

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS OF EDUCATIONAL ASSIMILATION
FOR REFUGEE AND NON-REFUGEE IMMIGRANT STUDENTS:
A PILOT STUDY OF A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Immigration in the United States

The United States of America has experienced a deluge of immigration in the past fifty years. A diverse influx of immigrants began entering the United States after amendments to the Immigration Act in 1965 abolished the national origins quota system. In contrast to the earlier pattern of immigration during the late 1800s and early 1900s when the proportion of immigrants from Europe constituted the vast majority, more than half of the immigrants who arrived after 1970 were from Asia and Latin America. The U.S. Census Bureau's historical statistics clearly show this change in the foreign-born population through time.¹ In 1960, 75 percent of the foreign-born population were from Europe. In 1980, 39 percent were from Europe, while 54 percent were from Asia, Latin America, and other areas including Africa and Oceania. In 2007, nearly 85 percent of the foreign-born population were from Asia, Latin America, and other areas including Africa and Oceania. Altogether the foreign-born population of the United States reached a record high of 38.1 million in 2007, representing 12.6 percent of the total population of 301.6 million (Grieco, 2009).

Refugees Worldwide

Among the foreign-born population is a special group of people who came to the United States as refugees. According to 101(a)(42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), the definition of a refugee is:

“a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country of

¹ The foreign-born population is defined as “anyone who was not a US citizen or US national at birth”. This particular population includes persons who are not US citizens as well as those who have become US citizens through naturalization. (Grieco, 2009)

nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Martin, 2010).²

In order to understand the increasing responsibility that the United States is bearing on behalf of this particular subgroup among the foreign-born population, we need a larger perspective about refugees worldwide. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] (2010) reports that there were 15.2 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2009. Surprisingly, 80 percent of the world’s refugees were hosted by developing countries rather than developed countries. For example, Pakistan accommodated the largest number of the world’s refugees (1.7 million), followed by Iran (1.1 million), and Syria (1.05 million). Pakistan also accommodated the largest number of refugees in relation to its economic capacity with 745 refugees per 1 US dollar GDP per capita, followed by Congo (592) and Zimbabwe (245). The first developed country was Germany at 26th place with 17 refugees per 1 US dollar GDP per capita. This seems to be related to the larger pattern of refugee flight that most refugees flee to neighboring countries rather than countries afar, remaining in their region of origin. UNHCR (2010) estimates that approximately 1.7 million refugees, that is, 17 percent out of the total of 10.4 million who fall under UNHCR’s responsibility, live outside their region of origin.

There are some important trends among refugees worldwide that are worth recognizing before focusing on the refugee population in the United States. The war on terrorism, which was initiated by the United States, is impacting the movement of refugees worldwide. Not surprisingly, UNHCR (2010) reports that Afghani and Iraqi refugees covered approximately 50 percent of all refugees under UNHCR’s

² This definition was expanded in 1996 (under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act) to include persons who have been forced to abort a pregnancy or undergo involuntary sterilization or who have been persecuted for failure or refusal to undergo such a procedure or for other resistance to a coercive population control program. The definition, as established in 1980, excludes those who have ordered, incited, assisted or otherwise participated in the persecution of others. (Martin, 2010)

responsibility in 2009 and that 25 percent of all refugees worldwide were from Afghanistan in 2009. Afghani refugees were living in 71 different asylum countries while Iraqi refugees were remaining primarily in neighboring countries. Many refugees often want to return when the situation becomes more stabilized in their home countries. However, approximately 251,500 refugees repatriated voluntarily during 2009, the lowest figure since 1990 according to UNHCR (2010).

In terms of countries in demand, South Africa was the top destination country for new asylum-seekers worldwide with more than 222,000 asylum claims registered in 2009.³ This number represented almost one fourth of all individual applications globally. The United States was in the second place with 47,900 applications, followed by France (42,100), and Malaysia (40,000) in 2009. Another significant piece of information according to UNHCR's (2010) report is that unaccompanied and separated children submitted over 18,700 asylum applications in 71 countries in 2009 – the highest number in four years. Europe received 81 percent of the claims, with the United Kingdom in the first position, followed by Norway and Sweden. The most prominent countries of origin for these minor applicants were Afghanistan and Somalia. Also, UNHCR (2010) estimates that over half of the refugees worldwide resided in urban areas with less than one third in camps. However, 60 percent of refugees in sub-Saharan Africa resided in camps. Women and girls represented almost half of refugees and asylum-seekers. Forty-one percent of the women and girls were children below the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2010).

Refugees in the United States

The United States is currently the leading country in resettling refugees. The

³ Asylum-seekers are individuals who have sought international protection and whose claims for refugee status have not yet been determined. (UNHCR, 2010)

country's 62-year history of refugee legislation began with the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which brought a massive number of Eastern Europeans to this country (Martin, 2010). Other specific legislation such as the Refugee Relief Act of 1953 and the Fair Share Refugee Act of 1960 followed. A large number of Hungarians in 1956 and Indochinese refugees in the 1970s entered the United States due to the placement of the U.S. Attorney General's parole authority in bringing people for humanitarian reasons. Eventually, Congress passed the Refugee Act of 1980 in response to the 1967 United Nations Protocol, which prohibited any nation from returning a refugee to a country where his or her life or freedom would be in danger (Martin, 2010). From 1980 to 2001, the United States admitted approximately 2.1 million refugees. From 2001 to 2002, the number declined by 61 percent, decreasing from 68,925 in 2001 to 26,773 in 2002. A possible reason for this decrease might be the changes in security procedures after the terrorist attack on September 11 and admission requirements resulting from the USA Patriot Act of 2001 (Jefferys, 2007). The number moderately increased afterward with 41,150 persons admitted in 2006 and 74,602 persons admitted in 2009. The top three countries of origin for refugee admissions to the United States as of 2009 were Iraq, Burma, and Bhutan, respectively (Martin, 2010). This is partially due to the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act of 2007, which granted some Iraqis who provided assistance to the U.S. government or nongovernmental organizations in operation in Iraq to be considered for refugee resettlement under the secondary priority class in the application process (Martin, 2010). In sum, a total of 112,400 refugees were admitted by 19 resettlement countries, including the United States (79,900), Canada (12,500), Australia (11,100), Germany (2,100), Sweden (1,900), and Norway (1,400) (UNHCR, 2010).

Young Adult Refugees and Community Colleges

The composition of the refugee population in the United States reveals an important implication for education. Children under the age of 18 accounted for nearly 34 percent of all refugees who arrived in the United States in 2009 (Martin, 2010). Another important age group was the young adult refugees who are 18 to 34 years old, and within this group were individuals of college-going age. This age group also contained nearly 36 percent of all refugees who entered the United States in 2009 (Martin, 2010). In a study by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP), Erlsman and Looney (2007) show that immigrant students, especially those who came to the United States as teenagers or young adults, face various challenges in gaining access to college. This finding implies that a portion of the 17-and-under-aged refugee group and the whole young adult refugee group may bear a greater risk in pursuing higher education than any other age groups. For their college education, young adult refugees often turn to and are demographically concentrated in community colleges rather than other types of higher education institutions, whereas child refugees are widely dispersed in elementary and secondary levels of U.S. public schools (Erlsman & Looney, 2007). These trends and findings place community colleges as both important and appropriate settings to study the educational assimilation of young adult refugees, most of whom are still under the influence of parents and families.

Community colleges are interesting and valuable places for studying refugee and immigrant student population because these institutions increasingly serve as a stepping stone to educational and economic opportunities. Using a nationally representative sample of students, Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) found that the foreign-born students were 20 percent more likely than their U.S.-native counterparts to begin at a community college and subsequently transfer to a four-year university.

The number of immigrant students turning to community colleges is increasing due to community colleges' open-access admissions policies, affordability, proximity, and range of course offerings including English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) (Szenlenyi & Chang, 2002). In particular, providing ESL programs is the predominant way of responding to the needs of immigrant students at community colleges (Gray, Rolph, & Melamid, 1996). On the part of immigrant students, they have also played an important role in diversifying community colleges because of their high heterogeneity in racial, cultural, linguistic, and economic backgrounds (Szenlenyi & Chang, 2002).

Despite the high level of internal diversity in community colleges, immigrant students in these and other higher education institutions are often considered as a homogeneous and educationally successful group (Szenlenyi & Chang, 2002). Therefore, the imminent challenge for educational institutions, including community colleges, is to find appropriate means of responding to the diversity of backgrounds and needs of these students. Szenlenyi and Chang (2002) further argue that such a challenge is strongly related to the lack of data available on immigrants in community colleges. Gray and colleagues (1996) also pointed out that "none had asked immigrant students about their needs and perceptions of the campus environment (p.105)." In sum, the literature calls for research pertaining to national, regional, and institutional studies on immigrant students' educational achievement and expectations in the community college context. The literature further implies that such studies will help understand the different levels of internal diversity within the immigrant student population (Szenlenyi & Chang, 2002).

Purpose and Significance

Refugee students are unique among immigrant students primarily in three

ways. First, the lack of choice surrounding their departure from their country of origin and their arrival in a new country distinguishes them from other immigrant groups (Burnett, 1998; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). Second, refugees not only have been forced to flee their homelands but also have experienced varying degrees of emotional and physical trauma. These pre- and trans-migration experiences can influence refugees during their resettlement process in a new land. Third, refugees usually arrive in a new land without prior preparation. Other immigrants are often found to be prepared, for example, by studying a second language in their homeland (Coelho, 1994). On the other hand, refugee students also have similarities with other immigrant students such as their shared migratory experiences and educational contexts of second language learning.

Despite the aforementioned facts and the available observations demonstrating that refugee students are unique among immigrant students, the distinction between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students has not been drawn well in the educational research literature and policy discussion. Both the literature and discussion tend to address immigrant students as a whole by lumping within-group diversity or by focusing on Latino students who comprise the numeric majority.

The purpose of this research is to bridge the afore-stated research gap by exploring how the process of educational assimilation differs between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students. More specifically, this study examines how well the segmented assimilation theory, which is the most-widely used theoretical framework in studying immigrant adaptation, can explain the difference in educational expectations between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students. The themes and patterns that emerge from the experiences shared by the refugee and other immigrant student interviewees offer a starting point for a larger study in the future. According to

the themes and patterns found, the interview protocol will be refined by deleting questions, adding new questions, and rephrasing questions. Therefore, this research serves as a pilot study for the purpose of testing the appropriateness and adequacy of the conceptual framework and interview protocol, which are mainly developed from the theory of segmented assimilation. This research will provide researchers, educators, policymakers, and practitioners with an in-depth understanding of the unique influence that the refugee background of a student can exert on his or her educational assimilation process in the United States.

Research Question

This research study seeks to answer the following question:

How does the process of educational assimilation differ between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students in community colleges?

CHAPTER II

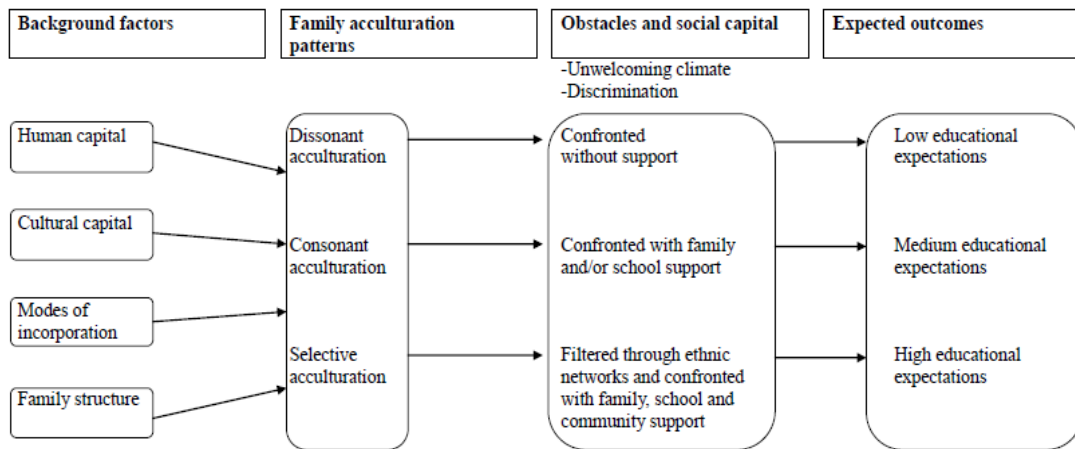
CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

To address the research question, I use a conceptual framework derived from a holistic review of four bodies of research literature – assimilation theories; forms of capital; obstacles of refugee students; and educational expectations. Assimilation refers to the change in an individual or a culturally-similar group that results from contact with a different culture (McBrien, 2005). On the basis of a large-scale longitudinal study of the children of immigrants and refugees, Portes and Zhou (1993) suggested a theory of segmented assimilation, which accounts for diverse entry situations and receptions of immigrant and refugee populations at a group-level. Several studies to date have used this theory to study assimilation of immigrant students without distinctions between refugee and non-refugee status of the students. For the specific purpose of studying the difference in educational assimilation between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students, the particular needs and obstacles that refugee students face are incorporated into the larger framework of segmented assimilation since this might more appropriately inform the study of refugee students. The segmented assimilation theory was originally developed for studying second generation immigrants. Since there is no theory developed for young adult immigrants and literature on adult immigrants is not appropriate for studying educational aspects of this particular group, the segmented assimilation theory is adopted as a central skeleton of the conceptual framework. However, the original framework of segmented assimilation is carefully revised by embodying major elements from the research literature in the areas of refugee experiences and

educational expectations.

