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THE EDUCATIONAL AND OCCUPATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF SUDANESE REFUGEE YOUTH IN AN AMERICAN PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL IN THE MIDWEST

by

Anne Omwango Kiche

An Abstract

Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in
Educational Policy and Leadership Studies
in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

May 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Professor David Bills

ABSTRACT

Research on the educational and occupational aspirations of U.S. youth born in Africa is not only rare, but some studies have assumed that these immigrants are a monolithic group. However, they differ in experiences according to whether they are refugees, asylum seekers, or voluntary immigrants coming from various countries in Africa. These immigrants also come from different countries with different ethnicities, cultures, religions, and races. This case study makes such a needed distinction based on a small sample of high school students from Northern Sudan who lived in a small Midwest U.S. city. Diversity in ethnicities and cultures not only affects educational and occupational aspirations but also impacts how the aspirations are formed, maintained, and achieved. The Sudanese refugee youth who participated in this study had high educational and occupational aspirations, with all of them aspiring to obtain a college degree and some intending to achieve careers in medicine, dentistry, law, and engineering. These high aspirations were backed by high academic scores. Almost all students in this study came from well-educated families despite their current low socio-economic status (SES). Their current SES and minority status (MS) did not seem to affect their aspirations and academic performance. This study showed that educational and occupational aspirations are formed when students have strong social support from parents, significant others, teachers, peers, and their community, all of whom influence and reward high educational expectations and enforce the students' cultural obligations.

Abstract Approved: _____
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May 2010

Thesis Supervisor: Professor David Bills

Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

Anne Omwango Kiche

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies at the May 2010 graduation.

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To my family

My dad (baba) Hannington Ondiek Omwango, my uncle David Edger Omwango, and my baby sister Aska Akumu (Pachanga), even though you are no longer with us I know you are watching over me. May God rest your souls in eternal peace.

To my mom Rael Omollo Omwango, you are an inspiration to me. I learned to work hard by observing you. You were the very first person who taught me to read and write. I will be forever indebted to you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the past 30+ years, the United States has experienced a flow of immigrants from Africa coming either as refugees or as those who voluntarily leave their country of origin. Some of the reasons for their coming are attributed to economic conditions; educational opportunities; reuniting with loved ones; and civil war, political turmoil, and instabilities in various parts of the African continent (Arthur, 2000; Apraku, 1991; Balch Institute, 2001; Bean & Bell-Rose, 1999, Takougang, 1995).

The number of African refugees admitted to the United States has steadily increased since 1980 (Takougang, 1995). During the period 2003-2004 (U.S. Admissions Program), more than 138,000 African refugees were admitted to the United States for permanent resettlement. Although the majority of those admitted were from Somalia with 43,000 and Ethiopia with 37,000, other countries with high numbers of refugees included Sudan, Liberia, the Congo, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Angola. By 2007, the number had increased to 1.4 million, with the majority coming from Nigeria, Egypt, and Ethiopia (Terraza, 2009).

In recent years, the U.S. refugee program has grown more diverse in terms of both locations where refugees are processed and nationalities that are admitted to the United States. There is no indication that the refugees plan to leave the United States in the near future. Most of the refugees come with their children, who attend U.S. public schools.

Researchers have often monolithically grouped refugees coming from various countries in Africa to the United States with no distinction of nation of origin or even race. Yet, Rumbaut (1998) argued that when given the opportunity to indicate their race, only 45% of all immigrants from Africa reported themselves as Black, 44% as White, and 8% as Asian. This study makes a distinction by concentrating on refugee youth from the Sudan to examine the different ways they adjust in U.S. public schools.

Sudanese refugee youth, like other immigrants, attend U.S. public schools where they are expected to integrate and perform like native-born citizens, even though some may lack the knowledge needed to fully integrate as has been determined among some immigrants (Contreras, 2002). These students face different challenges because they are now in a new environment where the style of teaching, the language used, the curriculum and how it is taught, and communication skills may be different from what is familiar to them (Igoa, 1995, Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2002). Refugee youth circumstances may be complicated even further for those who have spent time in refugee camps and who may not have received the kind of education that they needed in order to fully integrate into the U.S. education system. Like other refugee youth, Sudanese refugee youth may have suffered physical and emotional trauma from wars in their home country. According to Lutheran Immigration Services (2005), many refugees have limited resources after they arrive and are therefore forced to live in poor neighborhoods. The report further stated that many of the refugees also face discrimination in the United States. However, when given the opportunity to come to the United States with or without their parents, Sudanese youth have hopes and dreams just like other immigrants seeking freedom and opportunities, widely recognized as the American promise.

