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What Factors Influence the Academic Success of Somali Graduate Students?

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What Factors Influence the Academic Success of Somali Graduate Students?

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Abstract

As Somali refugees arrive in the United States, their unique culture and religion has become a challenge for academic institutions unaware of how to accommodate these new students with unique academic needs and social status. This study aims to identify the factors influencing the academic success of Somali graduate students and explore ways the Somali graduate students overcome the academic challenges. This phenomenological study analyzed the experiences and perceptions of ten Somali graduate students in the Midwest universities. Participants were either foreign born or second-generation born Americans. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews aimed at identifying challenges in the academic environment, and the ways the participants overcame their unique academic challenges. This study revealed that the primary factors affecting their academic success are in the presence of/or absence of inclusions academic environments, socioeconomic status, level of family obligation, levels of resilience, and encountering racism. These students overcame academic challenges by taking un-Islamic financial assistance, prioritizing English language learning, relying on family/spousal support, making connections with faculty, and forming ethnically homogenous academic support groups. Somali students have a plethora of academic factors affecting their success, most of which are common to more minority students in America. The ways these students deal with those academic challenges are unique to first-generation Somalis, especially concerning the paramount cultural and religious values around the importance of education which was the main source of academic motivation. Future research for Somali graduate students should be focused on what separates them from others in their same ethnic group who do not go to college.

Keywords: academic, achievement, challenges, integration, retention, economic integration

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I offer a special thank you to those graduate students who shared their experiences and time with me. The completion of this research would have been impossible without their input. And I thank them from the very bottom of my heart. I appreciate them taking the time to respond to the interviews and helping make my study possible.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter I: Introduction

Each year, the population in the United States grows more diverse (Zanolini, 2010).

Analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data reveals that more than 5.3 million students, or nearly 30

percent of all students enrolled in colleges and universities were either immigrants themselves or

children of immigrants.

By the year 2050, the U.S. Commerce Department projects that 50% of the population of the

United States will consist of those from non-European descent (U.S. Department of Commerce,

2001). With this demographic shift, there has been a notable underachievement among Somali

students. In many studies, the challenges and barriers to Somali students' success are well

documented and understood by researchers, education officials and the Somali community

(Rasmussen, 2009). However, there is a growing gap between research relevant to academic

success and achievement of Somali students. According to a report on Immigration and Higher

Education Study issued by Citizens League in 2009 indicates that Somali college students are

among the newest immigrant groups whose academic experiences have not yet been examined

well. Rasmussen (2009) argues that Somali refugees who were born after the collapse of the

Somali government in the 1990s had minimal experience with formal education prior to coming

to the United States.

The purpose of this study is to help education department directors, school administrators,

and educators learn about the ways and avenues that Somali students use to reach their academic

success.

As the Somali population in the United States has grown over the past three decades, the

group's history, culture, language, and their prior education remains unknown for too many

Americans. To understand the challenges and success the Somali students are experiencing today

in universities in the Midwest, it is crucial to investigate the history and education of Somalis before they arrive in the United States. Therefore, this qualitative study examines the contemporary academic attainment techniques and outcomes of Somali students in America. Moreover, the thesis delves more deeply into several other variables that correlate with student academic accomplishment. Students may vary their acquisition of English, the long-term residence, the level of education of their parents, the importance of education, and the motivation of the student.

Background and Context

Geography- Somalia is located in the horn of Africa and shares a borderline with Kenya to the south, Ethiopia to the west, Djibouti to the northwest, the Gulf of Aden in the north, and the Indian Ocean in the east (Metz, 1992).

Population- Somalia has a population of around ten million people. About 85% of its residents are ethnic Somalis who have historically settled the northern and central parts of the country (Metz, 1992).

Language- "Somali language was officially written in 1972 and is mainly spoken in Somalia, Somali-populated regions in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Djibouti" (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 2). Ibrahim (2017) explains that Osman Kenadid, a prominent educator, a poet, and writer, wrote the first Somali alphabet, an Arabic-based script, in 1950. However, before the script was presented to the public, Italian colonial authorities arrested him, and his project did not materialize. Hussein Sheikh Ahmed Kaddare created a version of Somali orthography based on Afro-Asiatic languages in 1952. Once again, the attempt to implement a common Somali alphabet was not a success in the context of a sustained struggle for Somalia's independence. Several other writing

systems were used to transcribe the Somali language, but none were officially or publicly implemented before 1972.

Somalia has different dialects, but mostly are mutually intelligible to each other. An English linguist, translator, and historian Andrew Dalby (1998) explains how Somali dialects are divided into three main categories: Northern, Benaadir and Maay. Although the dialects are different, they are linguistically unequal, meaning that some languages and dialects do not carry the same prestige. In Somalia, dialects spoken in the center and north of Somalia are deemed the standard language. Holmes (1992) explains that a "standard language" is always a particular dialect which has gained its special position as a result of social, economic, and political influence. Benadir and Maay language variations are not used as the language for education, law, economic/business activities, and so on.

Apart from Somali language, the Arabic language is commonly used in Somalia because of the Islamic religion which is adhered to by almost all Somalis. Other languages, such as English in the north of Somalia, French in the northwest, and Italian in the south of Somalia are also used by some Somalis. To understand Somali people better, it is crucial to learn that not all Somalis are monolithic. Ethnic Somalis live in East African countries of Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia, yet they all relate to each other one way or another (Metz, 1992).

Colonial period- By 1960, Britain and Italy granted independence to their territories, allowing the South and North to join as the Greater Republic of Somalia on July 1, 1960 (Metz, 1992). The lands in Djibouti, Kenya, and Ethiopia, however, were not united with the North and South regions that composed the new Somalia Republic because at the time of the independence, Djibouti was under the colony of France and the British had ceded two Somali territories to Ethiopia and Kenya.

When Somalia received its independence, they democratically elected its first president, Adan Osman. According to Steve (2007), Osman was a member of Somali Youth Campaign for an Independent Somalia. In the 1967 presidential election, Osman was defeated in a countywide election held on July 6, 1967, as the Somali citizens elected Abdirashid Ali Shermarke. Sadly, Shermarke was assassinated two years later. Soon after his assassination, a Somali army led by Mohamed Siad Barre came to power through a bloodless coup d'état on October 21, 1969 (Sachs, 1988, Putman & Noor, 1993). The military coup ended the democratic government and replaced it with a Marxist revolution. The Barre regime ruled the country with an iron fist. Four years after the takeover, Somalia joined the Arab League where Somali students could travel and study in the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Ibrahim (2017) contends that scholarships offered to Somali students in Arab speaking countries led to the rise of extreme Islamic ideologies as students returned to the country and confronted Somalia's long-held moderate practice of Sufism. Ibrahim (2017) tells us that President Barre announced a declaration that gave Somali women equal inheritance rights. Right away, ten prominent Islamic scholars opposed his equal rights decree, but they were swiftly executed in Mogadishu by a firing squad. Soon after their execution, tension simmered as Somali people arose to weaken his despotic administration.

Civil war- Somali plunged into an internecine conflict in 1990 when forces opposing the government staged a bloody coup against President Barre and killed many innocent civilians belonging to rival clan groups. With the sudden influx of Somali refugees crossing neighboring countries' borders, these refugees were then allowed for resettlement in the United States (Ibrahim, 2017).

Background on Refugee Resettlement in the United States - Minnesota is home to a growing Somali population that came to the United States with strong attachments to their ancestral

heritage and identity. As the new refugees arrived, they chose to live in the neighborhoods with their own community. Hudda Ibrahim explains in her book *"From Somalia to Snow"* about Somali ethnic enclaves. She states:

> When new arrivals come to America, they choose to move into areas where their clan is heavily concentrated. Somalis who are already established in America help newcomers from their clan start their lives near their families, often providing a place to live until the newly arrived can stand on their own. Once the newcomers find work, they assist others who come after them. When a clan family line lives in the same neighborhood, its members assist one another. If one of them loses his job, his fellow clan members give him a place to live and food to eat until he finds a new one. This unity helps them preserve the ancestral culture and traditions that are so important to them. This cohesive community structure has helped hundreds of Somali Americans in Saint Cloud (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 92)

According to Ibrahim (2017), Somali people came to the United States with psychological traumas born out of a deadly civil war, and other challenges related to subsequent displacement in the refugee settlements in Kenya and Ethiopia. Before they recovered from their negative experiences, they were exposed to poor housing, poor-paying jobs, and many other problems in their new home. Many had a tough time adjusting to the American way of life because of language and cultural barriers. Despite the existing untreated trauma and poor integration, Somali refugee parents hope for a brighter future for their children.

The process of settlement and integration presents many challenges for Somalis. To understand the dynamics that face Somalis in the West, one must understand 'assimilation' and 'acculturation.' What is assimilation or acculturation? Let us look at the assimilation theory that

Jean Piaget, Swiss developmental psychologist, originally proposed. Piaget (1970) stated that assimilation refers to a part of the adaptation process. According to Portes and Zhou (1993), segmented assimilation theory focuses on diverse experiences of assimilation among new waves of immigrants and their children. They stressed that waves of refugees who arrived since the 1980s were perceived less likely to assimilate into the host community than those of their predecessors owing to their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Partly, this is accurate because most Somali refugees relate assimilation to negative connotations. According to Ibrahim (2017),

> "Assimilation involves the adoption of cultural values and norms from the broader society. Integration refers to the degree of participation in the broader society, interacting with people outside of one's own racial, ethnic, or religious community." (pp. 128-129)

Somali people are hesitant to assimilate, but willing to integrate into their host community. For many Somali community members, the concept of assimilation has a negative connotation associated with the obliteration of one's identity and ancestral culture as part of a larger process of fully adopting American culture. Therefore, Somali people deliberate to what degree they should assimilate and preserve their own culture, faith, and family ways of living (Ibrahim, 2017). Despite being wary of cultural integration, most Somalis are open to the idea of economic and academic integration. This means that full integration requires that new Somali refugees are supported in their transition to the local U.S. community.

Offering the new arrivals equal academic opportunities is the foundation of successful integration (Rothstein, 2014). According to Rothstein (2014), integrating disadvantaged Black students into schools where more privileged students predominate can narrow the Black -white

achievement gap. For Somali students, both economic and educational integration is crucial for their future achievement.

Statement of The Problem

Within the past two decades Somali refugees have resettled in the United States. As the refugee student population in schools continues to become increasingly diverse in terms of race, class, ethnicity and language, Somali refugee students meet a litany of challenges upon arrival in the United States. Some of the most salient hurdles emanate from linguistic and cultural barriers, trauma, shifting family dynamics, and navigating unfamiliar educational systems in their new home. These students also confront interrupted schooling, different school norms, and new pedagogical approaches unfamiliar to them. Yet, research on Somali college students' experience is quite scarce and is primarily limited to primary school aged children and teenagers. As these students encounter a great deal of academic, social, and cultural difficulties while navigating their new colleges and universities, it is critical to investigate how they have overcome these challenges. There is a modicum of literature highlighting Somali college students' motivation, perseverance, achievement, and graduation rate in the Midwest.

I examine the scale of Somali colleges' experience as they transition to higher education and look at the roles that they played in eliminating their linguistic challenges, accessing a support system, and receiving academic guidance at their universities and types of motivations that helped them. According to Coleman (2009), some other factors that constrain students' academic and linguistic accomplishment consist of socioeconomic status, parental educational attainment, support, and expectations. Also, home environment factors and primary language preferences similarly influence the academic performance of students. According to Pewewardy & Frey (2002), some studies stress and attribute poor academic success to the low level of college

preparedness, alienation, and isolation. Yet, again, the research on Somali college students' experience is quite scarce.

The proposed study is important in numerous ways. The findings of the study may be beneficial to educators, administrators, school principals, and college presidents. The findings will help them understand factors impacting their education and good academic performance.

Research on barriers and challenges of Somali students' experience is abundant, but the academic achievement of those Somali college students is virtually non-existent at this moment. The primary purpose of the study is to better understand the academic challenges of young Somali refugee students 'experience in their university settings, but also how they effectively navigate those academic challenges. At the end of this thesis, I will be able to shed light on my investigation results which will provide academics, school principals and practitioners some guidance related to ways to approach the academic challenges and barriers faced by Somali refugee students.

I am a Somali, Muslim, Black student who knows what is like experiencing academic barriers and challenges. My experiences and reflections of academic and linguistic hurdles are similar to what most Somali American students face in schools.

Scope of the Study

This study focuses on examining and identifying the factors influencing the academic success of ten Somali graduate students and explore ways the Somali graduate students overcome the academic challenges in Midwest universities. Specifically, the study aims to explore the experiences and perceptions of graduate students who have taken at least one course at a Midwest university. The study will be limited to graduate students enrolled in Midwest

universities. The geographic scope of the study was limited to the states of Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the research is to identify the factors influencing the academic success of Somali graduate students and explore ways the Somali graduate students overcome the academic challenges.

Overview of Research Questions

This study seeks answers for the following questions: -

1. What factors influence the academic success of Somali graduate students?

2. How do Somali college students in universities in the Midwest deal with these challenges?

3. What kind of support do Somali college students receive in order to overcome these hurdles?

Overview of Research Design

The researcher interviewed participants who were selected based on the conditions that they are ethnically Somali, 18 years of age or older, of refugee background and enrolled as graduate students. Participants were recruited from several universities in the Midwest. The primary process of data gathering was interview. The participants' interviews were audio-recorded.

Significance of The Study

Conducting research to examine both challenges and opportunities impacting Somali college students' academic achievement is an intricate undertaking. It is crucial to examine all factors influencing education, achievement and graduation by highlighting the avalanche of challenges that most refugee college students face include language barrier, poor literacy, gender

differences in education, poor parenting involvement in school, lack of parental awareness and engagement, poor educational background of parents, lack of strong role models, cultural alienation, subtle racism, poor acculturation, high rates of poverty and student mobility or family responsibility.

Role of the Researcher

In qualitative studies, the researcher's role in data collection is essential. Therefore, my role in this study was as an observer-as-participant by accessing the thoughts and feelings of study participants.

To provide a brief background about myself, I was born in Somalia. The reason I am passionate about this study is that I have encountered similar obstacles during my early years of study. My previous obstacles continue to resonate with hundreds of Somali students. For over five years, I have taught refugee and immigrant students, particularly Somali children who had little or no formal education. During that time, I learned about their struggles. I realized how our refugee children and youth had a tough time adjusting to life in their new communities and schools. I witnessed the linguistic differences and how they could not figure out how to navigate the U.S. school system.

I saw several Somali children born or brought to the U.S. who did not share most of the challenges faced by new refugee students. Second-generation students often adjust culturally and linguistically faster than their parents. But those students who came to the United States during their college years have difficulty overcoming the same barriers. I am familiar with what some of my family and community members went through when they came to the United States. Although my parents completed their university studies, my mother took all her subjects in the Arabic language and my father in the Italian language. They, like many other Somali parents

today (regardless of education level), cannot assist their children with homework, the college entrance process, or job seeking. So, none of them could help with their children's homework, particularly in the English language other than English grammar. My curiosity in this specific theme of the study derives mainly from my previous profession as a high school ESL teacher.

Operational Definitions of Key Terms

Numerous terms used in the thesis have various meanings. These definitions will allow all readers, irrespective of their cultural background, education, and experience, to grasp key terms employed in this study. In this thesis, the terms 'refugee' and 'immigrant' will be mentioned on various occasions. It is crucial for clear explanations of what they mean here and what they convey when they are used. Theoretically and empirically, it is crucially important to distinguish second generation of first-generation Somali college students because they do not share many of the common academic and integration challenges that new refugees face.

Immigrant: By definition, an immigrant is someone who leaves the land of his or her birth and settles in another country (Ibrahim, 2017).

A refugee: Refers to individuals who underwent a forced migration (Cortes, 2001). To get a better sense of what refuge is, let us look at the UN definition closely:

> "A refugee is a person who is outside his/her country of nationality and has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, or political opinion." (UNHCR, 2011, p. 5)

In this research, the terms 'immigrant' and 'refugee' will not be used interchangeably because the term 'refugee' refers to any person uprooted from another country and being admitted to the United States as a lawful permanent resident (McBrien, 2005).

For this research, I will use the term 'refugee' as "a person who has fled his or her country of origin and cannot return to their country of origin because of the possibility of persecution." (UNHCR, 2011, p.5)

First-generation immigrant student: This term "implies to a student born outside the United States, but legal resident status" (McBrien, 2005, p. 331)

Second-Generation refugee: refers to either the children or the grandchildren of refugees (typically born or brought to the U.S at an early age) (Ibrahim, 2017).

A native-born citizen: A native-born citizen or resident of a country whose parents are foreign born, or a foreign-born citizen whose parents immigrated when that person was young, that is, the first native-born generation (Waters & Pineau, 2016).

A foreign-born citizen: A foreign-born student is someone who has immigrated to a new country of residence or has one or two foreign-born parents.

Primary refugees**:** Refugees who arrive directly from Africa with or without having family ties to Saint Cloud.

Secondary immigrants**:** Most Somalis who came to Minnesota are considered as secondary immigrants, meaning that they lived in other parts of the United States before. According to Ibrahim (2017), secondary immigrants are people who were settled first in one state or city and then decided to move to another place because of better opportunities. Hudda Ibrahim argues that the most significant determinants of Somalis' secondary migration were socioeconomic factors, community resources, access to the job market, housing availability, educational opportunities, and the presence of family and clan family groups. Mattessich (2000) attributes the primary reason for people moving to Minnesota to the presence of family or an extended family member.

Assimilation**:** Involves the adoption of cultural values and norms from the broader society (Ibrahim, 2017). Assimilation means when individuals "adopt characteristics of the host culture and, in turn, shed characteristics of their original culture" (Vang, 2015, p. 78).

Integration**:** Refers to the degree of participation in broader society, interacting with people outside of one's own racial, ethnic, or religious community (Ibrahim, 2017).

Identity**:** The individual characteristics by which a person is recognized or known (Mordini & Tzovaras 2012).

Acculturation Stress**:** Immigrants and refugees encounter numerous psychosocial challenges while adapting to cultural differences in a new country. These stress factors arise from circumstances such as immigration status, language barriers, economic hurdles, and discrimination (Dillion, 2013).

Achievement Gap**:** Denote differences in the academic achievement of groups of students.

Opportunity Gap**:** Denotes the disparity in access to quality schools and the resources needed for all students to be academically successful. (Pendakur, 2016).

Cultural capital**:** Social and cultural knowledge within a society that is deemed "valuable," gives individuals access to social mobility (Bourdieu, 1979).

Limited English Proficient (LEP): Students are those students whose first language was not English or those who live in households where English is not the primary language used (Vu & Walters, 2013).

Students with Limited and/or Interrupted Formal Education (SLIFE): Refers to those who had little or no formal educational training in their country of origin or those whose education was disrupted by warfare or other causes (Vu & Walters, 2013).