Figure 1. General conceptual framework: The process of segmented educational assimilation



This revised conceptual framework allows for the exploration of how immigrant students’ background factors may shape family acculturation patterns, which in turn may predict different paths for overcoming obstacles, and eventually produce different outcomes of educational assimilation (see Figure 1). Students’ *background factors* entail four constructs, including the three items found in Portes and Rumbaut’s (2001) original framework. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), *human capital* refers to the skills that student and parents bring in the form of education, work experience, and language knowledge that make individuals productive at home, school, and work. *Cultural capital*, which is a construct I added to the original framework, is defined as family-mediated values and outlooks that facilitate access to education (Portes, 2000). *Modes of incorporation* comprise three contexts of reception in the host country – government, community, and society. These modes condition the extent to which immigrant human capital and cultural capital can be brought into play to promote successful economic and social adaptation. *Family structure* refers to the composition of the immigrant family, particularly the extent to which it includes both biological parents.

In this framework, *family acculturation patterns* are classified into three

categories – dissonant, consonant, and selective. *Dissonant acculturation* takes place when children’s learning of the English language and American ways, as well as their simultaneous loss of the immigrant culture, outstrip their parents’ learning and loss of culture. *Consonant acculturation* is the opposite situation, where the learning process and gradual abandonment of the home language and culture occur at nearly the same pace for parents and children. *Selective acculturation* takes place when the learning process of both parents and children is embedded in a co-ethnic community of sufficient size and institutional diversity to slow down the cultural shift and promote partial retention of the parents’ home language and norms. These acculturation patterns may lead students into segmented paths when faced with two main *obstacles*: unwelcoming climate and discrimination, which can be translated into social and individual rejection, respectively (McBrien, 2005). Immigrant social capital, which is composed of family, school, and community resources and ties, serves as a cushion during the process of overcoming the aforementioned obstacles. *Social capital* is defined as the ability to acquire access to resources by reason of the connections between individuals or membership in social networks and other social structures (Coleman, 1988). Portes and Rumbaut (2001) further explain that social capital grounded on “ethnic networks” especially provides a key resource in confronting obstacles to successful adaptation.

Finally, the current study identifies three *expected outcomes* of educational assimilation – low, medium, and high educational expectations. This study defines educational expectations as the highest level of education a student realistically plans to achieve in the future. *Low educational expectations* pertain to receiving up to an associate of arts degree granted by community colleges after completion of two years of study. *Medium educational expectations* pertain to receiving up to a bachelor’s

degree granted by four-year colleges and universities. *High educational expectations* range from a master's degree to a doctoral degree granted by graduate schools.

Assimilation Theories

Early theories

The concept of assimilation or acculturation is not a contemporary invention. The concept has developed into its present form through time with an increasing number of scholars and social scientists involved. The article on critical history of acculturation psychology authored by Rudmin (2003), a Norwegian scholar, is helpful to understand the early development of assimilation theories. Rudmin (2003) introduces the definition of acculturation with a direct quotation from a classic anthropological study. The quotation reads, "Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovitz, 1936, p.149). According to the Oxford Dictionary, "acculturate" means to "assimilate or cause to assimilate a different culture, typically the dominant one". I will use the concepts of acculturation and assimilation interchangeably since the literature has used both concepts in the same way.

Although human experience of assimilation and acculturation has existed since the ancient times, it was not until Plato when types of acculturation policies were suggested among the Greeks for the first time. Plato was against acculturation by arguing that acculturation can produce social disorder, and he described those who detach themselves from the dominant culture as having a disordered character (Plato,

360BCE/1969). He proposed minimizing acculturation according to an implicit psychological theory that younger people acculturate at a greater rate than older people (Rudmin, 2003). Plato asserted that only those above the age of 40 should be allowed to travel overseas. He also argued that travelers should be required to stay in the port district of the city in order to minimize citizens' contact with foreign travelers.

Historically, the United States has been a special place regarding acculturation because the nation was founded by people from diverse European nations, unsettling diverse Native American tribes and importing slaves from various African and Caribbean regions (Rudmin, 2003). DeTocqueville (1835/1945), a French historian, observed acculturation in the United States of the early 19th century and theorized that assimilation was evident in the nation and would eventually bring Americans together in becoming one people. Around the beginning of the 20th century, Thomas and Znaniecki proposed the first full psychological theory of acculturation in 1918. Based on the empirical research studies about immigrants in Chicago, they theorized that a minority group's culture is composed of shared attitudes and habits, called schemas, which are adaptive to one's family, ethnic community, and occupation. They further explain that "modernity" is the dominant culture imposing acculturative pressure on people in the United States (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1958). Bartlett (1923/1970), a British psychologist, similarly argued that unresolved tensions that resulted from acculturative pressure could negatively impact social life. Bartlett's main argument was that the attitudes of the minority toward the dominant culture particularly have a significant role in achieving positive acculturation outcomes.

Early development of acculturation theories, including the aforementioned ones, largely revolved around typologies or taxonomies as a matter of adding and subtracting aspects of cultures. However, Berry and colleagues (1984) finally

organized their typology in its present form of assimilation, separation, integration, and marginalization. As the amount of acculturation research has expanded expeditiously since 1984, new fourfold typologies have continued to be proposed (e.g., Bourhis, Moise, Perrault, & Senecal, 1997; Coleman, 1995; Hutnik, 1991; LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993; Rudmin & Ahmadzadeh, 2001).

Next I will delineate the theoretical and empirical literature on contemporary theories. One noticeable change I found between early theories and contemporary theories is the increasing use of the term “assimilation” over the term “acculturation”.

Contemporary theories

Several theories have been proposed to explain the different educational assimilation outcomes of immigrant students. The literature broadly indicates five different assimilation theories – straight-line theory, accommodation or selective assimilation theory, optimism theory, segmented assimilation theory, and new assimilation theory. According to the *straight-line theory*, the cultural norms and values of immigrant students will naturally diminish as they interact with U.S.-native students. Thus, this theory predicts that ethnic differences in, for example, high school dropout rates will draw to a close over time (Waldinger & Perlmann, 1998). Most researchers adopting the straight-line theory (e.g., Kao & Tienda, 1995; Rong & Brown, 2002) conjecture that becoming Americanized over generations is a prerequisite for educational and economic success. As a result, the theory predicts that first-generation immigrant students will suffer the highest dropout rates and that higher-generation students will have the lowest dropout rates (Perreira, Harris, & Lee, 2006).

The *accommodation or selective assimilation theory* predicts the opposite

educational outcomes as the straight-line theory. This theory advocates the cultural norms and values that immigrants bring with them as the best resource for their educational achievement. According to Rumbaut (1997), the cultural features of immigrant students prevent them from assimilating to potentially harmful norms and behaviors of native students. As a result, it becomes more likely that immigrant students educationally perform better in school than their U.S.-native counterparts. Thus, the opposite forecast is that the first-generation immigrant students will perform the highest in academics with the lowest dropout rates while higher-generation students will perform the lowest in academics with the highest dropout rates (Perreira et al., 2006).

Between the straight-line theory and the selective assimilation theory is the *optimism theory*, which predicts that second-generation students will be the best performing group in school well above their first-generation and higher-generation counterparts (Perreira et al., 2006). Most researchers holding this theory contend that second-generation students inherit determination and the positive attitudes of their parents, but are linguistically more proficient in English than both their parents and first-generation students (Kao & Tienda, 1995; Landale, Oropesa, & Llanes, 1998). However, optimism declines and the risks of minority status come into effect by the third generation.

While the three previously discussed theories share their emphasis on the individual students, the *segmented assimilation theory* places its emphasis on the host country's contexts of reception in determining the life course of contemporary immigrants. The literature on this theory seeks to understand "how it is that different groups may come to assimilate into different segments of American society" (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Therefore, the focus here is on the assimilation outcomes of

ethnic groups as a whole beyond their family and individual background. To understand the process of rendering these diverse assimilation outcomes, researchers closely studied the “modes” through which immigrant groups are incorporated into American society. These “modes of incorporation” are determined by the contexts of reception that immigrant groups face upon their arrival in the United States, such as U.S. policy toward the group (e.g., whether the group was given refugee status and assistance), the prejudices of the host society, and the characteristics of the co-ethnic community (Portes & Zhou, 1993). To date, the segmented assimilation theory is the most widely-used theoretical framework to study immigrant youth. The literature adopting this theory agrees upon the main finding that immigrant youth settling into communities with active political support, opportunities in the labor market, and strong co-ethnic communities are more likely to succeed in school than those who arrive with a less supportive reception (Bean & Stevens, 2003; Glick & White, 2003; Landale et al., 1998; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Reitz, 2002).

Finally, two sociologists, Alba and Nee (2003), have developed the most recent theory on assimilation, namely, the *new assimilation theory*. Complementing each of the theories discussed above, the new assimilation theory articulates the significance of various forms of capital (e.g., human, cultural, and social capital). Alba and Nee (2003) argue that “assimilation, defined as the attenuation of distinctions based on ethnic origin, is not an inevitable outcome of adaptation by ethnic and racial minorities”. Instead, they claim “assimilation” to be a cumulative and unintended result of “pragmatic decisions” made by immigrants and their children to improve their welfare. The main factors impacting these decisions are various forms of capital. Therefore, differences in the forms of capital available to immigrants and their children are likely to determine different assimilation paths (Perreira et al.,

2006).

Although all of the theories described previously are informative, no one theory can fully explain the process of educational assimilation of immigrant students. To examine variations in educational assimilation pathways effectively and conclusively, I blended the influence of various forms of capital into the segmented assimilation process, which is the skeleton of the conceptual framework for this study. In the following section, I discuss how each form of capital is expected to influence educational assimilation.

Forms of Capital

Human capital

According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), *human capital* refers to the skills that student and parents bring along in the form of education, work experience, and language knowledge that make individuals productive at home, school, and work. Research shows that parents' human capital in the form of education has strong positive association with the educational attainment of their children (Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991). Students whose parents are more highly educated are more likely to have better educational outcomes than those with less educated parents. The means through which educated parents provide support can be the direct investment of their time and financial investments in other resources (e.g., books, computers, tutors) (Perreira et al., 2006).

However, research has not reached a consensus about the influence of parents' human capital in the form of employment (especially maternal employment) on their children's education (Krein & Beller, 1988; Ruhm, 2004). Employment can

provide parents with income for investments in children's education. On the other hand, employment can constrain parents from investing adequate time in their children's development. Similarly, literature on the influence of student employment on educational attainment shows mixed results (Mortimer, 2003). Some research demonstrates that students obtain the skills and resources, which can build character, teach responsibility, and ultimately yield positive educational outcomes (Newman, 1999; Ruhm, 1997). Alternatively, increased student time investments in work can result in decreased investments in schooling as students are deprived of time spent doing school-related work and eventually have less interest in education (Ruhm, 1997). Several empirical studies also concur with such an observation that high-intensity employment, typically more than 20 hours per week, is negatively associated with academic achievement and attainment of youth (Mortimer, 2003). Yet, the impact of employment on educational attainment varies by race (Donahoe & Tienda, 2000). For example, although research shows that White students benefit the most from working, the effect seems to be reversed for African American students (Mortimer, 2003).

Students' human capital in the form of language knowledge, which is English-language proficiency in the United States, is a chiefly important skill for their educational achievement (Alba & Nee, 2003). Literature also confirms the strong positive relationships between English-language proficiency and educational outcomes (Rumbaut, 1997; White & Kauffman, 1997).

There is also evidence that family structure has a strong association with students' access to parental human capital and the investments in resources that promote educational attainment (Perreira et al., 2006). The literature further demonstrates that certain family structures (especially the absence of a father)

interfere with child development and reduce the likelihood of high school completion among adolescents (Krein & Beller, 1988; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994; Painter & Levine, 2000).

Cultural capital

According to Portes (2000), cultural capital can be defined as family-mediated values and outlooks that facilitate access to education. Family members can promote a student's educational attainment by motivating the student, monitoring his or her behavior and friendships, and developing close, supportive relationships that enable open communication within the family (Perreira et al., 2006). Several studies found positive associations, for example, between educational outcomes and school attachment (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2001), college aspirations (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998), parent-child closeness (Fuligni, 2001; White & Glick, 2000), and parent monitoring or involvement (Aguiano, 2004; Kao & Tienda, 1995; White & Glick, 2000).

For students with an immigrant background, research shows that these components of cultural capital may have a particularly important role in helping them adjust to life in the United States (Kibria, 1994; White & Glick, 2000; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). However, some recent studies identify a new form of cultural capital pertaining to immigrant students, namely, resilience (Trueba, 1999; 2002). Although Trueba (1999; 2002) applies the concept of cultural capital to Latino immigrants in particular, I hypothesize that resilience may be a significant asset to immigrant students from other ethnic groups. According to Trueba (2002), immigrant students manage unique skills (e.g., being bilingual, the ability to cross racial and ethnic boundaries, and a general resilience in the face of hardship and obstacles) and convert

them into a cultural capital that leads to educational success (Haynes, 2000).

