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# Lived Experiences of Diversity Visa Lottery Immigrants in the United States

Tekleab Elos Hailu

*University of Northern Colorado, teklabelos@yahoo.com*

Bernadette M. Mendoza

*University of Northern Colorado*

Maria K.E. Lahman

*University of Northern Colorado*

Veronica M. Richard

*Indiana University Northwest*

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### Abstract

Every year approximately 50,000 people immigrate to the United States through the avenue referred to as the Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery. In this article, the authors present a literature review of immigration to the U.S. through the DV Lottery, reflect on their own immigration histories, and utilize phenomenology to investigate and describe participant feelings, expectations, and experiences as DV Lottery immigrants. Participants experienced mixed feelings, including high expectations prior to and difficulties after immigrating to the U.S. Findings presented include (a) life experienced in the U.S.; (b) access to learning and training opportunities; and (c) recommended support future DV Lottery immigrants.

### Keywords

Diversity Visa Lottery, Immigration, Phenomenology

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## Lived Experiences of Diversity Visa Lottery Immigrants in the United States

Tekleab Elos Hailu, Bernadette M. Mendoza, and Maria K. E. Lahman  
University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, Colorado, USA

Veronica M. Richard  
Indiana University Northwest, Gary, Indiana, USA

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*Every year approximately 50,000 people immigrate to the United States through the avenue referred to as the Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery. In this article, the authors present a literature review of immigration to the U.S. through the DV Lottery, reflect on their own immigration histories, and utilize phenomenology to investigate and describe participant feelings, expectations, and experiences as DV Lottery immigrants. Participants experienced mixed feelings, including high expectations prior to and difficulties after immigrating to the U.S. Findings presented include (a) life experienced in the U.S.; (b) access to learning and training opportunities; and (c) recommended support future DV Lottery immigrants. Keywords: Diversity Visa Lottery, Immigration, Phenomenology*

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When a certain country or a region within a country cannot meet the economic needs of its people, particularly in terms of employment and income, people may emigrate in search of sustainability. At the same time, if better opportunities for employment and income in other countries or regions exist, then these opportunities attract people looking to increase their individual potential for financial and emotional security (Bookman, 2002). In addition to the need for a better life, other reasons that force people to migrate are wars and political, religious, ethnic and gender persecutions. Natural calamities such as droughts, floods, famines etc. are also causes for migration. All these situations could entail a local, or internal, or an international migration. Added to these causes is the globalization of world markets, the ease of movement facilitated by modern transportation and communication, and the global skills and talents that allow individuals to work gainfully in places than in their own countries (Fussell, 2010, Maharaji, 2010).

The U.S. is often considered a place of opportunities: people immigrate to the U.S. both legally and illegally. Ogletree (2000) states that people use four major ways to immigrate to the U.S. legally: (a) by being family-sponsored; (b) through employment; (c) as refugees; and (d) the diversity visa.

There are two methods of *family-sponsored* immigration. First, when parents are living in the U.S. legally, they can invite their unmarried offspring to join them. Second, a daughter or a son living in the U.S. legally can invite their parents to immigrate to the U.S. In employment-based immigration, one secures a job in the U.S. and then immigrates with his/her family or as an individual. Another category of immigration is refugee immigration in which people leave their country of origin due to some hardship. Some of these immigrants seek asylum after entering

the country legally for a limited time, which is the case in family-sponsored or employment-based immigrants. Others enter the country by crossing the border clandestinely and then ask for asylum.

In addition to family-sponsored, employment-based, and refugee immigration, people can immigrate through a program identified as the Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery. Through this program, immigrants enter the country after winning a lottery position. The U.S. Department of State explains the program as:

The congressionally mandated Diversity Immigrant Visa Program makes available 50,000 DV annually, drawn from random selection among all entries to persons who meet strict eligibility requirements from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. (U.S. Department of State, 1997)

As such, winning the lottery does not bring any money to the recipient; rather, the award serves as a means to enter the U.S. legally as a winner of a visa. Those entering this lottery must fulfill the requirement of high school completion or work experience requiring at least two years training (U.S. Department of State, 1997).

Since DV Lottery immigrants leave their home countries legally and voluntarily and wish to enter the U.S. legally, it is logical to assume that the lottery immigrants are lured into the country by the prospects of better opportunities and better chances of economic freedom, leading to a more secure future rather than being pushed through any other form of persecution. No one would wait while being persecuted for a lottery with a very slim chance to win. Thus, the intention to immigrate through the DV Lottery is mainly initiated through other reasons than persecution. The majority of the DV Lottery immigrants are similar to what Bookman (2002) referred to as volunteers who are “motivated by expected economic benefits namely a better job including higher wages, improved working conditions, greater status, more possibility for advancement, increased job satisfaction and so forth” (p. 112). However, as new settlers, most DV Lottery immigrants lack the social networks to help them market their experiences and skills. Therefore, furthering their educational or technical skills remain the only options that can lead to a stable employment and a more secure life. Improving and adjusting his/her educational level and skills to meet the requirements of a new environment also carries inherent challenges.