SIFE: Students with interrupted formal education.

Delimitations of the Problem

In this study, I described the lived experiences of ten Somali American graduate students in Midwest colleges and universities.

Organization of Thesis

Organization of this thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction and an overview of this study. Chapter two presents the literature and existing research on the challenges and opportunities new Americans encounter in their educational settings. Chapter three discusses the methodology, data collection and analysis used to conduct this study. Chapter four presents the findings of this investigation. Lastly, chapter five provides a concluding discussion as related to the study findings, implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Chapter II: Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the challenges and opportunities students face in colleges and universities in the Midwest. Therefore, the following literature review touches on the barriers hindering achievement for Somali students and ways students overcome linguistic and academic barriers.

In the introductory chapter, I covered Somali history, refugee experience, defining terms, and touched on the significance of cultural and educational challenges confronted by Somali students.

According to Michalski et al. (2017) explains how refugee students represent a significant source of diversity on today's university campuses. He suggests that "institutions of higher learning can facilitate improved access, commit to developing support services and a more welcoming and inclusive environment in order to ensure student retention and success among an increasingly diverse student population." (Michalski et al. 2017, p.66).

Therefore, a myriad of theories has been developed to account for stark differences among refugees (first or second generation), immigrants, and native-born Americans. According to Venters and Gany (2011), migrants from Africa are among the fastest growing population in the United States and have grown 16% between 1990 and 2000. About 26% of these immigrants are East Africans, and among East African communities, Somalis are among the fastest growing group of immigrants (Venters & Gany 2011). Over 50,000 Somali refugees live in the state of Minnesota and 93,000 speak Somali or other East African languages (Bigelow, 2010). According to Minnesota Education Equity Partnership (2018), "Somali is now the third most spoken language in Minnesota, behind English and Spanish." (p. 12)

The following section deals with the type of education Somali people received in their own homeland before coming to the United States.

Education

To understand the importance of education, it is imperative to look at both pre- and post-colonial periods. Also, it is crucial to examine the destruction of the education system, both during the conflict and post-conflict era.

Pre-Colonial Education – According to Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007), pre-colonial traditional societies in Somalia were mostly oral societies. Both British and Italian colonial powers opened schools, but the Somali people, who were predominantly pastoralists, were suspicious of missionary-led schools for fear of possible proselytization and evangelization (Cassanelli et. al, 2007). Only a few Somalis were admitted to the missionary-run schools because they wanted to acquire the skills necessary to gain employment in the colonial system. Apart from a few individuals enrolled in such educational institutions, Italians in the south of Somalia encountered robust resistance from the traditional elders and Somali religious leaders. Somali elders were wary of such schools' intentions to teach and educate their children.

According to Afyare Elmi (2010), before the western civilization of Somalia in the late 1880s, Somali culture and Islam were the primary sources of knowledge for most Somalis. During these periods, illiteracy was prevalent as most education centered around teaching young children their oral traditions, hunting, or gathering. Andrzejewski (1985) wrote:

> Like the modes of memorization, the channels of dissemination of works of oral literature can vary substantially. In some societies, certain highly esteemed genres of poetry are memorized and then disseminated by professional or semi-professional bards and reciters, while prose narratives and light verse are left to amateurs. In other societies,

anyone is entitled to recite any genre he wishes, provided he finds a willing audience.

(1985, p. 36)

Eno and Dammak (2014) reported that before the arrival of colonial powers in Somalia, Somalia had a traditional informal educational system where children were taught how to survive and learned hunting. According to Eno & Dammak (2014),

The Somali child undergoes a traditional pedagogical system in which s/he starts learning Islam's Holy Scripture in a Qur'anic school as young as from age four. Here, s/he learns how to read and write the Arabic alphabet, which is the basis for Qur'anic as well as Arabic-language studies. (p. 11)

According to Omar (2015), the Qur'an provided traditional and Islamic education. In some communities, attendance of Islamic school is mandatory for all children where a parent enrolls them at the age of five years. Here, students are expected to finish Hafiz, Quranic memorization, prophetic traditions known as hadith, and *nahwa,* basic Arabic language, mostly grammar. At the age of fifteen, most children are familiar with *tasrif*, the conjugation of verbs, inflections of words, syntax, semantics, and declensions.

Period of Colonial Rule: According to Ali (1998), with the arrival of colonial powers in the mid-late nineteenth century, the education sector advanced rapidly, with hundreds of schools built, new teachers trained, and Somali script implemented nationwide.

Helen Chapin Metz (1992) explains that the two colonial powers of Italian Somaliland and British Somaliland pursued different educational policies. Metz (1992) states that the Italians trained the people to become farmers or do menial jobs in its plantations in south of Somalia while the British established an elementary education system. Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007) explain well how those Somali people who were committed to learning English or Italian and to

acquire the skills necessary to gain employment in the colonial system faced a strong resistance from their families, kin and religious leaders who had a stake in the Islamic educational institutions that had been expanding prior to the colonial occupation.

Postcolonial Education: After independence in 1960, there were about 233 primary and twelve secondary schools in the whole country. The main medium of instruction was Arabic in the first four years, with English or Italian taught as subjects. In the next four years of primary (or middle school), the medium of instruction was English in the northern regions and Italian in the south. Native Somali was neglected as a medium of instruction, as it had no written script at that time. One can imagine the level and quality of learning achievements produced by the combination of foreign education and language systems (Cassanelli and Abdikadir, 2007).

Post-Conflict: The civil war that broke out among Somali clan groups in the early 1990s demolished all education infrastructure (Abdinor, 2008). School buildings were destroyed, educational equipment and materials were looted, and many students, teachers, and administrators were displaced abroad (Abdinor, 2008). With the collapse of the Somali state in 1991, political factions vying for power dismantled all public schools (Ali, 1998).

Unfortunately, Somalia has since been a country without any formal system of education (Ali, 1998). As of 2006, 26 percent of children were enrolled in some sort of educational institution (Hassig & Latif, 2008). This means approximately seventy-four percent of school age children do not attend any school.

Lee and Abdikadir (2007) argue that the Somali education system has become weak prior to the civil war in the 1990s. They claim that school enrollment at primary and secondary levels had begun declining in the 1980s due to Somali professional teachers' brain drain. Thousands of

teachers were lured abroad, particularly in the Gulf Arab countries, with lucrative pay packages as Somali schools grappled with a recruitment crisis, and budgetary allocations for education.

Cassanelli and Abdikadir (2007) explain that the collapse of government-run schools and curricula in the early 1990s precipitated the rise of many private educational institutions. The only schools that survived were "those that enjoyed the wide participation of local communities or those that were established by or with the assistance of Arab and Islamic charities." (p. 105)

The following section will highlight how Somali refugees came to Minnesota and the issues and barriers they faced whether it is language barriers, poor literacy, gender differences in education, parenting involvement in schools, lack of parental awareness and engagement, lack of strong role models, cultural alienation, racism, and acculturation,

Background: Coming to Minnesota

According to the Minnesota Historical Society (2009), Somalis began arriving in the United States in 1993. But that is not the first time Somalis came to the United States. According to Putman and Noor (1993), the first Somalis came to the US in the 1920s and settled in the New York area. Most were sailors, although some worked in steel mills, and most came from northern Somalia. Ibrahim (2017) explains that those Somali immigrants came to the United States to be free from colonization by various European nations, but most of them returned to Somalia when Great Britain and Italy granted independence to Somalia on July 1, 1960. Ibrahim (2017) further describes that a second wave of Somali refugees arrived between 1985 and 1989 when new internecine conflict erupted in northern Somalia. At that time, clans living in the North of Somalia tried to secede from the rest of the country, but the dictatorial regime led by Siad Barre ordered the Somali army to barrage the North with artillery shells. Many wealthy families were able to settle in Europe, New York, and Washington. This literature review will only focus on

Somali people coming to Minnesota after the civil war in Somalia in 1991 and who face distinct

challenges from their immigrant/refugee predecessors.

Ibrahim (2017) investigates why many Somali refugees chose to live in Minnesota more

than other states. She explains why:

> For decades, Minnesota has been a favorable destination for immigrants coming to the
>
> United States. Unlike Somalis, Scandinavians and Germans moved to Minnesota because
>
> the climate was much like their homeland, as was the soil for farming. Somalis hail from
>
> an arid land on the horn of Africa. They practice the Islamic religion. "Many may wonder
>
> why thousands of Somalis, who have a unique culture and little knowledge of English,
>
> choose to live in this cold and snowy state. (p.27)

According to Stephanie Chambers (2017), many of the Somalis who moved to Minnesota in

the early 1990s immigrated from California, Virginia, or Texas. Chambers (2017) attributes the

reason for the secondary migration within the U.S to the high cost of living in certain states and

the limited work options that forced many Somalis to look for better opportunities that fit their

circumstances. Ibrahim (2017) found that the most significant determinants of Somalis'

secondary migration were socioeconomic factors, community resources, access to the job

market, housing availability, educational opportunities, and the presence of family and clan

family groups. Despite the range of pull factors, most researchers and writers theorize the

availability of meat-processing plants and other factory-related jobs that do not require much

English skills may have drawn tens of thousands of Somali refugees to Minnesota, making the

state host to the largest Somali population outside of Somalia. Those meat- and poultry-

processing plants have become a major employer for Somali workers in the region for over two

decades (Ibrahim, 2017). Both Chambers (2017) and Ibrahim (2017) posit another reason

Somalis gravitate towards Minnesota is that Minnesota is replete with various dynamic refugee resettlement and myriads of organizations that offer social services to new refugees and immigrants. Ibrahim (2017) believes Minnesota's many active resettlement providers help new Somalis with temporary cash assistance, employment, housing, low-cost legal services, ESL classes, community development programs, and other outreach services.

Apart from those above-mentioned reasons refugees choose to live and work in the state of Minnesota is that Minnesota is the region that has a long history of welcoming the refugee population (Chambers, 2017). According to McCabe (2011), the African-born population in the United States has considerably "grown from 200,000 to 1.5 million between 1980 to 2009." In the state of Minnesota, Minnesota Historical Society has estimated between 36,000 and 60,000 Somali people living in Minnesota. According to Bigelow (2010), the population is estimated at approximately 55, 000, but the number fluctuates every year due to changing refugee policy and constant migration from other states to and from Minnesota. According to Dickrell (2018), joint statistics released by the Economic Status of Minnesotans and Minnesota State Demographic Center revealed that between 42,400 and 55,200 people with Somali heritage are currently living in the state of Minnesota. Regardless of what the exact number of Somali populations is, many researchers including Crista et al. (2009) tens of thousands of Somalis came to the United States, making Somalis the single largest African refugees to enter the United States.

However, adjusting to the new home created new complications such as language barrier, cultural misunderstanding, and many more that could make their resettlement in the new home much more difficult (Shandy & Fennelly, 2006.) According to Yusuf (2012), despite Minnesota' welcoming communities, Somalis have faced challenges. Kruizenga (2010) Somalis bring with them a combination of a minority culture, religion, and race that provides a different type of the

immigration issue. This type of profound allegiance to their ancestral cultures placed Somali newcomers into precarious situations. According to Kruizenga (2010), Somali values and culture have been passed on from one generation to the next through the rich oral tradition of the Somali people. Ibrahim (2017) believes Somalis, like other newcomers before them, bring their faith, language, clothing, music, folk dances, ethnic foods, cultural practices, and identities with them. Their unique cultural characteristics add to the diversity of the communities they settle into.

Even though all waves of immigrants regardless of their origin were faced with similar problems of language barriers, poor cultural adjustment, and religious intolerance, Somali refugees encountered enormous resistance due to their adherence to their Islamic faith and ancestral cultures (Ibrahim, 2017).

According to Bochner (2003), cultural confusion occurs when people are exposed to a completely unfamiliar setting of attitudes and beliefs. Many of these newcomers confront monumental challenges related to poor literacy, language barrier, gender differences in education, poor parenting involvement in schools, low academic motivation, high rates of poverty, lack of strong role models, racism, student mobility or family responsibility and many other hurdles that can prevent them from fulfilling their American dream.

The following literature highlights the challenges and opportunities that most refugee students face in their educational context. Some of these challenges relate to poor education among the people, language and cultural barriers, the possibility of a gender gap in education, and other gender differences in education, a dearth of parental involvement in education, lack of strong role models, racism, poor acculturation, and many other obstacles.

Poor Literacy

According to Migration Policy Institute (MPI) (2015), immigrant adults in the United States lag their native-born peers in literacy, numeracy, and problem-solving skills, with resulting effects on their income, employment, education, and health. Also, a report conducted by the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (IAAC) in 2012 indicates immigrants are over-represented among low-skilled adults: accounting for 40 percent of immigrant adults lacking basic English literacy. Most Somali parents who were born and raised outside the Somali metropolitan towns can be illiterate in their own language. According to Ibrahim (2017), Somali people value oral communication more than written communication because people prefer talking because they believe such a form of communication can convey opinions easier and faster and bring instant feedback.

First, it is imperative to define what literacy is. Masny & Ghahremani-Ghajar (1999) describe literacy as the ability to read and write. The etymology of the terminology "literate," derives from the Latin *litera*—or *literatus/literatus*, and it means educated, instructed, or having knowledge of letters. Whatever the term means, every society may not have an identical connotation when discussing the manner of communication entailing oral and print. In the West, people who cannot read and write are labeled as illiterate or pre-literate. Some academicians including Shapiro and MacDonald (2017) reject these above-mentioned terms and argue that those from oral cultures are "orally literate." Some other researchers and writers agree there is a symbiotic relationship between literacy and orality. Among those include Masny et al; (1999) defines literacy as the ability to retrieve and convey information through print or oral communication.

Thomas and Collier (1997) suggest that students with low literacy, interrupted schooling, and traumatic experiences take 10 years or more to catch up to average levels of cognitive and academic language.

Masny and Ghahremani-Ghajar (1999), Somali people are mostly exposed to a variety of literacies: home-based, religious, and school-based. For example, home-based literacy often emphasizes manners, etiquette taught to children via storytelling by their own parents, guardians, or community around them. This form of literacy is crucial for the child's development of and exposure to early oral literacy skills. According to Kim and Teresa (2016), children's literacy development begins at birth as babies hear language and begin to understand meaning from the spoken word. Desmond and Elfert (2008), most African societies utilize traditional practices such as song, dance, and storytelling to engage participants in discussion and practice of communication skills before introducing the teaching of literacy skills.

For the same reason, Somali children first learn to read and write in Arabic in Quranic schools. Ibrahim (2017) clarifies that children learn Qur'an first and the process of Qur'an memorization generally takes part-time students three to five years. While students who can stay full-time in Islamic schools can complete memorization in less than two years.

Language Barrier

Recently, there was a significant increase in the number of Somali college students in Midwest colleges and universities. As soon as refugees get resettled in the United States, the primary expectation is for them to attend school. Sadly, limited or no English proficiency greatly impacts new refugee student's ability to achieve academically. Therefore, the language barrier is one of the greatest challenges many students face. Robillos (2001), researchers examined how language barriers give rise to several subsequent challenges. Though U.S educational institutions

offer courses to support them, many new students do not show their full potential and struggle with cultural and social adjustment as well as academic adjustment in the US.

The problem with the students' dearth of English language skill is most salient among new students brought from Africa. This type of poor proficiency and fluency can be attributed to the insufficient exposure to the language itself, as well as insufficient practice of English language. Robillos (2001) relays that second-generation students do not struggle like their parents did. However, with the large population of Somalis that will continue to settle in the U.S, dealing with the educational, social, and cultural challenges of first-generation refugees is likely to persist for longer periods than may be expected when one considers international political factors and their resistance to active assimilation/integration that American institutions expect of newcomers.

Gender Differences in Education

It is crucial to explore what gender difference in education means to understand Somali's success in academic institutions. Zia (2006) explains that not all researchers and academicians have a commonly agreed upon meaning because gender relations vary from society to society. First, what is gender? Mishara and Khatun (2017) posit that gender is a social construct that impacts roles, responsibilities, attitudes, and behavior patterns of children, men, and women in all societies.

Ibrahim (2015) who explained gender inequality in the terms of education in Somalia. He noted that "parents of girls in rural areas were hesitant to send their girls to school," and such uneven school enrollment led to tremendous gender disparities. In Somalia, gender roles are separate and quite clearly delineated. Abdullahi (2001), because of the prevailing gender roles, girls do most of the household chores, whereas boys do relatively little in terms of domestic

household maintenance. Thus, such gender discrepancy lingers into adulthood and impacts women's equal access to education and other resources negatively. When Somali refugees arrive in the United States, they bring with them their own ancestral cultures where their different expectations of gender roles cause frustration and misunderstanding in many Western systems (Kanu, 2008).

Historically, men tend to have higher educational attainment levels than women even in the West (Spender & Sarah, 1980). Bradley (2000) argues that despite significant increases in young women's educational accomplishment, there are some visible gender differences that persist in college courses. Smyth (2005) agrees with Bradley's notion of existing gender differences in some educational fields. He believes that engineering courses tend to be predominantly male while arts/humanities, nursing, health, social science, education courses and business courses are disproportionately female students. According to Vu and Walters (2013), Somali girls are experiencing significant pressure from their parents to pursue female-dominated career paths that are low-paying or that are not compatible with the students' interests and abilities.

Roderick (2003) explains that the gender gap in school engagement in the United States is found to be greatest among African American students, with male students experiencing more marked declines in school motivation over time. There has been a significant relative shift in the patterns of male and female attainment in recent years. Taylor and Krohn (2005) who examined educational aspirations of minority students in Canada and. In their paper, they found out that "visible immigrants, regardless of other characteristics (gender, family structure, region, community size, and first language), were still considerably more likely to have university aspirations than Canadian-born non-visible minority students." (p. 6)

In their paper. They argued that visible immigrant women were more likely to obtain college educations than their male counterparts. Leet-Otley (2012) explains that the Somali community follows strong patriarchal norms where Somali girls are ideally expected to cook and clean around the house. Girls also take the role of caregivers to their younger siblings, ailing parents, and grandparents. In traditional Somali families, daughters are expected to marry in their teenage years and fulfill their household and family responsibilities. The situation is quite different for Somali male as their society and culture pressures boys to go to school and graduate without interruption. Another societal expectation is for men to aim high and excel in programs considered lucrative, such as law, any variety of professional level medical schools, and engineering programs. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (2019), today the girls attend school more than the men in the West. This presents a direct conflict between the expectations of traditional Somali culture and contemporary Western societal trends concerning gender and education.

Somali girls who were born or brought to the United States early in life highly value the importance of education and regard educational attainment as a key determinant of success. Ibrahim (2017) attributes the rise of girls' education to several factors including gaining economic independence, the weakening of parents' influence in their children's lives, and the pursuit of college education.