Social capital

Social capital is generally defined as the ability to acquire access to resources by reason of the connections between individuals or membership in social networks and other social structures (Coleman, 1988). Immigrant families that combine high levels of human capital with high proportions of cultural capital are backed by the more extended networks that their family members create. Haynes (2000) explains that social capital, which is inherent in the relationships among and between actors, describes “social norms” and the “sources of human motivation” and that people negotiate both “constraints” and “opportunities” through their social networks. Taylor (2000) further identifies two aspects of social capital – bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital is a more inward-oriented aspect, which bolsters distinctive identities of a homogeneous group. In contrast, bridging social capital is more outward looking and tends to better connect heterogeneous groups by providing linkages to external assets and information dispersion.

As for immigrants, social capital that is especially grounded on ethnic networks provides a key resource in confronting obstacles to successful assimilation for three reasons (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). First, immigrant parents can utilize such social capital in creating economic opportunities, which help put to use the skills they brought from their country of origin. Second, it helps preserve intact immigrant families because strong ethnic communities often encourage norms against divorce and place an emphasis on the traditional importance of families. Third, such ethnic social networks often strengthen parental authority.

Furthermore, Portes and Rumbaut (2001) argue that social capital depends

more on the density of ties among immigrants than on their relative economic or occupational success. In other words, whether fellow immigrants from the same country of origin are wealthy and highly educated does not matter significantly if they feel no obligation toward one another. It also does not matter whether many fellow immigrants are doctors and business owners if they are geographically or otherwise unreachable. However, economically and occupationally limited but socially responsible communities can be a priceless resource because their ties support parental authority and parents' sacrifice for their children's education and career.

Although literature does not adequately cover the role of teachers as social capital in school, this study will include the teacher's role as a part of students' social capital in helping immigrant students assimilate. A few studies provide a rationale for this by arguing that educators are key in facilitating socialization and assimilation of refugee and immigrant students (Hones & Cha, 1999; Trueba, Jacobs, & Kirton, 1990). For instance, when teachers are not sufficiently trained to understand the experiences of refugee students, they often misinterpret their students' culturally inappropriate attempts to assimilate in school (Hones, 2002; Lee, 2002; Trueba et al., 1990). Such cultural misunderstandings can have consequences in prejudice and discrimination, with the result that students, already struggling with cultural changes and an unfamiliar language, must also work to overcome the impact of negative attitudes (Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Ogbu, 1982; Olsen, 2000; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). Thus, teachers with a deep understanding about their students can be protective social capital for the students' educational assimilation.

Having delineated the theoretical and empirical literature on acculturation, assimilation, and different forms of capital on immigrant students, I will next present the literature of experiences pertinent to refugee students.

Obstacles of Refugee Students

Unwelcoming climate

Adapting to a new country and culture has generally been acknowledged as a stressful process involving several interacting cultural, social, economic, linguistic, and environmental factors. For refugees, this process is compounded by experiences of trauma and loss, along with financial problems, racism, unemployment, health problems, changes in family structure and roles, and different or little educational experience (Hamilton & Moore, 2004). Most existing literature reveals that the two main obstacles that are found to be most relevant to refugees in the United States are *unwelcoming climate* at the structural level and *discrimination* at the individual level. Since these obstacles simultaneously apply to non-refugee immigrants, they are incorporated into the conceptual framework for the process of segmented educational assimilation. A review of literature on each obstacle will follow in the next paragraphs.

Partially due to the novelty of multicultural education theories that emerged during the 1980s, the overall attitude of school personnel and U.S. peers toward refugee students was documented as being unwelcoming during the 1980s. For instance, Blakely (1983) studied 45 refugee families from Southeast Asian countries and observed that these families were severely struggling for economic survival, with the result that the parents did not always attend parent-teacher conferences or respond to letters sent home from school. However, school personnel stated that the refugee families did not care about their children's education and expected special treatment. Another study about Hmong refugee girls in U.S. high schools found that Hmong and U.S. peers were ineffectively communicating with one another because the Hmong

students were not yet skilled in the nuances of U.S. adolescent speech (Goldstein, 1988). Goldstein (1988) further noted that U.S. peers did not see anything to gain from befriending Hmong students. He also observed that teachers were more concerned with classroom order than with paying attention to the Hmong students for their educational assimilation. Overall, structural school policies were perpetuating the marginalization of Hmong refugee students, regardless of the academic reputations of schools (Goldstein, 1988).

Other studies revealed that the U.S. governmental context of refugee reception did matter significantly in creating structurally unwelcoming (or welcoming) climate during the 1980s. Perez's (2001) study finds that Cuban refugees who were originally from low socioeconomic classes were able to build strong ethnic community resources because the U.S. government received them as legal refugees with financial and social support. McBrien (2005) explains that the United States sympathized with the cause of Cuban refugees because of the political conflicts between the U.S. and communist Cuba. A large ethnic community came into existence in southern Florida and most Cuban refugee students attended public schools with high concentrations of other Cuban students. Therefore, Cuban refugees received psychosocial support from these community resources during the process of assimilation.

In contrast, Nicaraguan refugees who were originally from high socioeconomic classes were rejected by the U.S. government although their political situation was similar to that of Cuban refugees escaping communist Cuba (Fernandez-Kelly & Curran, 2001). Consequently, they were unable to build ethnic community resources as Cubans did, and they had to work at low-paying jobs where employers could exploit their undocumented status. Their children could not expect to receive

higher education because they did not have legal residency and could not apply for financial aid. Nicaraguan refugee families also had much family conflict because the gap between parents' culture and language acquisition and children's acquisition increased rapidly. As a result, Nicaraguan refugee children experienced ethnic identity crisis by preferring to be called "Hispanic" rather than "Nicaraguan" in hopes of fitting into the larger Latin culture of Cubans (McBrien, 2005). Not only Nicaraguan but also Haitian refugees experienced similar unwelcoming circumstances in the United States. The analysis of data from the Children of Immigrants Longitudinal Study demonstrates that Haitians, among all migrant groups, suffered the greatest amount of prejudice and discrimination from the U.S. government during the 1970s and 1980s (Stepick, Stepick, Eugene, Teed, & Labissiere, 2001).

A more recent study describes how Bosnian, Latino, Somali, and Sudanese refugee students were once welcomed but then later neglected by structures and policies that were in place at a middle school (Gitlin, Buendia, Crosland, & Doumbia, 2003). Attitudes of school personnel and school policies viewed languages other than English and cultural differences as deficiency. Furthermore, what Gitlin and colleagues (2003) referred to as "subtle exclusionary practices" were in place. There was a lack of extra-hour transportation that would encourage refugee and immigrant students to participate in after-school activities. White students dominated school assemblies and monitoring staff in the lunchroom facilitated segregated seating. Gitlin and colleagues (2003) concluded that welcoming discourses, among students and school personnel who claim to welcome diversity, are separate from the reality of attitudinal and structural racism.

Discrimination

While unwelcoming climate entails a more structural nature, it is closely related to discrimination directed individually at students. Several studies to date have documented discrimination against individual refugee students. An ethnographic study of 50 refugee students from Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala delineated how students who had taken advanced academic courses in their home countries were placed in low-track courses in U.S. high schools (Suarez-Orozco, 1989). School counselors did not allow them to take college preparation classes, notwithstanding their aspirations and abilities. The students under study were often dually discouraged by such a discriminative attitude at school and by the needs of working full-time for family survival while attending school (Suarez-Orozco, 1989).

Another study about school personnel perception toward Hmong refugee students at a U.S. elementary school is striking. Trueba and colleagues (1990) found that many teachers and administrators assumed their students' low intelligence and learning disabilities. However, Trueba and colleagues observed that school personnel including school psychologist were unable to diagnose the presumed deficiencies. The researchers found that one of the important criteria for labeling a student as "most needy learning disabled" was the student's limited English proficiency. They observed, as a result that the students experienced deep depression and isolation as well as panic. Even more surprising, the students came to believe they were disabled and they became less motivated to learn although some of them performed above average in subjects such as mathematics.

A more recent study pertaining to Hmong refugee students in a U.S. high school shows that the students immediately started recognizing the social and academic hierarchy, which places White students at the top (Lee, 2002). The

researcher observed that the mainstream teachers felt no responsibility for the Hmong refugee students, setting aside the role to ESL teachers. Some teachers noted that the Hmong culture is preliterate, clannish, and rural and believed that the Hmong students lacked motivation. Not only teachers but also some students at the school described the Hmong students as culturally deficient. In order to overcome these incidents of discrimination, the Hmong students tried to claim their identity as Americans and separate themselves from more recently-arrived Hmong students. Lee (2002) argues for the urgent need of schools to address the notion of being American. However, another study dealing with 18 adolescent refugee girls from eight different countries indicated that discriminative experiences yielded short-term but not necessarily long-term consequences in academic goals and career aspirations (McBrien, 2005).

In sum, the literature on unwelcoming climate and discrimination confirms that such obstacles generated by teachers, peers, and school personnel intensify the refugee students' isolation. Studies show that discrimination at the individual level often had roots in these actors' misunderstandings of cultural differences, or at least their lack of interest in knowing the differences. Next I will elaborate upon the literature on educational expectations, especially among minority students, most of whom are immigrant students.

Educational Expectations

This study defines educational expectations as the highest level of education a student realistically plans to achieve in the future. Educational expectations are an important construct for measuring educational assimilation because research has consistently shown that they are strong predictors of actual educational attainment (Duncan, Featherman, & Duncan, 1972; Haller & Portes, 1973; Sewell, Haller, &

Portes, 1969; Sewell & Hauser, 1975, 1980). Research shows that educational expectations are strong predictors of actual educational attainment for minority students. For example, one study found that Latino students with high educational expectations are less likely to drop out of school than those with low expectations (Driscoll, 1999). Research also shows that different mobility systems are at work for minority and white students (Kerckhoff & Campbell, 1977; Porter, 1974; Portes & Wilson, 1976).

There are similar racial differences reported in the studies of family socioeconomic background effects on education. Qian and Blair (1999) find that family socioeconomic background has a greater impact on white students' educational aspirations than on non-white students' aspirations. Kuo and Hauser (1995) report similar finding on students' attainment. Hanson (1994) also documented the socioeconomic (SES) effects on the educational expectations of white students, but there were no effects for non-white students. Asian, black, and Latino students were found to be willing to go further in higher education than expected levels based on their socioeconomic backgrounds (Kao & Tienda, 1998). In sum, the body of literature on racial differences of SES effects indicates that factors other than socioeconomic background may be more extensively impacting the educational expectations of the non-white minority student group, which includes immigrant students.

The literature provides two possible explanations for the weaker relationship between family SES background and educational expectations for minority students compared to white students. First, Goyette and Xie (1999) illustrate an example from diverse Asian groups whose higher educational expectations, in comparison to whites, may be a result of "selectivity" on experiences and characteristics shared by all Asian

groups. Other studies provide a historical example such as Asian exclusion, which may have made Asian immigration highly selective (Cheng & Yang, 1996; Hirschman & Wong, 1986). Therefore, it may have been likely that Asian immigrants come from a higher socioeconomic class in their countries of origin. Second, another explanation lies with “collectivity” of minority group members. Feliciano (2006) points out that the collective experiences and identities of the racial/ethnic group (racial consciousness) may be more significant than individual SES backgrounds in shaping educational expectations. Ogbu’s (1991, 2003) work on collective self-identity may shed light on this notion. He argues that in contrast to involuntary minorities, such as blacks, immigrant minorities develop collective self-definitions that are based on a positive view of shared experiences, thereby creating a sense of collective dignity and pride (Ogbu, 1974, 1991, 2003). These group-level factors – selectivity and collectivity – signify the focus of this study in which the educational assimilation outcomes of ethnic groups are considered as a whole beyond their family and individual background. For example, as previously discussed, the process of arriving at diverse assimilation outcomes is studied within the “modes” through which immigrant groups are incorporated into American society. These “modes of incorporation” are determined by the contexts of reception that immigrant groups face upon their arrival in the United States.

However, family and individual factors including patterns of assimilation are still greatly important. Research demonstrates that minority students whose parents have higher educational expectations for their children tend to have higher expectations for themselves. Goyette and Xie (1999) found that this tendency is greater among Asian students when compared to white students. Kao (2002) also found that immigrant parents have higher expectations for their children than do non-

immigrant parents. Kao (2002) further reports that Asian, black, and Latino parents have been found to have higher expectations for their children than do white parents of the same socioeconomic background.

In conclusion, the literature on assimilation theories, forms of capital, obstacles of refugee students, and educational expectations suggests that immigrant individual and family factors exert influence on the process of educational assimilation within the broader group-level processes of racial/ethnic communities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how the process of educational assimilation differs between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students. More specifically, the study examines how well the segmented assimilation theory, which is the most-widely used theoretical framework in studying immigrant adaptation, can explain the difference in educational expectations between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students. The themes and patterns that emerge from the experiences shared by the refugee and other immigrant student interviewees offer a starting point for a larger study in the future. Based on the themes and patterns found, the interview protocol will be refined by deleting questions, adding new questions, and rephrasing questions. Therefore, this research serves as a pilot study for the purpose of testing the appropriateness and adequacy of the conceptual framework and interview protocol, which are mainly developed from the theory of segmented assimilation. One advantage of a pilot study is that the researcher can deal with some of the practical aspects of collecting data. According to Shkedi (2005), a pilot helps the researcher to highlight the different elements of the observation and interview techniques and to clarify which are appropriate and which are problematic. Another advantage of a pilot study is its contribution to decisions about what, why, how, who, when and where to interview and/or to observe (Seidman, 1991).

