's been studying. Leave him be. He needs his rest. You [Mom] have been sitting all day. Please help me."

A coworker is also very supportive of Paye's schooling:

> Will is encouraging. He always talk to me. He always say, 'anything you don't understand, I can help you. We can read together.' And I'm like, good!

Between the encouragement and support Paye receives from his wife, son, and co-worker, Paye will go far academically.

Sami

Sami is a 26-year-old woman from Liberia. She is single and lives by herself. Like Naomi, Sami has several aunts, uncles, cousins, and a nephew living in the Twin Cities with whom she gets together often.

Prior to arriving in the United States in 1999, Sami lived for five years in the Ivory Coast. She started the 8th grade here in Minnesota and earned her high school diploma from a Minneapolis suburb in 2003. Sami did not start here college career at Technical College, she attempted the Registered Nurse (RN) program at a north suburban community college and a different technical college. She transferred to the Technical

College for the Licensed Practical Nursing program because, as she put it, *the RN program wasn't working out quite OK academically.* Sami works about 32 hours per week as a nursing assistant and trained medication aide in a nursing home.

Giggling through the entire interview, Sami grew serious when bemoaning the lack of information that she and the other have about the academic and other support services offered at Technical College. She again grew serious at the end when she explained that, in her opinion:

education is key, like to success, to a better life, for your family… for yourself…. It's a vital thing.

After the last question was asked, Sami shouted, *Yaaaay! Successful interview!* She giggled and commented that she wanted to *contact channel 12 and have our next meeting over there on camera!* She may have a new career choice in mind when she wondered about how to get an internship as a reporter. Sami invited Naomi to join to come along to her interview.

Zab

Zab is a 32-year-old woman from Ethiopia. Zab arrived in the United States in 1999. She is married, and lives with her husband, son (12), three daughters (10, 5, and 8 months), and 20 year-old step-daughter. Her 18-year-old daughter recently arrived in the United States. She does not live with Zab, whom she has not seen since she was a baby.

Although she earned her high school diploma back home, Zab enrolled in ABE with the belief that she belonged in the lowest level English as a second language classes. The placement tests placed her at almost GED level. She refused, stating that:

I need more skills. I know how to read. I understand when I read. But I need to know how to writing and speaking, and stuff like that.

Soon afterward, a county social services worker suggested she take her placement tests for college. She passed despite her belief that she is not a college person. Zab never expected to be in college.

Zab is in the Licensed Practical Nursing program, but is only going part-time. During the week, Zab helps her children with their homework. She feels fortunate that she is able to help her children with their homework and ensures that they are able to participate in school activities and sports. After her husband gets home from work at 3, she goes to the library to study for several hours before going to the gym and then to work. Zab works full-time, over-night in a nursing home, which gives her a chance to study. She is active in the woman's group at her mosque. Zab teaches Arabic at her mosque on Saturdays and on Sundays she teaches the Oromo and Amharic languages at the community center.

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Themes Traversing the Interviews

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This study sought to discover which strategies immigrant or refugee students from war-torn countries in Africa utilize in order to persist in their post-secondary career and technical programs. Four themes emerged from the interviews, the difficulty of school, finding services to utilize, time, and motivation. Each theme comprises such a variety of aspects that several sub-themes are essential in order to fully describe the richness.

Theme 1: Accepting that *School is hard!*

Mid-way through her interview Hani exclaimed, *school is hard!* This simple utterance sums up the first theme. The student-participants divulged that school is difficult primarily due to the language. They also perceived themselves to be alone, with very little help or support. Despite that, they have accepted that school is hard and had

no trouble asking for help, even if it involved the students determining the answer on their own.

Sub-theme: Not allowing the language to be an insurmountable barrier: *Find your way out.* When asked how she made it through school and graduated, Mugisha admitted that the largest obstacle was the English language. Mugisha believed that *if someone did not born here, that is the language become like a barrier for everyone.* Language was a challenge because of the academic nature of English in the classroom and having an accent, which made it hard sometimes for other students and teachers to understand them.

Hani expressed her frustrations with both English not being her first language and not having a strong background of academic English when she exclaimed:

> Anatomy and Physiology, I hate that class! I mean, the teacher is great! He is really understanding with someone like me. I mean English isn't my first language. So during the lesson, in the class, I'm lost. I have to go back and break everything down into little pieces.… He asks questions sometimes and I don't participate as much as I should. Because I don't understand. And sometimes I think I don't learn some things.

Mugisha expressed her frustrations with academic English as well:

> Have to look for in the dictionaries, and I found the word, this word means, try to change it in my language and that it still doesn't make sense.

Listening to these comments, and similar ones made by the other student-participants, one has to wonder how many students have chosen to leave school due to not having an adequate academic vocabulary, rather than acknowledging that academic English is, in fact, challenging and failing the first time may be a very real possibility. Naomi understood the possibility of failure but also recognized the need to persist, *I take*

a test, and I fail. It's like, I'm going to take it again. In a similar vein of the acceptance

of failure, Eve said:

> I didn't do well in computers last term… I was at a 92 but I failed a timed
> [keyboarding test].… I said OK. And I go, that's it. I'll just take it next
> semester.

Mugisha offered this advice:

> As a student, we have to work through it. I mean you find your way out.
> Study harder, get more vocabulary, vocabulary words, and find out how to
> understand what is in the book, then pass it.

Pronunciation and accent produced barriers as well. Gemechu spoke about how

knowing how to use a regional difference in the pronunciation of a basic word phrase, or

perhaps even using the correct grammatical pronunciation, can cause a listener to not be

able to understand the speaker:

> Tomorrow I'm going to go. I'm gonna go tomorrow. Nobody can
> understand. I'm gonna go tomorrow. No one over there [Ethiopia], but
> here [Minnesota] it is ok.

Jim, a Liberian whose first language is English, also reported encountering challenges

with his accent. He guessed that maybe one-half of the students in his class could

understand him:

> I usually try to limit the questions. So if I have more questions to ask, I will
> have to like break it down. Break it down a little bit. Like how for them to
> understand me faster, and be able to answer my questions the way I want it.

As a result, when he has a question, he relies first on his textbook, then the one or two

students in his lab group, and finally his instructor before asking his other classmates.

Gemechu expressed a similar hesitancy when communicating with his classmates.

> Even with my classmate, I am not gonna communicate, because of my
> language. Maybe because of accent. So even if I talk to them, they might not
> be able to understand my language because of… accent.

This self-imposed separation from classmates could account for some of the feelings of loneliness expressed by the students.

Sub-theme: Accepting that *I am alone in my work!* Mugisha combined the subthemes of the English language and being alone in one of her statements:

I don't think I had that much of study group. And, like the way I'm speaking, the way my English sounds, no one was interested to study with me that much.

However, the loneliness expressed most often extended beyond the language barrier, to not having classmates or family available for help. Hani dramatically uttered, *I am alone in my work* while Sami whispered in plaintive tones, *I wish I did have some people outside of school helping me.*

This subtheme, alone in my work, was the result of two different factors. The first being that family or friends did not understand the nature of the academic program. Jim's girlfriend helped him throughout high school:

But in college, it's car stuff, and she doesn't really know. I don't even go to her anymore.

Mugisha explained:

Outside the school, I don't think I had someone who can help 'cause no one knew what I'm doing.

Naomi's family just wanted to know when she will graduate:

When are you going to graduate? [laughs] They have no idea how hard it is. When are you going to graduate? That's all they ask.

The second aspect of *alone in my work* was expressed in the non-support of community members. Eve saw the rejection on the faces of her friends and community members when she said she was going into nursing.

> So when I say nursing, oh, she's going to have a lot of money. And you start to see them, the rejection there…. Like if you do better, they push you down. They want to pull me down.

Hani mentioned her friends and community members attempting to scare her away from

attempting school, because she will fail.

> Because people scared me before I started school. They were like, oh my god, you are going to fail! And they will fail you! They will not accept you! You will be out of there, like in no time. The nursing instructors are, specifically the nursing instructors, all of them are bad! I swear!… That, the teachers, the teachers will look at you, the nursing instructors will look at you and say you will not make it! Just quit while you are ahead!

Hani did not listen to her friends and chose to attend Technical College:

> I am like, hmmm! Nope! I'm glad I stuck with Tech College. It's a good school…. Like all the instructors are really great…. The nursing teachers, I think they're all great!

In fact, when a friend asked Hani about the nursing program at Technical College,

Hani said, *don't be afraid! The teachers are great!*

Sub-theme: Looking for guidance: *I always ask.* One characteristic that Hani

really liked about the instructors at Technical College is their willingness to *talk to you,*

and explain to you, and not just give you the answers and get rid of you. A third

subtheme which quickly became apparent in the interviews was the students' willingness

to ask for help, especially from the instructors and lab assistants.

David said he asks for help, *right away after class.* Naomi agreed:

> I usually talk to the professors after class. I like to know.... I always ask. I always go to my teacher.

Gloria conceded that *yeah, I have* when asked if she sought out help and when pressed,

she acknowledged that *I always ask him something* when she has questions in the Biology

Lab. Eve and Hani also asked for Joehey's assistance:

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She's a helper in the biology lab, Judy? Joehey? She helps me out a lot. I go to her office for tutoring. **Eve**

This wonderful lab assistant named Joehey. I like Joehey. I go to her. I go to the office. **Hani**

Mugisha, as a tutor in the Math Lab, would ask for help when she needed the help then turn around and offer help to those who needed it. Sami and Naomi both giggled before answering that they often asked for Gary's assistance in the Math Lab. Paye asked for help especially with what he was reading, *if I have something like something I don't understand.* But he also warned:

Once I know you, you'll be my best friend 24/7!... At least like for an hour like that. I'll just come and sit with you. Oh I don't understand a part of my notes, can we go through it? And then I don't understand a part of the book. Can we go through it?

Gemechu acknowledged that *asking is not too bad.* While Sami explained:

It depends on the subject. Like if it is the lab, I will ask the lab assistants. Or maybe ask other classmates. And, sometimes I should be asking the professor, but I don't always.

Then Sami chanted, *just ask! Just ask!* However, Sami also mentioned that she hesitates to ask the nursing instructors for assistance because:

Pretty much they want you to take the initiative and learn the stuff on your own. So, they figure if you get this far, you should know. You should pretty much be able to take personal responsibility.

Jim waits to ask for assistance until he is unable to figure the problem out on his own.

If I do like work in class, and I don't understand it, well, I will, my first reference will like going to the book. Then we usually work in a group in the shop, I will ask like, probably like Scott or Nate [classmates]. I ask them and if there is no final result, I will go to Dave [instructor]. Dave usually is the one I will try. At least, he will try to take the question out of me. I will ask him question. He will ask me back the same question and we try to work through it and usually will come out to a good solution.

Acknowledging that working through the problem to arrive at the answer is frustrating,

Jim admitted that he asks his instructor last because:

> I want for him to give it [the answer] to me, but he will allow us to go through it step-by-step. And I can resolve and probably answer my own questions. So, that's why he just look at me and shook his head.

Summary of Theme 1: Accepting that *School is hard!* Hani admitted, *last*

semester I had deep problems. This is not a surprising confession. Mugisha explained

her number one obstacle,

> Is the language. It is to be able to understand what the class is about. And some of the classes, the words are kind of scientific, more science. And it requires more understandings, not just the regular English.

Add the issue of accent, "*this is the accent we do have. This makes us different, you*

know" (Gemechu) and to repeat a comment Mugisha made:

> And like the way I'm speaking, the way my English sounds, I was like no one was interested to study with me that much.

It does not take much stretch of the imagination to realize how the student-participants

can perceive that they are alone at school. Even though these students have accepted the

fact that they face many academic challenges, these challenges have not caused the

student-participants to give up. As Eve said, *to give up? I don't give up easily.* Asking

for assistance was the preferred strategy for dealing with the challenges of school. The

second theme which emerged from the interviews discusses from where the student-

participants received their assistance.