In most cases, these challenges include having a certain amount of knowledge, money, time, and acceptance from learning institutions of the immigrants’ foreign qualifications or certifications for enrollment. The assumption is that DV Lottery immigrants are college graduates because they have access to information about the DV Lottery, including deadlines, dates of application, and application processes (U.S. Department of State, 1997). Participants in this study also substantiate this assumption, as all are college graduates with at least a two-year degree. The educational and/or the skill level requirements particularly apply to independent immigrants (21 years of age and above). Thus, anyone who applies for the DV Lottery has to fulfill this requirement. If anyone wins the lottery without fulfilling the educational or skill requirement, their application is nullified. Money becomes a potential barrier when applying for the DV lottery because the only way someone can apply for the DV Lottery is through the Internet, which requires money. After winning the DV Lottery, the recipient also needs money for visa processing and transportation. As a result, the amount of citizens with access to essential information, the educational skills to complete the application, the financial resources to access the Internet, and the time to do so is limited (Rotimi, 2005).

Despite these limitations, the number of immigrants entering the U.S. through the DV Lottery is growing each year. With 50,000 DV Lottery immigrants entering the U.S. each year, knowing and understanding what they experience and what problems they encounter might help future lottery winners. Consequently, how DV Lottery recipients are acclimating to a new environment through education and skill training, what they experience as they go through the process, and what problems they encounter warrants careful study if future DV Lottery immigrants are to receive the help they need in making their integration into American society smoother. Eliminating unnecessary pain for these immigrants would enable them to focus more on building their future and functioning as productive citizens. Therefore, we explored DV Lottery recipients' experiences during the first few years in the U.S. The central research question of the study was: What were the life experiences of DV Lottery immigrants during their first one to five years in the U.S.? This paper will especially appeal to future DV Lottery immigrants, U.S. local and federal officials, and communities DV Lottery immigrants join.

### **Literature Review**

In theory, all persons that immigrate to the U.S. via the DV Lottery enter the country with the same opportunities and status regarding public support; that is, they face the same problems and benefits. Except for the immigrants with relatives living in the country willing to help them get established and ameliorating their problems (i.e., family-sponsored immigration), the majority of immigrants pass through similar lived experiences.

Bookman (2002) argues, "Voluntary population movement results from a personal cost/benefit analysis that indicates relocation will maximize utility" (p. 112). In the case of DV Lottery immigrants, the cost/benefit analysis is mostly conducted, in addition to the information they have through different sources like friends and acquaintances, by what they know about the people who had already immigrated to the U.S., as substantiated by most of this study's research participants. Part of this cost/benefit analysis comes into play when immigrants who stay for some time in the U.S. return to the country of their origin for a short vacation. Once in their home country, these U.S. immigrants usually indulge in a luxurious lifestyle by their home country's standards because they return with some savings aided by the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar. Most times the U.S. currency is higher, placing the DV Lottery immigrant at an advantage of having more cash than his/her fellow countrypeople. Immigrants returning to their home countries also help their families, building better homes for their relatives and themselves. With this material wealth apparent, the lifestyle entices homeland locals to immigrate to the U.S., making them think and believe that everyone who lives in the U.S. is flourishing economically. As Maharaji (2010) indicated, such a situation widens socio-economic inequalities among people, leading to instabilities and eagerness to migrate. Fussell (2010) also argued that a country of emigrants is most likely to send more immigrants to a receiving country, continuing the process of immigration. Thus, these locals take those immigrants returning for a vacation as a point of reference for success in the U.S. In turn, prospective immigrants remain ready to migrate to the U.S. when the opportunity through the DV Lottery arises.

There are differing views about DV Lottery as an immigration policy and its effects on the origin of immigrants. For example, Rotimi (2005), writing about immigration through DV and its effects throughout the continent of Africa, argues that "the new threat to Africa lies in the increasingly diverse mass evacuation schemes for highly trained and skilled Africans" (p. 10). Rotimi's argument is in terms of the "brain drain" from Africa, which he believes affects the

growth and development of the continent. Rotimi thus criticizes the immigration through DV Lottery as “the ultimate objective of the process—take the best and leave the rest” (p. 11). However, Ogletree (2000) writes that although there is still a racial bias in the U.S. immigration policy, this policy has come a long way—referring to the DV Lottery as a better avenue and policy of immigration. The DV Lottery immigration policy is better than the other immigration policies of the U.S., because it gives better opportunities for Africans and Eastern Europeans to immigrate to the U.S. African countries in particular, and Eastern Europe, as compared to the rest of Europe, were the regions with the least number of people who immigrate to the U.S. But through the DV Lottery, a few African and Eastern Europe countries are among those with the highest quota allowed to send immigrants. Consequently, Rotimi criticizes the DV Lottery in terms of draining human resources from the African countries, while Ogletree appreciates the lottery in terms of increased opportunity for different racial groups.