In Somalia, local organizations that have partnered with UNICEF Somalia are promoting gender equity in education and striving to improve both access to and the quality of girls' education in Somalia (UNICEF, 2015). According to a report issued by UNICEF in 2018, child enrollment almost doubled from 50,700 to 100,000, nearly half of them girls, studying in a safe learning environment for the first time.

Parent Involvement in Schools

As the students with refugee backgrounds enroll into schools, challenges to an effective partnership between home and school arise due to cultural and language barriers. These differences are further exacerbated by the cumulative stressors experienced by refugee families and by interruptions to their formal education.

Jeynes (2017) examined academic achievement and school behavior of Latino pre-kindergarten through college-age children and subsequently discovered a correlation between parents' involvement in education and academic achievement of the students. Kim & Bryan (2017) reach a similar conclusion that children whose parents do not become involved in their education often do not benefit as well academically and socially as those children whose parents get involved.

It is imperative to examine ways parents can get involved in their child's educational experience and how such parental involvement provides required support to overall students' academic success. Okeke (2014) argues that when parents become more involved, they gain a better comprehension of school, they empower the communication with their children, they have constant access to needed services, and they strengthen their self-efficacy and sense of empowerment.

The Epstein model is useful in demonstrating the expectations of the host culture, particularly from the perspective of the schools (Epstein, 1995). In this model, Epstein defined six types of involvement for families and their children's schools. She further defined each type and gave examples or suggestions as to how those types of involvement might occur. These types are "listed as (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaboration with the community." Host cultures (American culture in

this example) set the expectations and norms for interacting with schools and even shapes the way schools in turn involve families. This is, however, a challenge for new cultures that have rarely confronted Western education institutions.

Because of this concentration on the norms of the host culture setting the tone and process for family involvement with educational institutions, Epstein et al. (2010) suggested the need for schools to create a well-defined approach to overcome language barriers in communication and establish a method for involving diverse families' opinions. They contended that "facilitating the success of new students depends on the involvement of school counselors, families, and the community." (p. 1)

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) formed a multi-component prototype that seeks to explain parents' motivation for decisions regarding school involvement. Some of their models include (a) parenting where families establish home environments to support children as students, (b) communicating, a method where families establish and foster good communication channel with the school, (c) volunteering where families come to school and volunteer, (d) learning at home, allowing kids to have an environment conducive for learning, (e) decision making and collaborating with community.

High Rates of Poverty

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2015), refugee families often resettle in high-poverty and high-crime neighborhoods, increasing exposure to stressful conditions. According to Minnesota state government statistics on income, Somalis are the poorest group in Minnesota. Ibrahim (2017) argues that:

> Somali people came to the US with the effects of conflict and subsequent trauma that
> were born out of displacement and prolonged exposure to refugee life in the neighboring

countries of Kenya and Ethiopia. Before they recovered from their negative experiences, they were exposed to poor housing, poor-paying jobs, and many other problems in their new home. Many said that they had a tough time adjusting to the American way of life because of language and cultural barriers. (p. 93)

According to the National Association of School Psychologists (2015), many refugee families may experience practical barriers, such as not having a car or employment that does not allow for active engagement during school hours. With fewer family resources, their college ambitions are constrained (Johnson, 2012). Aysola, Orav, and Ayanian (2011) contend that living in poverty precipitates disadvantaged children to have greater absenteeism. The New York University sociologist Sharkey (2013) defines the correlation between living in a poor neighborhood, poverty, and academic achievement in his book "Stuck in Place: Urban Neighborhoods and the End of Progress toward Racial Equality". He argues that Black children in low-income neighborhoods are more likely than others to have parents who also grew up in such neighborhoods.

Lack of Strong Role Models

Numerous researchers have long realized the importance of role models in the development of young people's goals and aspirations. Khattab (2015) explains that students who have college-educated role models to emulate often strive for higher academic standards. Khattab (2015) argues role models stimulate and galvanize students to come up with high educational aspirations, expectations, and school achievements. According to the National Mentoring Partnership (2014), role models' mentoring helps young people stay on the path to graduation. Researchers like Lockwood et al. (2002), find that positive role models boost young people's incentive by modeling a guide to attaining success. Similarly, Bush, Martin, & Clark (2001)

agree that students who do not have any strong model may not achieve good academic success. This means when students who are new to the country do not receive mentors and role models who look like them, the tendency for them to fail in school is feasible.

The Impact of Racism on the Students of Color

Many colleges and universities have experienced a substantial influx of refugee children, and teachers often feel ill prepared to respond to their unique and multi-faceted needs (Bridging Refugee Youth and Children's Services, 2017).

According to a report written by the National Association of School Psychologists (2015) states that refugee children may be at risk for harmful behavior by others if classmates or even teachers unfairly stigmatize them. Because of some poor treatment, many students of color report feeling isolated and lonely, and some may encounter depression (Dillard & Chisolm, 1983).

Poor Acculturation Process

With more students pursuing post-secondary education in the Midwest, researchers have revealed further interest in understanding students' adjustment issues and factors affecting their adjustment, and the prospect of them finding university support. Bigelow (2010) explains that "adjusting to life in the United States can be an unsettling process for newly arrived Somalis because most are not accustomed to having a minority status" (p. 108). For students from refugee backgrounds, the acculturative education process shaped their understanding of what it would mean to be successful in the United States. Numerous studies have been conducted on the correlation between acculturation and students' success in postsecondary education. To better understand the proper significance of acculturation, it is crucial to look at what the researchers say about this experience. Acculturation refers to changes in behavior and attitudes through contact between individuals from distinct cultural backgrounds (Berry 2006).

For students from refugee backgrounds, the acculturative education process shaped their understanding of what it would mean to be successful in the United States. This was as true for those who resettled in early childhood and navigated the U.S. from childhood to adulthood as it was for adult refugee migrants to the U.S. Acculturation relies on the interaction between two or more cultures, a guiding principle in the existing literature about acculturation theories. Portes and Zhou (1993) noted that new refugees are less likely to blend in than their predecessors because of their racial and ethnic origins.

There are some barriers that hinder a proper acculturation or assimilation of new refugees and immigrants to their host community's cultures. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) theorized three contingent factors on which assimilation patterns rely include (a) the pace at which children and parents acculturate, (b) cultural and economic barriers confronted by immigrant youth, and (c) availability of resources that help new families and community members to overcome the acculturation barriers.

Not all Somali college students face poor integration. Ibrahim argues that:

"First-generation Somalis seem to face more prejudice and discrimination than their second-generation children, who do not have a strange accent and adapt well to American culture because they have a better understanding of the culture. Part of the reason for their acceptance is that the second generation feels and acts more Americanized than their parents." (Ibrahim, 2017, p. 148)

According to a report on bringing evidence to the refugee integration debate co-authored by Bernstein & DuBois (2008) explain that refugees integrate with time in the US. Bernstein contends that:

On average, their labor force participation rates rise to or exceed native-born rates, their income levels rise, and their use of public benefits declines. Their English language proficiency improves, and youth have strong educational attainment. Most refugees

become US citizens, and many become owners of homes and businesses, contributing to
their communities. (p. 10)

Gardner (2005) contends that second language (L2) students who perceive the target culture positively will learn the target language more efficiently than those who have a negative perception towards the targeted language culture. Today, Somali youth learn English quickly and integrate into American society because they go to school and have diverse schoolmates and colleagues (Ibrahim, 2017). Hudda Ibrahim argues that,

"American-born children of Somali parents will have better advancement in terms of acquisition of college education, entry into the workforce, and municipal positions in the near future. These growing generations will, one day soon, become more similar to natives over time by acquiring local human capital. Unlike their foreign-born parents, the second or third generation will achieve full social and economic integration. Second-generation Somalis tend to catch on quickly and may even do better than natives one day. (Ibrahim, 2017, pp. 165)"

Somali students who were brought here young do not have issues with English proficiency and the adoption of the dominant culture, which Gardner (2005) referred to as an individual's openness to taking on the characteristics of another cultural/linguistic group. While they may not have a problem adapting and adopting to American culture, they do face scrutiny from older generations of first-generation Somalis.

Bernstein et. al (2008) also states that the age of arrival makes a significant difference in educational attainment. Most Somali refugees who arrived as young children tend to achieve better educational attainment outcomes. Bernstein argued that refugees who arrive as children have strong high school graduation rates. Today, many Somali students who were brought young possess more educational aspirations than their parents (Ibrahim, 2017).

Student Mobility and Family Responsibility

According to Gray (2016), most Somali people came to the United States with limited or no prior work experience and education. For them, life is hectic. Finding a decent job is not easy. Whenever they encounter poor housing and scarce jobs, Somali families leave their city. Students and their families may only reside in a certain area for a limited amount of time. Many reasons could be attributed to why people move around that much. Some researchers and writers attribute the constant movement to Somali people's past nomadic history. According to Hudda Ibrahim, (2017)

> In rural Somalia, pastoral nomads migrate in search of better pastures and water for their livestock. Before any movement begins, young scouts go out to distant places to look for areas where rainwater and pastures are abundant. These pathfinders return to share whether the locations they have visited are habitable or not. This type of exploration is known in Somali as a Sahan. Similarly, Somali refugees in America often travel around in search of places that offer plenty of job opportunities, good education, affordable housing, and a safe environment. Like itinerant pastoral nomads in Somalia, Somali refugees in America do not stay in one place for long. They are constantly on the move in search of better places to live. (pp. 28-29)

According to Yusuf (2012) and Roble and Rutledge (2008), when Somali families settle in some parts of the Midwest, they look for meat processing jobs that do not require much English. Those illiterate, hardworking, blue-collar parents enroll their children and ensure they become successful in higher education. When job opportunities become scarce and parents are laid off, they look for work in other locations and are sometimes forced to move away. This type of constant movement creates students to halt their education because they may be taken out of

school for extended periods of time or transferred to other schools to live closer to other family or clan members. So, while Somalis encounter numerous factors that could and can result in lower educational attainment, families still highly value academic achievement (a characteristic common to immigrant groups in America), providing motivation for their children to succeed. It is rather a nomadic lifestyle, seeking out better opportunities, that halts education more than poverty in many cases. In some sense, Somalis are resistant to the oft-quoted barriers to education in America.

According to Rasmussen (2009), another salient hurdle common to many Somalis in America is finding suitable housing. Housing issues are particularly urgent for educational achievement as frequent mobility hurts students' ability to settle in and get comfortable at a school, and overcrowded housing makes it difficult for children to find a good space to do homework.

Family responsibility is another reason students tend to move. According to Farid & McMahan (2004), it is common for students to move throughout the U.S. to reside with other family members due to familial responsibilities such as taking care of younger children or older grandparents, aunts, or uncles. Family is incredibly important to Somali culture (Roble & Rutledge, 2008). It is common to see Somali students moving from one school to another. Regardless of Somalis' education and socioeconomic status, strong social networks are an important strength of Somali culture. That is why Somali families often choose to live together or nearby because they provide one another for support, social identity, and a source of security (BRYCS, 2017; Ibrahim, 2017).

Family Separation

Researchers noted Somali people prioritize their family more than anything else. Roy & Roxas (2012) explained how those students who came to the USA with their distant relatives felt obligated to work and support their parents back home financially. Those adult students who left spouses back home often return to Africa once or twice a year. Recently arrived young refugees work late hours in part time jobs while attending school during the day, which helps support their families financially.

Student mobility and family separation can create immense problems because students often drop out or switch schools UNESCO (2019). However, the negative impact of changing schools due to family responsibility and Somali student achievement have not yet been professionally researched. In this thesis, the negative correlation between academic achievement and mobility is critical to be examined. A crucial factor to study is how frequent geographic mobility and family responsibility affect access and quality of education among Somali students specifically.

Despite all challenges and barriers Somali students face academically, linguistically, and culturally, many students overcome these challenges.

Achievements of Somali Students in Schools

After having faced a plethora of tribulations and excruciatingly painful exodus, Somali college students also met numerous challenges and barriers in American schools because of their previous interrupted and limited education during the conflict in Somalia and subsequent living in refugee camps (Roy & Roxas, 2011; Gichiru, 2012). Roy & Roxas (2011) pinpoint the ways the new refugees managed to overcome their significant language, integration, and cultural barrier to success in schools.

According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's report on refugee students' performance and achievement, immigrant and refugee students are motivated learners and have a positive attitude to school (OECD, 2009). However, with the accessibility of school loans and "remedial English language courses," many immigrant students have chosen to pursue their studies for four years and beyond (Hayow, 2018). The report states that first generation students are confronted with the most demanding situations. Most of these new students are struggling to learn a new language, adapt to a new culture and social situation, or acclimatize to an unknown school system.

Roy (2011) who conducted an in-depth study of how Somali Bantu students and their families adapted to U.S. public schools and colleges. Roy (2011) also highlights how recently arrived refugee students have made their quick transition to schools in the U.S. and how they negotiate success in a formal and foreign schooling environment. Some factors Roy (2011) cited include school assistance, educators' perceptions, and students' placing high value on education.

Most of the Somali community has been in the state of Minnesota for nearly two decades. The constant arrival of newcomers means the community is continuously growing (Minnesota Education Equity Partnership, 2018). Different waves of immigration confirm that there is a diversity among ethnic Somalis in the United States in terms of English language proficiency, cultural and economic integration, parents' educational awareness and importance. Kapteijns & Arman (2004) explain that those immigrating to Minnesota from other states and younger generations may have more familiarity with the American culture and systems. In general, Somali American children adopt the English language and American culture at a faster pace and higher level than do their parents (Kapteijns & Arman, 2004; Ibrahim, 2017).

A few studies were conducted to examine how cultural capital differences among students affect academic attainment, retention, completion, and graduation of those first and second-generation students. Bourdieu (1973) defined cultural capital as an "inherited capital of relationships and skills" (p. 97). A student who has more cultural capital has more resources, such as parents with bachelor's degrees, can more likely succeed than a student with less cultural capital.

Roble and Rutledge (2008) explain how Somali people are adapting to their new home. Graduation rates among Somali students in Midwest colleges and universities have significantly improved over recent years. It is crucial to explore the experiences of students within the education system, the characteristics and policies of their schools, the support received from the local authorities, and the impact of parental involvement and parents' attitudes to school.

According to a recent report written by Minnesota Education Equity Partnership (2018), Minnesota educators and schools are working with Somali students and families to build a stronger educational foundation and share promising practices and policy ideas to build on current successes to increase academic achievement for all students.

Family's Financial and Moral Support

Higher education is frequently seen as a tool to achieve upward income mobility (Chetty, 2017; Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). Several academic studies highlight the value of the significance of family support in education. The following section looks at the emotional and financial aspects of family support and how these affect the academic performance of low-income college students. According to Roksa & Kinsley (2019), a sample of 728 low-income first-year students were chosen for an interview to discuss the significance of emotional support from family to successfully complete their education. Thus, the report emphasizes how emotional support from

families helps students perform better academically because it fosters psychological well-being and increases student engagement (Roksa & Kinsley, 2019). According to Roksa & Kinsley (2019), the report highlights that "the first-generation students often benefit more from family financial support than their peers" (p.1). Presented findings offer valuable insights into the role of families in supporting low-income students in college and can inform institutional policies and practices aimed at facilitating their success.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

Early research studies examined the significance of positive teacher-student interaction and how such interactions yield beneficial impact for students. Pascarella et al. (1978) first found that academic performance is facilitated by a variety of student-teacher interactions, those being intellectual discussions, course related discussions, and career related discussions. Pascarella et al. (1978) continued their research and in 1987 found that quality, positive student-teacher interaction had an enormous influence on the student's overall academic development, especially for older students (Anaya & Cole, 2001). Endo and Harpel (1982) found that there was a correlation between the progress of students and the support they receive from their faculty.

In 2000, research regarding the impact of positive student-teacher interactions on academic achievement became clearer. However, these relationships enhance many dimensions of student performance and achievement both at the high school and college levels. Anaya (2001) found that student-faculty interactions focusing on academic concerns are positively associated with academic achievement. According to Anaya (2001), academic achievement is enhanced when professors are perceived to be supportive and accessible. Later in 2010, Komarraju et al. discovered all types of positive interaction and communication lead to higher college engagement, better academic achievement, and self-confidence.

There is less research to be found on the student-teacher interactions and their impact on minority students' academic achievement. Anaya (2001) found that Latino student's interaction with faculty is lower than white students and they perceive faculty as neutral rather than supportive. Whether student-faculty interactions are helpful for other less often studied groups of minority students (in this case first generation Somali Americans) has yet to be seen.

Peer Support and Tutoring

Each year, the United States resettles more refugees than any other country in the world (Cooper, 2014). Upon their arrival, the students were placed in school environments foreign to them while adjusting to a new culture. This section deals with the connection between student performance/achievement and peer support and tutoring. Many studies reveal the importance of tutoring. In order for students to be engaged, it is essential that they be grouped with peers (Endo & Harpel, 1982). According to Morillas and Garrido (2014), tutoring plays an important part of a university's teaching-learning process. They also describe tutoring as a primary approach that enhances students' academic success and future professional goals.

Burrell (2014) argues that tutoring alone does not only improve students' grades and college achievement, but it also improves gender equality and the integration/acculturation of those deemed as minorities and/or previously excluded groups. Burrell (2014) further explains how high-quality tutoring enhances the retention of female students and positively impacts their future careers.

Besides college tutoring programs, Kapteijns and Arman (2004) contend that the first wave of Somalis has established community development organizations that help Somalis learn English. Numerous non-government organizations run by Somali Americans open doors to newcomers and assist them with afterschool programs. Community engagement pedagogies also

facilitate new students in navigating the American educational system. Omar (2015) attributes the success of Somali students in their efforts to seek tutoring, community volunteers, and other Somali families for social support networks. Omar also argues that the Somali students have developed good English proficiency, so they adjust well to the United States school system.

Because of the availability and accessibility of free tutoring services at today's colleges, an increasing number of Somali Americans in Minnesota are choosing careers in education (Hirsi, 2015).

Inclusive Campus Climate

Studies have revealed that campus climate influences students' level of success and sense of belonging. If students perceive campus as a welcoming and safe environment, then they are more likely to become engaged in campus activities and feel a part of the campus community. Many researchers have found that immigrant refugees and students could gain greater educational opportunities if they feel a sense of belonging. According to Shelton (2019), touches some of the barriers to belonging. He argues that some of those immigrant and refugee students may encounter racial discrimination and hostility from dominant students. The question here is why is it important to have a positive and welcoming campus climate for minority students? To answer this question, let us examine what researchers stated about the correlation between campus climate and students' academic achievement and retention. Hurtado et al. (1998) defines campus climate as 'a part of the institutional context that includes students' attitudes, perceptions, behaviors, and expectations around issues of race, ethnicity, and other diversity characteristics. According to Allen (1992), campus climate is critical for the tenacity, academic performance, and retention of students in college. This means educational institutions must prioritize ways to embrace all students regardless of citizenship and national origin for the college campus climate

to remain or become inclusive and welcoming. Carter (2006) also believes the context and the climate in which student interactions occur may impact the social and learning outcomes of college students, with inclusive climates being most beneficial. Research reveals hostile campus climates are a precursor to low academic performance. For instance, Hurtado et al. (1998) found that constant exposure to an unfriendly campus environment will have an impact on a student's ability to transition successfully into college.