Theme 2: *I use a lot of help. But, only specific types.*

Despite the wide variety of programs and services offered at Technical College,

very few were actually utilized by the student-participants. Across all interviews, most of

the programs and services were answered with *I have never gone to them* (Paye) or *I*

don't know what they are (Eve). This theme has three sub-themes. The first sub-theme

discusses where assistance was found; the second sub-theme explores the non-use of

programs and services; and the third sub-theme focuses on the fact that the participants

were unaware of many of the services and programs offered at Technical College.

Sub-theme: Finding assistance: *They've been a great help to me.* When asked

about the use of different services offered by Technical College, a comment repeated

through the interviews was, *they've been a great help to me.*

The labs were the most utilized service. Sami mentioned the Writing Lab,

referring to both herself and Naomi, *we use that… Hours!* Paye also used the Writing

Lab, however not for writing assistance:

> If I don't understand my lesson, I just go there and then say, 'Oh, Pam, I need
> help somewhere here. I am not understanding this portion of my lesson. Can
> somebody come and help me?'

Eve and Paye both spoke about the Math Lab. Eve credited the lab's assistance in

improving her skills. *The first test I failed. The second one, I passed it.* Paye no longer

needs the assistance of the Math Lab,however,

> I am always there, doing some calculations, dosage calculations, because
> I mean, I'll do them. But I took it last semester. But I'm still doing it this
> semester, and I'm going to do it next semester!

Paye also used the Computer Lab:

> I was even going into the computer lab. I had to get on D2L [Desire to
> Learn, the on-line course management system]. How to go about searching
> my lesson. Where to get my plan, and my syllabus and everything.

Hani, Paye, and Sami utilized the Reading and Language Lab in Adult Basic Education.

Hani and Paye both went to adult basic education to brush up on college skills, for the

Accuplacer, a basic skills placement text. Paye explained:

I went to the adult basic to like prop up for the placement tests. I was there for like two months.… Got to learn some basic math and read some English.… I went to the language lab. I went to the reading lab. I spend time in reading lab. Did some tests there before proceeding. And I mean it was very, really, really helpful.

Sami started in adult basic education with the intent to test out, however:

I was going to do that… for Basic Math and Basic English and Reading. I did that. I went to adult learning, to try to test out of it. But, it was taking so long that I just thought, let me take the class! Like they have a whole sequence that you have to go through, there. And I just felt like I should just take the class. Instead of going through this whole sequence.

She credited her impatience with the course sequence and her ensuing enrollment in the Reading class for being involved in this study:

That's how I met you! [giggled] … And I wouldn't be sitting here!

One class in particular was mentioned as being helpful. Naomi spoke at length about Strengths and Wellness, a 2-credit class taught by Jean:

You know, really knowing your strengths, what to do, and it really helps. I just learned a lot in that class. That was really helpful…. My strengths class last semester that helped me a lot. I am able to manage my time.… Because they talk about procrastinating, what to do, when not to. I used to [procrastinate], but now I'm 'get it done.'

This class focused on an individual's strengths rather than his or her weaknesses and develops academic and life skills.

Sub-theme: Non-use of available programs and services: *I have never used them before.* The non-use of the programs and services at Technical College was due to two reasons. The first reason the student-participant felt like he or she did not require the service, especially the Math Lab and Adult Basic Education. David said *I am fine with math.* When asked about the Math Lab, Gemechu replied *no, I'm good with that!* Eve displayed her knowledge of the American vernacular in her response, *nuh-uh!* when

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asked about needing Adult Basic Education. Gloria replied, *oh them I don't use.*

Because I came from Canada, so I went to school there to explain her non-use of Adult

Basic Education.

The second reason for the student not utilizing the program or service was the

preference of following family advice or listening to the teacher. For example, David

said he talks to his sponsors:

> I just follow their advice, and their instruction. Because I am not familiar
> with the college in this country.

Meanwhile, when asked about using the counseling or coaching programs, Gemechu

replied:

> I didn't use somebody. You know, I just wanna follow what the teachers say,
> my instructors said. So other than that, I don't got anybody you know who's
> going to coach me, who's going to help me with that.

The Automotive Technician instructors are in collaboration with the Student

Success Center and the Reading instructor to provide direct academic support services

within the Automotive spaces. As a result, Jim did not utilize the services or programs

offered by Technical College, nor was he aware of them. He confused my role as

Reading instructor with the academic counseling service, *would that be like you coming*

down to see us? In addition, when asked about using the enrollment coaches, Jim

mentioned Craig, a success coach, visiting the Automotive classes to specifically teach

the class *how to navigate ... the big, the auto book.* The automotive instructors take care

of advising and counseling as well. When asked about using personal counseling for

being overwhelmed or experiencing stress, Jim equated personal counseling with career

advising, *is it like teachers, because Dave he usually do that stuff. Like Advising Day?*

Does that count? Advising Day is a non-class day set aside for program instructors to

assist their students with planning for the next semester and provide other support if needed. Jim confirmed that he has done Advising Day with his instructor to plan for the next semester.

Sub-theme: Non-use of available programs and services: *They have that here?*

Gloria replied, *I have no idea what there is* when asked about programs she has used to help her with her studies. When asked about using the Multicultural Student Center, Mugisha replied, *I don't think I know, I know that.* Sami and Naomi, on the other hand, at least recognized it: *I just see the sign saying multicultural, out there in the mezzanine* Naomi said, and Sami agreed, *by the cafeteria, yeah, I saw that too!* Naomi, like others, *didn't have a clue what they are, what they're doing.* And, Sami suggested, *they should make it more vibrant.*

When asked about Phi Theta Kappa, David asked, *five what?* After hearing the explanation that it is an academic honor society, he replied, *I read it in the road [hallway] today, but I have never seen it before.* Several participants, Hani, Naomi, and Sami, reported that they had received an email from them but were not sure of what it entailed. *I got a letter from them, asking if I wanted to join. I don't know* replied Hani.

Gemechu's response to his awareness of the food shelf managed by the student senate was, *I didn't know that, even I don't know.* However, when asked about their knowledge of the student senate, both Sami and Naomi praised the food and the t-shirt give-aways:

> You mean the food that they put out there? I have eaten some of their muffins. **Sami**

> The sandwiches they bring sometimes, and the t-shirts. **Naomi**

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They should keep doing that. They're doing an awesome job! Giving out free popcorn and t-shirts and muffins. I think they are doing a wonderful job. **Sami**

However, Sami went on to lament, *they haven't done anything wonderful this year.*

In response to her use of the Academic Resource Center, or library, for something other than the computers, Eve asked *what else can they help you with there?* While Hani's response to her use of any of the counseling/coaching services provided by Technical College was *I don't think I was aware*.

Paye took a humorous view of not knowing about peer-tutoring:

I don't really know about it.… I really want to know those tutors so I can be giving them a headache!

In contrast, Sami and Naomi were quite upset about their lack of knowledge of the programs and services available at Technical College. Interviewed together, the two good friends turned the interview into a conversation:

Naomi suggested: *maybe they should reach out to everyone. So we know what's going on*.

Sami agreed: *there's a lot of clubs that we don't even know about that are here. I don't know.... There is not a lot that's very exposed.*

Naomi stated: *there's a lot of things around here I don't even know. People just don't know.… A lot of people, I'm sure do not know we have these kind of activities. I don't even know we do!*

Sami continued: *and where do they meet, and when do they meet?*

Naomi interjected: *yeah, those informations* [*sic*] *should be...*

Sami finished the thought: *yeah, posted.*

Despite being upset about their lack of knowledge, Sami and Naomi offered a suggestion, an information scavenger hunt based on the programs and services Technical College offers. Sami suggested:

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We should just go on a scavenger hunt for all these people.… We should go around and find every place that we talked about on that sheet. And meet those nice people.… Yeah, we should! We'll start with the student, ah the senate, ah student senate area here. Then we work our way down.

Naomi added in the kinds of information the students could find out:

That would be kind of nice. What service do you do? What do I come to you for? Just like an information hunt! What is this place? What do they do? Trust me, people would want that a lot. And I don't know anything! We don't know what stuff they do.

The conversation concluded with Sami's offer of her and Naomi's assistance in the planning and implementation, *we will be your go-to girls if you need anything!*

Summary of Theme 2: *I use a lot of help*. But, only specific types. Technical College offers numerous programs and services to assist the students in their academic programs as well as social groups. However, for the most part, the student-participants utilized the labs for assistance. They were unaware of the majority of the other academic services and social programs. Jim's comment regarding his knowledge of any student organizations for the Automotive students was indicative of the responses for the other programs as well, *no, I don't think so.*

Jim mentioned the lack of time available for social clubs because of school work:

I mean make time for club and school work, it's crazy! I think, that's what Dave doesn't even want to look at it…. He'll go, 'they can't even do their homework! And you guys want to have clubs?'

The student-participants' perception of time is the third theme to have emerged from their stories.

Theme 3: Dealing with *no time. That's the big thing.*

When asked about activities outside school, Sami stated, *no time. That's the big thing*. The lack of time was a sentiment that resonated throughout all the individual

interviews. Time, and the lack of, was interwoven in the discussions of work, family,

studying, friends, and the juggling of all the previous responsibilities. As Gemechu

pointed out, *I don't have time.… Work and study, there is no time.*

Sub-theme: Juggling life-roles: *I have a hectic life.* Gloria's statement, *I have a*

hectic life is the title of this sub-theme because it encompasses the various life-roles the

student-participants may be required to enact: student, family member, and/or employee.

No matter the individual's situation, the concept of time led to the feeling of life being

hectic:

> It's like I don't have much time. During the time I have, I'm running at
> school or at work. **Sami**

Hani was the only participant who specifically mentioned the course load being

overwhelming and being unable to do anything about it:

> I can't say, you know, 'Are you crazy?' No! I mean, it's the program. I
> cannot say, 'Ok, I am going to take this amount of class and I am not going to
> take this amount.' I can't say that. I have to take the whole thing. And I
> think I can do it.

As a result, Hani stopped working:

> I did [work] last semester. But not this semester because I am overwhelmed.
> I am taking a little break from work.

Similarly, both Naomi and Paye made the decision to quit their jobs in order to

concentrate on their studies:

> I had to give up working. Because I got the [surgical technician] program,
> the program got really harder. **Naomi**

> When I started school, I just put my two-weeks notice in [at one of his three
> jobs]. Because, it's too, going full-time and then having those jobs. **Paye**

Eve, who owns her own salon, has chosen to work:

> Mainly during the summertime. Because during school, I don't work.

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Gloria, on the other hand, attempted first to continue working and going to school full

time. Unfortunately, it was unsuccessful:

> Last semester I got into my program and then I was working full time, and
> I was always coming here on my day off. Then, I was so stressed out. And
> I had to withdraw from 2 classes. It was too much. So this time I decide to
> drop my hours. I work morning, every Friday, and every other weekend,
> sometimes every weekend.

Working part-time was a common tendency. David works *21 [hours]… Evening.*

Second shift. Paye explained his schedule:

> I only work 6 days, and then it's Friday, Saturday, and Sunday and then
> the following Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.

Jim has a similar schedule:

> Usually it's on the weekends so it doesn't have to interfere with my
> schooling.

The student-participants also had to juggle school with being a parent. Both Zab and

Mugisha put their children's homework first.

> I do help them to do their homework first. Before I do mine. Then once
> they're done their homework, then I will do mine. **Mugisha**

Jim's daughter is too young for school, but he still found it necessary to schedule his

homework around her and other household tasks:

> I do some little bit of work like cleaning the house, and um, finding, giving
> my daughter food to eat. Because my girlfriend work on Sunday so I have
> to stay home, she work overnight. So from work I have to stay up with the
> kid and play, do everything. Usually, I try, if I want to do studying, any time,
> I usually try to put her to bed, I give her a lot of food and she just go to bed,
> three to four hours before she get up. So, I can do studying within that time.