In terms of the underlying skills required of DV Lottery immigrants, Bookman (2002) contends potential migrants calculate their chances of finding better employment opportunities than their current opportunities. To consider immigrating, a person must have access to the relevant information in order to make an informed decision. Vital information includes an individual’s needs and interests, information about job availability and the types of jobs available, having access to learn and improve one’s self and family members, family and social life, and safety and health issues. Therefore, discovering the difficulties immigrants might face and highlighting information particularly relevant to the life experiences of immigrants becomes critical.

Some researchers have reported on these difficulties. Murphy (2006) notes “settling into a new country can place an immigrant at increased anxiety due to constant pressures and worries about being able to ‘make it,’ depression around unrealized expectations, and decreased satisfaction with life as a result of a host of concurrent stresses associated with adjustment” (p. 81). Bookman (2002), on the other hand, examined broad factors that influence the decisions of potential migrants by creating certain stressful feelings and preventing them from immigrating to the U.S. He stated that, “A middle-aged Russian doctor is discouraged from immigrating to the United States because of the seemingly insurmountable obstacles associated with obtaining the appropriate occupational license” (p. 111). Such discriminating practices could then aggravate the unequal racial balances in the country. Understanding some of the possible difficulties immigrants might encounter, Pécoud and de Guchteneire (2007) argue that “states should then invest in migrants’ linguistic and professional skills, thereby increasing their integration and the size of the workforce” (p. 17). Otherwise, as Mahalingam (2006) states, because many immigrants do not have the social and cultural capital necessary to negotiate their social status, they are often marginalized, leaving many of the DV Lottery immigrants frustrated and powerless. Some researchers (e.g., Arthur, 2008; Mahalingam, 2006; Rotimi, 2005) have argued that the immigrants’ education is discounted in the U.S. and other countries, affecting their opportunity to get a job he/she is qualified for, to find satisfaction in job quality, and, consequently, to receive a salary for which they are qualified, all of which influence their morale and overall life condition.

Although the U.S. immigration policy has come a long way in regards to the DV Lottery, it still has a racial bias and interethnic inequality (Bookman, 2002; Ogletree, 2000). Thus, some regions are more favored than others even in the DV Lottery (Romero, 2003). On the other hand, the DV Lottery has negative effect on the continent of Africa by providing entry access to

the U.S. to the skilled laborers that could have contributed to the development of the continent (Rotimi, 2005).

## **Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to ascertain the experiences of DV Lottery immigrants into the United States. To meet this goal, we oriented our research in the methodology of phenomenology. Phenomenology is both a school of thought (philosophy) as well as methodology (Vagle, Hughes, & Durbin, 2009). Flood (2010) also indicated that phenomenology is a philosophic attitude and research approach. Flood (2010) further noted that there are two main phenomenological approaches when phenomenology is used as a methodology of research: descriptive phenomenology and interpretive phenomenology.

Descriptive phenomenology comes from Husserl's philosophical ideas and focuses on understanding the essential components of the lived experiences of a group of people (Flood, 2010). A descriptive phenomenological study aims to describe and clarify the meaning of phenomena from the lived experiences of people. Thus, it results in valuable knowledge about individuals' experiences (Penner, 2008). In descriptive phenomenology, the researcher brackets his or her ideas, preconceptions, and personal experiences or knowledge when collecting information and reflecting on the lived experiences of the participants (Lopez & Willis, 2004). In a descriptive phenomenology there are certain features to any lived experience common to all persons who have the experience. From the common experiences one can then make a generalized description which is considered to be the true nature of the phenomenon being studied (Lopez & Willis, 2004). "In descriptive method the researcher makes no interpretation. Rather, he or she analyzes the description given by participants and divides them into meaning-laden statements, gathering those meanings that are essential to the construct of phenomenon being lived" (Penner, 2008, p. 95).

On the other hand, interpretive phenomenology goes beyond description of concepts and essences, and looks for meanings embedded in common life practices. It is about what the discourses with participants imply of his or her everyday experiences (Lopez & Willis, 2004). "In the interpretive method, the researcher uses his or her prior knowledge and insights to interpret and uncover hidden meanings with the goal of producing a vivid textual representation of the phenomenon described" (Penner, 2008, p. 95).

The use of the descriptive phenomenological approach was employed in this study to examine the experiences of DV Lottery immigrants. In descriptive phenomenology the biases and perceptions of the researcher are bracketed to avoid or at least minimize any influence of the researcher on the results and conclusions of the study. But in interpretive phenomenology the knowledge and preconceptions of the researcher are welcomed as part of the results and conclusions (Penner, 2008). Bracketing is setting aside preconceptions and personal knowledge of the researcher when listening to and reflecting on the lived experiences of those being studied. Bracketing is best facilitated through a reflective diary, using the participants' own words, and open and honest conversations (Penner, 2008). Similarly, Flood (2010) also noted that the researcher brackets his or personal knowledge in descriptive phenomenology and this prevents any bias or preconception that could influence the study.