Identity

Scholars have pinpointed how identity shapes and contributes to new immigrants' education. Hayow's (2018) research on Somali college students and the role of identity in education elaborates on the Somali culture and how both culture and religion play a significant role in creating a strong value concerning education in the minds of many young Somalis. Somali culture has a saying, universally known, that says "Those without knowledge are without light." This proverb plays out in every stage of life for Somalis, children from a young age are sent for religious education where learning the Arabic language is of utmost importance (Hayow, 2018). Family instills this value in their children consistently throughout life, with young Somalis reporting that family and culture are the two most powerful influences in excelling academically (Hayow, 2018). This cultural pride in gaining knowledge propels many young Somalis to gain a college level education in America despite facing barriers that historically disadvantaged other ethnic and racial groups in America.

Taking pride in ethnic identity, once entering the educational system, can be detrimental to students of different ethnic backgrounds than White Americans. Although many teachers may hold egalitarian beliefs, it is well documented that the U.S school system reproduces existing social and racial inequities (Syed et al., 2011). Coming into a racialized, inequitable education

system, people of color who are otherwise motivated and eager to gain an education are forced into marginalized positions that compromise their sense of belonging, academic engagement, participation in extracurricular activities, and even their choice of classes and majors (Syed et. al 2011). Whether it is through an awareness of underrepresentation or stereotypes communicated by teachers and peers (explicitly or implicitly), students of color soon find their identity a barrier to quality education in the U.S (Syed, 2011). Somali college students report marginalization and racism in the classroom, as well as a broad lack of awareness of culture and teachers unwilling to incorporate multiculturalism into the curriculum (Hayow, 2018). The Somali identity (unarguably a marginalized one in the U.S) also prevents one from gaining social capital in the college environment. Somali college students report that they lack quality relationships with White Americans (outside of faculty) that result in many missed professional opportunities, whereas they feel White students are able to find internships easier and have deep professional connections through family and friends that are inaccessible to Somalis (Hayow, 2018). Many Somali college students find themselves outcast from White Americans both socially and concerning group academic pursuits (Hayow, 2018).

While Somali college students face detrimental marginalization in the U.S educational system, they have begun to form their own academic and professional networks, and while this still results in isolation from mainstream society, it is their solution to the many barriers they find themselves up against during their college careers. Somali college students will form homogenous student groups to help with homework and connect each other with resources. Other times, Somali alumni help to mentor and provide a role model for current Somali students. Hayow (2018) found that Somali students feel that having people of the same background who have succeeded gives them energy to excel. Somali students may also start Muslim Student

Associations (MSAs) to form networks that provide support that they are lacking in wider society. Again, these predominately culturally isolated solutions are not ideal, but rather an effort to temporarily remedy access and cultural barriers related to academic success. Ideally, mainstream society and educational institutions need to do better in welcoming and helping students of color be more connected to the resources and networks they need.

Finally, Somali students, other groups of people of color, and academics agree that educators must begin to embrace multiculturalism in the classroom. When culture is used to help students make connections in the classroom, the road to literacy and education is made easier. Conversely, lacking multiculturalism in the classroom hinders educational development for students of color and leaves them feeling powerless (Hayow, 2018). Much research has shown that when culture and same-background role models are integrated into educational structures and classrooms a greater sense of belonging, academic self-efficacy, academic engagement, and facilitates social integration (Syed, 2011). The beginnings of the way to dismantle educational barriers for students of color are echoed by both academic research and students of color themselves.

Acculturation and Academic Achievement

When it comes to the effect of acculturation process on the academic success of ethnic groups around the U.S, much of the results relay similar findings, that holding on to cultural values and ties to that culture (family, communities, etc.) is linked to higher academic achievement. Cultural values are a protective factor in preserving the student's drive to do well in school (Santiago, 2014). Somali communities have not been studied, but other African, Asian, and Latino (Mexican) cultures have been studied in terms of acculturation stress and its impact on academic achievement. For the most part it has been found that when high acculturation stress

is present in New American groups, high anxiety and depression is activated and thus, affect the drive to do well in school.

For Latino students (first generation Mexican Americans, to be specific), the stress of immigrating follows with an acculturation process that can result in lower academic achievement, however retaining traditional Mexican cultural values can offset the effect of stress on academic achievement. Those who hold onto their traditional cultural values miss less school and have higher grades than those who relinquish their culture to assimilate. Those Mexican Americans who arrive and have the mentality to leave culture behind, have lower GPAs on average as compared to those that constantly maintain their cultural ties. Most interestingly, over time the next generation of children who integrate more fully into American culture do worse academically than their first-generation counterparts who hold tightly to their culture (Santiago, 2014). For Mexican Americans, traditional values of demanding work and former successes, told as stories in their home country through hard work, is ingrained as a traditional value that spurs one to academic success in America (Auerbach, 2006). Cultural values are carried out in America by succeeding in academic environments.

Many studies tell the similar story when the first generation of Mexican Americans and Jamaican immigrants lose their culture, they may have less desire to succeed academically. Equally, those who maintained their cultural values had less acculturative stress and higher GPAs. Jamaican students who were academically motivated were found to have a strong connection with their home country. This cultural preservation has a positive impact on academic achievement (Buddington, 2002). The Hmong, like the Somali, retain extraordinarily strong ties to their culture and language. For Hmong, family is a driving force behind their desire to academically achieve. These family interactions relay strong cultural values around the pursuit of

education (this value has increased since coming to the West) (Vang, 2015). Family and culture are cited as the main sources of where they get their strong value of education. This is not only an effect of secondary schools, but also extends to college performance. Because Hmong have strong cultural value on pleasing the parents, doing well in school to make parents happy and uplift family from low SES, is a strong motivator to learn to do well in western educational institutions despite the stress of the acculturation process (Vang, 2015).

Many of the studied populations of new American immigrant/refugee groups have a vast number of cultural similarities to new Somali Americans. I suspect that cultural preservation and acculturative stress will have similar effects among the sample I intend to study. Somali culture, like the Hmong, places a high value on pleasing the parents, and I suspect this will spur them to shrug off acculturation stress and drive them towards academic achievement. Similar to Latino culture, Somalis cultural value of hard work and tradition of storytelling about the success/hardship of previous generations, I suspect this cultural value also protects against acculturation stress and leads to an ardent desire to achieve. Losing cultural identity and thus desire to achieve, like some of the Jamaican subjects, happens among Somalis as well, though this is only an observed phenomenon not yet studied. Somalis retain strong ties to those family and community members back in the home country, and thus I suspect will retain strong cultural messages about education that insulates them from negative acculturation processes. The retention of culture in the face of acculturative stress, arguably, leads to a drive to achieve academically. I suspect my Somali participants may report similarly about the acculturation process and educational attainment/drive.

Academic Resilience

In recent years, the number of students of color enrolling in higher education has increased, however they still struggle with completion of their degree program (either altogether or within a 6-year period (Ramos, 2019). First-generation students of color account for 33% of those enrolled in college, but only 27% complete their degrees within 6 years (Ramos, 2019). The socioeconomic factors that first-generation students of color face are among the largest challenges they face that set them apart from their upper-class white counterparts. Students of color often cannot rely on family knowledge about the school system, financial aid, help with course work, etc. (Ramos, 2019). Students of color often find themselves intimidated in the college environment when encountering affluent, suburban students who seem to be well-versed in all things academic (Morales, 2014). These students often face higher rates of depression and anxiety. This dynamic makes it less likely to complete school, go to graduate school or doctoral programs (Ramos, 2019).

Numerous research studies have focused on the importance of resilience for refugee students. As usual, refugees face a range of difficulties prior to, during, and after migration (Walther, 2021). Once these refugees arrive in the west, they face linguistic and cultural barriers, racial discrimination, isolation, and a range of other challenges. This means some of the factors that help first-generation students of color have been identified by other academics of color. Some of those studies reveal what makes first-generation students of color resilient and help them overcome their challenges in their academic settings (Ramos, 2019). Researchers and academicians of color identity factors that assist the first generation in the completion of their education. Their studies reveal what renders first-generation students of color resilient when attempting to overcome their challenges in their academic settings (Ramos, 2019). Ramos argues

that mentors effectively listen and hold students of color accountable for their goals. He explains how these mentors do everything in their power to build students' resilience. Morales (2014) examined these factors and found the following: resilient students of color in higher education believe in their own ability to affect change, have experienced success in the past, have lived vicarious experiences, and are confronted with verbal persuasion. For these students, professors who share their own struggles have been exceptionally impactful in helping students of color believe in their own success and achieve it. Detailed and specific feedback from faculty is also one-way students have built resiliency, knowing what went wrong and where they succeeded gives a clearer path to academic success. In terms of what characteristics resilient students of color exhibit, they: display help seeking tendencies, link academics to future economic security, and constantly (with the help of mentors) appraise their strengths and weaknesses (Morales, 2014).

This study intends to explore the themes of resilience and identify what makes these first-generation Somali college students resilient in the face of a slew of socioeconomic factors that should put them behind in higher education.

As a result of their resilience, refugee students successfully overcome adversity (Sleijpen, 2017). The term resilience refers to a person's ability to adapt successfully to acute stress, trauma, or chronic forms of adversity (Sleijpen, 2017). According to Sleijpen (2017), data analysis revealed four resilience strategies including acting autonomously, (2) performing at school, (3) perceiving support from peers and parents, and (4) participating in the new society. Other researchers have attributed the resilience of adult students to several other factors, including access to family moral and financial support, social support, and intrinsic motivation.

Another factor that helps adult students develop considerable resilience in their most challenging years of education is related to their religion and spirituality (Schweitzer et al., 2007).

Personality

Personality is another form that accelerates proficiency in second language proficiency and fluency. But first, what is personality? How does it impact one's education and language learning process? To answer these questions, it is imperative to look at the existing studies that are focused on the relationship between a learner's personality traits and language learning process. According to Ortega (2013), personality can be conceived of as stable traits or qualities in a person, as more dynamic dispositions that are connected to the cognitive processing of emotions, or even as predispositions that have been learned through social experience. It is important to look at the correlation of people's personality types and learning languages. However, several researchers in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) have deeply examined whether students who possess certain personality types are more attracted than others to the study of foreign languages. Some researchers, including Ehram (1995) looked at cognitive, affective, motivational, personality or other external factors' simultaneous effects on language learning. Also, some other researchers focused on the possibility that people's quick learning process might hinge on certain aspects of personality, such as extraversion and introversion.

Moody (1988) looked at learners' intuiting and thinking personalities. He found out the reasons behind why 'intuitive thinkers' were particularly attracted to studying foreign languages. However, Krashen (1981) elucidates that prediction of L2 learning performance can be attached to the learner's self-confidence (i.e., Lack of anxiety), level of person's sociability (i.e., Outgoing vs. non outgoing personality), and level of self-esteem. When students who come to the United

States with limited English skills, yet feel comfortable and self-confident, they will have a better chance to become successful in language learning.

Students' Self-Motivation Towards Academic Achievement

Motivation is another factor that facilitates and accelerates a person's language acquisition and comprehension. Not everyone possesses the same desire to learn and personal investment in succeeding in a second language can be influenced by a variety of factors from family history to psychological trauma, culture, the presence of ethnic enclaves, and more. As Dörnyei (1998) explains that motivation is a crucial factor in different areas of human life and language education is no exception. However, Dörnyei (1994, 1998; & 2011) noted that motivation in education has received plenty of attention in language studies and attainment of higher education. Myriads of studies have undoubtedly demonstrated and verified that motivation is the cornerstone of second language acquisition among university students.

To dive deep into the variation of individual motivation, it is crucial to examine different types and forms of motivation including intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to behavior that is driven by internal rewards while extrinsic motivation.

 In other words, the motivation to engage in a behavior arises from within the individual because it is naturally satisfying to you (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation occurs when students are motivated to perform a behavior or engage in an activity to earn a reward or avoid punishment (Deci, 1976).

In the area of motivation, researchers have described the three fundamental psychological needs that drive human behavior such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three needs are the core dimensions of self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (2008) developed this theory, and they argue that people have a basic need to have control over the work they do, and

this leads to a feeling of satisfaction. Deci and Ryan (2008) emphasized the need for the Self-Determination Theory where the behavior and feelings of students depend on social factors such as the attitudes of teachers. This type of Self-determination Theory (SDT) explores a wide range of phenomena across gender, culture, age, and socioeconomic status (Deci and Ryan, 2017). Based on the theory of Self-Determination, a teacher can meet the student's psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Deci & Ryan posits that:

> Autonomy refers to the belief that causes of behavior can be found within ourselves, and that we are the main agents and regulators of our own behavior. Competence refers to a sense of confidence and effectiveness achieved through action while relatedness refers to an exchange of interests with other people. These three needs are essential and basic psychological needs that humans are born with rather than acquired universal attributes. Thus, the theory of basic psychological needs assumes that humans can determine their behavior in a way that will satisfy basic psychological needs. (Deci et al., 2000, p.68)

Because of today's colleges and universities, the number of students with diverse backgrounds is growing rapidly, and it is vital for educators and departments to focus much on what makes a student dynamic and attentive in the classroom. When the psychological needs of those students are met, the teacher-student relationship is born.

Chapter III. Methodologies and Methods

Overview

The previous literature review did not provide sufficient qualitative studies relevant to examining the multi-level effects on student achievement. The purpose of the qualitative methodology allows us to better understand the experiences of Somali students in depth. Only once we can identify common themes, can they be operationalized to study quantitatively.

Purpose

The objective of this study seeks to understand the students' lived experiences, challenges, and achievements and identifies the key elements that influence the academic success of Somali graduate students. This study sought answers to the following questions: (1) What factors influence the academic success of Somali graduate students? (2) How do Somali college students in universities in the Midwest deal with these challenges? And (3) What kind of support do Somali graduate students receive to overcome these hurdles?

The following sections will investigate research questions, the methodologies employed, the study participants, procedures used, types of analysis methods, and ethical concerns.

Research questions

This study seeks to answer for the following questions: -

1. What factors influence the academic success of Somali graduate students?

2. How do Somali college students in universities in the Midwest deal with these challenges?

3. What kind of support do Somali college students receive to overcome these hurdles?

Methodologies Used

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore ten graduate students' experiences and perceptions towards their academic challenges and the ways they have overcome those challenges. Phenomenology helps the researcher "understand the meaning of people's lived experience, perceptions, and reactions" (Fraenkel et al. 2012, p. 432). According to Creswell (2013), "phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 76).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher's role in qualitative research is essential, as I collected data and implemented analysis. Therefore, my role in this study was as an observer-as-participant by accessing the thoughts and feelings of study participants.

To give you a quick snapshot of my background, I was born in Somalia. I finished my bachelor's degree in business. The reason I am enthusiastic about conducting this study is that I have encountered many obstacles during my years of study. My previous barriers still resonate with hundreds of Somali graduate students. For over five years, I have taught refugee and immigrant students, particularly Somali children who had little or no prior formal education. In those years, I learned their struggles.

Study participants

The participants were ten graduate students from Midwest colleges and universities. The participants identified themselves as ethnic Somalis even though some were born and raised in Ethiopia and Kenya.

Upon securing Institutional Review Board approval, the surveys were distributed electronically in English and Somali to participants. I recruited ten males and ten females.

Eligible participants who took part in this research were required to have completed at least one or two semester(s) of graduate coursework in the Midwest universities.

Data Collection Method

This study used an interviewing method where both the interview questions were the primary instrument used. The interviews were recorded electronically using a recording device known as Olympus WS-852 Digital Voice Recorder. More intensive questions followed, with the intent to gather data with more depth on motivation (Charmaz, 2006).

Before any steps were taken, informed consent forms containing information about the interview were emailed to prospective participants. Participation in this study was voluntary, therefore the participants were told they could withdraw this process anytime for any reason. Participants were informed that they had the right to ask questions of the researcher before signing the consent form at any time during the investigation. No participants received any type of financial incentive to take part in my research other than a "thank you" card. For accuracy and reliability of the interviews, participants received their transcription for fact checking. I utilized both Otter and Zotero to transcribe and annotate the interview data. Otter is a transcription application that automatically changes speech to text. Zotero helped the researcher combine both the literature and interview themes.

Those selected participants had the opportunity to validate and authenticate that I had correctly captured their reflections and views without any additions and omissions.

Each interview took place between 25 to 30 minutes in one session. The survey questions took 15 to 20 minutes. Therefore, the data was maintained confidentiality on password protected digital files only accessible by the researcher while working on the research. As Ritchie (2013)

explained, it is the researcher's obligation to safeguard participants' credibility through established IRB protocols.

The initial interview was conducted face-to-face and then the second interview was done via Zoom because the COVID-19 pandemic had intensified.

Ethical considerations

The researcher prioritized the importance of ethics throughout the study. It was the researcher's top responsibility to ensure the validity and reliability of the study. To do that, permission was obtained from the St. Cloud State Institutional Review Board before conducting the research. Participants received an informed consent form which gives detailed disclosures to participants, including confidentiality and right of withdrawal at any time of the interview. Interviews began only after the participants had signed the consent form. The participants were promised that their names would not be revealed. In this study, pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities to maintain confidentiality.

Materials

Demographic questionnaire (Appendix C) was completed by each participant at the beginning of the first interview. The demographic questionnaire inquired about the participant's name, age, relationship status, number of children, years of education, occupation, place of birth, place of parents' birth, places of residence, how many years resided in the refugee camps, how long at current place of residency, religious affiliation, and language(s) spoken. The interviews were recorded on mobile devices and then the files transferred and stored in password protected computer files.

Researcher Positionality

As a researcher, I recognized the complications of negotiating positionality as an insider and outsider when conducting qualitative study on areas of which I was profoundly knowledgeable. I also understand how to offset between fostering relationships and trust with interview participants while keeping myself from the subjects.

Chapter IV: Results

Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the study as well as findings and the related literature on factors influencing the academic challenges and success of Somali graduate students. The chapter begins with a brief section about the demographic background of participants, followed by research questions. This chapter includes discussion that will tie back to the research questions. The research questions for this study are, (1) What factors influence the academic success of Somali students? (2) How do Somali college students in universities in the Midwest deal with these challenges? and (3) What kind of support do Somali graduate students receive to overcome these hurdles?