Adapting a qualitative methodology based on interviews, this study provides detailed information-rich analysis of refugee and non-refugee students' processes of educational assimilation. Qualitative analysis experts acknowledge that "the major way in which qualitative researchers seek to understand the perceptions, feelings, and

knowledge of people is through in-depth, intensive interviewing” (Patton, 2002). They further agree that “direct quotations are a basic source of raw data in qualitative inquiry, revealing respondents’ depth of emotion, the ways they have organized their world, their thoughts about what is happening, their experiences, and their basic perceptions” (Patton, 2002). The role of the qualitative researcher is, therefore, to offer a framework within which participants can respond in a way that represents accurately and thoroughly their points of view (Patton, 2002). The researcher’s role is crucial as Lofland (1971) states, “To capture participants ‘in their own terms’ one must learn their categories for rendering explicable and coherent the flux of raw reality. That indeed, is the first principle of qualitative analysis.”

Demographics of the Nashville, Tennessee Area

Although the foreign-born population of the United States reached a record high of 38.1 million in 2007, representing 12.6 percent of the total U.S. population, there are some interesting patterns worth noting among the individual states in terms of the year of entry of their foreign-born populations. According to the most current American Community Survey data (Walters & Cortes, 2010), a clear difference between the patterns related to the year of entry for foreign-born populations in traditionally foreign-born populous states and those in less populous states is evident. Traditional immigrant destination states such as California and New York have consistently shown high proportions of foreign-born populations throughout the last 30 years. However, the proportion in the foreign-born populations in less populous states in the Midwest and the South has increased significantly in the recent years. Tennessee is one of the states in which such a recent demographic change is taking place. Thirteen percent of the foreign-born population in Tennessee entered prior to

1980, compared with 43 percent who arrived in 2000 or later (Walters & Cortes, 2010).

The aforementioned demographic trend has been observed especially among the most recent immigrants in the past five years. Of those states with a foreign-born population of more than one million, four states (California, Florida, Illinois, and New York) had a lower proportion of recent entrants than the national average, which was 14 percent (Walters & Cortes, 2010). Several states beyond these traditional immigrant destinations, such as North Dakota (34 percent), Kentucky (28 percent), and South Dakota (26 percent) had among the largest proportions of foreign-born immigrants entering between 2005 and 2009. Tennessee had over 17 percent of its foreign-born people entering between 2005 and 2009. Walters and Cortes (2010) conjecture that although these states account for a small proportion of the total foreign-born population, they illustrate the “widening geographic distribution” of the foreign-born, particularly among more recent entrants.

Nashville in particular had 45 percent of its foreign-born population who had lived in the U.S. five years or less as of 2000 (Cornfield, Arzubiaga, BeLue, Brooks, Brown, Miller, Perkins, Thoits, & Walker, 2003). The city’s foreign-born population increased more than three times in size between 1990 and 2000. Nashville has become a popular destination for immigrants due to its relatively low cost of living and fair job market (Swarns, 2003). There are large groups of Mexicans, Kurdish, Arabs, Vietnamese, Bantus, Laotians, and Cambodians, among other groups, currently living in Nashville (Cornfield et al., 2003). The number of Kurdish in Nashville is the largest in the United States, numbering approximately 11,000 (Copeland, 2006). Some of the 60,000 Bhutanese refugees who are admitted to the United States are have recently resettled in Nashville (Echegaray, 2009). During the Iraqi election of

2005, Nashville was one of the few international locations where Iraqi expatriates could vote (Alligood, 2005).

The changing demographics of the foreign-born population in Metropolitan Nashville calls for greater attention to the needs of recently-arrived refugees and immigrants. The educational assimilation of the K-16 school-going aged children among these recently-arrived refugees and immigrants especially deserves greater attention because it directly and indirectly impacts their economic and social outlooks as adults.

Site Selection

As previously discussed, community colleges are both important and appropriate settings to study the educational assimilation of young adult refugees and immigrants, most of whom are still under the influence of parents and families. These institutions increasingly serve as stepping stone to educational and economic opportunities. Using a nationally representative sample of students, Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) found that the foreign-born students were 20 percent more likely than their U.S.-native counterparts to begin at a community college and subsequently transfer to a four-year university.

I selected the ESL program at Nashville State Community College as my research site to recruit recent immigrant students for interviews. Nashville State Community College is the only community college in Metropolitan Nashville and its two campuses – Main campus and Southeast center – are separately located in Metropolitan Nashville and have been used for the recruitment process of this study. Refugee and non-refugee immigrant student groups were selected as the unit of analysis because the literature points out that there are certain unique characteristics

that distinguish refugee and non-refugee students. The current study mainly asks a question about the difference in educational assimilation between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students.

The ESL program of Nashville State Community College has experienced rapid growth and a changing student population since the college offered its first ESL courses to 56 students in the fall of 1996 (Becker, Flood, Longwood, Manier, & Stein, 2009). Since then, the foreign-born student population has consistently increased in number. A total of 485 foreign-born students representing 72 countries of origin attended Nashville State Community College in the spring semester of 1999. The number reached 536 students representing 69 countries of origin in the spring semester of 2009 (Becker et al., 2009). In terms of immigrant status, approximately 82 percent of recent foreign-born students were recorded as permanent resident or U.S. citizen during the 2008-2009 academic year (Nashville State Community College [NSCC], n.d.). Another 6.4 percent of the recent foreign-born students were recorded as refugees during the same academic year (NSCC, n.d.). Although the percentage of legal refugee students is small, it does not warrant neglect because a portion of those permanent resident or U.S. citizen students may have a refugee background before their change in immigrant status.

Participant Selection

After selecting the research site, I utilized purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) to select three refugee immigrant students and three non-refugee immigrant students (n=6) based on the following selection criteria: (a) possession of legal refugee status or permanent resident/U.S. citizenship; (b) young adult age of 18-34 years old; (c) five years or less of residency in the U.S.; and (d) current enrollment in ESL classes.

These criteria were devised in order to capture the characteristics of first generation young adult immigrant students who have recently arrived in the United States. Other characteristics such as countries of origin, age, and gender were used to seek maximum diversity in the sample. Specifically, I used stratified purposeful sampling as a strategy for purposefully selecting information-rich cases. The purpose of a stratified purposeful sample is to capture major variations rather than to identify a common core (Patton, 2002).

My stratified purposeful sample stratifies by two aspects – ESL levels (low, medium, and high) and immigrant status (whether refugee or non-refugee). In order to accomplish these levels of stratification, I first mapped all ESL classes offered in the spring semester of 2010 and then selected two classes from each ESL level while allowing maximum variation in terms of instructors, days and times of classes, and campus locations. A total of five ESL levels were in place originally, but classes were offered only in level 2 through level 5 during the semester under study. I then requested to do class visits through the director and staff of the ESL program. I selected Grammar 2 and Literacy 2 for level 2 classes. Level 3 classes included Conversation 3 and Grammar 3. Level 4 classes included Basic Reading and Basic Writing. Level 5 classes included Developmental Reading and Developmental Writing. Upon permission of the class instructor, I made a three-minute in-class presentation about the research study and asked those interested in participating to sign up on a sheet of paper. I categorized level 2 as “low”, level 3 as “medium”, and level 4 and 5 as “high” ESL levels. Then I selected three refugee students and three non-refugee students, one from each of the three categorized ESL levels. As I contacted the selected students, some of them decide not to participate. Thus, a continuous selection process was utilized based on the sign-ups until I arrived at

having six people who clearly expressed interest in participating (see Appendix A for student characteristics).

Data Collection

A combined approach of an interview guide and a semi-structured interview with open- and closed-ended questions was used by specifying key questions exactly as they had been prepared in advance while leaving other items as topics arose to be explored at the interviewer's discretion. According to Patton (2002), such a strategy "offers the interviewer flexibility in probing and determining when it is appropriate to explore certain subjects in greater depth, or even to pose questions about new areas of inquiry that were not originally anticipated in the interview instrument's development". It is important to utilize such a combined approach because this study serves as a pilot study for the end purpose of testing the appropriateness of the interview protocol.

I conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the six immigrant students about their background, family acculturation patterns, obstacles, and their educational expectations (see Appendix B). Patton (2002) explains that recording the verbatim responses of interviewees is essential because the purpose of each interview is to record as fully and fairly as possible the interviewee's perspective. Participants and I met in a coffee shop near the Main Campus or in the lounge of Southeast Center, whichever was more convenient for the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes on average and was voice-recorded upon consent of the participants. An informed consent document for research, which was approved by Vanderbilt University Institutional Review Board, was reviewed and signed by both the participants and the interviewer at the beginning of the interview. In all cases of

recording and transcribing the interviews, the names and other identifying items of participants and any names mentioned during the interviews were recorded as pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

I also took strategic and focused notes (Patton, 2002) during the interviews in order to formulate new questions as the interview unfolded, especially where it may have been appropriate to obtain more in-depth information about something mentioned earlier. Another reason was that there was no guarantee that the voice recorder would not malfunction during the interviews. I also wanted the participants to feel more comfortable in articulating themselves by giving them intervals of eye contact between listening and note-taking. Immediately after the interviews, I took notes on the setting and my observations about the interview. I tried to transcribe the recordings as soon as possible after the interviews.

Data Analysis

I used content analysis as a major strategy for data analysis in this study. According to Patton (2002), content analysis generally refers to “any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings”. I describe these core consistencies and meanings as patterns and themes, respectively, in my findings. In analyzing interviews, I began with cross-case analysis, which means grouping together answers from different participants according to the same questions (Patton, 2002). The semi-standardized interview protocol helped with easily accomplishing the cross-interview analysis. Specifically, I systemically hand-coded data into a premade chart based on the original conceptual framework, as follows:

Area 1: Background factors

✧ Human capital – Participant, father, mother, family SES

- ✧ Cultural capital – Family values, outlooks for participant’s education
- ✧ Modes of incorporation – Government, community, society
- ✧ Family structure – Whether living with both parents and/or siblings

Area 2: Family acculturation patterns

- ✧ Dissonant
- ✧ Consonant
- ✧ Selective

Area 3: Obstacles and social capital

- ✧ Unwelcoming climate
- ✧ Discrimination
- ✧ Social capital – Ethnic community networks, teachers, family

Area 4: Expected outcomes

- ✧ Participant’s educational expectations
- ✧ Parents’ educational expectations for their children

By constantly comparing the hand-coded data, similarities and differences between refugee and non-refugee immigrant students emerged in each area of the educational assimilation process. Then I focused on individual cases to magnify the detailed depth of the emerging patterns. I chose not to use computer software for data analysis because I considered six participants as a fair sample size from which detailed voices of the participants would be heard through organic stories and perspectives.

In sum, patterns and themes have been discovered through inductive analysis. I then deductively analyzed the data by applying the existing theoretical framework of segmented assimilation and examining the data in terms of theory-derived sensitizing concepts. Sensitizing concepts refer to categories that the analyst brings to the data (Patton, 2002).

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The goal of this chapter is to tell a detailed story of the findings from the descriptive analysis of student interview data. First, background factors including various family elements and the greater communal, governmental, and societal circumstances are discussed in comparison between refugee and non-refugee students. Students' pre-migration experiences, which powerfully and clearly distinguished refugee students from non-refugee students, emerged as a new area of focus from these findings. Next, categorical findings on ways in which students and parents acculturate are presented. Then, students' perceptions of institutional and individual obstacles are provided, and the importance of social relationships in students' access to educational resources is discussed. Finally, students' educational expectations are described as they relate to the predictions of the original segmented assimilation model.

Background Factors

Family as an Advantageous Starting Point for Non-refugee Students

At the individual and family level, the overall level of education and language knowledge that non-refugee students and their families' bring from their home countries exceeded that of refugee students and their families'. Only one out of the three non-refugee students had a father without higher education, whereas two out of the three refugee students did. The gap in mother's education was even larger in that only one non-refugee student's mother did not receive education beyond high school,

whereas the educational levels of all refugee students' mothers ranged from no formal education to high school education. The language proficiency of parents also indicated a similar pattern in that non-refugee students' parents had a higher proficiency both in their native language and in English than their refugee students' counterparts. This pattern was more clearly captured when I separately examined the mothers' language proficiency. Refugee students' mothers were hardly able to speak, understand, read, and write English and two thirds of them even had lower literacy in their native language when compared to their spoken proficiency in their native language.

Not only were non-refugee students and their families more advantaged in terms of their levels of education and English language proficiency, but their family structures and financial circumstances were found to be placing them in a more advantageous position for educational assimilation. For instance, two thirds of the non-refugee students were living with both father and mother, whereas only one refugee student was. Also, the tendency for the student's family to own rather than rent a home was found to be higher among non-refugee students' households as opposed to refugee students' households. However, the levels of former education and English language proficiency on the part of the students themselves were similar between refugee and non-refugee students. Therefore, with the levels of education and language knowledge among refugee and non-refugee students being similar, factors among their families tend to place non-refugee students in a more advantageous place in their educational assimilation as compared to refugee students.

Consistent Messages of Encouragement from Family Members

A common theme throughout the interviews was an acknowledgement of the

important role that family members played in continuing the students' education whether they were refugee or non-refugee. Virtually all students spoke about various ways in which their family members had encouraged them to continue their education. Only one non-refugee student from Korea said that she received more encouragement from her friends and people in the community than from her own family members. The following paragraph recounts one refugee student's experience regarding this type of consistent encouraging message that has been received:

My brother always encouraged me to study because he knew I can do it. He also was a civil engineer. My two brothers are civil engineers. Life was getting better and better as we growing up because my brothers graduated from university and they had a job in Afghanistan. It was an NGO and we had enough support, like house.