In this study also we have bracketed our own experiences regarding the phenomenon investigated through a reflective diary and using the participants' own words. Thus, this study is based on the ideals of descriptive phenomenology where seven DV Lottery immigrants were

asked to describe their experiences as DV Lottery immigrants to the U.S. Five clusters of themes were identified as common experiences of the participants.

This research thus aligns most closely with the Husserl's descriptive phenomenology and philosophical ideas (Flood, 2010). That is, we were interested in describing the lived experiences of the DV Lottery immigrants as told by them.

The IRB of the University of Northern Colorado reviewed the research proposal and gave us the permission to collect information and conduct the research. The participants of the research were approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in the research. The objective of the research was explained and the participants signed a letter of consent that explained their right to the extent that they could withdraw from the research any time they wanted to do so. All of the research participants were adults. We used pseudonyms to conceal their identities and the information they provided us was inaccessible to anyone save the researchers.

### Theoretical Perspective

Constructionism and phenomenology are so intertwined that one could hardly be phenomenological while espousing either an objectivist or subjectivist epistemology" (Crotty, 2004, p. 12). Since the methodology of this study is phenomenology, we believe constructionism underlies the fundamental structure of the study. Constructionism is a theory of knowledge derived from the understanding that meaning from the objective world is socially constructed through various interactions "between human beings and their world. (Crotty, 2004, p. 42)

### Researcher Stance

Tekleab was the primary researcher in this study in that he conceived the study and collected and analyzed data with the advisement of the other authors. The secondary authors had a primary role in advisement, literature, writing, and editing. The secondary authors are interested in this topic due to their diversity status and personal research in diversity. Therefore, the term "I" refers to Tekleab unless otherwise indicated. We follow with a personal introduction of each author in relation to the research topic.

*Tekleab:* As a DV Lottery recipient from Eritrea, I know how difficult and expensive the immigration process is. First, accessibility to consular offices takes time and the application takes money. However, I won the lottery while I was studying in England in 2004. Fortunately, the process from England was not difficult. Then, I moved with my family to the U.S. in 2005 as the opportunities in the U.S. were said to be better than elsewhere.

Having the opportunity to research the lived experiences of DV Lottery immigrants, I looked at the issue with the goal of trying to avoid my own personal experience and encounters so that I could describe and interpret the experiences of the research participants. Unlike many DV Lottery immigrants, my decision to immigrate to the U.S. was based on my personal experiences living in the U.S. and Europe as a student. Thus, I was more or less aware and familiar with the life situation in the U.S. Prior to my immigration through the DV Lottery, I was aware that there are no shortcuts to a luxurious and easy life in the U.S., but that with hard work and better information one could achieve his dream. Thus, being aware of the new



environment and having the right information helped me know what to expect, and how to deal with the encounters.

*Bernadette:* When someone asks me about my family history and where I “came from,” I proudly say I am from people who worked in the fields to provide for their family. My father followed this path, picking fruits and vegetables in California. With this said, I am now far removed from that lifestyle. My father made sure that his children did not have to live the same life he did. Being third-generation Mexican-American, we could see the past, but we could not relate. On my mother’s side of the family, my great-grandmother never spoke English. I remember being upset as a child that this woman could live in the U.S. and not attempt to speak English. Then learning more about New Mexican history, I realized my great grandmother was born, never had moved, and now was in the U.S.

After all of the work my family has gone through to live securely, my parents are now retired in Arizona. With the new Arizona law SB1020, they have to be prepared to prove they are U.S. citizens. My father served in the U.S. Air Force for 23 years and still he is asked to prove he “belongs” in this country. While they are sitting at a roadblock with their identification cards in hand, I am advocating for them and others for legal entry and residency into the U.S.

*Maria:* I am a Mennonite with roots in Swiss Germany. My ancestors immigrated to the United States during the radical wake of the reformation as religiously persecuted immigrants. This persecution was serious with some Mennonites being tortured and ultimately killed (e.g., tongue screws, burnt at the stake, drowning) in the name of Christ. My heritage is pictured graphically in the *Martyr’s Mirror*, a book that lay beside the family Bible on our piano when I was growing up. The story of how my ancestors determined to come to the United States to make a new start was a large part of my heritage. I often consider the meaning behind my religious immigration heritage as I hear of other immigrants’ stories within equally trying contexts, such as Arizona’s law SB1020, The treatment of Arab immigrants in the wake of September 11, 2001, and groups that wear religious garb, as some Mennonites do, such as Somalis and Eritreans.

*Veronica:* Like most people in the U.S., my family emigrated from other countries. As a research methodologist, I have a great interest in research with diverse persons and research aiming to empower people. I joined this research project on the latter end as a research consultant and editor.