Eve was the only participant who actively attempted to manage her family's time:

> How I manage my time? Between my kids and my school life and my
> relationships, and all that. I try to. I have to carry a calendar. I have to set
> everything by schedule. Because I schedule the things to be done for the
> whole month, and then I try to go by that. Except the kids bring in new

things. Because, I always have a list of all the things to be done. And then,
I try to manage my time from that.

Gloria stated near the end of her interview:

Time is a big issue! I go home. I go to school. I know I always complain
about time.

And Sami concludes this sub-theme with her words:

I think it is hard because, you know what, you are working, and at the same
time juggling school and work.

Sub-theme: Concentrating on one class: *I was worrying about that class more*

than the others. Time is not just entwined with the different responsibilities the student-

participants have, time is also a factor in the amount of time the student-participants

spend studying. Paye stated that school is:

Actually very hard sometimes, when you look at some of the school work
and then, and you look at for long, and you're like, oh my gosh! How will I
get done with this? How will I get through this?

Hani captured a common trend among the student-participants with her statement:

I don't know how to manage, you know, manage the time and say, ok,
two hours on this, three hours on this, and then it catches up with me.

Several students admitted to studying one subject to the exclusion of their other classes.

I'm doing a certain thing for one class, I will, it will take up all my time…
I'm only concentrating on one. **Hani**

Mugishu explained why she received a poor grade in Project Management:

Biology took all of my time of studying and I could not find more time for
the other classes because I was worrying about that class the more than the
other ones."

Both Paye and Mugisha spoke about long days spent studying. Paye's day begins:

In the morning hour, because sometime I like to study during morning hours.
I get up like 4, 4:30 and then read through 'til time for me to come to class.

Mugisha often spent all day at school:

Come here to school. Stay here all the time because it takes time for me to get stuff in my head, I mean. One page takes me forever to know what is there, because of my second language. Which means I spend more time to study. The thing which maybe another student can just get it, in two hours and done. So, most of the time I was staying in the school, even if I don't have a class. I have to come here, be here that long in order to, to study.… If I know I have a test next week, I will begin to study maybe one week before, in order to get it. Because, I am a slow learner. I can't study one thing, in one night and get it. So, for me, I need more time to study, in order to understand what am I studying.

Finally, Sami connected the importance of asking questions to the concept of time, "It helps to ask questions. Because, you get the information instead of trying to work harder to figure it out on your own."

Summary of Theme 3: Dealing with *no time. That's the big thing.* The following statement of Mugisha's demonstrates how time affected her school and home life:

As a second language speaker, it takes energy to study a program. We do much, we spend more time to study things, in a class in which someone can just study new in a few hours, So, I stay more longer with my books. I create the time. I get a recorder. I can record every one my teachers. I record them. And then I reviewing in the night, while cooking and washing dishes, listening what the teacher said. And, I try to learn that way.

Even while she did her house work, Mugisha continued to study. She kept studying, so she could *Get it! Get it!* This dedication is indicative of the motivation expressed by Mugisha and the other student-participants as they persisted in their studies. Motivation is the fourth theme to emerge from their interviews.

Theme 4: Determined to persist: *I'm still hanging in there!*

Despite the difficulty of the academic programs and lack of time, the student-participants were determined to persist. Early in Eve's interview, she declared, *I'm still*

hanging in there! The motivation to continue was developed in several sub themes: the desire to provide a good example, the encouragement of others, and internal resources.

Sub-theme: Motivation: *I want to be a good example.* Gloria, a single mother, acknowledged that she often had to drop out of school in order to work. But she turned that into a lesson for her son; that sometimes plans need to be put on hold, but to never quit, or give up:

> I want to be a good example for my family. You can tell him, go to school. Do this. Do that. And, I have to show him how, you know. I always tell him if you don't go to school, you know where you're going to end up? McDonalds. You know… I mean the young people they don't understand how we get here. How I bring the money, you know. If I quit school, then he will think it's OK to quit school, too. I want to be a good example for him. That keeps me go- go- going! [laughs] Because sometimes he just, you know when I'm… "Mommy, didn't you used to go to college, why did you give up?" Oh, I didn't give up, I quit, you know. Because I don't want him to think that it's ok. You know I tell him I quit because I need money. I still have to work you know. You know money issues sometimes hold him back also. We can survive.

Gloria compared the realization that she had to return school while she continued working as:

> Challenging yourself every day. But you don't want to give up too, you know. Because life is not easy.

That is the message she wanted her son to understand.

Although this sub-theme is entitled "I want to be a good example", there is an additional dimension to this sub-theme, to gain respect. Several student-participants spoke about gaining respect by setting a good example in two highly visible roles: as an immigrant and as a co-worker. Gloria spoke eloquently of her desire to show that immigrants are not just looking for government hand-outs:

> I always want to work. And, I want to make money. I don't want to be on welfare or something. For at least some people just say immigrants, they just

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collect welfare money. But that, it just drives me crazy, because we work very hard. I mean, I can be sitting there complaining. "Oh, I am a single mother. Can you give me money?" You know, you can have food stamp or whatever, but I don't want to, you know, just... But you hear that kind of words sometimes. "Oh those immigrants they don't work." "They just collect from the government." I work hard, you know. I never put myself in that position. I have a dream, you know! Yeah. You work hard. You work extra hard than the other citizens because you have to make everything.

What the people Gloria was referencing do not realize is that while Gloria works hard to provide for her family, she is also working hard in school to provide a better future for her family. Sami explained one motivation she utilizes to persist in school is to gain the respect of her co-workers:

It also help in the workplace because when you don't know anything, like, for some of the CNAs [certified nursing assistants], I hear them saying all the time, oh we don't feel respected. It's like people just look at us like our job is to just change [unknown word]. They just look down upon them. It's like those are the hardest working people in the nursing home and it's unfair that you know these people feel that way. That the job you're doing is not respected. So, if you're working, like in an area you want to, it's a motivation. Because you want to succeed, you know.

She also believed that by succeeding in the workplace:

You can succeed and be a better example to other people. You can be a mentor. You can be. I mean people just look up to you.

Sub-theme: Teaching and mentoring: *She is very encouraging.* The student-participants spoke about drawing motivation to persist academically from the encouragement of others. Paye and Gemechu both mentioned the encouragement that they receive from their friends.

We are schoolmates, and then they are very much encouraging, seriously, and we give encouragement to one another. **Paye**

One friend that motivate me to go to school.… But always he said, 'Hey! Don't stop! Don't end with, I mean, college, I mean, diploma, or just go for BA, or masters, stuff like that.' He motivate me. **Gemechu**

Motivation in the form of encouragement did not just come from classmates. Mugisha

and Sami explained how specific instructors motivated them.

> Jennifer, she was really helpful. When I was go, because she was teaching
> me the speech thing. Speech class which to stand on the front of people. For
> me, it's like if I felt somehow I couldn't make it. So she was, "ok, you can do
> it. One day you can put in front of you, pretend you are talking to people, see
> if you can make it." So I, at the end of that class, I was so bold, I was just, ok
> I can go in front of people, open my mouth as I be able to, to, be able to
> speak. She was motivator. **Mugisha**

> Georgina, she was just like, can I call my mom or what? [giggled] Yeah, she
> was my advisor and motivator. She goes "you can do it, you can make it. I
> don't care, you can do it!" I mean she seen, she seen my weakness, but she
> just overlook it. "But here you can get it. You can get it…. You can do it.
> You can even if you feel like you don't have that more English to do it. But
> you can do it." **Mugisha**

> I know some of the teachers they want me to succeed. Like last time, Nancy
> wrote me a real good recommendation for my, when I was applying for my
> scholarship and I actually got it! And, she wrote some things in there that
> surprised me in that I didn't know that about myself and I was like wow! Oh
> my god! So I want to be successful for her, you know! And for myself too.
> But for her too! She's really, really good, she's a really good teacher. **Sami**

Paye and Gemechu spoke about the encouragement they received from co-workers:

> He always when I go to class, I mean work, he's like, "My man, how's
> school coming on?" I'm like, I'm working towards it. And he says "that's
> just how I started out. You see now, I'm working for my BSN. I started, I
> went for my LPN, just as you started. You going for your LPN. From there,
> you go for your AAS. From there, you go for your BSN." That's how I'm
> doing it. So, it's a gradual process you see. **Paye**

> Even my supervisor, even my manager. So he always, you know, encourage
> me to go to school. **Gemechu**

Family members were also a main source of encouragement.

> My wife, my sister. Actually my mom who's overseas right? So, especially
> my wife. **Gemechu**

> My sister is very, very supportive…. She helps me in terms of the, with the
> stress because I go there and sometimes when I have a, when I had a bad day
> in class or I can't study. I call her and told her I am giving up. And she says,

she will sit down with me and tell me, you are so close. You know, don't
give up now. And she, she gives me a lot of good advice. **Hani**

Both Paye's wife and son encourage him to persist, each in their own way:

Sometimes if I'm not getting up, she's [his wife] like "it's 5:00 are you going
to read a little?" She's real encouraging. She's really encouraging. Oh,
she's encouraging me, you need to, you need to really pay attention.

I was studying in the room, and then I came from the room, I was like I study
too much. I am tired. Let me lie down a take a rest and then sleep a little
chance. So I was lying down and he [his son] needed something from the
grocery shop. And then, he was like, "Mom are you going out?" Then, and
then the Mom said, "no I'm not going out." He said, "but you told me today
you are going out. I want to get something." She said, "see your Dad lying
over there. Why can't you go." He said, "no Mom, Dad has been working so
hard. He's been studying. Leave him be. He needs his rest. You been
sitting all day. Please help me."

David was the only student-participant who mentioned drawing motivation from his

countrymen:

Because the first-comers, which means from Eritrea, they came 1980, 1970.
When I came here, they say you have to go to school first. If you don't go to
school, you will end up like us. Most of them are working 40 or 30 years,
day and time, full time and part time. But some of them, they don't have
house. They have responsibilities for their family, first thing. And they gave
me advice, if you go to school, if you graduate from college, you will help
yourself, and you will help your family. And you will survive the life you
have in America. Otherwise, without school, you will end up like us. Then
when I try to give up, I just keep in my mind their words.

Paye's statement from near the end of his interview sums up this sub-theme:

There are people that sometime encourages you, and sometimes when you sit
and try to like, think back on your encouragement, and think. It gives you
feelings that, I mean. You have to take courage to go ahead.

Courage is one example of an internal motivator, the final sub-theme.

Sub-theme: It's internal: *So I was like, I am not going to give up!* This final

sub-them focuses on internal motivators. Paye mentioned that it takes courage to

continue. Hearing the stories of juggling work, school, family, academic English and

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other daily life stressors, makes one wonder what inner attributes these student-

participants draw upon in order to persist.

Naomi, Sami, and Mugisha credited religion. Naomi said, *for me, it's my faith.…*

Believing in God.… My prayers and keeping close to God. Sami expanded upon

Naomi's comment:

> I might get doubtful along the way, discouragement comes, but you know, I
> think the same as her [Naomi]. I'm like, just knowing that God is there, like
> with me, because without him, I wouldn't have been this far. And just
> knowing that he's giving me that strength to keep going. And just he has
> been there all along. Like nobody else. I mean my parents, second, you
> know.

Mugisha acknowledged religion as keeping her motivated as well, but more as fate than

faith:

> I found out the class was kind of harder than my, my level. So I am not
> learning thing. Some of them have a course, never come across. Never.
> And, it's like, why am I doing in this program? I mean, can I just try to
> change it to a different one? But, then some other thing came to me, said,
> you are supposed to do this. Because that what you came into your mind at
> the first time when you looking, to look at, look for what you can study. This
> is the way the program came into your mind. And since it was the one which
> came to mind, then that's the one. And you will be able to pass this classes
> [*sic*], no matter what.