This student talked about his brother's faithful support as if it were an engine for his academic endeavors, and he also seemed to follow his brothers as role models for career. He specifically drew a clear link between receiving higher education and obtaining a job that can provide a house for the family. Whether they were refugee or non-refugee, almost all of the interviewees described some type of encouragement that they received from their family members. A non-refugee student said,

Just you know, my auntie was doing pre-nursing over here [at Nashville State Community College] and I was new here. So I didn't really have an idea about college here and everything. So she told me that I should join her at her college here. [My parents] always encourage me you know when I'm done with my class, I go to home and they always ask about my class, how was my class, everyday.

This student described how regular conversations with her parents at the end of each day helped her stay motivated for her own education. These accounts demonstrate the value that these students' family members placed on education through quality family relationships and the desire to cultivate the students' educational expectations and eventually promote their actual attainment.

Differing Aspects on the Mode of Incorporation: Government, Community, and Society

Speaking from the group level, refugee and non-refugee students were largely found to be different based on two aspects of the “mode” through which immigrant groups are incorporated into American society. First, refugee students seemed to be in a more advantageous place in terms of governmental contexts of incorporation mainly because the current U.S. policy toward refugee immigrants is more favorable. A refugee student’s account revealed that the U.S. government not only provides refugee people who are being resettled in this country with legal status but also gives them temporary assistance in monetary forms: “They give our apartment and give our assistance for eight months. Just for rent, phone, and electric. And uh... Tenicare. Medicare.” The U.S. government’s legal context was clearly found to be opportune for refugees from countries in which the U.S. is currently involved in wars, such as Afghanistan and Iraq.

In contrast to the favorable federal policy context for refugees, the communal contexts of incorporation seemed to be more advantageous for non-refugee students than for refugee students. Almost all of the non-refugee students referred to their concentrated ethnic communities in Nashville, while most refugee students mentioned no such communities in the area. According to one non-refugee student, the development of Korean immigrant communities largely revolves around ethnic churches in the area. She acknowledged the significance of relationships developed through church:

People are the best help. First of all, the people I met through church were the most help. I came to know all of these through those people. I acknowledge that.

Similarly, Indian immigrant communities gather for several ceremonies, which are

called “functions” and include occasions like weddings or Indian holidays, at a specific community hall in Hermitage. Both the Indian and Korean communities are strongly established and are large and visible in the Nashville area. Although Iranians do not have a strongly established community in Nashville, according to one Iranian non-refugee student, he mentioned that Iranians are geographically concentrated in one specific residential area. Unlike these non-refugee students who were able to describe their ethnic communities in the local area, the refugee students from Somalia, Iraq, and Afghanistan all merely mentioned some of their ethnic communities that they heard are large and visible in larger metropolitan cities such as Los Angeles or Chicago, but not in the local Nashville area.

However, the societal context of reception indicated an important similarity between the interviewed refugee and non-refugee students, unlike the differing governmental and communal aspects previously discussed. The most obvious similarity was the fact that the students were all bearing the potential of being targeted with prejudice because of their non-white immigrant backgrounds as opposed to racially white backgrounds. This finding will be given further attention later in this chapter.

In sum, the mixed mode of incorporation that was largely found throughout interviews draws a big picture about refugee and non-refugee immigrants in three ways. First, from a policy perspective, the U.S. government is more favorable toward refugees as opposed to non-refugees. Second, the ethnic communities are more opportune for non-refugees in terms of the strength of network establishments. Finally, both refugee and non-refugee immigrants bear the same risk of facing discrimination in the society because of their racially non-white backgrounds.

Refugee Students' Unique Experiences from Country of Origin

The most powerful theme that emerged from the interviews was the refugee students' resilience in the face of life-historical adversities that were clearly distinguishable from the non-refugee immigrant students' experiences. When prompted by questions about their current life in and the original motivation for coming to the United States, all refugee students frequently responded in relation to their past experiences by describing and comparing/contrasting their U.S. experience to the harsh life conditions and experiences from their countries of origin. This was not observed among the non-refugee students. For example, when questioned if she had ever felt embarrassed by her parents or family in the United States, a refugee student who expected to attain a bachelor's degree in nursing responded,

Most of the time they [the student's parents] understand many things because we have lived with different people from different countries in refugee camps. Almost 20 countries all over the world. Not actually over the world, but parts of Africa... Foreign people live in their own way over here. So it's natural.

In response to the question of why he came to the U.S., a refugee student from Iraq recounted his difficult situations while attending secondary school and the school's inappropriate curriculum:

My school was far, five kilometers. I walked because I had no money to pay for the car. For middle school and high school. Six years I walked everyday five kilometers. I have two brothers couldn't attend school because they couldn't walk. They left school and stayed home. Then they went to Iraqi army. Saddam Hussein take anyone who no school to the army. We had army classes in high school. Everyone had guns and the teachers. We go out and exercise on the guns. It was very very bad for all.

This student further said that he expected to attain a doctoral degree in electrical engineering in the end. He started attending a four-year university to obtain a bachelor's degree in the following semester, just as he said during the interview during the previous semester when he was still attending the community college.

Refugee experiences included not only general difficulties in schooling, but

also life-threatening incidents in their lives. A refugee student who was from Afghanistan, told such a story about facing severe hardships in his home country and in the refugee camp of a neighboring country. He described how he lost his father at the age of four soon after his family escaped to Pakistan from an outright fear of death by the Russian army:

Russians came and my father escaped before we came to Pakistan. Then he was feeling bad and he got sick. I think it was depression or those things. He was not able to go back to where he lived all of his life. So he could not tolerate it and finally he died.

The historical time period of Russian attack and the Mujahedin's fight for independence of Afghanistan during the 1990's was closely embedded in the story of this student. Despite the loss of his father at a young age, he continued to be an enthusiastic student who was consistently motivated in his academic endeavors. He described how he loved going to school and was motivated to challenge himself:

I went to a school, which was for those without fathers... And I loved being at school... From the very start, I never had a classmate in the same age as me. I was four years old when I start my school... I have good memories of the school... We also had a chance to study during summer at school. So in ninth grade, I did three-month summer school and I passed all my subjects. Those classes were just for preparing for the next semester, but I passed them all. I studied hard those summer time and I was taking challenge. That's why I forwarded two years in graduation.

His account of the living conditions in the refugee camp while attending school illustrated a severe environment for children to overcome. He said, "We had houses from clay... We didn't have electricity all the time... Especially for summer, we had electricity partially. Three or four hours in 24 hours. Some people even didn't have it at all... I can't never forget those nights which was summer night. It was very very hot. Those bugs stinking everywhere." However, an unexpected statement followed after his description of the refugee camp. He said, "But my childhood which was in Pakistan I'm happy that I got educated there."

The significant impact of war on the lives of the refugee students in their countries of origin is evident throughout the interviews, while non-refugee students recalled no such incident. A refugee student from Somalia recounted why her family escaped to Kenya when she was little:

Clashes started before I was born. So my mom just moved around, but we came to Kenya when I was very young... People were fighting. There were two groups fighting. So there was a big civil war. That's what they call.

Whether it was a civil war within a nation or an international war in which several nations were involved, the interviews revealed that any warring country is not capable of providing its citizens with basic necessities, including safety. The interview with the refugee student from Iraq sufficiently demonstrated this notion:

I come in here [the United States] as refugee with my brother. He was work with a US army. Then our life became dangerous... Everyone work with the American, they kill him because they help, they think, American in our country. They say America is the enemy, our enemy, because when they entered to our country, they destroyed anything, you know what war is to do. We have two war with United States. Yes, first 1990 and the second 2003... Two million Iraqi killed until today. Four million left Iraq to neighbor, to Jordan, to Syria, to Europe, to Australia, to United States, all over. Very very dangerous. No electricity, no water in Iraq. Everything became very very bad.

The overall impression conveyed by the refugee students during the interviews was that they were richly knowledgeable about the history of their home countries. One factor seemed to be the fact that they all had lived through unending wars as if those wars had been a part of their daily life. In contrast, during the interviews with the non-refugee students, they did not discuss the history or the current sociopolitical situations of their home countries.

Family Acculturation Patterns

Various Acculturation Patterns Regardless of Immigrant Status

The interviews demonstrated a full range of the three categories of acculturation patterns between students and parents. As previously explained in Chapter 2, family acculturation patterns were classified into three categories in this study. *Dissonant acculturation* takes place when students' learning of the English language and American ways, as well as their simultaneous loss of the immigrant culture, outstrip their parents'. *Consonant acculturation* is the opposite situation, where the learning process and gradual abandonment of the home language and culture occur at nearly the same pace for parents and students. *Selective acculturation* takes place when the learning process of both parents and students is embedded in a co-ethnic community of sufficient size and institutional diversity to slow down the cultural shift and promote partial retention of the parents' home language and norms. Although the patterns of acculturation among the students and their families were found to be considerably haphazard for a researcher to use them to distinguish between refugee students and non-refugee students, it is noteworthy to examine how individual students' relationships with parents played out in each type of acculturation.

First, three students exemplified dissonant acculturation by recounting conflicts that arose due to the different pace of coming to understand American culture between students and parents. For example, a refugee student shared his experience of inviting an American lady to his home one day. He said, "My mother continuously offered her to eat more after she's done with dinner, and I had to explain to my mom..." He had to explain how the culture of hospitality is different between America and his home country where multiple times of offering food or drink to a guest are considered the norm. A non-refugee student who said that she liked to "follow American ways very much" spoke about an incident at the airport when her parents visited from Korea:

He [My husband] asked, “Do you want to eat bread?” I said, “No, I don’t want to.” There were my mother and my sister there, too. My husband just bought his bread and came back to us without asking one more time or asking my mother and my sister also. So my sister said, “What an attitude...”

She continued and stated, “Such differences... So if those differences clash too often, there is trouble.” Both incidents shared a similarity in that being hospitable or inhospitable entailed different words and actions depending on traditional Asian culture or American culture.

Second, the interview with a non-refugee student demonstrated consonant acculturation in which the student’s learning process of American ways of life seemed to be taking place at a similar pace as his parents’. Upon questioning whether he had ever been embarrassed by his parents because they did not know American ways, his instant response was “No” with confidence. He clearly pointed out that his parents and him together prefer American ways of life in general. He said, “They [My parents] are the same as me.”

Third, the remaining two students evidenced selective acculturation in their relationships with parents. A non-refugee student described how, in regard to whether to prefer American ways of doing things over her family’s own ways of life, it depends on the situation:

You know, like I say to my brother, go hang out with friends, that way they use like US ways, you know. And sometimes if you got some occasions, functions with the family, then they wanna react like Indian ways. So they don’t wanna forget the culture, too.

This kind of bicultural life functioning seemed plausible in the context of the strongly-established Indian local community, which was found to have a sufficient capacity to encourage the preservation of the home culture by providing various venues. While retaining her home language and culture, this student also described how her parents reacted with flexibility to something that was not supposed to be

acceptable in India:

But here I am taking evening classes at college – 6 to 9. So in India my parents, because of religion, they don't let their children to go out late night. Over here they are reacting with me like US people. So they like me come late. I come home almost at 9:30 or almost 10. And they are okay with that. So far I fulfill my study goal, they are good with that.

Another student who evidenced selective acculturation similarly responded that it depends on the situation as to whether to prefer American ways of doing things over her family's own ways of life. She explained the significance of her mother's prior position that she held in her home country:

My mother was also a community over there. She was a woman support group leader. So they [my parents] don't do anything that ever make me embarrassed. Foreign people live in their own way over here. So it's natural.

Although this student was a refugee from Somalia and did not have a strong co-ethnic community in the area as the student from India, her responses indicated a high level of retention of home language and culture. For instance, she was wearing a white head scarf during the interview and said that she wears it at all times.

Regardless of the types of acculturation patterns, almost all students complimented several aspects of American ways of life. A refugee student who demonstrated dissonant acculturation referred to clarity in communication and self-dependence as such aspects of American culture:

Some of it is like being very straight, being very clear... In Nashville I find out that most of the people and communities are more independent... They don't need to have relations with with... like your second or third cousins. Everyone lives for himself or his family. Maximum like brother and sister. But in back home, you have to take care of your cousin's cousins... there is everyone.

Another student who was a non-refugee and demonstrated dissonant acculturation in her family stated, "You know American people do not usually use tricks. They always like to follow step-by-step instructions."

The themes of clear communication and self-dependence repeatedly emerged

in other students' interviews, which demonstrated consonant or selective acculturation patterns. A non-refugee student described recording documents as a method of clear communication: "I think everything in United States is "write", write it down, write down everything... You know what, you know, what they expect you to do." A refugee made a contrast between her home country and the U.S. by saying: "In Africa you will not feel self-dependent yourself. But now here you got school and all other responsibilities. Those things make me proud." Although the pace of coming to a point of understanding American culture between students and parents varied by interviews, all students clearly distinguished what aspects of American culture they preferred.

Obstacles and Social Capital

Overall Welcoming College Atmosphere with Subtle Discriminative Experiences

Both refugee and non-refugee students felt welcomed at Nashville State Community College. Regardless of the students' immigrant status, they pointed out the school's open admission policies, financial aid, and considerate acts of its faculty as examples of being welcomed. The following statements provide some examples.