Description of the Sample

As explained in methodology, this research uses a phenomenological methodology that seeks to "understand the meaning of people's lived experience, perceptions, and reactions" (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012, p. 432). In this research, only ten individuals were chosen to highlight their experiences and perceptions towards their academic challenges and the ways they have overcome those challenges. Eight out of those ten participants were born abroad in east Africa. Only two participants were born in the United States. The participants' ages ranged from 24 years old to 42 years old. Of the ten participants, five were female and five were male. This seemingly uneven distribution of birthplace more accurately mirrors the current Somali American population, with many more college-aged adults being from East Africa than from the United States. Immigration to the United States is still relatively recent, with more Somalis being born abroad than within the United States.

Participant Overview

Following the project design, outreach began to Somali graduate students who graduated and lived in multiple states in Midwest. Initially, twenty participants were recruited for the project but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, half of them dropped out due to upheaval in jobs, acculturative stress, and many other economic issues. The remaining ten participants partook in the study, which was twofold. It consisted of an initial face to face interview in which COVID guidelines were followed, relationships and repertoire was built, an initial interview question began to be touched on, and a second interview because initial conversations were long in length and not all questions were answered or more probing was needed. At the time of the second interview, the COVID-19 pandemic had exacerbated, and arrangements were made to meet on Zoom or telephone.

Interviews were all conducted in English and all participants answered questions only in English. Since all participants went through graduate school in multiple states in Midwest, they all possessed a strong grasp of the English language. Interview questions were communicated only in English.

Gender Composition of the Population for the Study

To collect a reliable study, the researcher identified the importance of gender equality and gender perspectives in the research. An equal number of female and male participants were contacted and recruited to partake in this research study. Those recruited participants were asked to answer questions regarding their challenges and opportunities in graduate school.

Participants' Demographics

Table 1 contains the participants' pseudonyms, gender, age (at the time of the interview). As is shown in the table, the participants were diverse in terms of age and gender. The oldest participant was forty-two and youngest was 24 years old. All ten participants interviewed went to

universities in multiple states in the Midwest such as Minnesota, Wisconsin, South Dakota, and

North Dakota.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

#	Participant pseudonyms	Gender	Age	Place of Birth
1	Amina	Female	26	Somalia
2	Aine	Female	24	US
3	Harun	Male	41	Somalia
4	Lula	Female	27	Somalia
5	Aisha	Female	25	US
6	Hussein	Male	28	Somalia
7	Mariam	Female	28	Kenya
8	Ridwan	Male	33	Somalia
9	Ibrahim	Male	29	Kenya
10	Muse	Male	42	Ethiopia

Despite the variety of their experiences, challenges, and successes, shared values and

common themes around education arose during the interviews. Participants were asked to answer

the following questions:

1. **Challenges**

   1. What was your experience of being in college?

   2. What challenges have you faced while in school?

   3. Have you ever had any financial problems hampering your education?

   4. Did you have trouble reading? writing? Tell me a story about each?

2. **Overcoming Barriers**

   1. How did you overcome the challenges you described? Tell a story about each challenge.

   2. Who helped you? Did you receive support from your school / Writing Centers, peers, or your professors? If yes, what kind of support?

   3. Tell me stories about those who helped you.

3. **Motivation**

   1. Describe your motivations for going to college.

   2. Why do you think you succeeded in college?

   3. What strategies did you use to succeed?

   4. Were there individuals who helped you succeed in college?

   5. In what ways did your cultural background affect your college experience?

Participant Profiles

The following section includes a description of each of the participants including basic demographic information as well as a brief account of their educational histories in order to provide perspective to the data reported in this chapter. The participants are presented in the order in which they were interviewed. A coded system of numbers and letters are used to protect identities and maintain confidentiality.

Participant #1: Amina

The first participant interviewed was Amina (a pseudonym) a 26-year-old graduate. She was born in Somalia. Amina and her family arrived in the United States in 2007 when she was twelve years old. Amina began to learn English straight away upon arrival. Amina's parents had only completed secondary education in Ethiopia. Even though Amina's parents did not speak English, she was encouraged to focus on her studies. Her parents did not burden her with many household duties so that she would be able to fully focus on schooling.

Now Amina has a family of her own, and she did not want her children to go through the same ordeal she faced while in school. She is pleased to be able to read to her baby and is aware that she was not afforded the same opportunity when she was younger. While she was attending school, Amina's parents were not able to help her with her homework.

Participant #2: Aine

The second participant was Aine (a pseudonym) who was born and raised in Atlanta. Her family moved to Minnesota nine years ago. Aine' parents were educated and had a master's degree from a Somali university, but none of them spoke English well. Instead, they spoke Italian and Arabic in addition to their native language. Because of this background in education, they wanted their daughter and her other siblings to learn more and aim high.

Even though Aine was born in the U.S, she stated that she went through several educational problems. Regardless of the problems she had, she attributed most of her academic accomplishments to her parents' high academic expectations and some of her teachers who were committed to helping her do well in school.

Participant #3: Harun

The third participant was Harun (a pseudonym), a 41-year-old participant who was born and raised in Somalia. He came to the US with his six children in 2010. His family lived in several countries including Ethiopia and Kenya before coming to Minnesota. Harun speaks four languages: Somali, Kiswahili, Amharic, and English. Right after he came to the US, he faced a lot of challenges. He explained how the U.S. educational system was not easy to understand. Despite having an education, he is still working at a poultry company to support his children. Neither of Harun's parents ever had any formal education. They were born and raised on a farm far away from the cities. Regardless of his parents' education, everyone in his family encouraged him to pursue higher education.

Participant #4: Lula

The fourth participant was Lula, a 27-year-old mother of two children. Lula was born in Somalia. Lula's family came to the U.S in 2014. When she arrived, she started attending ESL classes.

Her dad only completed high school education, but her mother had no formal education, instead pigeonholed into a life of caring for a large family. Lula picked up English extremely fast. Now she has one child. She is hopeful that she will help her daughter do well in school.

Participant #5: Aisha

The fifth participant was Aisha, a 25-year-old woman who was born in Seattle, Washington and grew up in Minnesota. She works at one of the schools in the Midwest as a teacher assistant. Aisha is not married, but rather she chooses to live on her own. Her parents and older siblings have master's degrees. Aisha's parents attained two-year college degrees in Somalia, before fleeing war with their children.

Participant #6: Hussein

The sixth participant was Hussein, 28-year-old, who grew up in one of the refugee camps in Kenya. As soon as he came to the US in 2010, he went back to school and received his college education. He aspired to thrive in school and be someone. His passion and motivation to receive a master's degree helped him endure the obstacles he faced along the way. He mentioned he had some language and cultural barriers upon his arrival, but he took an ESL class and his English improved more quickly than most of his family members.

Participant #7: Mariam

The seventh participant was Mariam, a 28-year-old who lived in Kenya for many years. When her family left Somalia due to clan conflict, they began living at Kakuma refugee camp. Despite her parents having an elementary level education only, they did all they could to support their children to go to a school run by the United Nations and UNESCO. When her parents came to the U.S, they maintained their high academic expectations for all their children regardless of gender. Mariam's parents expected all their children to excel and outshine others in education.

Participant #8: Ridwan

Ridwan, 33 years old, studied cyber security and computer programming. Ridwan took his high school and two-year college equivalent exams in Mogadishu. As soon as he came to the US, he registered for a four-year degree. However, the journey to a bachelor's degree was far from easy, he encountered several challenges when he was faced with balancing work and school. Unfortunately, he dropped out of school and focused on working full time for a few years. Later, he re-entered college and completed his college education.

Participant #9: Ibrahim

The ninth participant was Ibrahim who was born in Kenya. Both of his parents had only high school diplomas. Ibrahim and his family came to the U.S in 2000. Ibrahim speaks Somali, English, and Kiswahili. Ibrahim is married and has two children. Ibrahim dropped out of school several times with a focus on paid labor. This resulted in him spending more time than his peers completing a graduate degree.

Participant #10: Muse

The tenth participant was Muse who was born in the Somali region of Ogaden land in Ethiopia. He is 42 years old and has five children. His mom lives in Ethiopia and his dad died when he was ten. His mom never had any prior formal education. Muse grew up on a farm and tended camels in the Somali region of Ethiopia. Later he lived with his uncle in Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. During his stay in the capital, Muse received his education equivalent to high school and college. When he came to the US with his family, his English was limited.

Educational background of respondents' parents

Students coming to schools and colleges in the Midwest come from various social, cultural, and educational backgrounds. They came to the US at different ages, resulting in varied degrees of certain challenges and barriers. Regarding the educational background of the respondents' parents, 46 percent of respondents' fathers and 31 percent mothers completed high school. Only an extremely low percentage of the respondents' parents had only completed college level education, with 22 percent having no schooling.

Numerous themes have emerged in the research that resonate with the current literature. The participants often dwelled on faith, culture, and their past school experience and challenges,

successes, types of support systems, and motivational factors that helped them complete their

education.

In the following sections, I will be covering (1) factors influencing those participants to

succeed, (2) how those graduate students managed to deal with their challenges, and (3) what

support they received to overcome those academic hurdles.

Research Question One: What factors influence the academic success of Somali graduate

students?

Participants highlighted several themes and sub themes that influence their academic

success. Among them include inclusive campus climate, motivations, resilience, and self-

identity.

Theme #1: Inclusive climate

Inclusive campus climate serves as one of the predictors of students' school attachment and

engagement. Almost every college or university has mission statements that recognize the

importance of building positive multicultural environments and learning opportunities for their

diverse students. Even though educational institutions invest a lot of money and resources in

assessing the climate of their campuses, students from diverse backgrounds continue to tell

stories of hostile climates in colleges and universities. This study collected and analyzed the

experiences and perspectives of the ten students on the campus climate, whether the climate

helped them or hindered their social and academic integration.

Participant #1: Amina

When I went to school, I was afraid I would not find many students that looked like me.

You know how scary it is when the campus is all white and there is no diversity in

student demography. Fortunately, our university had a Somali organization who wanted

to support us. Some participants agreed that the school's inclusive environment helped them adjust to college life and their ability to complete their studies. For example, Aine explained that the campus has a committee of students from diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds who are willing to assist students.

Participant #2: Aine

Some of my friends told me that they deal with racism on campus, but not me personally. Most of the people I came across were very respectful. I do not know whether I have been treated differently depending on the way I dress. Our primary responsibility was to provide social, emotional, and academic resources to minority students who often experience feelings of isolation.

Participant #3: Harun

"I have been successful both academically and socially because of the inclusive campus environment free of overt discrimination."

Participant #4: Lula

I am not saying that the campus climate was a hundred percent inclusive. For the first years, the campus was not supported because it lacked caring, diverse structures to help me feel included and engaged with extracurricular activities (both academic and non-academic). At my college, social life on campus was somewhat isolated and I saw students of various racial backgrounds hanging out with people who looked like them. I heard stories from my friends telling me the overall climate was cool.

Participant #5: Aisha

Students of color found it difficult to integrate into their university community. We did not have a single person who looked like me working on campus, and I do not think the

academic environment in most of the departments reflects the heritage of ethnic minority students. I have firsthand experience of racial microaggression on the university campus. My experience with racism has made me feel socially isolated.

Participant #6: Mariam

"In my school, I enjoyed supportive leadership that was committed to supporting student learning and academic growth."

Participant #7: Ridwan

My campus had an incredibly supportive climate, from inclusive student organizations to administrators who made things welcoming. There were other support systems that reflected the campus diversity and made my time spent on campus productive and inspiring. Also, I had a lot of people who looked like me and formed culturally specific student groups to support each other. It made my campus experience very welcoming.

Participant #8: Ibrahim

My campus had faculty and staff from all different cultures and backgrounds, including many students like me. It gave the campus a very inclusive feel. Apart from the inclusive education, my campus always had multicultural clubs, student organizations that were specific to certain ethnicities, the social scene was diverse, classes were diverse. I felt welcomed on my campus.

Participant #9: Muse

"My campus was very welcoming, most people I encountered treated me like an equal and did not look at me differently for being different. I had a wonderful time on campus. My college was a place where I felt safe and secure."

Some of the participants said they discovered some specific challenges as barriers to academic success. Some participants initially voiced reservations about reaching out to faculty or on-campus resources for support. In the end, they stated they successfully completed their education by having access to an inclusive campus climate.

Theme #2: Motivational Factors

So far, challenges and support have been covered, but we desired to also explore what motivates these students beyond the desire to overcome challenges with good support systems. Challenges accompanied by good support systems are only part of the equation for academic success. What motivates these students psychologically to continue in the face of seemingly insurmountable challenges and overall low external social capital?

Three main themes emerged as motivational factors: Providing a better life, awareness of family sacrifices, and the value of knowledge and new skills in and of themselves.

Valuing knowledge and skills in and of themselves

Many students talked about education and upskilling oneself as being valuable in and of itself. It is suspected that the root of this motivational factor is the intense focus that both the Islamic religion and Somali Culture have on attaining an education.

Aine: stated that

When I was going to college, I was motivated to learn new skills. Like many of my colleagues, my motivation had nothing to do with seeking external rewards like money, power, status, or recognition. My parents already had some degrees and wanted to do the same. Knowledge seeking was a task in my family everyone was supposed to take up. Its value does not have to connect to money or power.

Hussein: said

When I was going to college, I was motivated to learn new skills. Like many of my

colleagues, my motivation had nothing to do with seeking external rewards like money,

power, status, or recognition. For me pursuing knowledge was a benefit in and of itself.

 Aisha: "When I was going to school, I did my homework before they were due because I

was hungry to learn something new and succeed in school."

Mariam:

Many people on my campus were motivated to just get their degree to make money.

While I do think that's important, I enjoyed the journey of learning for its own sake. In

our religion, pursuing knowledge for its own sake is encouraged.

Motivational Factor: Better Future

Some of the research participants mentioned that extrinsic motivation helped them become

driven and competitive in the classroom. In this case, a better material future and the resulting

psychological safety and opportunities were motivating factors for some participants.

Muse: "I was tired of working in dead-end jobs with poor pay. I wanted to move to the top

of the job ladder and make a decent earning for my family."

Harun:

One of the biggest factors that helped me stay in school was that I wanted to get a job that

corresponds to my degree. Also, Hussein mentioned he would return to his home country

for more career opportunities once he completes my education.

Motivational Factor: Previous Family Sacrifices, Current Family Pride

Some families used their personal family narratives intended to motivate the students. As a

result of limited or no education, Somali parents highlight their hardships that they have

encountered in life. For example, Lula said that her father had a high education in Somalia, and he expected his children to aim high and achieve more. Lula mentioned,

> My parents told me they faced a lot of economic issues in Africa and in the US. My mom showed me how callous her hands were while she was working for two warehouses. She tells me, 'I don't want you to have these hands. And I want to be honest with you if you don't listen to me today, you are going to get these same hands if you don't put in a lot of effort to graduate and find a job that corresponds with your education and degree.' I don't think any of my parents minced their words. And I think they were very honest with all they said to me.

Ridwan went back to school because he believed his master program would equip him with specific skills and knowledge required to better himself and his family as well. He said that:

> My dad never had any prior education, so he struggled finding a decent job. He worked in several meat-processing plants and stood all night long. Each time we had a conversation, he reminded me of the importance of education and how education was the only ticket that would help the family get out of their generational poverty.

Ibrahim also mentioned how his parents encouraged him not to squander educational opportunities in the US. He stated that:

> My dad reminds me of how he grew up poor. At the age of sixteen, he started working in a quarry, excavating rocks with heavy tools. And my mom worked at rich families' homes to do some au pair work. When we came to the US, my parents worked day and night - seven days a week, to allow my siblings to get a good education. Their stories motivated me to do something more and outdo their academic expectations. At a younger age, the best motivation I had was to get an education. I knew education was the greatest

equalizer. Until today, I believe education can open the door to opportunities, resources,

and skills that a family needs to not just survive but thrive.

Lula said that she lost her dad and grandpa while fleeing the civil war.

I came to the US at the age of ten with my mom, grandma, and three younger siblings.

Mom worked in multiple shifts as far as I remember. And my grandpa took care of us.

Because of her strenuous tasks, mom got arthritis in her hands and could not keep

working in many shifts. We lived from hand to mouth for years. And I witnessed all the

suffering and financial hardships, and I decided to not stop learning something new. I was

committed to completing my education and helping my family live in a better world. I

will share with anyone in my family and in the community about the value of education.

Amina explained how her family encouraged her to do well in school by comparing her to

others in the neighborhood.

My mom often used some other families whose kids graduated from universities as an

example. She then said, "don't let me down." I stayed in school and never wasted a single

time. I did my homework on time because I wanted to make her proud of me.

Theme #3: Resilience

A final factor is essential to explore to fully understand how Somali students attain

academic achievement, and that is their resilience. Levels of resilience are individual to each

person and hard to quantify or give explanations for. This section is dedicated to allowing each

participant to voice their deep and personal journeys with perseverance. Resilience was also

explored because, like many refugee groups new to America, their resilience is one of their most

admirable features (and this is certainly true for first generation Somalis as well). This qualitative

exploration of resilience will also serve to examine how first-generation Somalis may differ and

are shaped by the refugee experience as compared to future generations in the academic context. The phenomenon of incredible levels of resilience among refugee populations who have literally been through hell and back, is something to preserve and understand within their own words.

During the interview, research participants highlighted the importance of their resilience. Eight out of ten participants touched on the significant adversities they encountered both before and after coming to the United States.

For example, Amina who came to the US said that:

Coming to a new country that was so foreign and with a lot of trauma and anxiety required me to be strong in the face of all these new things and challenges. Everything I encountered required a lot of determination, if I wanted something I had to put in more effort than most. At times it was disheartening to feel so alien, but with enough determination I got over those feelings and succeeded. Daily life was hard enough, let alone schooling. At times I look back, I can't believe I actually got through those challenges. Reflecting on my feelings during those challenges, I was very frustrated, but I never gave up. In school, I had to ask for so much help just to understand the direction I should be going in my homework. It was tough, but it's all behind me now.

Lula also echoed some of those challenges Amina faced while coming to America.

For me schooling required so much effort. I wanted to give up so many times. I remember trying to understand lectures and it felt like my brain was overloaded. You know when English is new to you, everything has to be translated in your head, first. That was the most challenging feeling, but I kept at the language learning, really, I had no choice. I can now say things are much easier for me, but I could've easily given up. Giving up would have been insulting to the hardships we have encountered, getting all

this way and through some of the ugliest parts of life just to give up on a language being too hard. No, I could never do that. With my new perspective, almost anyone has the ability to do anything if they strive hard enough.

Mariam:

The cumulation of things I came up against when I first arrived in this country was almost too much to bear. I was trying to learn English and work full time at a job that didn't require English, but still I had trouble with co-workers frustrated with me. I came home at night and cried many times, I just yearned for everything to go back to how it was. That couldn't happen though, so I had to make it. I had no choice. College was another hurdle that pushed me to my limits, but by that point I could handle anything.