## **Participants**

For the purpose of this research, we obtained participants through snowball or chain reaction sampling. Creswell (2007) explains snowball sampling as “identifying cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (p. 127). This sampling strategy helped to distinguish DV Lottery immigrants from those who immigrated through other routes to the U.S. To provide a distinction between the various types of DV Lottery immigrants, I used the criterion that potential participants must be the principle immigrant or the DV Lottery winner. Creswell (2007) writes, “criterion sampling works well when all individuals studied represent people who have experienced the phenomenon” (p. 128). Finally, from among the identified DV Lottery immigrants, purposeful sampling was used to identify the most appropriate individuals that could give the best information on the experiences of DV Lottery immigrants (Merriam, 2009).

In this research article, we investigated the expectations immigrants had and their lived experiences in the U.S. specifically during their first five years of stay in the U.S. The logic behind this focus was that if DV Lottery immigrants choose to do so, they could gain U.S. citizenship through naturalization after five years (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2011).

Seven DV Lottery recipients participated in this study, five males and two females. They came from different parts of Africa, Europe, and the Middle East and had lived in the U.S. from 18 months to 13 years. The participants' educational level varied from two years of college education after graduating from high school to a master's degree before they entered the U.S. None of the participants, save the medical doctor who was working as medical assistant, was working in or close to his/her original field of study. The participants ranged in age from 31 to 60 years old. At the time they won the lottery, five participants were married and had one to three children. See Table 1 for a breakdown of the participants' personal data. All names used are pseudonyms.

*Table 1.* Personal Data of the Research Participants

Name	Sex	Country of Origin	Age	Educational level	Years in the U.S.
Ala	F	Albania	42	Associate Degree: Accounting	7
Bin	M	Morocco	31	B. Sc: Geology	1 <sup>1/2</sup>
Bul	F	Bulgaria	60	M. Sc: Medicine	13
Efa	M	Ethiopia	41	BA: Management	6
Bab	M	Jordan	47	B. Sc:	9
Tog	M	Togo	32	Associate Degree: Accounting	5
Bun	M	Ghana	46	BA	6

## Setting

The study was conducted in a major metropolitan area in the Rocky Mountains. Seventeen percent of the population in this metropolitan area was foreign-born with a substantial number of DV Lottery immigrants (citation omitted for anonymity reasons).

## Data Collection

Data was collected through a demographic questionnaire; an in-depth, semi-structured, face-to-face, one-to-one interview; and a follow up phone interview. Merriam (2009) asserts "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behavior, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them" (p. 88). In this particular study, interviewing participants was the best method to elicit reliable information of the lived experiences of DV Lottery immigrants. Furthermore, Creswell (2007) argues phenomenological studies rely primarily on in-depth interviewing. Merriam (2009) advocates for the flexibility of a less structured questioning design; that is, semi-structured interviews. This structure helped me make the interview process more flexible while still focusing on uncovering the essence of the participants' experience. I used a digital tape recorder to capture the interview verbatim as well as note-taking to capture some of the more salient points the participants made. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with the participants based on the need for clarification of their responses.

Before conducting the face-to-face interview, I asked the participants to complete a brief questionnaire of demographic questions and other pertinent questions to the study (i.e., sex, age, country of origin, number of years lived in the U.S., educational level and field of study). In the face-to-face interview, I gave each participant the interview questions to read first. During the interview, I posed the following ten questions and elaborated on the questions as needed:

### **Interview Questions**

Tell me how you came to the U.S.

What were your feelings when you learned that you won the DV Lottery?

What were your expectations before you entered to the United States?

Did you find your expectations to be real?

How did you find life in the United States?

What are your best experiences in the United States?

What are your worst experiences in the United States?

Do you have access to educational/training institutions to learn?

Did you achieve any improvements in your education/skill after you immigrated?

What do you think should be done to make the experience of the DV Lottery immigrants pleasant?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Follow-up Question:** Would you still come to the U.S. if you had all the information, understanding, and experience you have today about everything in the U.S. as a DV Lottery immigrant?

The topics of the questions elicited information in which the participants described their feelings, expectations, experiences, and the mechanisms they used to cope with the new situations in the U.S. Emphasis was also given to collect information on the opportunities and access that DV Lottery immigrants have to enter colleges, universities, and institutions that offer skill training. Since the DV Lottery participants entered the U.S. from different perspectives and cultures, the data reflected multiple realities related to personal expectations and experiences. Each face-to-face interview took between 35 and 55 minutes.

The interviews for five of the participants were conducted in their homes. As such, I had the opportunity to observe home artifacts and relate observations to the interview responses that described the participants' experiences and their way of life, serving as validation to the data collected. What I observed showed how they felt about their home countries, and what they miss from their home countries. All of the participants explained that artifacts such as music and maps of their home countries make them feel that they are close to their countries and families in their home countries.

### **Data Analysis**

Connecting methodology with analysis, Creswell (2007) writes, "phenomenology is not only a description, but it is also seen as an interpretive process in which the researcher makes an interpretation" (p. 59). Merriam (2009) elaborates, stating "the task of the phenomenologist, then, is to depict the essence or basic structure of experience" (p. 25). In this study we described

the results reflecting the participants' stance about their lived experiences in the U.S. while putting the authors' stances aside through bracketing to help maximize the participants' understandings and views.