As one refugee student said,

I believe Nashville State Community College is a very good college for those who are newcomers. It's easy to get admitted, it has lots of kind of benefits, I mean based on financially and these things. It doesn't give you a hard time to get enrolled. Even like they help first semester whoever comes they don't ask for all kind of paper work. They give you a chance until next semester. ... And I know whoever comes from a poor country, mostly they are unable to go expensive colleges. So I always encourage them to go here even if I don't have paper work I mean my documents. I say 'Don't worry. They're gonna admit you.'

Another student with non-refugee status still said, "I use the financial aid. It was

really helpful because without that I couldn't continue my education." A refugee student described how he felt welcomed at school by considerate acts of one faculty member:

Like Mr. McKenzie, as soon as he learned that I'm Afghani, well there is a chance for you to make extra money if you want with a company. Little Planet it's called. Have you heard of that? It's uh... a small office of uh... probably literature work and these things. Mr. McKenzie works for them somehow. So I went there many times and talked to them to do translation into my language. I mean he didn't have to find me, but he did a favor. I appreciate it.

However, whether they were refugee or non-refugee, all students responded that they needed more interaction with native English-speaking students. At the same time, some of them expressed concerns in befriending American students. As one non-refugee student said,

But it's hard to get talk with Americans. Maybe I have this experience. But uh... I don't know much about their culture. So I can't connect with them. I don't have any friends American.

A refugee student described his observation of his friends who had taken college-level classes outside the ESL program:

Because some of my classmates who has taken uh... like regular college classes I've seen them they mostly have foreigner students as friends. Because we somehow understand each other, but I believe mostly Americans cannot make friends faster with foreigners. Because for them it's hard to accept another culture. Not hard but something very unfamiliar. But foreigners, because they are foreign it's easy.

Besides the two students quoted above, the other students mainly reasoned that the lack of interaction was due to a structural issue, that is, all ESL classes were comprised of foreign students with limited English proficiency. Therefore, most of them considered such a lack of interaction as temporary and something that will cease when they begin taking regular college-level classes or when they transfer to a four-year university.

At the individual level, both refugee and non-refugee students experienced no

direct discrimination against them at school or in the community. As one refugee student said, “It might be due to their short lengths of residence in the United States”. Despite their responses of no direct discrimination, one refugee student and two non-refugee students recalled subtle discriminative encounters because of their limited English language proficiency. One refugee student said,

Nothing very serious, but uh... We stopped by gas station. I asked the lady about some stuff there, “What are these?” She explained but this southern accent is little hard for me to understand. So I asked her again. Anytime I don’t understand I say “Would you please repeat it?” She didn’t feel very good about it. It’s not disrespect, but not very good interest in men, since since uh... shortage of understanding. Probably, mostly because of language.

As opposed to the refugee student who thought such a discriminative act did not originate from disrespect, another student demonstrated the ambiguity in people’s true motives. As a non-refugee student said,

Although they do not say bad words to me, you can tell from the person’s face if he or she looks down on you. Rather than racial or ethnic reasons, it’s more of language issues, in my opinion. But who knows, the person might have behaved like that out of racial or ethnic reasons. But I still think the language part is more significant in discrimination.

However, while the obstacle of discrimination due to language issues was found to be subtle, a new element emerged as an explicit obstacle for the students – a lack of time to be invested more in academics or community involvement. Such a lack of time was mainly due to employment. Except for two students, both refugee and non-refugee students were working full-time or part-time to contribute to their family income while attending school. As one student said, “I don’t have all those times to go out and get information [on community activities or organizations].” Only one student was not working at all due to her own decision and no need for additional income for her household. Another student was not working although he earnestly sought employment.

Co-ethnic Friends, Teachers, and Family as Resources

Both refugee and non-refugee students throughout interviews described how their close friends from the same ethnic group were helpful in finding a school and job. For example, a refugee student was able to obtain information about college from a lady from her Somali community in Nashville. They became friends while working at the same food manufacturer. A non-refugee student described that an Indian woman who was the wife of a motel owner and who had provided a job and a place to stay for her family was “like a friend”. Another refugee student also narrated the detailed advice that he received from his co-ethnic neighbor about living in America:

I remember start of 2009, or maybe late 2008, one of the people came in the masjid [mosque in Farsi]. He said, ‘My son, I will give you an advice or suggestion whatever you are expecting because I’ve been here for 20 years or something. I learned something for those who come new. You can live in this country in three ways. The first option which most refugees in California – they don’t study, they don’t work, they just live in the composite of their own, and they have car and they can eat with food stamp and all these things, and they have small kind of salary or something. ... Which is the worst to my knowledge the baddest.’ And then he said, ‘Second is work hard for five years day and night, don’t have any kind of vacations, don’t have any kind of happiness, just working working working working for five years til you make some money and you start your business, they your life will be gone, but for your children, you will have something. They will live at least like a normal family, normal child in the United States. ... The third way is ... Get a degree in this country. And then you will have a easier life.’ And he said, ‘This is the most I like.’

This account shows how immigrants sometimes categorize themselves and advise newcomers based on their categorizations. Whether they were refugee or non-refugee students, most of the students had one or more close co-ethnic friends whom they could rely upon for making educational and career decisions despite the absence of strongly-established communities for some ethnic groups.

Not only co-ethnic friends but also ESL teachers at Nashville State Community College were found to be important resource persons to whom the students turned for their educational guidance. For instance, a non-refugee student

said that her ESL teacher was a good person to talk to about her education because her teacher was also learning nursing, which was the student's field of interest for further studies. She also mentioned that her teacher was "very friendly" and that they sometimes chatted on Facebook.

Finally, when they were asked what they found to be most helpful for adjusting their life to America, all three refugee students (but only one non-refugee student) answered "family". They all recounted that they could not come to the United States nor attend school without the support from their families.

Expected Outcomes

Educational Expectations

Overall, the refugee students had higher expectations than the non-refugee students in their educational endeavors. All three non-refugee students expected to obtain a bachelor's degree in their field of study. Two of the three refugee students expected to receive a doctoral degree and the other a bachelor's degree. Both refugee and non-refugee groups' expectations also matched those of their parents.

Furthermore, the whole process of educational assimilation among the students did not necessarily play out as the original conceptual framework predicted. The two refugee students whose families had low levels of education and language ability, as well as the experience of difficulties in their war-torn countries of origin, demonstrated dissonant acculturation patterns in their families. Unlike the original prediction of confronting obstacles of subtle discrimination and time constraints without any support, these students' obstacles were confronted with the support of family and co-ethnic friends'. Both students expected to obtain a doctoral degree in

their fields of study. In contrast, the non-refugee student whose families brought high levels of education and English language proficiency from their country of origin presented selective acculturation patterns in her family. Although she was within reach of strong family support and ethnic networks in the local community, she expected to obtain a bachelor's degree in nursing. Overall, individual student interviews revealed that the process of immigrant students' educational assimilation did not seem to take a linearly segmented path as the original model expected.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to frame and interpret the findings of this study by unpacking and applying the major concepts from the literature review to the specific findings of this research. In other words, this chapter addresses how we expand our understanding of refugee and non-refugee student experiences in community colleges. First, cultural capital is redefined and its development in the students' country of origin and in the United States is discussed. Next, the difference between students' perceptions of school and community in general and individual encounters with school and community receptivity is addressed. Last, the significance of social capital in terms of connections with co-ethnic friends, teachers, and family is illustratively analyzed.

Cultural Capital: Pre- and Post-Migration Development

The invaluable significance of cultural capital nurtured in the family context came across clearly in student interviews. Cultural capital, as defined in the literature review, refers to family-mediated values and outlooks that facilitate access to education. Student interviews largely revealed a weak relationship between family SES background and educational expectations for both refugee and non-refugee students. This supports the body of literature on this topic, which indicates that factors other than SES background may be more extensively impacting the educational expectations of non-white minority students, including students with an immigrant background (Qian & Blair, 1999; Kuo & Hauser, 1995; Hanson, 1994; Kao & Tienda, 1998). One of these "factors other than SES background" was found to be certain

aspects of cultural capital that were often nurtured through family values and relationships. As discussed in the previous chapter, virtually all of the students who were interviewed spoke about various ways in which their family members had regularly encouraged them to continue their education. These accounts signify the high value that these students' families consistently placed on education and the high level of trust the students placed on their family members and their support. According to previous research, such aspects help promote the students' educational expectations and their eventual attainment by specific means of motivating them, monitoring their behaviors, and most importantly, developing close, supportive relationships that enable open communication within the family (Perreira et al., 2006). This notion of close family relationships might have a profound contribution to the cultivation of the high levels of educational expectations that were found among the students. Interestingly, these high expectations levels were found despite their relatively low family SES backgrounds overall.

However, a unique form of cultural capital emerged more extensively during the interviews with the refugee students, most of whom expected to obtain a doctoral degree in their fields of study, than with non-refugee students. This particular form of cultural capital was the refugee students' resilience that was developed in the face of life-historical adversities that were clearly distinguishable from the non-refugee immigrant students' experiences. Such resilience in educational pursuit was found to be mainly developed through difficult life conditions and experiences in the refugee students' countries of origin. This finding concurs with the literature that immigrant students manage unique skills such as a general resilience in the face of hardship and obstacles and convert them into a cultural capital that leads to educational success (Trueba, 2002).

My hypothesis supported the belief that resilience may be a significant asset to immigrant students from not only Latino groups as previous studies found (Trueba, 1999; 2002), but also from diverse ethnic groups. As a Somali refugee student who expected to obtain a bachelor's degree in nursing responded as described in the previous findings chapter, I observed that despite the harsh life situations in the refugee camp, this student's experiences with diverse people in the camp were now serving as resources for understanding to assimilate with different people in the United States. Trueba (2002) names such a skill of immigrant students as "the ability to cross racial and ethnic boundaries".

Another account of a refugee student who was from Iraq (as previously described in the findings chapter) demonstrates that this student valued school attendance more than his brothers did even though the school curriculum included inappropriate components such as shooting with guns. Although this student disliked a certain part of the curriculum, he continuously embraced the importance of going to school by walking five kilometers every day. The possible relationship between the students' high educational expectation and the active development of resilience in his or her home country links to the literature addressing the likely conversion of a resilient experience by a student into cultural capital that may benefit their educational success, as previously discussed.

The last refugee student who was from Afghanistan also described how he loved going to school and was consistently motivated to challenge himself in academics. This motivation was in the midst of the loss of his father at a young age while living in a refugee camp with difficult conditions:

I went to a school, which was for those without fathers... And I loved being at school... From the very start, I never had a classmate in the same age as me. I was four years old when I start my school... I have good memories of the school... We also had a chance to study during summer at school. So in

ninth grade, I did three-month summer school and I passed all my subjects. Those classes were just for preparing for the next semester, but I passed them all. I studied hard those summer time and I was taking challenge. That's why I forwarded two years in graduation.

After this student further explained the details about the living conditions in his refugee camp while attending school, he made the following statement, which was an unexpected one: "But my childhood which was in Pakistan I'm happy that I got educated there." He then formed his face into a grateful smile. Such an account concurs with Johnson and colleagues (2001) who relate the extent to which a student is attached to school to the student's high educational expectation. This student later enrolled in a four-year university for the following semester as he mentioned during the interview while he was attending the community college. He expects to eventually obtain a doctoral degree in architecture.

In sum, the difference in motivations of coming to the United States between refugee and non-refugee students was clearly seen throughout the interviews. All refugee students were largely motivated to come to the United States by "push" factors in their countries of origin such as war and safety-related issues. All non-refugee students were brought by "pull" factors such as an opportunity to unite with families or to study English. Compared to refugee students, overall higher human capital and more advantageous family structure among non-refugee students and their families placed them in a better position for educational assimilation in the United States. However, refugee students were not found to be without any means to assimilate successfully. They were found to be incorporating a unique form of cultural capital, namely resilience, which was often developed from hardships and obstacles in their countries of origin. This resilience was seen through continuing and expecting to achieve high levels of education in the United States.

Welcoming Climate At Large and Subtle Individual Discrimination

Supporting evidence for the increasing attractiveness of community colleges for immigrant students, as seen in the literature review (Szenlenyi & Chang, 2002), came across clearly in the student interviews. The students described several institutional policy aspects of community colleges as “welcoming”. However, not only institutional but also interpersonal components seemed to be at work for students to perceive the school climate as “welcoming.” This was evident regardless of the students’ immigrant status. Both refugee and non-refugee students reported the school’s open admission policies, financial aid, and considerate attitudes of their teachers as examples of being welcomed. As one refugee stated,

I feel welcomed the way they handle people. The way teachers welcome students in class, the way they answer you questions willingly, all those things I feel comfortable. I say I’m respected fully. I’ve never seen anybody interfering with my culture. Nobody.

The attitudes of teachers in the classroom that were described by this student draw a contrasting picture with what previous researchers observed in some schools with refugee populations. As described in the literature review, Goldstein (1988) observed that teachers were more concerned with classroom order than with paying attention to the educational assimilation of the Hmong refugee students. Lee (2002) also observed that the mainstream teachers felt no responsibility for the refugee students, setting aside that role to ESL teachers. Overall, there was no evidence that the college institutional policies were perpetuating the marginalization of any group of refugee or non-refugee immigrant students.