Mugisha, in addition to fate, discussed the concept of determination that enabled

her to persist in her education program all the way through to graduation:

> Other thing is determination. I mean even if I don't, I was feel like that I
> don't understand that much. But I have to know that I can do it. Especial if
> in the level where I don't care if my, my language does not go through, I can
> understand it. But the only thing I know is I can pass the class! Just like
> that! More angry, it's like I can be more angry to the class! Whether you are
> hard or not, then I will pass you! I have to pass, no matter what! I don't care
> if it is hard or not.

Hani credited the concept of motivation itself:

So, I'm motivated. At the end of the day, I am not only doing this for me. I am doing it for my family. I want to be able to help people out.

While both Eve and Naomi credited confidence, Eve simply stated, *I can do this.* Naomi, meanwhile, pointed out that confidence is what sets her apart from others:

I know this is important and I'm going to do it. No matter what. Everybody else is saying, 'because I have to have'. But it's gotta be that I can do anything.

The final attribute acknowledge by the student-participants was their refusal to give up.

I try not to give up, too. **Gloria**

I'm a fighter. **Sami**

I'm not going to quit now. I hate quitting! That's one thing that makes me, that burns my blood! I'm not a quitter! I'm going to keep up. I hate giving up on things." **Hani**

I don't like to back down from anything. No matter what, I'll go in it. But to give up? [laughed] I don't give up easily. **Eve**

Paye opened this sub-theme on internal motivators with a comment on courage. This sub-theme concludes with a challenge from his wife:

If some of us can, you know, go through it and make it, what about you? I mean, you like sometime when you stuck or something, and you can really pay attention to it, then why give up? I mean, you know, keep on keeping on, and things will be ok, and then and anyway, you will go through.

Summary of Theme 4: Determined to persist: *I'm still hanging in there!* The student-participants relied on many forms of motivation to persist. Gloria wanted to set a good example for her son while trying to gain respect for immigrants as hard workers. Mugisha and Sami both asserted that their instructors were a source of motivation. Paye related a story of how his son ensured Paye persisted in his studying. Eve and Naomi believed in the attribute of confidence and Eve, Hani, Gloria, and Sami refused to give

up. As Paye's wife said, *keep on keeping on, and things will be ok, and … you will go through.*

Summary of the Themes

Four themes emerged from the interviews with the student-participants. They focus on the difficulty of school, finding services to utilize, time, and motivation.

The first theme, accepting that school is hard, acknowledged the fact that the student-participants would not allow the challenges of the English language and their accent slow them down or hold them back. Several strategies included enrolling in ESL classes or breaking down information into more manageable "chunks". The student-participants also acknowledged that, despite support from family and instructors, they were alone in their educational pursuit. The concept of being alone stemmed from family and friends did not understand the program in which the student is enrolled or that the community was not supportive and had either a "you'll fail!" attitude or a "you think you're better than us" attitude. The primary strategy to combat this aloneness was to avoid the non-supportive situations and then to ask for assistance.

The second theme, I use a lot of a specific type of help, built upon the previous theme's strategy of asking for assistance. The student-participants found assistance with instructors and lab assistants. It was a common belief that the labs were welcoming and very helpful. The findings also showed that many of the programs and services were not being utilized. One reason was that the services were not needed as the students utilized other strategies, for example relying on their instructors. A second reason was that the student was simply unaware of the service and found alternative strategies to use, such as relying on the labs.

The third theme, dealing with not having enough time, encompassed the various aspects of the student-participants' life-roles. They had to develop strategies to balance the demands of school, family, and work, which often led to quitting the job, or only working part-time. In addition, due to the length of time it took many of the students to comprehend the academic English, there was an immediacy of need for assistance. Teachers and lab assistants could only provide so much help, so the student-participants often were forced to concentrate on the one class deemed the most vital, often to the detriment of the other classes.

The final theme, determined to persist, examined the internal and external strategies utilized by the student-participants. Providing a good example to others was common as well as the encouragement received from family, friends, and instructors. However, despite all the challenges expressed by the student-participants, all eleven participants expressed a core determination to succeed.

These themes, and sub-themes, are in concurrence with the findings of previous studies as will be discussed in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This study was a qualitative case study within the constructivist paradigm designed to discover the strategies utilized by African immigrant and refugee students in order to persist in a post-secondary career and technical education program. A gap was found in the current research addressing both this specific population and this particular academic context. This study sought to elicit the strategies used by eleven student-participants at a small suburban technical college. Chapter 4, Findings, explored four themes which emerged from the words of the student-participants: (a) accepting that school is hard; (b) using a lot of help; (c) dealing with no time; and (d) the determination to persist. This chapter discusses how these themes and their sub-themes reflect the existing knowledge base on post-secondary academic persistence for African immigrants and refugees in the following areas: language, social capital, time, and motivation.

Challenges with the Language

Language was the most often referred to challenge. Comments included difficulties with the English language in general, struggles with academic English, and the challenges inherent with having an accent. These statements correspond with findings in other studies.

Accent

Accent was a barrier for some student-participants, causing them to not ask as many questions. Jim mentioned that he would break his questions down and ask different classmates so they would understand him better. Hubenthal (2004) studied older Russian immigrants' experiences with learning English. A theme that emerged from her interviews was the shame of their English abilities that was felt by her respondents:

For some of the participants, their shame affected their performance and even

participation in ESL courses. Katarina rarely initiated conversations with

other students in her ESL class at a community college due to problems

understanding their pronunciation, a common dilemma for the respondents.

She said, "I can ask . . . but I afraid. . . because I would not understand

answer." (p. 116)

The student-participants in my study did not explicitly mention feeling shame for their

accent; however it may be inferred from Hani's unwillingness to speak up in class or

Jim's hesitancy to ask his classmates if he has questions.

Learning English: Time and Money

Gebre (2008) explained several systemic challenges faced by immigrants and

refugees if their English language skills have been determined to be not proficient enough

for college-credit courses by standardized placement tests.

The first challenge is time. As Curry (2004) and Gebre (2008) noted, immigrants

and refugees are first placed into English as a second language (ESL) classes. After

successful completion of ESL, but before they can enter a degree-granting program

(either academic or vocational), the immigrants and refugees are placed into

developmental, or remedial, English, reading, and math classes. This can be a lengthy

sequence of courses, especially if the student lacks the confidence in his or her skills with

the English language. Mugisha referred to this lack of confidence when asked about

advice she would give a newcomer regarding school. Mugisha felt that, initially,

ABE/ESL is beneficial in order to ensure basic communication skills (i.e., reading,

writing, speaking, listening) are learned. However, after several years, the reliance on

ABE/ESL becomes a waste of time due to the fact that the student is not progressing in terms of learning career-specific English (as opposed to work-place ESL, which tends to be more survival English) or academic English and degree completion.

Mugisha's belief that too many years spent in ABE/ESL is corroborated by Rodriguez and Cruz's (2009) explanation of the "gatekeeping" consequence of ABE/ESL. They wrote that ABE/ESL classes are designed for "English acquisition for entry-level employment and basic family life, versus preparation for transfer to a 4-year institution" (p. 2399). The authors further supported Mugisha's belief that ABE/ESL becomes a waste of time with their own statement, "the situation for [ESL] students can involve a cycle of coursework that requires a time investment for which there is no clear payoff in terms of credit accumulation toward … a degree" (p. 2399).

Mugisha's reflection on the length of time so many English language learners spend in adult basic education leads into the second challenge, finances. Gebre (2008) pointed out that in many states, ESL courses as well as developmental courses are non-credit courses, and as a result, will not apply to the terminal degree. Because they are non-credit courses, they may also be ineligible for financial aid. There is a growing debate as to who should provide ESL courses: the college, thus increasing the student's debt, or an adult education program, free education funded by the state and federal government but setting the student apart from the college community.

Summary

Whether it is basic English skills, academic English, or accent, language as a barrier to refugee and immigrant educational achievement is well documented (e.g., Becerra, 2010; Curry, 2004; Gebre, 2008; Lee, 2011; Rana et al., 2011; Reynoso, 2008;

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Szelényi & Chang, 2002; Taffer, 2010). However, when considering the sequence of English language courses an immigrant or refugee is advised to take, or is required to take, there are three articles (Curry, 2004; Gebre, 2008; Rodriguez & Cruz, 2009) that substantiate Mugisha's reflection that the educational institution itself may add a level of challenges faced by these students. In light of these additional challenges, Mugisha recommended that newcomers do what she did: Take ABE/ESL to gain the basic communicative skills then further develop academic and career-specific English through general education classes and program-specific classes.

The Influence of Social Capital

Social capital can be defined as membership within a highly contextual network of relationships. Values and trust, as well as obligations and expectations, are embedded within these relationships and through this network of relationships certain highly socially desirable actions are made possible (Coleman, 1988). In the context of higher education, social capital involves (a) being able to navigate the often-times convoluted processes of applying for admission to an institution, acquiring financial aid, and registering for classes or (b) knowing how to ask and who to ask for assistance. Only Paye reported specifically asking for assistance for something other than academics, and that was for help filling out paperwork.

Based on the themes which emerged from their interviews, my student-participants have utilized their networks of social capital in ways that concur with the findings of previous studies.

Asking for Assistance

In many cultures, the teacher is regarded as the subject matter expert, sometimes even to the point where a student would not consider suggesting or offering an opposing point of view. The student-participants utilized social capital familiar to them by asking their instructors if they were unsure of something. Geisler (2007) found that the "academic and social interactions with faculty… had considerable impact on their decisions and behavior of persistence, regardless of whether their interactions took place inside or outside the classroom" (p. 128). Boulanger (2009) reported her students intentionally sought out instructors "during office hours or through informal means to get extra help, to answer questions" (p. 196). She continued with the suggestion that many of the instructors developed a relationship similar to that of mentor to their students. A mentoring relationship was neither specifically mentioned nor alluded to by my student-participants.

A second avenue of assistance my student-participants utilized was the academic labs on campus, in particular the Math Lab, the Writing Lab, the Computer Lab, and the Biology Lab. They often utilized more than one lab based on their needs. For example, Paye, Gloria, Sami, and Mugisha used the Math, Writing, and Computer Labs while David used only the Writing and Computer Labs. Hani and Gloria used the Biology Lab as well. Boulanger (2009), Geisler (2007), and Reynoso (2008) spoke about the importance of the labs (also called learning centers or tutors). Boulanger reported "More common was use of the learning center… the math lab… a regular appointment with her English as a Second Language tutor" (pp. 207-208). While Geisler found that "most students repeatedly sought help from the institution's Writing Center… five students

reported seeking recurrent assistance with math" (pp. 130-131). Finally, Reynoso wrote "Most participants reported that tutoring contributed to their academic success. Tutoring was especially important in helping their students improve their writing skills and in completing the ESL sequence" (p. 415).

Unaware of the Services

One rather disconcerting theme that emerged from the interviews was the fact that my student-participants were unaware of many of the programs and services available at Technical College that have been designed to assist them. Examples of the programs and services offered include academic and career advising, the Student Senate-run food shelf, disability services, and personal counseling. When asked about programs she has used to help her with her studies, Gloria replied that she did not know of any assistive programs. This unawareness is representative of the statements made by my student-participants. However, Szelényi and Chang (2002) wrote that immigrant students may be unaware of advising and counseling programs because these programs may not be "recognized or accepted in their native cultures" (p. 66).

Araujo (2011) and Garcia (2010) explored the concept of social capital in relation to student persistence and retention. Araujo (2011) explored how Latino migrant farmworker students enrolled in a post-secondary College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) utilized social capital to persist through their first-year of college. Her findings revealed the development of social networks, an awareness of how to apply for college, enroll in classes, and receive financial aid, and the usage of academic and personal counseling. As a result, a majority of the participants persisted into their second-year.