Harun:

As a son coming to America as a refugee with older family members, I had a lot on my plate. I would see other American guys my age with no family responsibilities like me, I admit a little resentment started forming in me. But I had to remind myself not to get caught up in all this materialism and social life. Family and supporting them comes first. I did what I had to do to make it here. If that meant long nights studying and wracking my brain, I would do it. I was leaps and bounds behind other students in the beginning, but I pushed with everything I had to get where I am today. Once I got over comparing my life to others, I was absolutely determined to make it in this country.

Hussein: "Juggling school and work was one of the hardest parts of my life. Not only was it hectic, but I was also learning a new language too. I look back and don't know how I did it."

Hussein explained how he pushed himself to do well in school. He said,

I know that because of the opportunity I was given, I had to make the most of it and if that meant pushing myself to my absolute limit, I would do it. I am proud of the effort I've put in; it makes new challenges easier to tackle. There's nothing that tests your determination like coming to a foreign place and excelling along with the native-born population (and in some cases excelling beyond them). I don't resent what I went through at all, it made me a stronger person.

Ridwan:

I had to manage a household along with a full-time job and schooling. I had so many people relying on me in the very beginning. I was a young able-bodied male, which means I took the brunt of the hardest tasks. The pressure of expecting to achieve an education, feed my family, and somehow learn to navigate the American system was brutal at times. But nothing was going to stop me, I had an obligation to my family to do something better for them. My determination was propelled by my family. I can achieve anything these days, I am not afraid of any challenge and I'm willing to do whatever I need to maintain my success.

Research Question #2: How do Somali college students in universities in the Midwest deal with these challenges?

When asked how they dealt with their academic challenges, almost all participants talked about their previous experiences and challenges in high schools and colleges. After they talked about those challenges, they mentioned how they dealt with those challenges.

Theme #4: Learning English for Academic Success

Most Somali students know little to no English before immigrating to the United States. Such language and cultural barriers significantly impact first-generation Somali students' lives

and their learning process. Eight out of the ten participants in this study explained they faced language and cultural barriers when they were new to the country. Since English is the medium of instruction, students were expected to perform well in English. To attain competency in writing, reading, and understanding school material, language proficiency was essential.

Learning English was one way that many of the participants got through schooling successfully. Not only did it make academics easier for them, but it also made social integration easier to a degree. Many of the participants went through struggles to get their English skills up to par, finding learning English the most critical element to success in America that they pursued at any cost.

Harun said,

I came to America later than many of my peers and learning English was something I felt already behind on. I started learning English at every moment I could. I knew I'd want to go to college one day, so English was crucial to learn. I even kept learning English while in school. You can't have success in anything here in America without English.

Harun and many other participants said they practiced English as much as they could. Having friends who did not look like them helped them deal with their academic challenges.

Ibrahim said, "Learning English is everything. If you are having difficulties in America and in school, learning English will solve so many of your problems. You have to do it if you want to be something better."

Amina said,

I feel like learning English is so important to your success in school. You can learn the content in any language, but if you want a degree in America (which is valuable in any part

of the world) you have to know it in English. You will be stuck if you don't put English as the first priority.

Amina also touched on her past experiences before she managed to deal with her language challenges.

Even though I was able to speak English, sometimes I was disheartened when teachers and students said "what?" When I spoke in class. I knew I had the thickest accent one could imagine. In class, there was a time when I felt frustrated, sad, angry, confused, and nervous with distinctive styles of communication and learning. After much effort, I learned English well.

Not all participants such as Aine and Aisha never faced language challenges. Aine stated:

I was born here in the United States, so I never had any issues with the English language or communication in general. But when I was growing up, my family did not let me spend time together with the children in my neighborhood or school because they were too afraid that I might be bullied or taunted for who I was, my cultural and ethnic identity. Instead of thinking about homework and life like the rest of the kids, I grew up trying to justify my faith and distancing myself from terrorists who murder in the name of their religion.

Aisha who was born in the United States mentioned she was shy and quiet in class.

"Many teachers and students thought I could not speak English well." Aisha said.

Lula:

Because of language and cultural differences, I was afraid to make new friends who were not Somalis. None of my teachers knew that I was isolated in terms of culture and

language. And it is sad that the schools were not equipped to train teachers so that they

can support and respond to the isolation of Somali students.

Hussein:

People focus on the language barrier and overlook the cultural barrier. Some cultures, it is

OK for students to speak on top of each other. In the classroom, I do not do this. I often

wait until there is total silence before I can express my views. Yes, the fear of

mispronouncing academic terms was one of the impediments that made me feel afraid of

in-class discussion.

Mariam:

I don't know why we focus on language barriers so much. Let us blame it on our

differences in communication styles that might have caused me to hesitate answering

questions in class. Apart from oral communication, I personally struggled writing papers

that reflected my feelings and experiences. I never heard anything like in-text citations,

academic style, run-on sentences, and many other written mechanics.

 I often used Google Translate when writing papers. But thank God, my English improved

gradually. My speaking ability has improved, and my academic writing has expanded."

Ridwan:

I think new students tend to go down the same path when they're new to the school

system. Obviously, most refugee students are paralyzed by language barriers. The same

thing happened to me, but I got through it after a lot of demanding work. Now I advise

other students to overcome the language barrier.

Muse:

> When I had some language difficulties, my kids often helped me with my homework.
> They have clearly explained my homework questions. Sometimes I was jealous of my
> children's natural ability to learn English easily when we adults struggled with learning
> English. Yes, I struggled a lot. I received a lot of Bs and Cs in class, but I never gave up.
> I never quit trying to do well in school.

Because of students' language and cultural barriers when they were new to the American education system, most students agreed that they encountered isolation. In their interview, the participants mentioned that those barriers forced them not to properly express their personalities, ideas, and create bonds with others. All participants revealed how their previous language and cultural barriers negatively impacted their educational attainment, academic achievement, and graduation. Many of these participants expressed concern about how they would achieve their education objectives. Some were even frustrated with the overall learning process and different pedagogies within the American school system.

Although most participants had faced many challenges in the past, they all reported that they managed to deal with their obstacles. Ultimately, participants expressed appreciation for the learning environments where they received support.

Theme # 5: Sought Financial Loans

Seeking financial loans was another theme that emerged from the participants' interviews. Aine said that she had no issues of taking school loans. She explained that:

> Taking interest-based loans is not permitted in Islam. I took the loans anyway. I was
> careful not to mention it to my family. They assumed I had saved enough and weren't
> aware of the total costs. I had to do what I had to do to make my education happen. I

wasn't held back by language barriers, but I was held back by my family's socioeconomic status and religious rules. I wasn't going to let myself fall behind in school because of that. Every college student from working class families was taking loans, it is how they made it through school. I took the loans and never told my family about it. I feel conflicted about it to this day, but I do not regret doing what I needed to get through school. I paid the loans as quickly as possible. I just needed that balance gone from my student account to move on.

Aine was unique in this, she took financial loans while the rest of the participants found ways to work through school. Aine would be a clear example of integrating into American society in her own way, as she still held her religion close to her.

Aine: "My family financially struggled. They were juggling between multiple shifts, but they were able to pay my school tuition. No one wanted me to graduate college with debt levels that would take years to repay."

Harun:

I left some of my family members in Africa. As soon as I came to the US, I concentrated on working full-time to support myself and my family as well. Of course, I wanted to go to school, but I could not. I hired an immigration lawyer to bring my family here. I knew if I worked day in and day out, I would never go back to school. Within three years, my family arrived, and I had an opportunity to resume my education. Many students like me face a lot of stress from working multiple shifts. I don't think this burden is shared by other native-born American students. At that time, I wasn't aware of what kind of financial aid I could get.

Lula: "My family had a tough time making ends meet to begin with. I didn't want to borrow money and get myself involved in loans with interest and make it harder for my family."

Aisha:

> Even though I was born in the United States, I felt like I still struggled as if I was a recent refugee. My parents worked low wage jobs where English was not required, so their income could only go up so high. I had to single-handedly put myself through school. It was many days of incredibly demanding work because I had to manage a job and go to school. It took me longer than my peers to finish school because I had no help from my parents and was on my own as the only one who knew how to navigate the American system, yet I was low income and looked different. Jobs were hard to get, school took up most of my money. I leaned on my parents for a place to stay and food to eat. Having financial problems was the biggest stress that hurt my schooling.

Hussein:

> Sometimes people don't understand the amount of [acculturative] stress we go through when we are new to the country. My family came here with a little in hand to stake out a new life, concerned about housing, jobs and food. Of course, school was the last thing on my mind at that time.

Mariam:

> I spent many of my early years in a refugee camp, getting education from NGOs. Education was free in the camps. In Kenya parents outside of refugee camps paid for schooling, but the cost did not break a family. In the United States the cost of college would have literally broken my parents if I did not contribute. And even when I did contribute to my college expenses with my parents, it was a very precarious situation.

Money has held me back from pursuing the fullest extent of my dreams in terms of education."

Ridwan:

I went to school in my younger years in Mogadishu, but the cost of education was not as expensive. I went to school when I got here, but I quickly hit a wall, the money. It literally came down to food and housing or school and textbooks. I quit school and saved for many years, depriving myself of many things just to be able to pay for my degree in the future. It was a tough time that is hard to look back on.

Ibrahim:

I came to America and got married and tried to go to school. As I began to have kids, school fell to the side. Feeding, clothing, and housing my family was more important at the time than school. Paying for school meant many 12-hour shifts for many years. By the time I started school, it was bittersweet, I wanted better for myself and family, but the cost ate away at everything I had built up.

Muse:

Well, I did get some college before I came here in Ethiopia, but a lot of things did not transfer, this meant more money I had to spend in the U.S for college. It was disappointing and put me in a tough position financially. It took me so many more years to complete school than others. I went through periods where I had to hold off on school for a year or two at a time and then some semesters, I could only afford one or two classes, money and time was valuable and it had to be spent on making ends meet primarily. Schooling put me through a lot of grief, money being one of the most painful reasons.

Theme #6: Family Support Towards Academic Responsibilities.

Many participants found ways to make family obligations and responsibilities work for them to succeed in school. Many Somalis have large families and have children during what would otherwise be their college aged years. Family obligations worked to hinder them, but not surprisingly, those same family ties worked to help those students succeed in school as well.

Hussein said,

My parents and in-laws understood that if we were going to get anywhere in this country, we all had to help. They all helped with childcare, even my older parents. It was somewhat hard for them, but they knew they had an obligation to me as well. If I was to make it for all of us in America, they had to help because they would benefit.

Mariam said,

My parents were happy to help with childcare. Daycare centers were way too expensive for me at that point. Even though I felt guilty for making them help, they were happy to have a role again. You know, traditional family structures break down in America. My parents were glad to still have a job to do.

Ridwan said,

My family helped with childcare. At times, my wife was able to do it, but it's not possible to make it financially with me being a student. So, my wife would work, and our parents helped. When some of the kids got older, they helped with the younger ones.

Theme #7: Learning Time Management as a Crucial to Academic Success

Coming from nonlinear countries in terms of time, many of the participants felt that learning time management was another crucial part of academic success.

Musa said,

In America things are very structured time wise. In other countries it is not the same, but if you want to do well in school here managing your time is important. People do not let you off the hook here, you get plenty of time to complete things, it's up to you to learn how to do things on time.

Hussein said, "Time is everything here. You have to get things done on time. For the most part, excuses don't fly here."

Aisha said, "Even if you can do the work, managing your time is just as important. It's a tough lesson to learn if you aren't used to it. Once you succeed in managing your time, school becomes a lot easier."

Theme #8: Integration and Acculturation as a Factor for Academic Success

Refugee students face immeasurable academic challenges in their adjustment to new academic environments. During their adjustment, students cited some negative and positive school climate that might affect their well-being, academic success, and connectedness to a school. Amina remembers when she faced some acculturation stress.

When we left Africa for the Midwest, my family and I regularly found the experience confusing, depressing, and stressful. Then I began going to school, and the stress from the new place and culture escalated as I faced a higher level of anxiety and alienation. It felt like there were so many rules and norms I didn't know. At one point it was so stressful I became paralyzed, unable to complete any schoolwork. My mind was trying to learn so many of the basic things that I couldn't even comprehend anything. The anxiety was unlike anything I have experienced so far. It felt like the school environment was operating so fast and there was no time to catch up. From what I know now, high school is a time where everyone is operating in this high context environment, some teachers

care to stop and explain things but not so much the people your age, to them you are weird and below them. Not having supportive people your age is tough, and it really hurts the school environment. Unfortunately, everyone in high school (even the refugee kids), want acceptance more than education at times. And for refugee students this is a painful time, schooling becomes hard to focus on, at times you are too stressed and sad to effectively learn and keep up with schoolwork.

Because many of the participants come from a culture and community that is somewhat isolated, that isolation can hold one back from success, especially in academics in the U.S where education is collaborative. Getting out of one's comfort zone and beginning to integrate into American society was helpful from an academic perspective for many of the participants.

Aisha said,

It's common for people from my culture to stick to their own people. We face a lot of discrimination and it's disheartening, but if you can push yourself out of your comfort zone and get to know other people different from you, you can learn a lot. Things are easier if you can learn the broader culture from others.

Lula said,

American society is easier to navigate if you get out and get to know others. Don't be afraid of other cultures. If something agrees with you and is OK Islamically and helps others do well in society, then you can do that too. If something doesn't agree with you, you don't have to adopt it. But you should get out and explore other people and cultures, it helps you build relationships better. Relationships with my American classmates helped me understand my schoolwork better. I got to see how they worked and learned from it.

Ridwan said,

I got to know a lot of my American classmates. It was hard at first, everyone was noticeably quiet and careful. Once you get over that, you can do better in school because you have Native English speakers to work with. But the Native English speakers can learn from you too. You can both help each other's work be more informed.

Theme #9: Importance of Gender Equality in Education

Traditionally in Somali culture, there has been a gender division between certain tasks, this has broken down some in recent times and especially so in the U.S. Many participants felt that a more gender equal participation in school helped everyone better than if one gender was left out of the schooling process. Even Somali parents from traditional backgrounds pushed all genders to equally participate in higher education.

Ibrahim said,

It is better if all genders get an education. There's more money and more options for everyone. The whole family does better. I know some are in situations were having both spouses in school with children is hard, but education is important for both. Set time aside for your spouse to empower themselves with an education. When both are educated, you can help each other.

Mariam said,

My husband and I both went to school at some period. Us both having an education regardless of gender helped because we both could help each other. That was very motivating, to not be alone in going through American college by myself or having someone close who knew what I was going through.

Musa said,

> Gender equality in education feels right. All genders can participate and succeed
> successfully. We must help each other. Coming from a refugee background, it is good to
> have anyone who knows what you went through to get through school to rely on for
> support, it doesn't matter the gender.

Research Question #3 What kind of support do Somali graduate students receive in order to overcome these hurdles?

The researcher asked the participants about the kind of support they received to overcome their challenges. Arising from this question, three sub-categories emerged, institutional support, familial/spousal support, and faith/culture support. Despite the similar obstacles they encountered, they found support through different channels. When examining these three sub-categories of support, the students shared their positive experiences.

Theme #10: Support Somali graduate students receive to overcome their hurdles

Participants in this study mentioned they received different support systems that helped them overcome their academic hurdles. Among those assistance include family/spousal moral and financial support, institutional and peer support. Peer support and tutoring is classified under 'institutional support,' as it usually takes place within the institutional setting or at tutoring offices that are a part of the institution. But some of the participants in this study said that most of their peer tutoring took place in the home settings of either their own or their peers. The home setting feels more comfortable and inclusive than the school setting. Home settings were places where their cultures aligned, and learning was facilitated easier.

Because of this, a new category, 'interpersonal support,' could be created, as peer support was distinct from familial and spousal support, and distinct from the institutional support structures.

I.   Family / Spousal Moral and Financial Support

The family's financial and moral support theme emerged and was consistent with every interview. All participants stated that they received either financial or moral support from their families. They agreed that such family support was one of the most important aspects of their academic experience. While their parents may not have an education and do not understand how western schools work, all participants attributed their success to the support and influences of their parents, particularly, mothers and spouses were mentioned the most.

Most of the time, the participants classified the family support into (a) early influences and (b) recent influences. Many participants said that they had support from their families. Aine said her parents' high expectations for academic achievement were instilled in her early on and she was reminded of it often. Hussein and Mariam both emphasized that their family's struggles in the refugee camp meant an incredibly supportive family in terms of education. They relayed a similar sentiment, that after having gone through so many struggles, their families were their top cheerleaders for pursuing an education. They felt their families' moral support was more empowering than any kind of financial support, that if they could make it this far, money was a minor problem that could be overcome. Mariam said without her family reminding her of her strength she might have lost her way during her degree and given up.

Some of the participants mentioned that their spouses supported them economically. Muse, 42 years old, said that his wife worked two shifts so he could pursue his graduate education. Musa stated that "When going to school, my wife decided to work multiple jobs." Aine, born and

raised in the U.S, said that both her and her husband worked to help each other pay for school. She said: "Both of us were in similar positions, being born and raised in America, we had a lot on our shoulders, we had to help each other and be supportive of each other. We waited to have kids and did schooling together. The relationship really helped me continue when I wanted to quit."

II.   Institutional support

Participants have touched on the importance of receiving support from their teachers, departments, peers, and inclusive campus climate. Some participants highlighted the way their institutions of higher education helped them transition to living and working in the United States. Other participants touched on positive teacher-student relationships.

(a)   Institutional Support Sub theme: Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

In this study, positive teacher-student relationships are categorized under institutional support as teachers are actors within the educational institution. This important theme was identified when the research participants were asked to explain how they overcome their challenges at school. The participants emphasized the importance of having positive relationships with their teachers. They also noted that their positive teacher-student relationship has helped them develop confidence, self-esteem, and motivation to learn. Ibrahim said:

> In college I had a lot of very inspiring professors from around the world that shared their journey to America and through higher education. I would go to office hours, especially when there were no students needing a lot of help on assignments and get inspiration from these professors. We shared stories and I was very empowered by them. Without them, I may not have gotten to where I am today.

Amina attributes all academic and professional success to an undergraduate professor. She stated that:

> One professor in my major realized that I needed some encouragement. She recommended me for some extra clubs and organizations on campus that she oversaw. Together, in those extra programs and with her guidance, I developed more than I would have had I just sat at the back of the class and did the bare minimum. She had confidence in me, and that helped me grow my self-esteem and my own self-confidence. With the teacher's help, I managed to get out of my comfort zone and do things I never thought I would do in school. She is the reason for much of my academic success and how I developed many of my professional skills. We had different backgrounds, but she really took the time to understand me and develop a great relationship that benefits me to this day.