Creswell (2007) defines data analysis as "... the process of making sense out of the data" (p. 175). To make sense out of the data, we described and classified what the participants said. We categorized the data into groups based on the transcripts and the major interview questions. We used phenomenological approach to create the categories, which Creswell (2007) describes as "the general guideline of analyzing the data for significant phrases, developing meanings and clustering them into themes, and presenting an exhaustive description of the phenomenon" (p. 160).

Interviews were audiotaped with the participants' consent. The audiotaped interview was transcribed. We read the texts more than once to clearly understand each participant's description of his/her lived experience as a DV Lottery immigrant in the U.S. Similar ideas were marked, analyzed, and then joined. The joined ideas were then summarized and clustered, creating themes.

The objective was to explore and describe how the DV Lottery immigrants make meaning of their lived experiences as DV winners, DV Lottery immigrants, and their stay in the U.S. as immigrants (see Table 2).

Table 2. The Process of Transforming the Data

Stage of Experience	Clustered Ideas	Evolving Theme
When winning the DV Lottery	Lucky Happy Excited Fearful Anxious	Feeling
Before and after winning the DV Lottery	Better life Better job More money Better opportunity to learn	Expectations
After immigrating to the U.S.	Difficult Challenging Routine Tiresome Stressful	Survival
After settling in the U.S.	Access to school Invitations from schools Encouragement from schools	Opportunity available but expensive
For future DV immigrants	Government support is needed Society has to understand and support them They have to know that there is little support and be ready Endure the hard life	

The major phrases and sentences identified and classified resulted in five themes as indicated in Table 2 and discussed under the topic “findings” (pages 10 to 12). The themes are the main points and concerns the research participants identified and indicated as the major issues that explain their lived experiences.

### **Trustworthiness Procedures**

To increase qualitative research trustworthiness, Creswell (2007) argues,

We seek to have our account resonate with the participants, to be an accurate reflection of what they said. So we engage in validation strategies, often using multiple strategies, which include confirming or triangulating data from several sources, having our studies reviewed and corrected by the participants. (p. 45)

In order to triangulate the data collection, I drew on questionnaire data, face-to-face interviews, observational and artifact data, and a short follow-up phone interview to substantiate the data collected. I also interviewed a variety of people from differing environments with differing perspectives. Merriam (2009, p. 216) states that “triangulation using multiple of sources of *data* means comparing and cross-checking data collected through observations at different times or in different places, or interview data collected from people with different perspectives or from follow-up interviews with the same people.” Furthermore, the findings of the study closely reflect the data collected as elaborated below under the subtopics of “findings”.

### **Findings**

Based on the analysis of the data collected and the interview questions, the findings are organized into major themes. The interview questions were designed to elicit information on the experiences and feelings of the participants from the time they learned about their winning the DV lottery up to the first few years of their stay in the U.S. The main themes of the findings are in the areas of feelings, expectations, experienced life in the U.S., access to learning and training opportunity, and potential help for future DV Lottery immigrants, as explained by the research participants.

#### **I feel lucky: Feelings**

The participants expressed the feelings they had when they learned that they won the DV Lottery as happy, lucky, and excited with some degree of fear, hesitation, and anxiety. Bun, one of the participants, put it as “winning the lottery from among millions of applicants made me feel lucky, and I was so happy to come to the U.S. because I thought life was easy and convenient than what I had.” As a result of the excitement, some winners said they wanted to pack and leave immediately. All interpreted the meaning of winning the lottery as a lucky encounter. Efa stated, “Although I had a nice job, the feeling of winning and luckiness were pushing factors for me to leave my country and immigrate as DV Lottery migrant.” Tog indicated that the congratulations from friends and families ignited his feeling of happiness and that this made him decide to immigrate as soon as he heard about winning the DV Lottery.

This excitement notwithstanding, all of the participants expressed fear and anxiety because of life in a new, unknown environment and being separated from relatives, friends and other relationships. Most of this fear was based on not knowing what they would encounter in the new destination and environment.

### **Get rich quick: Expectations**

The expectations participants had about life in the U.S. were similar. They shared their expectations of having a better life, a better job, more money, and a better opportunity to learn. Tog said, "Now I see it to be different from what I used to see in the films and magazines." Similar to this understanding, all the participants indicated they had exaggerated and unrealistic expectations of the life in the U.S. as they found it extremely different from their initial expectations. Bul mentioned, "I expected to further improve my profession and skill and did not expect that I will be doing this type of job that I am doing now." Tog said, "I expected to be rich quickly and be able to help my family. But I found it to be difficult to be rich in the U.S. however you work and I found my expectation not realistic." Ala commented, "I thought that there is no problem with health care [and] that health care was free and accessible to all. But I found this expectation not real even compared to my own country which is less developed." Bab conveyed his expectations, stating "I thought I could go to a very good school and study with less expense and certain comfort, but although I am studying in the field I wanted to join, I did not expect it to be such expensive." He mentioned that now he has a huge student loan and fears that this debt might create problems for him later.