Garcia (2010) linked, in part, low retention rates for first-year Hispanic students in community colleges to a lack of knowledge of institutional initiatives targeted specifically to the needs of these students. Garcia discussed a phone survey designed to welcome the students to college and to offer guidance, if needed. "27% of their comments referred to barriers that the institution could address" (p. 841) which demonstrated a lack of knowledge of the services available to assist students. Garcia attributed this to the fact that these students were often the first in their family to attend college. These students, in effect, lacked the social capital necessary to successfully navigate the bureaucracy associated with an institution of higher education. Consequently, at Garcia's community college an intrusive advising program was designed and implemented to specifically reach the students most in danger of attrition from lack of awareness of assistive services.

These two studies demonstrated the importance of social capital to post-secondary persistence. Although the student-participants in my study are all persisting, the awareness of programs and services on campus may assist in decreasing the stress in other areas of the participants' lives, for example with their focus on one class to the detriment of the others.

Studying All Day and All Night

Mugisha, Zab, and Sami mentioned spending many hours in the Math Lab working with the lab assistants, Gary and Norm, emerging only to rush off to class or get something to eat. Hani and Jim also reported spending a similar amount of hours in the computer lab. They all mentioned that they spend long hours studying the material to a single class, often to the detriment of their other courses. This focus on one class resulted

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in a poor grade in another class and a dropping of her GPA. Hani admitted that she did

not know how to manage her time. Reynoso (2008), in his work with Dominican

community college students, related that his participants felt similar academic pressure in

trying to keep up with their course load. Andres, one of his participants, stated, "It was

hard keeping up with a full-time academic load. My freshman year was stressful. I used

to spend eight hours in school and I had very little rest" (p. 408).

Both Paye and Naomi mentioned that they learned in classes how to manage

their time. Paye learned about general time management skills in Basic English. Naomi

learned how to manage studying for multiple courses in her Strengths and Wellness class.

What my student-participants did not know, is that time management skills, as

well as other academic skills, are taught in two of the services offered on-campus,

academic counseling and success coaching. While a third service, peer-tutoring, provides

one-on-one student-driven assistance with the course material.

Garcia (2010) discovered a similar situation from her phone survey: The students

were unaware of services designed to offer support and assistance. Working with staff

members, academic and other institutional issues were resolved immediately and long-

term intrusive assistive interventions were developed and implemented. Reynoso's

(2008) students said that they were made aware of equivalent services in a first-year

orientation and, as a result, utilized these services when needed. Araujo's (2011) College

Assistance Migrant Program provided either direct assistance or referrals.

Other Sources of Assistance

Rather than utilizing programs and services offered by Technical College, Jim,

Gemechu, and David utilized alternative forms of social capital. Jim and Gemechu

followed the advice of their instructors. While David, although familiar with how college "worked" back home, acknowledged his unfamiliarity with the college processes in the United States and relied on his on the advice of his sponsor.

This form of social capital is similar to the mentoring relationships that Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) had found to make a significant impact in the lives of immigrant youth. The authors found that college-educated mentors are able to provide advice and information on how to access post-secondary education. Taffer (2010) recommended a mentoring program because it "provides structured support for new students" (p. 149), and refugees in particular.

Surprisingly, except for the public library, none of my student-participants utilized any programs or services located outside Technical College. Zab and David both frequented their local library. With her four children, step-daughter, and husband all at home in the evenings, Zab said that she would spend five or six hours a night studying at the library. David stated that he preferred to study at the library close to his home. He also mentioned he used the library for their free writing assistance website which is primarily for ESL students.

Hani's mosque offered stress-relief guidance and study circles for young girls or women going to school, unfortunately Hani did not elaborate if she, herself, utilized these services. There were no other community or culture/religious specific organizations mentioned as resources. After analyzing the factors which most affected the academic success, or non-success of immigrant youth, Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, and Todorova (2008) credited community organizations as a major force behind the youth who were successful and were lacking in the youth who were not.

Negative Impact of Social Capital

But what happens when utilizing the networks in one life-role negatively impacts the networks in a different life-role? Eve mentioned this challenge to explain why she often hesitated to tell her countrymen that she was in school for Licensed Practical Nursing. Eve's efforts to become educated in order to provide a better life for her family was seen as an attempt to become better than her countrymen, and was thus rejected as being too good to them. This rejection was often mirrored in her countrymen's facial expressions as well.

Several of Boulanger's (2009) participants mentioned this rejection as well. "As a result of college, former friendships had grown more distant – or had even become strained" (p. 183). "When you 'come back', they might remark sarcastically, 'All of a sudden, oh, you have a college degree'" (p. 185). Because of a similar negative reaction, another of Boulanger's participants said that "he had stopped mentioning it."

Glazman (2008), in his exploration of how social mobility (i.e., improve socioeconomic status) is seen as a motivator for U.S.-born first-generation college students to persist academically, referred to this feeling of rejection and the resultant isolation as survivor's guilt. Glazman suggested that as the student left family and friends behind in order to purse higher education, the student deals "with frustration, criticism, lack of family support, and loneliness" (p. 22). In addition, the family is forced to reorganize roles and responsibilities as the individual loses his or her former life-role as child or spouse in order to accommodate the new life-role as student. Family members, as a result, often "express this loss by placing guilt on the student" (p. 22). The

student consequently must "on the margin of two cultures: their family culture and their student culture.

Summary

This section began with an explanation of social capital as membership within a highly contextual network of relationships. Similar to participants in previously conducted studies, my student-participants utilized social capital to get assistance. One dissimilarity in my findings was that my student-participants were unaware of additional networks of which they are a member, thus not utilizing other avenues of assistance. This section ended with an examination of how social capital can negatively impact a student's education. Again, my findings were in concordance with the literature.

<center>**Issues with Time: Juggling Life-Roles**</center>

Ross-Gordon (2011) wrote that 'a key characteristic distinguishing reentry adults [beginning or continuing their enrollment as college students at a later-than-traditional age] from other college students is the high likelihood that they are juggling other life roles while attending school' (p. 26). These life-roles usually include employee, parent, and community member. As a result, the time requirements involved with fulfilling these obligations in addition to being a student present challenges to the adult learner.

Of the eleven student-participants in my study, only Zab was a student, parent, employee, and community member. During the day, she went to school, took care of the home and the children who were too young to go to school themselves. At night, Zab worked. Then, on the weekends, she taught the Oromo language at the community center and she was also vice president of the women's group at her mosque. Most of my student-participants juggled school, parenting, and work. Gemechu and David only

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juggled employment and school. However, all eleven student-participants agreed that they were very busy.

None of the previous research discussed employment specifically as a barrier to successful school completion. Gebre (2008) stated that "all participants confirmed they were working either part-time or full-time at the time of the study" (p. 133).

Geisler (2007) in her examination of persistence and attrition among nontraditional students found that her participants had to balance multiple obligations as well. "Nearly all of the students participating in the study cited work and family obligations, or a combination of the two, as the primary factors in their external environment that competed with their time they needed to devote to school" (p. 116). Geisler's students reported that balancing the multiple life-roles became easier over time. One of her students, SP11, said that she had to overcome feelings of guilt from spending time away from her children because of the time need to study, "it has gotten easier because I knew it had to be done."

Mugisha, one of my student-participants, expressed a similar sentiment when she realized that she had to make a choice between her studies and her children. She could quit school and be with her children, or ignore her children and concentrate on her studies. Mugisha realized that in order to get a good job in order to provide for a better future for her children, she had to choose to concentrate on school. She needed a college education to be employed in the career field she wanted.

Ironically, this necessity of juggling the needs of her children and the time requirement necessary for school was precipitated by her motivation to obtain a better life for her children. Motivation is the final theme that emerged from the interviews with my

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student-participants, and the final area in which the findings of this study reflects previous research in the field of post-secondary persistence.

The Motivation to Persist

For my student-participants, similar to findings in other studies, the motivation to persist came from various avenues.

Better Life for my Family

Although Gloria had to occasionally quit school in order to work and earn money, she knew that returning to school was always the only option. Gloria understood that she had to demonstrate to her family the importance of education, and that quitting school is not ok. This agrees with what Geisler (2007) found in her research, "students reported wanted to exhibit positive educational behavior for their children" (p. 105).

One of Reynoso's (2008) participants knew that education was a necessity, not an option, because "her English skills were so deficient that she could not help her six-year-old daughter with her homework…. She also knew that without knowing English and without a college education, it was going to be extremely difficult to find a decent paying job" (p. 403). My student-participant, Zab, understood this necessity as well. She also realized how fortunate she was to have an education. Unlike many of her friends, Zab could help her children with their homework and other lessons, whether it was math or reading, Arabic or understanding a specific aspect of their culture.

In addition, both Sami and Eve understood that education was a key to a better life. Sami explained that education is a key both to success and to a better life for not just the student, but for the student's family as well. Eve associated having a better life in this country to earning a college degree: it is necessary. Gebre's (2008) findings concur,

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"however, after they worked long enough in warehouses, these immigrants wanted to find better jobs. The only way to find better jobs was to go to college and earn degrees" (pp. 133-134). Meanwhile, Santos (2004) found that her participants "desire an education so they can have a career rather than a job" (p. 31).

Self-Efficacy

Boulanger (2009) found that self-efficacy was a common source of motivation to persist. In particular, this self-confidence was developed through the encouragement of others. She reported that "there was no shortage of examples provided by participants to indicate that other's supportive words had spurred their achievement and enhanced self efficacy…. Students also indicated that verbal messages from friends, family, and co-workers boosted their feelings of self-efficacy" (p. 176).

Self-efficacy was a common source of motivation to persist which emerged from my interviews as well. Each of my eleven participants mentioned at least one person who supported and encouraged them in order to persist in their academic program, despite the myriad of challenges they faced. Paye mentioned that he and his classmates work together for support. Jim, on the other hand, stated that he provided encouragement for his classmate and study-partner, especially as finals grew near.

Support From Instructors

Boulanger mentioned "faculty members were an important source of positive verbal messages for their students" (p. 176). Reynoso (2008) agreed. In fact, he discussed how the professors supported a student who was going through a particularly hard time. "Professors provided emotional support…. Helped her cope with an emotional problem she was experiencing…. Professors were understanding and

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sympathetic…. The emotional support she received from her professors assisted her in overcoming personal problems and helped her to achieve academically" (pp. 411-412).

Zab, one of my student-participants, related a similar out-pouring of support from her instructors while she was undergoing a particularly devastating personal situation. They allowed her to take an incomplete in order to get her life back on track. Hani reported her instructors were understanding of the challenges associated with the reliance on public transportation.

Religion

Accustomed as I am from having taught Somalis for so many years, who have thus far managed to maintain their religious traditions (e.g., prayer schedule) within the vastly different socio-religious cultures of the Twin Cities, I was not surprised find that religion emerged as a persistence strategy from my interviews. All but three students reported that they turn to their religion or use prayer for either encouragement or for stress relief. Naomi stated that prayer keeps her motivated. Hani reflected that she reads the Qur'an as a primary form of stress-relief. Mugisha combined religion with more secular pursuits for stress-relief, like singing and yelling at her to children to be quiet.

Consequently, I did not expect Boulanger's (2009) comment, "an unanticipated finding revealed that … praying was mentioned as a strategy to help them persist" (p. 250). She noted that "prayer was mentioned by half of the participants as a sustaining factor in their college experience; thus, engagement in prayer individually or with others was described as yet another coping mechanism or persistence strategy" (p. 186).

The statements made by Boulanger's participants reflected the comments made by my student-participants. She found that, "students regarded prayer as a method of

seeking solace and sustenance…. a way to keep going, or as Fred put succinctly stated, 'Without this, I could never have made it… it's sustained me through times that, well, nothing else would'" (p. 186).

Boulanger inquired into this surprising use of prayer as a persistence strategy. She found that "the majority of higher education research that references religion, however, is concerned with how college attendance affects religious beliefs rather than on the ways that students turn to faith for support" (p. 251).