Furthermore, a greater structural context, that is, the current U.S. government’s policy of treating refugees as legal immigrants, seemed to contribute significantly to the refugee students’ general perception of being welcomed. This is similar to the case of Cuban refugees who were originally from low socioeconomic

classes and were able to form strong ethnic community resources thanks to the U.S. government policy receiving them as legal refugees with financial and social support in the 1980s (Perez, 2001).

Despite the students' responses of no direct discrimination, student interviews indicated that most of the students perceived English language proficiency as the main issue for the minor experiences in which they felt subtly discriminated against. Although these incidents occurred in the community rather than on campus, the reported attitudes of these people in the community partially resembled those of the teachers, students, and school personnel observed in previous studies (Trueba et al., 1990; Lee, 2002). A recent study about diverse refugee students found that attitudes of school personnel and school policies viewed languages other than English and cultural differences as deficiency (Gitlin et al., 2003). As one refugee student responded,

Not discriminated if it means disrespect or something, but I would say there are some kind of ununderstanding, misunderstandings, which happen. If I go to a store, there are, especially when you go out of Nashville, where the people are not mostly in contact with foreigners, they don't understand you. ... And they don't give you lots of attention if they don't understand you.

Such a statement confirmed the main theme of the literature regarding discrimination, that is, discrimination at the individual level often had roots in people's misunderstanding of cultural differences, or at least their lack of interest in knowing the difference.

Social Capital: Co-ethnic Friends, Teachers, and Family

The initial idea of blending the influence of various forms of capital, which was adopted from the new assimilation theory (Alba & Nee, 2003), into the segmented assimilation process (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001) in designing the original

conceptual framework of this study was found to be reasonable. Student interviews largely revealed that the main factors impacting the students' decisions about their education and career were these different forms of capital, especially cultural and social capital. Specifically, social capital in this study was defined as the ability to acquire access to resources by reason of the connections between individuals or membership in social networks and other social structures (Coleman, 1988).

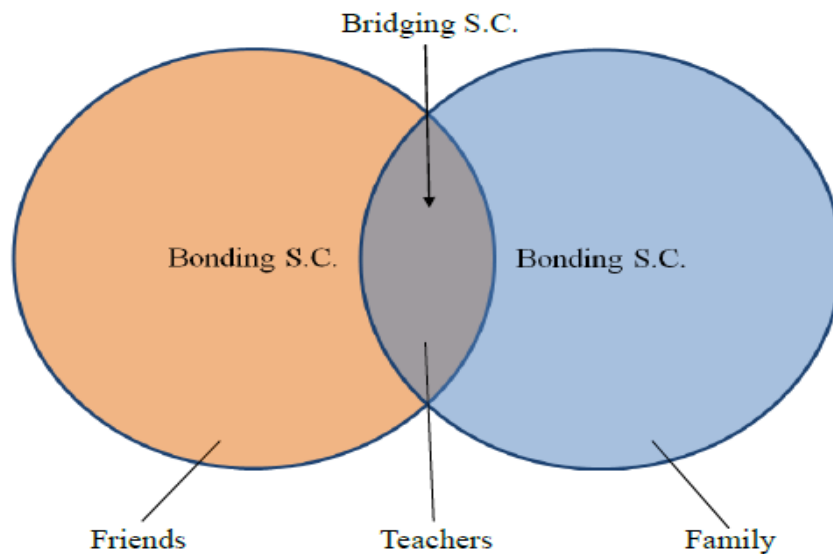
Student interviews revealed that various aspects of social capital may possibly serve as a cushion in the face of obstacles such as unwelcoming climate, individual discrimination, and time constraints for family survival. As previously discussed in the findings, the obstacle of time constraints that are placed on students because of their multiple obligations for family survival were found to be explicit while the obstacles of unwelcoming climate and individual discrimination were found to be subtle. This particular finding partially resembles a previous study's finding that refugee students were often dually discouraged by discriminative attitudes of students and teachers at school and the need of working full-time for family survival while attending school (Suarez-Orozco, 1989). A partial difference is that the students in the current study experienced subtle discriminative attitudes from the people in the community instead of school.

This notion of various aspects of social capital serving as a cushion appears to confirm some important themes from the literature on immigrant social capital. First, ethnic community networks seem to be a key source in confronting, or at least preventing, obstacles to successful educational assimilation, as previously discussed (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). Recalling the findings on the prevalence of the students' turning to co-ethnic friends for advice on their educational and career decisions, we observe that ethnic community networks provided these students primarily with what

Haynes (2000) identifies as “bonding” social capital, which bolsters distinctive identities of an ethnic group. However, the students’ co-ethnic friends also served as “bridging” social capital by connecting the students to external assets and information on education and work in the United States (e.g., informing them about a certificate program offered in the community college or introducing them to a co-ethnic employer for job).

Second, teachers seemed to play a significant role in facilitating socialization and educational assimilation of both refugee and non-refugee students, as previously argued in the literature (Hones & Cha, 1999; Trueba et al., 1990). All six students mentioned their ESL teachers as important resources for educational guidance. This shows that teachers provide both refugee and non-refugee immigrant students primarily with “bridging” social capital by guiding their decisions with necessary information. However, the interviews showed that teachers served as a source of social capital through not only being information-driven resources but also interpersonal resources for friendship. Such a finding was contrary to other studies, which previously found that students who were already struggling with cultural changes and an unfamiliar language had to also work to overcome the impact of their teachers’ negative attitudes (Fisher et al., 2000; Ogbu, 1982; Olsen, 2000; Wingfield & Karaman, 2001). According to the student interviews, their teachers at Nashville State Community College largely demonstrated the main theme of the literature, which was that teachers with a deep understanding about their students can provide protective social capital for the students’ educational assimilation.

Figure 2. Bonding and bridging social capital (S.C.) for immigrant students



As an extension of the discussion about teachers' roles in students' educational assimilation, the findings helped to draw a diagram that illustrates the "bonding" and "bridging" aspects of social capital among all actors – co-ethnic friends, teachers, and family. As seen in Figure 2, friends from the same ethnic group and the student's family can provide both aspects of social capital by being grounded on ethnic networks. However, the diagram depicts a uniquely strategic position that teachers can possibly hold in providing students with bridging social capital that is overlapped by both the student's friends and family. The position is a mediator role in which teachers can give objectively informed educational guidance to immigrant students while listening to the students about the perspectives of their friends and family. Through helping students synthesize and analyze their own perspectives, their co-ethnic friends' and family's on their education, teachers can give useful guidance by either confirming students' directions or advising that they revise them upon reviewing relevant information. Teachers may fill the void for immigrant students whose friends and families do not have access to information and strategies that enable them to adequately advise students about pursuing education in the United

States.

Although co-ethnic friends and teachers had a similar level of significance for both refugee and non-refugee students, the importance of family seemed to be greater for refugee students than for non-refugee students. This may be due to the level of human capital of refugee students and their families, which is generally low when they resettle in the United States, as previously observed. Thus, the weight placed on the family because of refugee students may relatively increase the bond among the family and cause them to reach out to outside resources. Another supporting evidence may be the lack of ethnically distinctive types of businesses that are currently established in the local area for refugees. In contrast, most non-refugee immigrants have their own established communities and businesses that are geographically and interpersonally accessible in the area. For example, student interviews revealed that most Iranians are involved in car businesses and that Indians own Subway sandwich shops in the area. Many Koreans run dry-cleaning shops and house-keeping companies. These businesses serve as hiring pools for their ethnic communities. However, refugees often work at Tyson Food in the area of meat packaging.

In sum, the role of teachers at school, as well as ethnic networks, was found to be important in confronting potential obstacles to educational assimilation for refugee and non-refugee students alike. The significance of family for such confrontation was found to be greater among refugee students than among non-refugee students. Furthermore, different family acculturation patterns were not found to be necessarily translated into certain ways of addressing obstacles, as the segmented assimilation theory originally suggested. For instance, ethnic community social capital was found to be important not only for the students with consonant and selective acculturation, but also for those with dissonant acculturation. Teacher social

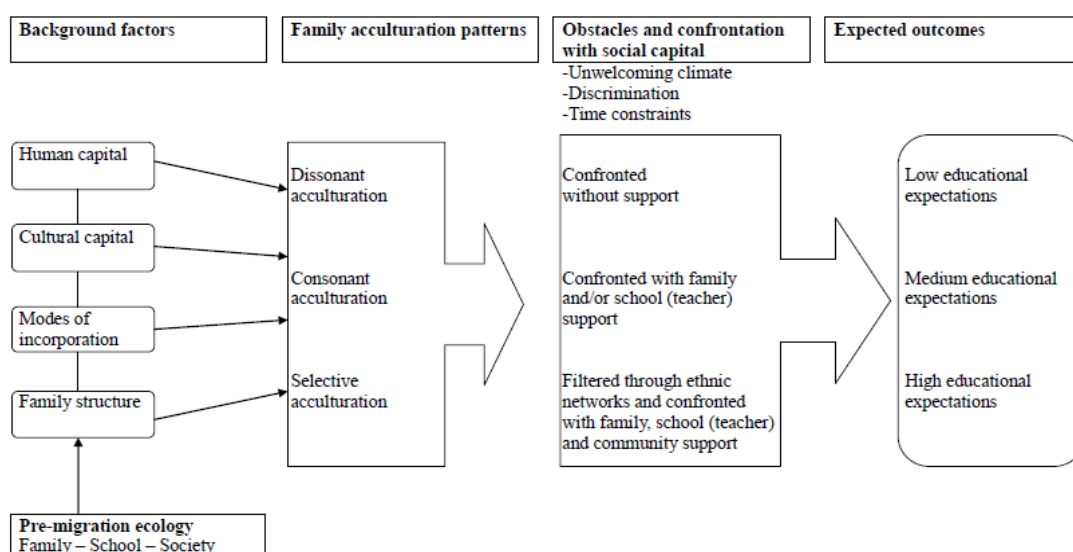
capital was found to be important for virtually all students regardless of their family acculturation patterns.

CHAPTER VI

DESIGN REFINEMENT

The current pilot study with six individuals, including three refugee students and three non-refugee students, suggests that there are four important points to consider in revising the conceptual framework for a full-scale future study. First, my main suggestion is to include the student’s pre-migration ecology as a base in the general conceptual framework (see Figure 3). The student interviews revealed that life-historical contexts were especially critical to understanding the educational assimilation of refugee students since their past traumatic events such as war, loss of a family member, poverty, and life at refugee camps from their countries of origin had a paramount impact on their and their families’ decisions to come to the United States in the first place. This also relates to the development of a unique form of cultural capital – resilience – that was extensively observed during the interviews with refugee students. This particular form of cultural capital was found to be developed primarily through difficult life conditions and experiences in the refugee students’ countries of origin.

Figure 3. A revised conceptual framework: The process of segmented educational assimilation



Second, an additional obstacle facing immigrant students is that of time constraints that are placed on students because of family survival demands. Third, it is recommended that the role of teachers be highlighted as an avenue of school support for students. Fourth, it is also recommended that the shape of the arrows between the areas of family acculturation patterns, obstacles and confrontation, and expected outcomes be changed from multiple segmented arrows (see Figure 1) to two conclusive arrows (see Figure 3). By doing so, one can flexibly expect any of the three outcomes from any one type of family acculturation pattern instead of following a rigidly-constructed roadmap for the educational assimilation process. As discussed in the findings and discussion chapters, overall, the interviews revealed that the process of immigrant students' educational assimilation did not seem to take a linearly segmented path as the original conceptual framework predicted.

Regarding the interview protocol, it is advisable to revise the protocol so that there are additional sets of questions in two additional dimensions – i) students' pre-migration ecology with respect to family, school, and society; and ii) students' interactions and relationships with teachers. During the interviews with refugee students, the section about the students' and their parents' background factors was often extended in length and depth to explore their pre-migration life events and concerns. In order to explain how some refugee students have higher educational expectations than non-refugee students, particularly in spite of the lower human capital that the refugee students bring, not only the process of segmented paths in the host country but also in the home country, may merit further study. Whether they were refugee or non-refugee students, all students mentioned their ESL teachers as important resources for educational guidance. More detailed interview questions about students' interactions with their teachers will shed light on how students'

relationships with their teachers develop into a source of protective social capital for immigrant students' educational assimilation.

As a result, the following set of questions about students' pre-migration ecology was added to the introductory section following the ice breakers in the original interview protocol (see Appendix C):

Pre-migration ecology

- Where are you from originally?
- Why did you decide to move from your country to America in the first place?
- How did you find out about the way to come to America? Can you describe the steps of moving from your country to come here?
- What did you know about the United States before you came here?
- Can you describe what your life was like back in your country? Can you specifically describe your family life? School life? Friends? Teachers?
- What did you like most about your school there? What least?
- What was the society as a whole like in your country? Any political problems? War? Social issues? Religious issues?
- Was your life in your home country any different from your life you had as child? If so, in what ways?
- How different do you feel about your life here in America compared to where you lived before moving here?

Furthermore, the following set of questions on students' interactions with their teachers was added to the section about social capital toward the end of the interview protocol (see Appendix C):

Student interactions with teachers

- When was the last time you talked to a teacher about your education? What

did you talk about exactly? With who?

- Do you ever talk about school or work with your teachers? What do you talk about specifically?
- How much do you participate in the classroom by asking questions or talking to your teachers?
- Do you ever go to your teachers' office hours? If so, how often and for how long does the meeting usually take place?
- Do you have a favorite teacher? If so, who and why?
- Do you ever think it is sometimes better to talk to your teachers about something rather than talk to your close friends or family? If so, examples?