### **To Survive: Experienced Life in the U.S.**

Participants described their life experiences in the U.S., as difficult, challenging, routine, lonely, tiresome, and stressful. Efa, Bin, and Bul indicated that they would not have come to the U.S. if they had known the life situation. However, because of the future opportunities they see for their children and the loans and debts they have accrued due to the immigration processes and the airfare, these DV Lottery winners indicated that they could not have gone back as soon as they learned about the life they faced in the U.S. Comparing their current situation to situations in their home countries, most of the participants in this research indicated that the difficulties of life in the U.S. are different from those in their home country. They indicated that although one can work and earn money in the U.S., there is often no choice when looking for jobs; one has to do jobs others do not want to do, which includes the jobs that are difficult, routine, and involve exposure to harsh weather conditions. Tog explained this phenomenon as a kind of "take it or leave it" type of situation "because those types of jobs are the only ones I could get, and to survive I had to do what I was able to get."

### **Plenty but expensive: Access to learning and training opportunity**

All participants responded that access to learning and training opportunities is plentiful compared to their experiences in their home countries and that they always receive invitations and encouragement to enroll and study. Bab, who is currently attending a higher education institution, mentioned, "It is not only the availability of opportunity but the practical reality to be able to learn at an affordable cost also is a big issue." They see their life experience in the U.S.

as difficult but monetarily rewarding with plenty of opportunities to learn. Bul explained one of the challenges to this understanding: “If you are accented there are occasions that people see you as if you don’t know anything and that creates a problem in getting a job even if you are certified and licensed for the job.”

### **Endure the hard life: Help future DV Lottery immigrants may need**

Some participants responded to helping future DV Lottery immigrants as “they have to be prepared to endure the hard life for three to four years.” Others suggested that there should be a program from the U.S. government or other institutions to help them find jobs with health care, housing, schooling, and information for the first few months. This idea is similar to what Schain (2008) reported, that in the 1920s some states organized commissions and programs that investigated the living conditions and civic education of the immigrant population. However, the DV Lottery immigrants feel that they lack governmental support. Thus, as Arthur (2008) and Getahun (2007) reported, many immigrants aspire to go back to their countries as soon as their situations allow it. Some of the current study’s research participants also expressed the same desire of going back to their home country after they paid off their loans and saved up some money that would help them start a better life at home.

## **Discussion**

DV Lottery immigrants bring numerous skills and experiences with them, as they are at least high school graduates or have at least two years’ experience of some technical skill. Although they are attracted to emigrate to the U.S. for different reasons, all these reasons relate to the need and interest of attaining a better life, a better job, a good salary, and the opportunities to get a better education. Takougang (2003) also noted that most of the immigrants that enter the U.S. through the lottery process are qualified individuals immigrating mainly for economic reasons. They arrive in the U.S. with high expectations of a life of ease and convenience. Similarly, Oikonomidou (2011, p. 25) also wrote “the role of imagination and hope seem to have a central role in the ways in which immigrants constitute their lives.” Soon, however, these expectations get lost in the deluge of finding employment—any employment—casting aside the hopes for jobs in their prospective fields and giving way to working multiple jobs in order to pay their bills and pay back the money they borrowed for transportation and fees for their visa. Obiakor and Afolayan (2007, p. 266), writing about African immigrants, noted, “... the dilemma of African immigrants, many of whom are highly educated, but because of the need to maintain their families in America and at the home front, are often contended to doing jobs that are far below their levels of education.” The participants in this study also expressed the same issue.

What participants indicated as their best experiences vary from one participant to another. Ala said, “I went through training and now I have a good job, good salary; and have a nice car, which I never dreamt to have when I was in my country. My experience with most people is also positive.” Tog responded that, “When I got a job, I was able to save some money, learned how to handle money, and I became planned and organized.” Bin, while describing his experience, proudly said that he had become a responsible and mature person, making decisions about what his life and his family’s life should look like. Bab explained that he did his first degree in accounting after immigrating to the U.S. and that he is continuing his postgraduate degree in the same field. He believes that this is a great opportunity and the best experience he received by

immigrating to the U.S. through the DV Lottery. Yet another participant described his best experience in the U.S. by saying, “We were able to get established and have a settled life quickly than we thought we would at the beginning.” Efa said, “The value and respect given to human beings in general is my best learning experience in this country.” Each participant had certain positive experiences and everyone interpreted the positive experiences from different angles. Some interpreted such experiences in terms of their social relationships and interaction, others in terms of their personal growth, and still others in terms of the material and monetary gains they made. Obiakor and Afoláyan (2007), citing previous research on African immigrants, wrote about similar positive experiences and how they turned obstacles into opportunities through hard work, perseverance, education, dedication, by being responsible, and family values.