Summary

My student-participants reported several motivators which have assisted them to persist in their education: the desire for a better life for themselves and their families, self-efficacy, support from instructors, and their religion. This coincides with the literature.

Summary of the Discussion

Reynoso (2008) quoted one of his participants, Carmen, to develop his theme of self-motivation as a persistence strategy. "I have to continue to pursue my college dreams despite the difficulties. I can't let others down. More importantly, I can't let myself down" (p. 424).

I feel that this quote concisely summarizes Chapter 5. Carmen has acknowledged the fact that there are challenges that need to be worked through. These challenges include the time it takes to become proficient in English and then become knowledgeable in the specific course material, the financial obligations, and the perceived lack of support. Carmen continued with the belief that she cannot let others down. This alludes to the support and assistance received by the students, either in the labs, by seeking

further assistance on unfamiliar course material, or from simple encouragement. Finally Carmen insisted that she can't let herself down. She stated that she "left her country to venture out in order to get a better life" (p. 424).

Only one of my student-participants, Eve, directly stated that she attends college because she wants a better life. I believe the lack of additional comments similar to Eve's is due to the fact that my student-participants are pursuing a technical and career preparation education. Their academic programs, whether it is Automotive Technician, Health Information Technology, Licensed Practical Nursing, or Surgical Technician, prepare the students for immediate placement in the career field. Therefore, the theme of wanting a better life for themselves is inherently understood. This theme is subtly interwoven throughout all eleven interviews and is exemplified by the sacrifices made. For example, studies over children, long hours of studying rather than social pursuits, or studying over full-time employment.

The fundamental theme emerging from all the interviews, expressed by each of my eleven student-participants, is a core determination to succeed, no matter the sacrifice. This determination to succeed is reflected in the literature on post-secondary educational persistence. It is reflected in how students utilize assistance from their instructors, lab assistants (Boulanger, 2009; Geisler, 2007), and community organizations (Suárez-Orozco, Suárez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008), take non-credit-based ESL courses in order to become more academically proficient (Gebre, 2008), spend long hours studying in order to better comprehend the material (Reynoso, 2008), juggle multiple life-roles (Gebre, 2008; Geisler, 2007), and face possible community rejection because they want to succeed (Boulanger, 2009; Glazman, 2007).

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CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss several conclusions I have drawn from my findings regarding persistence strategies utilized by the student-participants. I next address two practical implications based on these conclusions. Finally I make recommendations for the removal of barriers and the building of academic support and conclude with suggestions for further research.

Conclusions

There are four conclusions have been drawn regarding the strategies utilized.

Strategies Utilized by the Student-Participants

This qualitative case study was designed to discover which strategies African immigrant and refugee students have utilized in order to persist in a post-secondary career preparation and technical education program. I interviewed eleven student-participants, both male and female, whose ages spanned from 19 to 45, came from Burundi, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, and Somalia, and were enrolled in the Automotive Technician, Health Information Technician, Licensed Practical Nurse, and Surgical Technician programs. Despite their dissimilarities, there were several conclusions which were common across-the-board.

First, the student-participants actively sought assistance. They asked for help (e.g., clarification, further explanation, review) from instructors and lab assistants. This assistance was located in the faculty and tutor offices as well as the academic labs, the Math Lab, the Writing Lab, the Biology Lab, and the Computer Lab. In two instances, the student-participants who sought assistance *from* the Math Lab in turn became tutors *for* the Math lab.

Second, apart from the labs, the student-participants rarely utilized other programs or services offered on campus. The reason for this non-utilization stemmed from (a) not needing the service and (b) the fact that they were unaware of the existence of the service or program. The response was similar for the utilization of programs and services external to the college. External assistance was rarely used. Two students studied at their community library and one student's religious organization offered homework help. Several students mentioned their religious organizations in conjunction with stress-relief.

Third, the student-participants reported receiving encouragement which they used as motivation to persist. Family members, both explicitly and subtly, were the most encouraging. Explicit encouragement was primarily verbal expressions of support. Subtle encouragement often centered around the family member not insisting that the student work full-time so the student could concentrate on studying. One student, who had no family residing in the United States, received encouragement from his sponsors. The instructors, as an aggregate, were also mentioned as providing encouragement. Several instructors and lab assistants were specifically referred to by name as being particularly supportive.

Finally, to overcome the multiple challenges faced by the student-participants in their multiple life-roles (i.e., student, family member, worker), the students relied heavily on internal motivation to persist academically. In essence, they were not willing to give up. The awareness of the opportunity being offered to attend school, self-confidence, courage, determination, and the refusal to quit were personal attributes the students revealed as helping them to persist.

Implications for the Student-Participants

The persistence strategies utilized, and not utilized, by my student-participants have two practical implications.

Critical thinking skills not being developed. The eleven student-participants all reported that they ask the instructor or lab assistant for help, often immediately after class. This tacit acknowledgement of their challenges with the English language, the academic vocabulary in particular, demonstrates their willingness to seek out assistance rather than struggle and risk failing due to not comprehending the material. However, this immediate request for assistance may be a detriment to the development of other higher-order cognitive skills, such as critical thinking. Two students, Sami and Jim both admitted that often they prefer to not ask their instructors because they are not given the answer directly. In Jim's situation, the instructor walks him through the problem so Jim arrives at the answer on his own. Similarly, Sami gets the impression that her instructors expect the students to be able to deduce their own answers. On the other hand, David mentioned that when he submits his essays to be reviewed, he is only told what needs to be corrected, not what the corrections are. David does not mind, because as he said, "if you correct it yourself, you are thinking."

Critical thinking is becoming increasingly recognized as a skill to be developed at an educational institution. As the Reading instructor, I review program textbooks to understand the types of material being read and to determine the level of difficulty of that material. Both the Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) and the Licensed Practical Nursing (LPN) textbooks have sections in each chapter devoted to the application of critical thinking on the job. The Automotive faculty and I are in discussions on how to

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adapt their textbook material into practical exercises for the labs to increase "just-in-time" critical thinking skills. These skills are vital due to the high level of technology inherent in automobile repair as well as the vast array of technical configurations available for individual makes and models of vehicles. Finally, at Technical College, advisory boards across the programs have stressed the need for new hires to possess critical thinking skills.

Reliance on impractical strategies. Although the student-participants noted their willingness to seek assistance from their instructors or lab assistants, they may be relying on a study strategy which may not be practical.

By relying primarily on their instructors may preclude the students from actively seeking assistance elsewhere. For example, academic coaches and counselors demonstrate study skill strategies which can be adaptable to a variety of classes. They also assist with developing time management strategies. Time management, when combined with study skills, may reduce the student-participants' stated strategy of allotting all of their time to one class and disregarding the others. The coaches and counselors teach a comprehensive skill set meant to be carried throughout the academic career and into the work place. They do not just focus on a particular skill set needed to pass a single class.

A notable omission was the use of study groups. Several student-participants mentioned that they would use like to use study groups, except they are often excluded because of the language barrier. Other students did not use them, nor deem them particularly useful, given their tendency to become chatty. Several students reported not using study groups for this particular reason alone. I believe that despite the risk of

conversation rather than focusing on studying, study groups are valuable. As Paye explained, "my classmates … sometimes we just group ourselves and then read our notes and explain it together…. if one of us understand it better, we schedule ourselves and then get together... demonstrate what we understand." As a result of studying with others, understanding of the material is reinforced by explaining it to the group members and, conversely, the presence of others provides the opportunity for further explanation of poorly-understood material and to fill in the gaps of missing information as well.

Removing Barriers

Regarding the removal of barriers, I have recommendations in two areas, combating the lack of knowledge about resources and combating communication barriers, in particular the challenge of having an accent that makes it difficult for the student to be understood.

Combating Lack of Knowledge about Resources: Information Scavenger Hunt

Sami and Naomi came to be interviewed together. While reviewing the list of available programs and services offered at Technical College, both women grew quite upset about their lack of knowledge of these programs. What had begun as an interview evolved into a discussion on how to remedy their own unawareness and a perceived similar lack of knowledge among the greater student population. After a serious discussion, albeit interspersed with copious amounts of giggling, the women suggested an information scavenger hunt.

Sami and Naomi suggested setting a day aside and taking the list of programs and services used for this research study, with the addition of several other programs of which I was unaware, and visit the office each program or service. The student would need to

discover from the staff member or instructor what service is provided, the purpose of the program, why the student would visit or utilize the program or service (e.g., for support or for leisure), and periodically receive a small take-away such as a pen, t-shirt, cookie, or candy.

The purpose of this information scavenger hunt would be two-fold. First, the student would become more familiar with the programs and services that Technical College has to offer. The student would meet at least one individual from each office, so a connection is made. This connection may lessen the hesitancy to seek assistance because the staff member is no longer a complete stranger. As Geisler (2007) pointed out, "decisions to remain in school during these critical junctures … were often affected by a specific individual associated with the institution…. [and] the relationship be accessible to the student at the very time surrounding the crisis" (p. 169). Second, Technical College is a commuter school. As a result, students are often on campus for classes and then they leave. David had stated in his interview, "I am just coming here. And, when I'm done with my class, I go!" Very little integration, or relationships, with peers and faculty is developed. Tinto (1975) found that integration, both social and academic, plays a role in a student's decision to persist or leave.

Meeting with one of the enrollment coaches to discuss retention several weeks after Sami and Naomi's interview, I put forth their suggestion for an information scavenger hunt. The enrollment coach was intrigued with this suggestion, as was the director of public relations for the Student Senate. As Sami and Naomi had pledged to be the go-to girls for developing this information scavenger hunt, they may be adding on additional responsibilities to their already busy schedules.

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Combating Communication Barriers (Making Myself Understood)

A theme which emerged from the interviews was the student-participants felt that communication in the classroom was a barrier to their academic success. The student-participants believed they had a difficult time making themselves understood when interacting with their native-English speaking classmates, and by extension their professors. Unfortunately, it is not a two-way problem. The student-participants did not mention having difficulty understanding the language (as opposed to having difficulty with the lecture) of their instructors and classmates. The classmates of my student-participants have had little exposure to the accents. As a result, the classmates are unaccustomed to the idiosyncratic tones, emphases, inflections, and even sentence structures which make up a particular accent. Therefore, the onus to make themselves understood rests on the shoulders of the student-participants.

My first recommendation is for the student-participants to become more proactive in interacting with their classmates. It takes courage to place themselves in a humbling position, but as Paye stated, "You have to take courage to go ahead." Suggestions for increased interaction include simply asking a question about the class, making a comment (i.e., a complaint) about the weather or inquiring about the classmate's weekend. As comfort levels increase, I suggest the non-US born student ask a classmate or two to form an informal study-group. I would also suggest the instructor intercede and consciously create study or work groups with specific activities that will provide opportunities for the students to interact equally, and not result in the native English speaker doing the majority of the work because it is easiest.

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My second recommendation is to take a pronunciation class. I have an American-English pronunciation class targeted to the allied health students on the inactive course list at Technical College's Professional and Workforce Training Center. I developed it at the request of the Medical Assistant program faculty because their non-US born students were having difficulties finding internships due to their accent. It was offered one semester, but did not fill so it was canceled. The course has not been offered since due to my writing the preliminary examinations and conducting research for this dissertation. After hearing first-hand the challenges my student-participants face due to their accents, I will consider offering the pronunciation course again.

Building Academic Supports

Recommendations for building academic support focus on peer-supported mentoring and coaching, assistance with technical vocabulary, including summer bridge courses, and the development of critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

Peer-Supported Mentoring and Coaching

The student-participants overwhelmingly preferred to work with the instructors or lab-assistants if they needed assistance, rather than peer-tutors. Of those who were aware of peer-tutoring, four chose not to utilize it, one had used them in the past, one may in the future, and two stated outright that peer-tutoring is not available for their programs (Licensed Practical Nursing and Surgical Technician). One reason for the non-use may be that the peer-tutors are primarily US-born, native English speakers. As had been discussed previously, it was a common tendency for the student-participants to be hesitant when asking their US-born, native English-speaking classmates for assistance.