Muse said,

> When I was in school, I had teachers who helped and supported me through my years of study. There was one professor who encouraged and pushed me to ask questions about my career goals. For instance, he asked me to think about what I was interested in and what I was passionate about in life generally. He has continued to guide me through these years. With his support and guidance, I was able to apply for graduate school.

Four other participants pointed out that their teachers' clear direction helped them to progress at their own natural pace. For example, Aine reported that teachers set high expectations. She explained how a positive relationship helped her succeed when she was feeling inadequate.

All students benefit from supportive and healthy relationships with the adults at school. It is important for families and those that have the most impact on students (i.e., the teachers) in the academic institution to cultivate and build positive relationships for students that have not been equitably served as a result of explicit or implicit (racial, gender, ability, socioeconomic) bias. For students whose behavior interferes with learning, it is equally important. If a student has experienced exclusion due to disciplinary measures or other forms of punitive discipline in response to their behavior, their relationships at school may be damaged, setting them on a path for future removals, disengagement, and marginalization.

Harun stated:

I was lucky to have great professors who wanted me to be successful in my studies. When expectations are transparent for students, they can reach their objectives. The establishment of reasonable expectations encouraged me to succeed well in school.

It is important that teachers help students achieve their academic goals by having high expectations of all students regardless of their previous academic performance. It is also important to help all students feel connected to school and education.

Harun explained how the inclusive classroom implemented by his teachers was one of the strongest foundations of his achievement. He said,

My teachers made us feel welcome and provided us with opportunities to participate in a positive way. One professor offered me an internship at one of the organizations he was volunteering at. I am thankful that he took the extra step to get to know me, my interests, my background, my strengths, and my struggles.

Lula also highlighted the teacher's inclusive behaviors, his active listening, feedback, and the use of humor to deliver the lessons. Lula said that,

My teachers went out of their way to support my education. When you see that your

teacher is interested in getting to know you more, you feel a sense of belonging. I

remember there was a time I was juggling several shifts while going to school. My

English skills were limited, but my teachers gave me a bit more time to do my

homework. One time, a professor asked me to meet him after class. At first, I was taken

aback because I had no clue what he wanted from me. He asked me to speak to him about

my school and language challenges, my hopes and dreams, my career aspirations and

many more. It was the first time somebody wanted to know me and my own obstacles.

His empathy enabled me to concentrate more on my education. Even today, I am grateful

to him for his support.

Hussein believed that when teachers said 'hello' and genuinely inquired about their

wellbeing, students felt a sense of belonging. And that it means a lot to many students who feel

out of place in a new academic environment and culture. Hussein went on to say, "When the

teacher says 'hi' to you in the hallway and calls you by your last name, you feel like you are

accepted. Something small, but meaningful like that helps us build our self-esteem, increases our

motivation and connection to the course."

Aisha was grateful to some professors for their commitment to supporting her and other

students who looked like her. Despite being born and raised in the US, she struggled

academically. She said: "Beside their academic support, two professors mentored me and

provided me with non-formal educational opportunities that helped me learn how to address

social issues, build my communication skills, and boost my confidence in the real world."

Mariam also explained how her teachers were committed to pushing students to achieve

higher standards. She mentioned that:

Two of my teachers helped me while I was struggling in class. They showed me how committed they were to push us to attain high standards. I believe I would not have succeeded in school if I did not have any caring teachers. One thing I'd never forget was that when one of my teachers saw I was slacking in class a little bit. He asked me if the class was not that easy for me and then gave me the tools and resources to catch up.

Almost all students have reiterated the importance of feeling a sense of belonging. Ridwan believed that several things helped him overcome his academic hurdles. "In my schools," he said. "Some teachers and I shared   positive relationships. When you have caring teachers, you feel engaged, you feel cared for, and supported." Both Ibrahim and Muse highlighted that their skin color and accent never hampered them at all. Ibrahim explained that "I am not saying all teachers are helpful or willing to foster positive relationships with their students. In my case, I had excellent teachers who wanted me to succeed in school. My skin color and my faith never stood in my way." Also, Muse said that "Two of my teachers were extremely helpful and knowledgeable of our culture. I was always more motivated to attend because I knew they cared about every student, regardless of their culture, beliefs or country of origin."

Lastly, all research participants agreed that students learned best when the teacher showed interest in their own learning. Positive relationships between students and teachers have positive and lasting impacts on students' academic and social development. Participants reported that their teachers have encouraged, empowered, and fostered a comfortable classroom atmosphere and academic learning environment.

 Maintaining a positive relationship with a student creates the best environment in which to learn academic material and enables students to gain confidence and learn more about

themselves. Having a safe environment and good relationship with a nurturing teacher builds a young adult's character and resilience for dealing with the outside world.

III.   Peer support and Tutoring

Participants recognized the significance of being a part of a peer group willing to share available resources, study together, provide rides, and offer one another emotional support. During the interview, eight participants described the impact of peer support and mentoring on their academic self-efficacy. Two participants reported that previous Somali graduate students helped them adjust and adapt to the new school environment. The participants repeatedly mentioned the effects of peer tutoring on the academic achievement of students. Almost all participants highlighted how such peer support helped them develop social connections and friendships that contributed to quality learning experiences. Relationships matter and creating a sense of belonging at school is dependent on authentic friendship and social connections.

Amina mentioned that peer support she received reduced much of her schoolwork stress. Amina said

> You know that you have somebody in your age group who is willing to help you through the lessons and materials. When you see somebody your own age in the same classroom, you will be motivated to learn what you want. It's encouraging to see other people who look like you in the classroom excelling, it prepares you to feel more confident and less nervous about learning something new. That's what really helped me.

Aine, who was born and raised in the United States, believes that peer support has provided her with psychological resiliency and improved coping skills. She said that "I didn't have any problem with English, but I couldn't stand writing long academic papers. When I became confused, I went to a group of friends that were ready to help. We met on many occasions in a

private room of the library. We even worked together as a group. I can tell you that this one-on-one mentoring gave me the freedom to adapt to my learning, style, pace and understanding. I was glad those peer tutors revised their assignments. Now I realize that peer mentoring was a mutual relationship in which the mentor and mentee could learn from each other."

Harun said:

> I was shy about asking questions in class because I didn't want to look myself kind of dumb. Besides my shyness, the academic material sounded unfamiliar to me in the first years of my graduate school. While I was exposed to my peer group, I slowly got over my fear of teachers. And then I found out that I was asking questions in class or going to see my teachers for further clarifications.

Lula:

> Peer tutoring has enabled me to become more committed to my school than ever before. When you learn the lesson, you have a great deal of confidence. Now that you are familiar with the lesson you can discuss it in class discussions. That full confidence will make you love doing schoolwork and doing it on time. Because you know that you have a group of individuals who are willing to support you academically and psychologically. Most people are unaware of the importance of helping one another. Unfortunately, most schools do not encourage students to create their own peer support communities.

Aisha: "Peer tutoring allowed me to gain confidence in my writing skills and improve my motivation to study. My peer tutors helped me find sources and prepare presentations."

Hussein: "One-on-one peer-tutoring ultimately increased my assignment completion rate. While receiving support, I acquired valuable interpersonal communication skills."

Mariam: "When you see someone who looks like you who is willing to support you, all you do is triple your efforts and get your homework done on time."

Ridwan: "My friends and I formed a reciprocal relationship around peer tutoring. This peer support encouraged other new students to expand their social networks and social skills."

Harun:

When I was new to the country, I did not know the importance of peer tutoring. During the last five years, I took advantage of peer tutors, and they helped me with many things including looking at paperwork, grammar, and punctuation. They encourage me to be confident in what I write.

Ridwan:

During COVID-19 lockdown, many students from the community of color were worried about finding excellent peer support. After a considerable effort, a friend of ours started a group. And we met 2-3 hours a week via Zoom. As a result of the pandemic, I was personally more concerned about my educational success. I was struggling using the internet to access classes online. I was not that tech savvy at all. Anyway, my group supported me to navigate my academic and personal responsibilities, and time management strategies.

Ibrahim:

Being a part of a diverse group of students with diverse skills helped us all to do better schoolwork, as we passed things around and got feedback. Every person had a different perspective and hearing different perspectives with my study group, resulted in me developing the skills I was lacking and doing better in school.

Muse:

> Even though I worked in double shifts, I was able to take my time to visit the library twice a week to meet with peer support sessions with other students from East Africa. Almost all of us had some academic problems and confusion related to assignments and a lot more.

With this study, the researcher intended to help academics and education departments understand some of those challenges that first-generation Somali college students face. What supports are most helpful in their academic achievement, and what motivates them to stay in school and graduate. This study should help academic institutions better serve first-generation Somali students in a variety of ways, from quality teacher interactions to building support structures and understanding what drives these students to incorporate that knowledge where necessary.

Somali students are facing language barriers, financial challenges, family obligations, acculturation issues, and a lack of awareness of the dominant culture of their own culture, characteristics, and struggles. What is less known about this population is what drives them, what helps them. If academic institutions can create inclusive climates all around, value multiculturalism in all parts of the institution including the classroom and place a premium on good relationships between staff and students, then the challenges faced by Somali students can be eased. Somali students are motivated by factors that are easy to understand for someone from any culture if the time is taken to delve deeper and understand. The motivating factor of culture, religion, and family in education is often overlooked by educators. Their academic desire is motivated by a better future in the face of the struggles of the refugee experience more or just as much as anyone. These students do have the ability to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, educators and academic institutions just need to learn to recognize the shoes they are wearing.

In the future, as Somalis get farther and farther away from the 1991 civil war and its aftereffects, new challenges will arise for Somalis immigrating from other stable African, European, or Middle Eastern countries. If stability can persist in Somalia, these challenges may become something of the past. However, Somali culture is not unique, many traditional cultures function in a remarkably similar manner. This paper intends to provide insight to other people facing the refugee experience and entering the American education system. While we hope the refugee experience becomes something of the past for everyone, it is not likely given current geopolitical events. And for now, there are still plenty of Somalis intending to enter Western universities that are impacted by the civil war in one way or another, as young generations still find themselves in refugee camps today. Some of the challenges will change, but the history of how they evolved must be documented and learned from for the benefit of all.

Chapter V: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter presents the summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the data explored in the previous chapter. The purpose of this study was to discover some of the primary factors that contributed to the academic success of ten Somali graduate students.

Despite the limited sample size of a small group of participants, the study provides significant information about factors that influenced the academic success of Somali students in higher education and how they overcome their challenges. During the study, all names of these participants were changed to ensure anonymity.

Overview of the Study

This study sought to answer the three research questions. A scant amount of literature pertaining to Somali students' experiences with postsecondary education exists. In fact, much of contemporary literature primarily highlights the challenges faced by students with refugee backgrounds in primary and secondary public schools, usually students aged eighteen and under. This study intends to differ from those previous studies by additionally exploring motivational factors and the role of family and spouses in higher education. Most current studies are focused on what refugee students are lacking, rather than identifying their strengths and motivations for educators to capitalize on. Much of the research does an injustice to the academic abilities refugee students possess that result in academic successes, instead taking a deficit view of their capabilities. Somalis in higher education in the U.S who have succeeded have unique journeys, have utilized, and created innovative networks, and share motivational factors that largely go unnoticed by academia. Their academic success has also been marked by a very specific set of challenges not shared by their U.S-born White counterparts. Through this study the participants'

responses to carefully constructed interview questions gave rise to several culturally specific themes that were identified as factors contributing to success/support, motivation, and resilience.

Summary of Findings

The findings and recommendations described below are centered on the experiences of those ten participants. In this study, participants mentioned numerous factors that influenced their educational accomplishment. Among those factors cited include their resiliency, motivation, or willingness to learn, their inclusive learning environment and many other factors.

1. ***Research Question One: What factors influence the academic success of Somali college students?***

Inclusive Climate

As explained in the previous chapter, many themes and sub-themes arose from this research study related to some of the primary factors that have affected the academic achievement of Somali graduate students.

One of the themes that emerged from the interviews was the benefit of inclusive education where all students regardless of their age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status have the ability and chance to grow and learn. During the interviews, participants stressed the fact that their university's inclusive climate helped them feel supported intellectually and academically. Research indicates that many students may be more likely to prosper academically in settings with more collaborative modes of learning that acknowledge students' individual experiences (Kaplan and Miller 2007). The literature highlighted the positive school environment encourages students' academic growth, supports their feeling safe, and connects people with each other. This study supported the research on the effectiveness of inclusive academic climates. Conversely, in this

study it was found that non-inclusive school environments were detrimental to a student's motivation and attitude towards the academic journey.

Motivational Factors

Motivation was one of the major thematic elements of the research. Participants expressed a high degree of motivation for achieving a successful education. Dörnyei (1998) argues motivation is a key factor in various areas of human life. As usual, motivation is influenced by several considerations including internal and external factors, individual differences in expectations, self-efficacy, and goals. Regardless of the type of motivation, many academics agreed that they could all act as a strong predictor of or "determinant of academic success" (Robbins et al., 2004).

During the interview, the participants mentioned how their parents, peers, and teachers motivated them to do well in school. This type of support is in line with extrinsic motivation. Lastly, this study discovered that female participants were intrinsically more motivated than male participants. For example, female participants had a strong internal drive helping them to complete their academic goal. Such internal motivation appears to be significantly lower in males interviewed for this study. In this study, most male participants echoed status, good salary, recognition, or money motivated them to complete their education.

In chapter two, motivation has been extensively investigated, especially the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, how those types of motivation could affect educational attainment, completion, and graduation. However, research studies to explore the relationship between types of motivating factors and gender have not yet been undertaken in the new immigrant community.

Resilience

Research participants mentioned how they encountered school failures due to their personal problems such as poverty, multiple work shifts, non-inclusive school environment, teacher biases and many other social conditions that made it difficult for them to be successful at school. Most participants have echoed how their resilience helped them overcome all challenges that they faced while in school. Students of color often find themselves intimidated in the college environment when encountering affluent, suburban students who seem to be well-versed in all things academic (Morales, 2014). These students often face higher rates of depression and anxiety. This dynamic makes it less likely to complete school, go to graduate school or doctoral programs (Ramos, 2019). While the participants in this study did express stories that highly likely resulted in anxiety and depression, their backgrounds with the refugee experience resulted in high levels of resilience to overcome every challenge they faced. Participants talked about doing justice to the sacrifices their families have made to come to America, taking advantage of the opportunities offered after civil war hardship, and making their families proud. The hardships from the civil war were spoken about as a hurdle that once they overcame, they felt as if they had the strength to overcome any challenge in a safe, Western country ripe with opportunity. This resilience among other refugee groups fleeing war is well documented and differs from attitudes possessed by people of color who have existed in the U.S for hundreds or thousands of years (though those people of color have much more insight into the way institutional oppression works and could be valuable in dismantling it more than currently arrived refugee groups). The fact remains that, unfortunately, war and hardship have strengthened this group to succeed no matter what environment they arrive in.

Identity

According to the study's findings, Somali students studying at Midwestern universities are deeply rooted in their heritage, adhering to Islamic beliefs, practices, clothing, and food preferences. From the literature review, it has been established that the Muslim identity and lifestyle may impact their educational experiences. Many of the participants expressed experiences and opinions that align with current research on the role of identity in higher education. Ibrahim expressed the role of Somali culture and religion as motivating factors in his persistence of completing a higher education degree. Amina said, "my family has always instilled the value of education in me and my siblings from a young age, the whole Somali community and culture really values it above many other things, even money."

During the interview, participants pinpointed how they utilized their faith and culture to challenge the existing Eurocentric paradigms in American school policies and curriculum. Aine relayed that their college lacked multicultural education within her major, and its effect was discouraging, backing up the plethora of research that urges the adoption of multiculturalism for the success of students of color. Harun said,

> "In my major, there were a lot of opportunities for my professors to include non-western sources to complement their curriculum. I was able to think of things off the top of my head that connected to the curriculum that could have helped Somali students understand certain topics better. I went to the library to see if I could show that non-western sources could be complementary in my term papers, but even the library lacked a lot of non-western sources. When there's nothing we can connect to, we begin to disconnect, we feel not accepted. There's just an overall lack of wanting to change the ways classes are taught to help non-western people connect and understand topics. I feel like the White students could

also benefit from diversity in their education as well, it might help them see beyond their

own biases."

Another participant expressed having a lack of social capital at her college, an issue also

relayed by Hayow (2018). Harun expressed,

"Not many students wanted to work with me on group projects, I'm sure it was because I

was different from them and had an accent. Sometimes they would just do the work and

not include me, but I would get the grade anyway. I had the feeling that they felt they would

have to carry me, but that wasn't true. This happened throughout college. Eventually, it felt

like everyone had formed social groups where they gave each other information and help

in stuff like internship opportunities. Those opportunities weren't shared with me. It was

very disheartening."

One participant expressed that they and other Somali students formed groups of their own to

help with homework, even when they were not in the same major program. This is a dynamic

detailed by Hayow (2018). Mariam said,

"We really had to find each other (other Somalis) and try to help each other the best we

could. We drew strength from each other. Sometimes just sitting and doing homework

together was a huge help. Many times, we got together to talk about issues we were facing,

sometimes someone had a resource, but it was mostly within our own community. We did

the best we could to support one another, but we still had problems breaking into those

opportunities only afforded to White students. White people don't realize they have the

opportunities they have access to that we don't."

Finally, one participant talked about those who had already graduated being role models for

him to continue his education when things got tough. Ibrahim said,

"There were some alumni that I was able to get in contact with, I watched their successes from social media too. It gave me the determination to know that if another person like me can do it, so can I."

The importance of Cultural and Islamic Religious Values in Education

During the interview, female participants mentioned that their parents wanted them to pursue education the same as their brothers. Among the research participants, the literature around traditional gender roles playing a factor in the lower attainment of education among Somali females did not apply. Abdullahi (2001) posited that lingering gender roles continue to impact equal access to resources for Somali women. Lee-Otley (2012) stated that Somali women are expected to undertake household duties and marry young. For our participants, not one female mentioned gender being a limiting factor in the pursuit of education. Traditional Somali gender roles have morphed within this new cultural environment, with women still embracing their traditional gender role when the time calls for it, but otherwise pursuing opportunities without considering their gender as a limiting factor. Several participants were married and pursued education together or took turns working and going to school. In one instance, the wife ran the family business while the husband went to school. Among the female American-born participants, some had even put off marrying and taking up the role of wife/mother to attend school. Most of our female participants both had children and achieved advanced college educations the same as the male participants. More quantitative study is needed to measure the length of time that male and female college educated Somalis took to finish their educations to explore if there is any significant difference in the time it took to complete college, however this initial look into gender and educational attainment among college educated Somalis implies that gender may not play as important of a role as previous research suggests. It would also be helpful to explore the gender

composition of Somali graduate school graduates. This study found that socio-economic status hinders both male and female graduate students equally.