In addition to the main points of revision as described above, the questions throughout the interview protocol are to be rephrased in a more concise way. There were some instances in which students did not understand what certain vocabulary meant during the interviews. Such vocabulary included “discrimination”, “influenced”, “illegal”, “dispersed”, and “geographically”. The interview questions are therefore to be rephrased with easier vocabulary in simpler sentences (see Appendix C).

In conclusion, the revised study design with a modified conceptual framework and additional sets of and rephrased interview questions will help clarify the differing processes of educational assimilation between refugee students and non-refugee students to a greater and clearer extent in a full-scale future study. Through such a larger study, one will be able to target a greater number of immigrant student participants in multiple community colleges so that the researcher can contribute to a more generalized picture of immigrant students' process of educational assimilation.

APPENDIX A: STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

Pseudonym	Aziza	Mahdi	Housyar	Soheil	Dayita	Songyi
Age	20	27	22	30	21	31
Sex	Female	Male	Male	Male	Female	Female
Country of Origin	Somalia	Iraq	Afghanistan	Iran	India	Korea
Immigrant Status	Refugee	Refugee	Refugee	Permanent Resident	Permanent Resident	Permanent Resident
Length of U.S. Residency	1 yr 2 mo	1 yr 3 mo	2 yrs	1 yr	2 yrs	3 yrs 6 mo
ESL Level	Medium (3)	Low (2)	High (5)	Low (2)	High (4)	Medium (3)
Years of Former Education	10 yrs	16 yrs	17 yrs	13 yrs	13 yrs	17 yrs
Father's Education	High School	Middle School	Bachelor's	Master's	Bachelor's	High School
Mother's Education	High School	Middle School	None	Master's	Bachelor's	High School
Student's Educational Expectation	B.S. Nursing	Ph.D. Electrical Engineering	Ph.D. Architecture	B.A. Accounting	B.S. Nursing	B.A. Art
Parents' Educational Expectation for Student	B.S. Nursing	M.D. Medicine	Ph.D.	B.A. Accounting	B.S.	B.A. Art

APPENDIX B: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (ORIGINAL)

Research question

How does the process of educational assimilation differ between refugee students and non-refugee immigrant students in community colleges?

Conceptual frameworks

Segmented assimilation theory; forms of capital; obstacles of refugee students; educational expectations

Ice breakers

- How long have you been enrolled in Nashville State Community College (NSCC)?
- What is your academic goal at NSCC?
- How long have you lived in America? Nashville?

Background factors

Human capital (self)

- What brought you to America? NSCC?
- Where are you from originally?
- How many years of education did you have before coming to NSCC?
- What is your native language?
- How well do you speak and understand it? How well do you read and write it?
- How well do you speak and understand English? How well do you read and write English?
- If any, what kind of work experience did you have before coming to America?
- Do you currently work? What kind? Where? How many hours per week?
- What is the highest level of education that you would like to achieve?

Human capital (parents)

- Do you live with your parents? If not, where do they live?
- What is the highest level of education that your father completed?
- How well does he speak and understand his native language? How well does he read and write it?
- How well does he speak and understand English? How well does he read and write English?
- What was your father's occupation in your home country? What is it now?
- What is the highest level of education that your mother completed?
- How well does she speak and understand her native language?
- How well does she read and write it?
- How well does she speak and understand English?
- How well does she read and write English?
- What was your mother's occupation in your home country? What is it now?
- What is the highest level of education that your parents want you to get?
- Do you or your parents own or rent the house or apartment where you now live?

Modes of incorporation

- **Governmental:** Do you know if most (ex: Sudanese) in America are refugees/asylees, legal immigrants, or illegal immigrants?
- **Societal:** (Note) Prejudiced (nonwhite immigrants) vs. Neutral (white immigrants)
- **Communal:** Are there any concentrated (ex: Sudanese) ethnic communities that you know are large and highly visible in America? Is there a similar community in Nashville? Can you describe what those communities are like?

Family structure

- With whom do you live right now?
- Do you have family in your home country? Who?

Family acculturation patterns

- (Scenario) Linda and Luis are both students whose parents are foreign-born. Linda says: "I am sometimes embarrassed because my parents (family) don't know American ways." Luis says: "I am never embarrassed by my parents (family). I like the way they do things." Which one comes closest to how you feel? Could you share with me examples of times you felt either way?
- Do you prefer American ways of doing things? Can you give any examples?
- How about your parents (family)? Do they prefer American ways of doing things? Examples?
- Were there any times you got in trouble because your way of doing things is different from that of your parents (family)?
- Are you involved in any activities or with any organizations in your ethnic community here in Nashville? America? What kind of activities? How often do you participate?
- How about your parents (family)? What kind of activities are they involved? How often do they participate?
- Does anyone in your ethnic community talk to you about living in America? Who? What kind of conversations have you had? Have you been influenced by those conversations? How?
- How about your parents (family)? Does anyone in your ethnic community talk to them about living in America? Who? What kind of conversations have they had? Have they been influenced by those conversations? How?

Obstacles

Unwelcoming climate

- Do you feel welcomed at NSCC in general? Could you share with me examples of times you feel welcomed (unwelcomed)?
- How much do you feel respected for your native language and culture by students at NSCC? By teachers and staff at NSCC? Can you share with me some examples?
- How much do you feel that refugee and immigrant students have learning opportunities in which they can interact with native English speaking students at NSCC? Can you describe further?
- Do you think that people from (country of origin) are welcomed in Nashville? America? Examples?
- Do you think there is much conflict between different racial and ethnic

groups in America? Examples?

Discrimination

- (Background) There is much written about discrimination against immigrants and nonwhite people in this country. I sometimes read newspaper articles about it. There is also a long history of racial discrimination between black and white in this country.
- When I say “discrimination”, what does it mean to you?
- Have you ever felt discriminated against since you came to America?
- If yes, could you describe your experience to me? What happened? By whom did you feel discriminated? How did you feel? How did you respond?
- What do you think was the main reason for discriminating against you?
- If something similar to your experience happens again in the future, how would you respond differently or similarly?

Cultural capital and social capital

Family and community resources

- Does anyone in your family talk to you about continuing your education? Who? What kind of conversations have you had? Have you been influenced by those conversations?
- Does anyone in your ethnic community outside your family talk to you about continuing your education? Who? What kind of conversations have you had? Have you been influenced by those conversations?
- Could you describe your ethnic community? Where do people usually gather? Shop? Eat out? Live? Is your community concentrated in one area or dispersed geographically?
- What do you like the most about your community?
- What kind of jobs/occupations do people in your community usually have?
- (Scenario) Who would you call if your car broke on the way?
- (Scenario) Who would you talk to if you were financially burdened?
- (Scenario) Who would you talk to if you have questions or need advice for your education?
- How close are people in your community to each other in terms of helping out when someone is in trouble? Can you give examples?
- Do parents in your community talk to each other about their children’s education? How?
- Have you used any kind of support services that are available in your ethnic community or in Nashville community in general? For example, medical services, educational support services, employment information, English learning opportunities, or immigration services. Can you describe?
- How did you find them useful for adjusting your life here in Nashville?
- Last question. Overall, what did you find most useful for resettling here in Nashville?

APPENDIX C: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL (REVISED)

Research question

How does the process of educational assimilation differ between refugee students and non-refugee immigrant students in community colleges?

Conceptual frameworks

Pre-migration ecology; segmented assimilation theory; forms of capital; obstacles and confrontation; educational expectations

Ice breakers

- How long have you been enrolled in Nashville State Community College (NSCC)?
- What is your academic goal at NSCC?
- How long have you lived in America? Nashville?

Background factors

Pre-migration ecology

- Where are you from originally?
- Why did you decide to move from your country to America in the first place?
- How did you find out about the way to come to America? Can you describe the steps of moving from your country to come here?
- What did you know about the United States before you came here?
- Can you describe what your life was like back in your country? Can you specifically describe your family life? School life? Friends? Teachers?
- What did you like most about your school there? What least?
- What was the society as a whole like in your country? Any political problems? War? Social issues? Religious issues?
- Was your life in your home country any different from your life you had as child? If so, in what ways?
- How different do you feel about your life here in America compared to where you lived before moving here?

Human capital (student)

- How many years of education did you have before coming to America?
- What is your native language?
- How well do you speak and understand it? How well do you read and write it?
- How well do you speak and understand English? How well do you read and write English?
- If any, what kind of work experience did you have before coming to America?
- Do you currently work? What kind? Where? How many hours per week?
- What is the highest level of education that you would like to achieve?

Human capital (parents)

- Do you live with your parents? If not, where do they live?
- What is the highest level of education that your father completed?

- How well does he speak and understand his native language? How well does he read and write it?
- How well does he speak and understand English? How well does he read and write English?
- What was your father's occupation in your home country? What is it now?
- What is the highest level of education that your mother completed?
- How well does she speak and understand her native language?
- How well does she read and write it?
- How well does she speak and understand English?
- How well does she read and write English?
- What was your mother's occupation in your home country? What is it now?
- What is the highest level of education that your parents want you to get?
- Do you or your parents own or rent the house or apartment where you now live?

Modes of incorporation

- Government: Do you know if most people from [student's country of origin] in America are refugees, OR legal immigrants, OR illegal immigrants? "Illegal" means they do not have any lawful documents showing that they can live here.
- Society: (Note) Prejudiced (nonwhite immigrants) or Neutral (white immigrants)
- Community: Are there any concentrated ethnic communities of your home country that you know are large so you can notice easily in America? Is there such a community in Nashville? Can you describe what those communities are like?

Family structure

- With whom do you live right now?
- Do you have family in your home country? Who?

Family acculturation patterns

- (Scenario) Linda and Luis are both students whose parents were not born in the U.S. Linda says: "I am sometimes embarrassed because my parents (or family) don't know American ways." Luis says: "I am never embarrassed by my parents (or family). I like the way they do things." Between Linda and Luis, which one comes closest to how you feel? Could you share with me examples of times you felt either way?
- Do you prefer American ways of doing things in general? Can you give any examples?
- How about your parents (or family)? Do they prefer American ways of doing things? Examples?
- Were there any times you got in trouble because your way of doing things is different from that of your parents (or family)?
- Are you involved in any activities or with any organizations in your ethnic community here in Nashville? If so, what kind of activities? How often do you participate?
- How about your parents (or family)? What kind of activities are they involved? How often do they participate?
- Are you a member of a church/mosque? How often do you attend services?

- How about your parents (or family)? How often do they attend services?
- Does anyone in your ethnic community talk to you about living in America? Who? What kind of conversations have you had? How have you been helped or not helped by those conversations?
- How about your parents (or family)? Does anyone in your ethnic community talk to them about living in America? Who? What kind of conversations have they had? How have they been helped or not helped by those conversations?

Obstacles and confrontation

Unwelcoming climate

- Do you feel welcomed at your school in general? Could you share with me some examples of times you felt welcomed (or unwelcomed)?
- How much do you feel respected for your native language and culture by students at school? By teachers? By staff? Can you share with me some examples?
- Do you think you and other immigrant students are having enough interactions with native English speaking students at your school? Why?
- Do you think that people from your country of origin are welcomed in Nashville? America? Examples?
- Do you think there is much conflict between different racial and ethnic groups in America in general? Examples?

Discrimination

- (Background) There is much written about discrimination against immigrants and nonwhite people in this country. I sometimes read newspaper articles about it. There is also a long history of racial discrimination between black and white in this country.
- When I say “discrimination”, what does it mean to you?
- Have you ever felt discriminated against since you came to America? In other words, have you had any kind of problems with people at school or in the community because of your skin color, your native language, your culture, or your faith?
- If so, could you describe your experience to me? What happened? By whom did you feel discriminated against? How did you feel? What did you do in response? Whom did you talk to about it?
- What do you think was the main reason for the person to treat you that way?
- If something similar to your experience happens again in the future, how would you respond differently or similarly?

Cultural capital and social capital

Student interactions with teachers

- When was the last time you talked to a teacher about your education? What did you talk about exactly? With who?
- Do you ever talk about school or work with your teachers? What do you talk about specifically?
- How much do you participate in the classroom by asking questions or talking to your teachers?
- Do you ever go to your teachers’ office hours? If so, how often and for how long does the meeting usually take place?
- Do you have a favorite teacher? If so, who and why?

- Do you ever think it is sometimes better to talk to your teachers about something rather than talk to your close friends or family? If so, examples?

Family and ethnic community resources

- Does anyone in your family talk to you about continuing your education? Who? What kind of conversations have you had? How did those conversations have an impact on you?
- Does anyone in your ethnic community outside your family talk to you about continuing your education? Who? What kind of conversations have you had? How did those conversations affect you?
- Could you describe your ethnic community? Where do you do your shopping? How do you get over there? Where do people usually get together? Shop? Eat out? Live? Do people in your community live and work in a specific area or are they spread out?
- What do you like most about your community? Least?
- What kind of jobs do people in your community usually have?
- (Scenario) Who would you call if your car broke on the way?
- (Scenario) Who would you talk to if you were out of money?
- (Scenario) Who would you talk to if you have questions about or need advice for your education?
- How close are people in your community to each other in terms of helping out when someone is in trouble? Can you give examples?
- Have you used any kind of support services that are available in your ethnic community or in Nashville (e.g., medical services, educational support services, employment information, English learning opportunities, immigration services, etc.)? If so, how helpful were they?
- Overall, what or who did you find most useful or helpful for restarting your life here in America?

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