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I recommend that the peer-tutor advisor make a concerted effort to attract and train immigrant students to be peer-tutors. Peer-tutoring should target, in particular, students that are of the national origin(s) most highly represented in the specific technical programs. This will be beneficial for five reasons. First, there is a commonality of experience that can ease the hesitancy in seeking assistance. Second, if necessary, the concept may be explained in the student's native language. Third, the selection as a peer-tutor helps build self-confidence. Fourth, there is a possibility of developing informal study groups. Fifth, the availability of non-US-born peer-tutors demonstrates the college's dedication to diversity and the assurance that the college supports all students' readiness for a career upon graduation.

Help With Technical Vocabulary

Several student-participants remarked having challenges with academic English, and in particular, the scientific nature of the vocabulary essential to both the understanding of the course material and the completion of practical applications. I have two recommendations: (a) summer bridge courses and (b) sessions with peer-tutors, academic coaches, and study groups that focus specifically on the development of technical vocabulary.

Summer bridge courses. First, I recommend summer bridge courses to focus on basic scientific knowledge. This would not be applicable only to the health science programs. Other technical programs require an underlying scientific knowledge base as well. For example, biology is required for Horticulture and the principles of electricity are required knowledge for technical programs such as Automotive, Electronic Engineering, and Welding.

Although writing about the science needs for English Language Learners in middle school, Miller (2009) made some valid points about the technical vocabulary needs of adult immigrant and refugee students, and those from politically unstable countries in particular. Even if the student received education in their native country, "students with interrupted education lack the topic-specific vocabularies of academic subjects, understandings of register and genre, cultural background knowledge to scaffold their understanding and learning strategies to process content" (p. 573). In addition, "understanding the meaning of a word often entails grasping a concept. Words like 'density' or 'compression' are not simply a matter of translation from another language" (p. 575). Finally, many scientific words are used in everyday English as well. Miller gave *model* and *attract* as examples. The student needs to be aware of the importance of context, and this could ideally be taught in a lab situation in a summer bridge course.

Peer-tutoring, academic coaches, and study groups. A second recommendation is a focused emphasis on technical vocabulary via multiple academic strategies. The experiences of peer-tutors, especially non-native English speakers, in learning the concepts in English would be invaluable to their struggling classmates. Academic coaching can also help with teaching study skills to enhance learning, for example flash cards, note-taking, utilization of web-based study guides. I also recommend the deliberate formation of study groups. As one of the student-participants who studied with his classmates mentioned, if one member of the group does not understand the concept, another will. In effect, the group members help each other learn.

Problem Solving and Critical Thinking

Just-in-time automotive repair, assessment of the nature of a patient's illness at a clinic, and anticipation of the needs of the surgeon in the operating room are all examples of problem solving and critical thinking my student-participants need to be able to do. Due to the technical and practical nature of the curriculum, instructors incorporate problem solving skills in the classroom. Outside the classroom, lab-assistants and tutors have the opportunity to play a valuable role in developing problem solving and critical thinking skills as well, but are currently utilized more to check the accuracy of homework and explain concepts foe greater comprehension. I recommend a three-phase approach to get the lab assistants and tutors more involved in assisting the students to develop critical-thinking and problem solving skills.

Start with the basics: Reason out the answers. Students need to be able to look at a question or scenario and then reason out the answer or solution, rather than seeking out help immediately. The first phase to help students become problem-solvers is to have the lab assistants and tutors guide the students through the process of determining the answer, rather than just providing the answer. The process must include an explanation or rationale for the various steps in order to scaffold the development of background information, which may be missing or not quite understood.

Model, then practice, the problem-solving process. The second phase is to demonstrate the process of problem-solving using a simple but relevant project. The tutor or lab assistant models the steps of completing the project, including thinking out-loud to demonstrate the thought process involved in determining which steps were taken and then providing rationale for the steps. Next, have the students complete the project

themselves. Finally, provide a project that is a variation of the original in order to incorporate one of the critical thinking skills: adapting learned knowledge to a new situation.

Troubleshoot: What went wrong? The third phase is to provide an activity involving failed components, techniques, or processes. The student will need to determine where, how, and why the failure occurred. This activity utilizes both problem-solving and critical thinking skills.

Recommendations for Further Research

There are two avenues of future research that I propose: expanding this current study to other student populations and exploring the use of religion as a motivator.

Expand this Study to Other Student Demographics

I drew upon the concept of social capital to partially explain the use, and non-use of various programs and services by African immigrant and refugee students. I would be interested to learn whether the findings would be similar to other student populations at Technical College.

First, I suggest altering the interview guide to include questions that will obtain a deeper understanding for the non-use of the programs and services. These questions should be applied to any future persistence research conducted with the various student populations at Technical College. I also suggest re-interviewing my original eleven student-participants to gain a better understanding of their stated non-use of the specific programs and services.

Second, there is a sizeable population of first-generation students (i.e., the first in their family to pursue post-secondary education). First-generation college students tend

to not grow up with the expectation of attending college, thus arrive academically underprepared and lack the knowledge of networks derived through on-campus social capital (Glazman, 2008). In addition, because they often juggle multiple life-roles, first generation college students may not have the time available to actively seek out various forms of assistance. Technical College currently does not have a program designed to assist first-generation students, thus not providing in-house social capital networks. As a result, at Technical College first-generation students, like the African immigrant and refugees, are essentially on their own.

Third, first-generation status notwithstanding, the student body at Technical College tends to be nontraditional in terms of age (25 years old and older), educational background (many having earned a GED), ethnicity, family structure (multiple children in the household or single parent), recovering addict, or parolee/work-release as well. Geisler (2007) studied persistence and attrition behaviors among nontraditional students and found that persisting students had a personal goal to keep them motivated and developed coping skills such as time management and utilization of institution-specific resources. A more exhaustive, mixed-method study should be conducted to determine the persistence strategies used and *why*, as well as not used and *why*, by the various demographic populations mentioned above. Persistence strategies utilized by gender and by the specific technical programs need to be researched and understood as well.

I think uncovering persistence strategies utilized by other student demographics would add greatly to the retention efforts at Technical College. As Araujo (2011), Garcia (2010), and Taffer (2010) found in their research, targeted interventions are effective. Araujo explored a first-year experience (CAMP) targeted towards migrant farm-workers

at a single 4-year university. Over a period of four years, the CAMP program nationwide boasts a 86% first-year completion rate and 81% of the students continue on into their second year of school. Garcia adapted the findings from a "welcome to college" phone survey into changes at the institutional level and an intrusive advising program. Although retention statistics are not provided, the author suggested that the institutional changes made navigating the higher education bureaucracy more manageable, causing the students to become less frustrated and less willing to just give up. Meanwhile, the advising program proactively sought to learn of any challenges the students were facing and to advise students of support available. Taffer examined the results for the refugee students who took the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) and the Community College Student Experience Questionnaire (CCSEQ). She determined that mentoring programs which provide structured support, career counseling to assist in setting achievable educational goals, and a dedicated community liaison who specifically works with the refugee population provide the support the refugee student needs to make the transition to higher education and then to persist academically.

Religion as Motivation

Determining what motivates my student-participants and connecting these motivators to previous studies, one item caught my attention that I believe would be of value for future research. Both my student-participants and Boulanger's (2009) participants reported finding solace and motivation from their religion. It was a finding Boulanger did not anticipate, however it did not strike me as unusual given my previous work with refugees.

In an early proposal for this dissertation, I had proposed to explore how the refugee experience affects the adult learner. This interest stemmed from casual observations on the differences between the age of the student and the length of time spent in the refugee camps. I wanted to learn how the deprivations and trauma affected the mental health of the students and whether there were adverse repercussions. One aspect I was particularly curious about was the reliance on religion as a coping method. However, this proposal was deemed far beyond the scope for a dissertation, particularly since there was very little research to draw from as the research on the psychological aspects of the refugee experience was targeted primarily to nurses and public health workers (see Chapter Two, the section on Psychological Barriers).

Sami's comment, "knowing that God is there, like with me, because without him, I wouldn't have been this far" had struck me in particular because of my knowledge of her refugee experience and it also renewed my curiosity about how the refugee experience affects the adult learner. Similar to Boulanger, I found an absence of research that could link religion and academic persistence. Pollack (2003) wrote about the use of religion as part of healing after trauma and Sideris (2003) introduced religious concepts to explain suffering due to trauma. Meanwhile Starkey, Lee, Tu, Netland, and Goh (2008) explored how religion was used to explain behavior that the dominant culture in the United States considers mental illness, and Christensen (2010) found that the Somali community utilizes religion as response to mental health service needs in the K-12 educational system. These articles would be of use as context to inform counselors, educators, and retention specialists on the refugee experience, but they do not add concrete knowledge to persistence and retention efforts.

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Therefore, I believe that an exploratory, phenomenological study into how a student utilizes or experiences religion as motivation for (or, conversely, as a barrier to) academic persistence would provide an additional facet to the growing body of post-secondary persistence and retention literature.

A Final Suggestion

Because of the student-participants' familiarity with me, the interviews did not always follow the pre-established interview guide, but occasionally veered off onto more conversational tangents. It was on one such tangent that Sami and Naomi developed the idea of an information scavenger hunt. Making the conceptual leap from using an interview tangent for problem solving to using focus groups, I suggest bringing together groups of students to discuss a common theme that ran through many of the interviews: not enough time for studying because of caring for children. This was a theme that begged for a recommendation, but after hearing the student-participants' stories, so many personal variables were entwined I realized that a simple recommendation was not possible. Therefore, I suggest bringing together groups of students, delineated by ethnicity and/or program, for semi-guided, semi-formal conversations to discuss the issue of studying and day-care or babysitting. This conversational interaction should elicit feasible recommendations that have their roots in the students' social capital networks. The resultant recommendations can then be brought to Technical College administration and then perhaps developed as an institution-supported program.

Personal Reflection

This research project allowed me, as a researcher, to understand a very small group of students at Technical College a little better in terms of what kept them

academically motivated, what challenges they faced in their educational pursuits, and what steps they took in order to overcome those challenges. This research project also allowed me, as their professor, to get to know my former students better, as in what is important to them and the frustrations they experience in their lives as they strive to comprehend the technical portions of their programs and then apply the practical aspects of their lessons in a real-life situation. It was a humbling experience to see the high level of knowledge and complexity of skill that is required to work in fields that many dismiss as menial or low-skilled.

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APPENDICES

Letter of Introduction

February 9, 2013

This letter is to ask if you would be interested in helping me with a project for MY school. (Don't forget, I was not just your Reading teacher, I am also a student!)

I think your ideas will be really helpful, not just for my school, but for a much wider community: the refugees and immigrants from Africa who are going to a technical college.

Let me explain a bit about my schoolwork, so you will have a better idea of why your ideas are so very important!

I am writing a paper for the adult education program at the University of Minnesota. My topic (the BIG idea ☺) is to find out what immigrants and refugees from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, and Somalia do in order to keep going to classes at ▮▮▮ Technical College. I want your ideas about what you do so you don't give up on school. For example, do you use the Math Lab, do you study in groups with your classmates, do you go to the gym to relieve stress?

No one has ever asked your community of students before about what you do to stay in school. Writers have asked Somali students at MCTC (a community college) about what STOPS them from coming to school. Another writer, in Arizona, has asked refugees what they need in order to go to a community college (financial aid, ESL classes, etc). But, no one has asked about technical colleges. That is why YOUR ideas are so important!

I would really like to hear your ideas. They are very important! Please call me (▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮) or email me (pprokop@▮▮▮▮.edu) to set up a time that we can talk.

Thank You!