Telling of their worst experiences, most of the participants mentioned that their worst times were during the first few months, much like in other findings (Jiménez, 2011; Obiakor & Afoláyan, 2007; Rong & Fitchett, 2008). One participant described the situation as “no job, you don’t know your way out and in; and in some cases; people laugh at you because of the accent.” Bul, Efa, and Tog mentioned that some employers think that a heavy accent meant a low intelligence level, and this makes it difficult to get a job even if the immigrant is perfectly qualified. Thus, the immigrant ends up doing a blue-collar job or working two jobs because one cannot survive doing only one job. Most of the participants explained the jobs one gets need physical strength and in most cases are back-breaking jobs or jobs where one is always exposed to the weather. Other responses included the stress of day-to-day life. One participant mentioned, “The worst experience I had was the tension and stress of the daily life I had to go through and such life made me forgetful.”

Loneliness, communication problems and anxiety related to finding a job and getting settled were repeatedly mentioned. Bin mentioned, “Unwise use of credit card put me in trouble because I had no idea how a credit card should be used.” Getahun (2007) also reported similar findings concerning African immigrants. He indicated that although African immigrants in the U.S. are grateful for the opportunities they had in U.S., they also complained about loneliness, socio-cultural isolation, and alienation from mainstream American social system. Jiménez (2011) also wrote that integration of immigrants into mainstream society takes years, indicating how lonely immigrants may feel.

Some of the research participants mentioned that their education was discounted and they could not find a job in their field of training and specialization, thus doing any job they can get as Takougang (2003) highlighted among African immigrants in the U.S. In an extended conversation, Bul mentioned that “in the U.S. you have plenty to eat and you don’t starve. You drive a nice car and dress as you like, but it is difficult to be rich which I was thinking I will be in the U.S.” He indicated that this is because “my training and specialization is not accepted and I could not get a job in my field of study which could have earned me better income.” Thus, for many the expectations they had and the reality they experienced in the U.S. did not match. Similar to other research findings (Arthur, 2008; Getahun, 2007; Schian, 2008), the research participants of this study also mentioned that although there is better access to academic and skill-training facilities, they are not able to gain from the resources because they are either too expensive or because the DV Lottery immigrants do not have time to pursue careers in the learning facilities. Participants expressed mixed feelings when they learned about winning the DV Lottery and they expressed mixed and varied experiences, mentioning that it was particularly difficult at the beginning.



## **Limitations**

There were certain limitations of the current study. The small sample size cannot be representative of all DV Lottery immigrants. It is just about the experience of seven DV Lottery immigrants residing in one western metropolitan area of the U.S. It does not include DV Lottery immigrants from all countries that send immigrants through the DV Lottery. It is only about DV Lottery immigrants from seven countries. DV Lottery immigrants are economically and culturally different, having different work experiences and exposure. Thus, any challenge they encounter affects them differently. Since the DV Lottery immigrants come from diversified environments, their adaptation to the U.S. environment also varies.

The different states have different policies and social services. The policies and social services provided in a state may have different effects on the lived experiences of the immigrants. This study is specifically about DV Lottery immigrants in one state. DV Lottery immigrants in other states may experience different situations. The experience of DV Lottery immigrants also vary depending on the presence of a person who is willing to help them until they get established. Those that have a close relative or friend who are willing to help may have a less stressful experience. Thus, their adaptation to the new environment could be easier. The finding of this study captures the lived experience of the seven participants only and is applicable to the participants of the study and others that are in the same context.

Future studies about DV Lottery immigrants can explore the strategies successful immigrants employ. In addition, research in other states can be conducted to assess how DV Lottery immigrants are doing in the country. Further research could also be conducted to see if DV Lottery immigrants are negatively impacting the workforce in their respective home countries.

## **Conclusion**

DV Lottery immigrants come from all over the world with different background experiences and talents. Their varied experiences and talents should be acknowledged and utilized in order to play a more active, productive role in the communities they live in and the society at large. All the participants in this research indicated that they encountered so many problems when they immigrated to the U.S. during the first few months to a point where they felt frustrated and caused them to regret coming. These negative experiences could have been minimized or avoided, and their experiences made pleasant if they had had enough information and if there had been some help guiding them in getting jobs and familiarizing them to the overall environment. Although hard work and willingness to do any job are definite assets, their talents have been lost in the assumptions surrounding immigrants and their abilities.

Future research should concentrate on how some immigrants succeed and what help DV Lottery immigrants might need to get established. The successful stories could be learning opportunities for other DV Lottery immigrants, helping to create a general approach and avoid any frustrations for new DV Lottery immigrants. In this way, immigrants can truly be in the land of opportunity where dreams come true with hard work,

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### Author Note

Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed to: Tekleab Elos Hailu, MS, University of Northern Colorado Department of Educational Technology, Greeley, Colorado 80631; E-mail: [tekleabelos@yahoo.com](mailto:tekleabelos@yahoo.com); Phone: 720-278-1330.

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