Ibrahim (2017) implied that increasing levels of girls in schooling may be due to the weakening of parental influence. This may or may not be the case and needs further exploring. However, we do know that the obligation to parents, family, and community remains among our research participants. Has parental influence weakened, yet the cultural value of familial/community obligation remained?

Differing gender roles within the U.S as compared to the home culture was considered a reason for the frustration with western systems in existing literature (Kanu, 2008). However, for our participants frustration with the Western education system tended to result from drastically different cultural and institutional configurations and language barriers rather than confusion with gender roles. Both men and women within this study expressed being a type of cultural navigator and provider for their older family members when necessary. Both men and women put off schooling equally to provide for families in ways that the older family members could not. A few men even expressed taking up household duties and taking off school. For our participants, the strong cultural value around family expectations (e.g., being expected to assist family and community during times of crisis) was at odds with the western value of self-sufficiency. These two contrasting values affected people in this study similarly. In this case, Roy & Roxas (2012) and Roble & Rutledge (2008) were validated when they expressed that family is incredibly important for Somalis and that they are obligated to support family, extended family, and community.

Unfortunately, none of these previous studies demonstrated the value that the Islamic faith places on education and how Muslim students utilize their faith as an encouraging factor.

2. *How do Somali graduate students in universities in the Midwest deal with these challenges?*

Before attending college, participants mentioned how they have faced numerous challenges that impacted their decision to even attend in the first place. Some of the obstacles cited include language and cultural barriers, and poor financial resources. Language barriers were primary in making it difficult to move forward in college education, whereas cultural barriers caused misunderstandings and motivated instances of racism that caused a feeling of exclusion and isolation in tandem with language barriers or after language barriers had been cleared. Poor financial standing and understanding of the availability of federal/state grants were primary reasons pursuing schooling became difficult. Many families of students lived at or below the poverty line and families typically struggle to raise their socioeconomic status because they are limited to hard labor jobs that require little/no English skills. Families are also large in Somali culture; incomes do not provide enough to simply cover the costs of a college education without much sacrifice. Some federal and state grants include loans that would be helpful if not for the ban on interest in the Islamic religion. Many students are only able to use non-interest-based grants and must work to continue to pay bills in large, struggling families.

Concerning challenges within the academic environment, the participants encountered numerous barriers when entering the public school system with language and cultural barriers being the primary barriers that stand out as causing the most acculturation stress that go on to negatively affect academic success. The study shows that these participants have had both social and academic experiences in the American school system that were both positive and negative.

During the interviews, the participants highlighted how their experiences, language and cultural backgrounds in other countries impacted their learning in America. Almost all participants agreed they have faced a lot of academic challenges, family obligations, racism, a lack of history in navigating western educational institutions, and a negative campus climate. They acknowledged that they encountered various traumas, a lack of belonging, and many other negative things.

Taking out Loans

During the study, some participants mentioned they took school loans despite their religious beliefs, acknowledging the significance of education in reaching their academic goals and securing a prosperous future. In the Islamic faith, taking loans with interest is considered *haram* (forbidden). Therefore, many respondents mentioned they avoided taking school loans with interest and sought some other alternative interest-free loans and other sources of funding instead. Respondents echoed that their families' financial support, and the fact that they worked multiple shifts helped me keep away from relying on student loans.

Learning language

Here are listed how those challenges were addressed. Let's first start with how those participants in this study overcome those challenges associated with the immigration/refugee process in varying ways. For the language barrier issue, many participants relayed that though they have intense stress from being young with parents in a country that they did not know how to navigate, becoming that cultural navigator for their families at young ages ultimately helped their language ability. With the influence of family obligation and cultural values on the importance of education, many of the subjects did not have a choice but to become a cultural and linguistic bridge for their families. Though some participants were older when they had to learn

to navigate American and the English language, they all had some obligation to help older members of their family who had less opportunity to learn the system. Ultimately, language difficulties were overcome by the experience of being either a child or young adult thrown into a system where they had little choice but to learn the world and language around them for their families to stay afloat. Arguably, that experience helped them overcome the language barrier and pursued higher academics.

3. *What kind of support do Somali students receive to overcome their academic hurdles?*

Family / Spousal Moral and Financial Support

The theme of family support emerged from this study in the form of support to the spouse, early positive influences from educated family members, and moral support from the immediate family. On numerous occasions, respondents reported that without the financial help of their spouse, they would not have been able to pay for school. This theme has also been identified as a factor enabling both men and women to continue their studies equally. Somali women reported feeling supported by their husbands both financially and morally to pursue education. This is contrary to what one may think occurs in a traditional culture defined by gender roles. Somali men reported the same dynamic of encouraging spousal support during their higher education.

Many participants said they had parents who held their education in high regard. They mentioned that their support incentivized them to aspire to succeed in their higher education careers. Among men and women participants, explicit support for the attainment of college degrees was a motivating factor. Many times, the encouragement and support from family was more valuable than any kind of financial assistance. These findings are not quite supported by current literature, though some studies on Latino students begin to touch on the role of family support over financial support. Much of this literature on family support in education focuses on the impact of

parental support on children and teens in primary and secondary school. This may be due to vast cultural differences among Americans who have been here for generations putting off marriage until career goals are fulfilled. Somali students (and those from other traditional cultures) may be more likely to find themselves married while pursuing an undergraduate education than those from Western cultures. Literature is grossly lacking on the impact that spouses have on one's higher education career. While western academics may view marriage automatically as a hindrance to educational success, this initial investigation reveals that in certain contexts spousal support can be a positive motivator. Other literature focuses on spouses of university staff or examines how traditional gender roles and expectations hold women back from education. Investigation is needed into the potentially positive impact spouses can have on adult students' academic achievement.

Positive Teacher-Student Relationship

Communication between students and teachers was a widely discussed topic during the interview. Almost all participants echoed the importance of teacher-student relationships, as well as the role educators play in helping students build confidence in their education. This research centered on the student's view of this relationship and how such a relationship has positively impacted them, their motivation, self-confidence, and efforts to complete their studies. All participants agreed that it is crucial that students feel good about their classroom and that the teacher demonstrates that they care about the student and their achievements regardless of their skin color, faith, and socioeconomic status. The information provided by those participants and their responses were consistent with the previous research studies that identified teachers' cordiality, understanding, and support as crucial components of the relationship (Hughes, 2017). Several researchers have noted that there is a strong correlation between the teacher-student relationship and a student's overall educational success. The participants reiterated their

commitment to improving performance in certain classrooms simply because their teachers taught them inclusive textbooks or the content with which they were familiar.

In the area of motivation, researchers have described the three fundamental psychological needs that drive human behavior such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three needs are the core dimensions of self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (2008) developed this theory, and they emphasized the need for Self-Determination. Theory where the behavior and feelings of students depend on social factors such as the attitudes of teachers. This type of Self-determination Theory (SDT) explores a wide range of phenomena across gender, culture, age, and socioeconomic status (Deci and Ryan, 2017). Based on the theory of Self-Determination, a teacher can meet the student's psychological needs (Deci & Ryan, 2008). For example, relatedness support includes teacher behaviors, such as expressing affection, devoting time and resources, willingness to help, and a non-competitive learning structure. From this study, Self-Determination theory and the role faculty can have in it is applicable cross-cultural in the case of Somali higher education students.

Because of today's colleges and universities, the number of students with diverse backgrounds is growing rapidly, and it is vital for educators and departments to focus much on what makes a student dynamic and attentive in the classroom. When the psychological needs of those students are met, the teacher-student relationship is born.

Role of Peer Support, Influence, and Tutoring

During the interviews, participants mentioned the importance of receiving rigorous mentoring, tutoring and peer support. In addition, some of these existing studies have demonstrated that tutoring programs, peer support, mentoring and role modeling could be effective in improving students' ability to complete their studies successfully. The themes emerged from the interviews

supplemented some of the literature used in this study. For example, some of the previous studies have particularly focused on the importance of mentorship and role modeling in academic institutions. Lockwood, Jordan, and Kunda (2002) suggest that positive role models boost young people's incentive to succeed.

Evidence for this was plenty within this study with most participants referencing a professional academic who encouraged and guided them to academic success. Academic role models seemed to be just as important as the family who motivated them to higher educational attainment. Where the family instilled the desire to achieve externally from the school environment, academic role models and mentors provided internal motivation. Many participants suggested they would not be where they are today without the impact and active involvement of the professional academic role model/mentor. More research could be done to examine the potential for increased efficacy of a professional academic role model/mentor of similar background to Somali refugee students. Currently, professional, and academic role models cited by participants are effective despite not being from the same background. What makes a professional academic role model/mentor effective for a refugee student from East Africa is something that could have much value if further explored, as college students of refugee background are exploding in population in urban Minnesota academic institutions and even in some rural-urban fringe schools.

In addition, participants described the impact of peer support and mentoring on their academic self-efficacy, their transition to the new school environment, and other social connections. Current research is also consistent with the idea that peer tutoring enables students to engage more in their schools, familiarize themselves with the lessons, and feel confident in their ability to speak in class.

Implications of the Study

The participants placed a great deal of value on education and believe it is a fundamental step to attain economic success and personal fulfillment. Nearly all the students demonstrated prominent levels of motivation and resiliency in the face of significant barriers. Numerous studies have shown that inclusive institutional environments students contribute to learning, enhance self-efficacy, and facilitate the learning environment.

The major implication of this study is that there are many recently uncovered motivational and culturally relevant support factors for students that remain uncapitalized by the academic institutions serving them. More broadly, this investigation needs to be conducted across all minority populations. Previous studies start with a deficit view of minority students, and while that information is crucial, we need studies such as this one to begin to take a more inclusive asset-based approach to start with in understanding new populations of students and how they overcome challenges and succeed in the academic environment. As the academic industry is currently burdened with thousands of overbuilt campuses, new generations of students much smaller and culturally/racial different than baby boomers and millennials, this study will be essential in the current and frantic scramble to attract new segments of students into colleges. For teaching colleges, these findings will be crucial in expanding the multicultural skills of a largely white dominated profession who are more often encountering students with motivations, cultures, challenges, and abilities they do not quite understand. This study must be integrated into academic administration and teaching professions if innovative solutions are to be devised to preserve yet transform the American college landscape.

Limitations of the Study

There were a few limitations associated with this study. Due to COVID-19 restrictions, twenty graduate students were recruited from multiple universities in Midwest, but only ten graduates were interviewed. The finding of this study applies only to colleges and universities in the Midwest.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the findings of this study are based on a relatively small sample of graduate students from Midwest universities. As such, the generalizability of the findings may be limited to other graduate students with similar demographic characteristics and academic experiences. For this reason, subsequent studies may be carried out in different geographic regions to examine whether the results of this study can be generalized.

Despite the sample size may be small, the students interviewed in this study represented a diverse range of academic disciplines and had a variety of academic challenges. Hence, the findings may have some applicability to other graduate students in other states facing similar challenges. Also, future research involving more participants and more states will be required if possible.

In conclusion, while the generalizability of the findings may be limited, the study presents invaluable insights into the experiences, perceptions, and strategies of graduate students in overcoming academic challenges at Midwest universities.

Recommendations for Research

Future research should begin to take the factors identified here and begin to explore how academic institutions can begin to evolve to better serve the needs of diverse student bodies. Organization structures will have to be explored for cultural competence and for which structures work for supporting multiculturalism (and specific cultural groups at the same time). The need for

the American university system to transform itself is of utmost need in current times, with many operating in a format that feels too monolithic for students of new backgrounds and generations.

During this study, some themes such as cultural and religious values of education were echoed more than others. Those Cultural/religious values of education inspired the graduates to study. It may be interesting for future studies to determine if the existence of these factors contribute to helping those graduates to pursue their education.

Future research for Somali graduate students should be focused on what separates them from others in their same ethnic group who do not go to college. Are they in some way inherently different? Do they have access to something this study has missed that others do not? Are there subcultural influences at play that are hard to get to the heart of because they are rarely talked about or too charged? Differences among Somali college graduates and Somalis that never go to college must be investigated, despite starting at the same starting point. Or do they really begin at the same starting point?

Conclusion

This study sought to understand Somali graduate students' experiences and perceptions related to some of the primary factors contributing to their academic success as well as the challenges they faced during their graduate years. Almost all participants have pinpointed the importance of self-motivation and explained how their self-motivation was an integral part of their academic journey and educational process. Similarly, those participants cited the purpose of motivation has played a significant role in their learning process. To stay motivated, students require a supportive system and teachers. That is why the role of teachers is important when providing a critical support system that helps students excel in learning.

Positive teacher-student relationship was regarded as a fundamental pathway to the pursuit of academic goals and achievement. Many students mentioned a caring and passionate educator that inspired them to succeed. Many times, these educators shared their own struggles in their academic journeys and bridged cultural gaps to find common ground that connected both the faculty member and students. Though it may be unrealistic to advise that faculty members try to make personal connections with every student to help advance their academic success, it is possible for them to utilize office hours to better cultivate relationships that impact academic motivation in one way or another.

Resilience emerged as a factor that could predict academic success, in this case, resilience was rooted in past experiences and present struggles. When refugee students came to American schools for the first time, they encountered many challenges and barriers, but they demonstrated incredible amounts of resilience. Both the findings and literature confirmed that resilience is a dynamic process that incentivizes students. For this group of students, it is not only a dynamic process, but one rooted in trauma and hardship in which the lessons gained during the refugee experience provided a fund of strength for these students to overcome the many challenges these students face both within the academic institution and the financial hardship they face.

This study found that peer influence, peer support and peer mentoring were the main themes of the data obtained from the interviews. The existing theories also agreed that peer influence could incentivize and motivate students to aim for success. In all educational settings, peers can function as positive role models. For the participants, intra-cultural peer support and mentoring was of substantial importance.

Parental involvement, cultural understanding, and community involvement in their educational experiences were also cited as necessary for academic success. Somali culture being

one where parental satisfaction remains important for one to fulfill into adulthood, helped students strive for academic success because parents relayed cultural values of the importance of education and attaining education being pleasing to them.

Another factor that helped students was receiving spousal moral and financial support. This type of support that emerged is not commonly touched on by the current literature. In this case, spouses of all genders were revealed to be supportive and beneficial to the education of the other spouse. In a few instances, spouses would work together to both support each other through schooling. Other family members provided encouraging moral support that proved to be more effective for many of the participants than any financial assistance they could have received.

Despite all those family support, inclusive campus climate was another factor that came up during the interviews. This research underscored students need to feel a sense of belonging both in class and on campus. When students feel cared about, understood, supported, and encouraged by their departments, teachers, parents, spouses, and peers, they will prosper. The introduction of inclusive literature is essential to help students feel represented in the books they are reading.

This study attempts to provide a basis from which further research can help offer recommendations for the design of student services of the future. Further research must help align student support structures better for refugee students, as this study only provides an initial understanding of the factors at play. Ideally, universal cultural elements from every disadvantaged minority college going group can be identified and incorporated for better network-type organizational structures throughout the academic landscape.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

ST. CLOUD STATE
UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR LIFE.

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Tajir Rage

Email: tarage@stcloudstate.edu

**IRB PROTOCOL
DETERMINATION:
Exempt Review**

Project Title: What Factors Influence the academic success of somali students in higher education contexts

Advisor James Robinson

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

-Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

IRB Institutional Official:

María-Claudia Tomany

Dr. Claudia Tomany
Associate Provost for Research
Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1953 - 2523	Type: Exempt Review	Today's Date: 10/7/2020
1st Year Approval Date: 10/7/2020	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date:	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date:

Appendix B: Informed Consent Form

Documentation of Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study. This consent form will provide you with the information you will need to understand why this study is being done and why you are being invited to participate. It will also describe what will be expected of you as a participant, as well as any known risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that you may have while participating in the study. We encourage you to ask questions at any time. If you decide to partake, you will be asked to sign this form and it will be a record of your agreement to participate. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

I have read this form and the descriptions of this research study. I have been informed of the risks and benefits involved and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. Furthermore, I have been assured that any future questions I may have will also be answered by a member of the research team. I understand I can withdraw at any time. I voluntarily agree to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Study	**Signature** of Study	Date
Participant	Participant	

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent	Date

Appendix C: Email Recruitment

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Tajir Rage, and I am in the English Department at Saint Cloud State University. I am conducting a research study on identifying the factors influencing the academic success of Somali graduate students in universities in the Midwest and how they overcome the challenges they encounter.

For more information about this study, please contact the principal investigator, Tajir Rage, by phone at 206-446-5593 or email at tarage@stcloudstate.edu

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you! I appreciate any help you can provide throughout the research process.

Sincerely,

Tajir Rage

Principle Investigator

Appendix D: Demographic Data/ Biodata Questionnaire

1. Gender

    ___ Male

    ___ Female

2. What is your age? _____

3. In what country was your mother born? _____ _

4. In what country was your father born? _____ _

5. Which ethnic or cultural group(s) do you identify as belonging to?

_____

6. What is the highest level of school that your mother has obtained?

[] Grade school, or some high school

[] Completed high school.

[] Technical, Community College

[] Some University

[] Completed University degree.

[] Post graduate degree

[] Other (please write in) _____

7. What is the highest level of school that your father has obtained?

 [] Grade school, or some high school

 [] Completed high school.

 [] Technical, Community College

 [] Some University

[] Completed University degree.

[] Post graduate degree

[] Other (please write in) _____

Appendix E: Interview Questions

The following questions will be the basis for in-depth interviews. Follow-up questions will be used as needed if I do not collect all required information.

Date _____   Participant Allocated Code_____

A. Background Information

a.   Tell me a little bit about yourself.

b.   Probe: Where did you grow up? What do your parents do? What are your family's values and traditions?

c.   Tell me what motivated you or your family to come to the United States?

d.   Tell me what challenges you encountered in school?

e.   What grade did you start in the US? _____

B. Parents' Education

a.   Mother's educational attainment _____

b.   Father's educational attainment _____

c.   How do your parents support your education?

C. Barriers

a.   What challenges have you faced while in school and how did you overcome them? Tell me a story about each one.

b.   Have you ever had any financial problems hampering your education?

c.   Were you having trouble reading? writing? Tell me a story about each?

Any further comments

_____

D.   Overcoming Barriers

   a.   How did you overcome the challenges? Tell a story about each challenge.

   b.   Who helped you? Did you receive support from your school / Writing centers,

       peers, or your professors? If yes, what kind of support? Tell me stories about

       those who helped you.

       Any further comments _____

F. Motivation

   a.   What motivates you most? Tell me a story about when you motivate yourself to

       do your best?

   b.   What makes you stay motivated to persist at any task?

Any further comments

_____

_____

Are there any comments or thoughts that you would like to add before we end our interview

today?