Pam

Appendix B

Institutional Review Board Notification Email

1212E25807 - PI Prokop - IRB - Exempt Study Notification

irb@umn.edu   Jan 3 [2013]

TO: parkx002@umn.edu, morte020@umn.edu,

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

Study Number: 1212E25807

Principal Investigator: Pamela Prokop

Title(s): Strategies Utilized by African Refugee and International Students to Persist in Post-Secondary Technical or Career Preparation Programs

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This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota HRPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter.

This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date.

Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654.

You may go to the View Completed section of eResearch Central at http://eresearch.umn.edu/ to view further details on your study.

The IRB wishes you success with this research.

Participant Consent Form

Strategies Utilized by African Refugee and Immigrant Students to
Persist in Post-Secondary Technical or Career Preparation Programs

This study is being conducted by Pamela Prokop, doctoral candidate, Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development, in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota. Her advisor is Dr. Rosemarie Park.

Description of the Study

The research is designed to provide information on the strategies that this particular group of students has utilized to help them to persist in college. You will be asked questions regarding your background and personal situation and about the ways you have learned to deal with the academic work and challenges of going to college.

Voluntary Consent

Participation in the study is voluntary. You may discontinue your involvement at any time throughout the research process. Your decision to participate or withdraw will not affect your current or future relations with ███ Technical College or with Ms. Prokop.

Confidentiality

All information collected for this study will remain confidential. Names will be changed in all documents and in presentations of the data. Audiotapes of the interview and transcripts will be kept in locked cabinets in the researcher's home for the duration of the study and for five years following its conclusion, after which they will be shredded and disposed of.

How Results Will Be Used

The study results will be used for a doctoral dissertation for the College of Education and Human Development, University of Minnesota. They may be incorporated in presentations at meetings and conferences. The results may also appear in published articles.

Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Pamela Prokop. If you have any questions, feel free to contact her at (cell) ███████, or (email) pprokop@███████.edu.

Appendix D

Student Participation Interview Guide

Study ID: _____

Gender: Male or Female   Age: _____   Marital Status:_____

Country of Origin: _____

Who lives in your home with you? Give *only* the relationship * NO NAMES* and for children – their age:

_____

_____

Do you have other family living in the Twin Cities? Give *only* the relationship * NO NAMES*

_____

_____

Student Information

What was your education before coming to the United States? Please explain:

_____

What kind of education did you have after arriving in the United States?   (for example, did you go to a K-12 school as a youth, or did you go to Adult Basic Education classes?) Please explain:

_____

Where did your earn your high school diploma or GED? _____

Is this your first time in college? _____ If no, please explain: _____

_____

How many semesters have you been at this school? _____

Program you are in (or are on the waitlist for): _____

Do you plan to earn a: (Circle all that apply)   Diploma   Certificate   AAS

Employment Information

Where do you work? _____

Job title: _____

What are your primary duties (be brief!): _____

How many hours a week do you work? _____

What days and times is your normal shift? _____

Information About How You Came to the USA

Country of Origin: _____

When did you arrive in the USA? _____

When did you arrive in Minnesota? _____

After leaving your home country and before coming to the United States, did you live in

any other country? _____   If yes, where, and for how long? _____

_____

Have you gone to any of these?	YES	NO	Tell me more!
Peer-tutoring			
Writing Lab			
Math Lab			
Reading and Language Lab			
Computer Learning Lab			
Academic Resource Center			
Coaches			
• Enrollment			
• Success			
Disability Services			
Counseling			
• Personal			
• Academic			
• Career			
Adult Basic Education			
Multicultural Student Center			
Veterans Resources			
Student Senate			
Phi Theta Kappa			
Student Life Organizations			
Other programs at school?			

Do you do any of these?	YES	NO	Tell me more!
Time management (scheduling)			
Asking for assistance			
Marathon study sessions			
Study groups			
Relaxation / Stress relievers			
• Exercise			
• Yoga			
• Prayer / Meditation			
Other?			
Who helps you in your studies?	YES	NO	Tell me more!
Classmates			
Tutors			
Instructors			
Staff			
Fresh Stop Staff			
Administrators			
Family			
Friends			
Co-Workers			
Religious advisors			
Social groups			
Other people or groups?			

Appendix E

Original Interview Protocol

Strategies Utilized by African Refugee and Immigrant Students to
Persist in Post-Secondary Technical and Career Preparation Programs

Guiding question:

What strategies do African refugee and immigrant students utilize in order to persist
in post-secondary technical and career preparation programs?

Sub-questions:

1. Which academic strategies have the students utilized in order to persist in their
   educational program?

2. Which programs or services offered by the educational institution have the students
   found useful?

3. Which programs or services outside the educational institution have the students
   found useful?

4. Which networks (social, familial, academic) have the students found useful?

5. What motivates the students to persist in their educational program?

Interview Questions

I am working on a research project to learn about which strategies, techniques, or other
kinds of support that students in technical career programs use in order to get through.
My goal is to understand your point of view – what have you done in order to continue on
in your educational program.

Before we begin, do you have any questions for me?

These first questions are just general questions to get our conversation started.

1. Looking at students you know, what do you think has been their biggest challenges?

2. What are some of your family, employment, or other responsibilities that compete
   with the time you need to devote to school?

3. Tell me about your life as a student.

4. Has being a college student been like what you expected it to be?

5. Do you think you were prepared to *begin / return to* college?

6. What types of changes have you had to make in your life so you can be a college student?

7. Tell me about the people and circumstances that support your going to school.

8. Tell me about any people or circumstances that hurt your education – or make you feel "pulled away" from your studying.

9. How would you describe your relationships with your fellow students?

10. What is it like to work with your instructors?

11. How comfortable are you with seeking out help with an academic – or life – problem?

12. How comfortable are you with approaching a faculty member or staff member or administrator with a question or problem?

Follow Up Questions:

1. Explain how you decided to *begin / return to* college?

2. Why did you choose to study to be a _____?

3. What are some things about **YOU** that help you be a successful student?

4. How well do you feel you are doing with your studies?

5. What – or who – keeps you motivated?

6. Is there anyone or any group that has been particularly helpful?

   a. Tell me how you came to join with this individual or group?

7. What has helped you succeed in college?

8. Who do you talk to about your college experiences?

9. Tell me about the people or circumstances outside of school that support you in staying in college?

   a. How does this make a difference in your staying in college?

10. What do you do when you start to feel _____?

11. Tell me more about your experience with _____.

Appendix F

Persistence Strategies Utilized by Student-Participants

This appendix displays, in table format, the different strategies utilized by the student-participants, based upon data derived from the Interview Guide (see Appendix D). The strategies are divided into six tables. Each table utilizes the same symbols. Any symbol or information specific to a particular table is added as a note under the table.

Several changes were made to reflect the data. First, the student-participant, Zab, is not included on these tables. She was my first interview, and I followed the original interview protocol. It was not until the second interview that I realized that the student-participants were not aware of the services, or had utilized a service without knowing its name. Second, tutors and staff were viewed as the same, so I consolidated these two persons as 'tutors" (see Table 9). Third, lab assistants were viewed as distinct from tutors, therefore, I added a column for lab assistants (see Table 9). Fourth, I removed meditation as a relaxation strategy because no one utilized it, in fact most did not know what meditation was. Fifth, I removed administrators as a someone from whom support or encourage is received. The student-participants did not who they were, and nonetheless, did not feel comfortable approaching them. Similarly, I removed the Fresh Stop Café staff because they were not perceived as a place to go to relax or from whom to receive support. Finally, I removed Veteran's Services. There was a veteran of the US National Guard in the target population, but chose not to be interviewed.

KEY:

Y = I am currently using this service or strategy

(blank) = I have never used this service or strategy

past = I have used this service or strategy in the pas

DNK = I have not heard of this service or strategy, person or group

maybe = I would consider looking into this service or strategy

N/A = Program or service is not available for the specific technical program

Table 6

Academic Services

| Name | Peer - Tutoring | Labs | | | | Library | Adult Basic Education |
		Writing	Math	Read/Language	Computer		
David		Y			Y	Y	
Eve	DNK	Y	Y		Y	DNK	
Gemechu	DNK			DNK	Y		
Gloria	maybe	Y	Y		Y	Y	
Hani	past	past	Y		Y	Y	brush-up
Jim					Y	Y	
Mugisha		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Naomi	N/A	Y	Y	DNK	Y	Y	
Paye		Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	brush-up
Sami	N/A	Y	Y	past	Y	Y	brush-up

Note: "brush-up" = Adult Basic Education was utilized solely to brush up on basic skills

prior to taking the Accuplacer placement test.

Table 7

Coaching and Counseling Services

Name	Coaches		Dis-ability Services	Counseling			Other
	Enrollment	Success		Personal	Academic	Career	
David	DNK	DNK	maybe	DNK	DNK	DNK	Sponsors
Eve	DNK	DNK		DNK	DNK	DNK	
Gemechu	DNK	DNK		DNK	DNK	DNK	Advice from instructors
Gloria					maybe	DNK	
Hani	DNK	DNK		DNK	DNK	DNK	
Jim					Craig [a]	Dave [a]	Pam [a] (reading)
Mugisha	Y						Outside workforce center
Naomi				DNK	DNK	Y [b]	Jean [c] - time management
Paye	DNK	Y		DNK	DNK	DNK	Jeff [c] - time management
Sami	DNK	DNK		DNK	DNK	DNK	

Notes.

[a] During the 2012-13 academic year, the Automotive faculty provided targeted assistance for program students by bringing an academic counselor (Craig) and the Reading instructor (Pam) into their classrooms. Dave is an Automotive instructor.

[b] An attempt was made to use this service, but Naomi felt "they just blew me off… she [receptionist] kinda just pushing me away, like she was in a hurry". Naomi returned again to get help with her résumé, "and she was like, you should already know how to write it!"

[c] Jean and Jeff are General Education instructors; student learned the skill in class.

Table 8

Campus Organizations

Name	Multicultural Student Center	Student Senate	Food Shelf	Phi Theta Kappa	Student Life
David	DNK	DNK	DNK	DNK	DNK
Eve				DNK	
Gemechu		DNK	DNK	DNK	
Gloria	DNK				DNK
Hani	DNK			received letter	
Jim	DNK	Y			
Mugisha	DNK		Y	DNK	DNK
Naomi	DNK	for free things	DNK	received letter	DNK
Paye	DNK			DNK	maybe
Sami	DNK	for free things	DNK	DNK	

Table 9

Study Strategies

Name	Time management	Ask for Assistance				Marathon Study Sessions	Study Groups
		Classmates	Tutors	Lab Ass't	Instructors		
Dave		Y			Y		
Eve	Y		Y	Y	Y		
Gemechu	Y	Y		past	Y		Y
Gloria		Y	Y	Y	Y		Y
Hani			Y	Y	Y	Y	
Jim	Y	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Mugisha	Y		Y		Y	Y	Y
Naomi	Y				Y		
Paye	Y	Y			Y		Y
Sami			past	Y	Y	Y	

Table 10

Stress Relief Strategies

Name	Exercise	Yoga	Prayer	Other
David			Past	Watch movies
Eve	Y		Y	
Gemechu	Y			Watch tv, hang out with friends
Gloria	past/maybe		Y	Ethiopian coffee!
Hani	Y		Y	Read Qur'an, watch movies
Jim	Y	Y	Y	
Mugisha			Y	Sing, read Bible, go to church (worship)
Naomi	Y	maybe	Y	Go to church
Paye	Y			Hang out with friends
Sami		past	Y	Music, go to church

Table 11

Supporters Outside of Technical College.

Name	Family	Friends	Co-Workers	Religious Advisors	Social Groups	Other
David		Y		Y	Y	Sponsors
Eve	Y					
Gemechu	Y	Y	Y		Y	
Gloria	Y	Y	Y			
Hani	Y	Y		Y		
Jim	Y	Y				
Mugisha				Y	Y	
Naomi	Y					
Paye	Y	Y	Y	Y		Wife!
Sami	Y		Y		Y	