Newspaper articles have discussed the fate of 20,000 Sudanese orphaned boys from Southern Sudan known as the “Lost Boys” who fled their country’s ongoing civil war and walked thousands of miles across the desert toward Kenya. Many of the Lost Boys did not survive the journey and, for those who made it, 4,000 were relocated to the United States. Some of these boys described America as “heaven” (Washington City paper, May 6, 1990, and March, 2004; River Front Times, August, 2004; The Scanner, Seattle Edition, September, 2002; Dallas Observer, April 1, 2004). Other Sudanese youths have come with their parents, who fled from Sudan to Kenya or Egypt and were processed and relocated to the United States. All of these children have enrolled in U.S. public schools.

As with any other teenagers, puberty for these students is a period in which they become self-acquainted. They become aware of how they are regarded by others, how they fit into the big picture, the way things are, and the way they would like things to be (Suarez-Orozco, Suarez-Orozco, & Todorova, 2008; Watson, 2002). In addition to dealing with the risks that face teenagers in the United States, many of these refugee youth have to assume adult responsibilities to assist their families in adjusting to the new environment (Lutheran Immigration Services, 2005).

Statement of the Problem

The desire to go to college in the United States has increased from a minimal 22% in 1958 (Morland, 1960) to about 80% (Kao & Tienda, 1998) in recent years. One other outstanding result from studies of academic aspirations achievement of youth in the United States is the convergence in educational aspirations and outcomes in recent years, but gaps in educational achievement remain across different groups despite growing aspirations among U.S. youth to attain college education. Researchers' who have attempted to explain these gaps in aspirations and academic achievement among different groups have identified and tested many factors. The strength of these factors in enhancing educational aspirations and academic achievement is mixed and not uniform across gender, diverse U.S. ethnic groups, and different immigrant youth (Columbia, 2005; Pinder, 2008; Wiggan, 2007).

The U.S. population is becoming more diverse, and 34% of youth who are 15-19 years old come from minority groups. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (1990, 2000), the proportion of youth from immigrant families in the United States has grown from 15% to 25% (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2002; Zhou, 1997). As a result, the proportion of immigrant students in U.S. schools is expected to increase rapidly in the next few years. According to Suarez-Orozco et al. (2008), 20% of young people growing up in the United States have parents who emigrated from other countries, and it is projected that by 2040, one in every three children will grow up in an immigrant family.

The increase in the proportions of diverse populations in the United States now challenges researchers to revisit the status of educational and occupational aspirations of these newcomers. As refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers from various parts of the world continue to come to the United States in large numbers and generalizations about their behavior and experiences has become a common practice among researchers; however, some of these generalizations may not be valid because of the diverse ethnic and cultural composition of the U.S. population.

Many studies show that the aspiration levels of minority youth such as refugees, immigrants' children, and U.S.-born children of immigrants tend to be higher than that of the native U.S. youth population and that these minority youth also have higher educational performance and attainment (ERIC Digest, 1996-2000; Gibson, 1988; Kao, 1998). Thus, aspirations become important educational capital among minority youth and may compensate for other shortfalls, such as low income, lack of parental support mechanisms, and deficiency in language (Gibson 1988; Vernez & Abrahamse, 1996). In studies that examine this paradox, educational and occupational aspirations have emerged as important factors to consider when explaining academic performance and achievement levels of various groups living in the United States (Feliciano & Rumbaut, 2005; Hernandez & Charney, 1998; Kao & Tienda, 1998; Rumberger, 1983).

Researchers have reported that immigrants' children are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. child population. It is estimated that from 1990 to 1997, the number of children in the U.S., either foreign born or children of immigrants, totaled up to 14 million (Hernandez & Charney, 1998; Zhou, 1997). According to Martin and Midley (1994), the U.S. Congress liberalized immigration policy in 1965, and as a result, not only has the number of foreign-born immigrants increased but also their countries of origin have shifted from Europe to Latin America and Asia among others.

Research has indicated that a majority of these children have Latino or Asian origins, and numerous scholars have discussed in detail the unprecedented cultural and

linguistic diversity in public schools throughout the country. Addressing the needs of "newcomers" in U.S. public schools has become a pressing issue facing educators nationwide. To meet the needs of immigrant children, it is imperative to understand their educational and psychosocial adaptation (Suarez-Orozco, 1987). Over the past 18 years or more, increasing attention has been paid to immigrant children's adaptation patterns. However, one group that has been either ignored or left unexplored until very recently in this literature is African immigrant children. Although there are some efforts to theorize immigration issues among African adults, scholarly work on African immigrant children's adaptation patterns remain scant. My research will focus specifically on African immigrant youth from the Sudan who came to the United States as refugees and are attending U.S. public high schools in a mid-size town in the Midwest.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to understand the educational and occupational aspirations of Sudanese refugee youth in U.S. public schools and to determine how religion, culture, individuality, and their connectedness within their community shaped their aspirations. This was addressed by asking the following three research questions:

1. What are the educational and occupational aspirations of Sudanese refugee youth?
2. How are these educational and occupational aspirations formed?
3. What strategies and plans do these Sudanese youth adopt to help them achieve these aspirations?

Why Sudanese Refugee Youth?

Many immigrants coming to the United States tend to settle in larger metropolitan areas. They may live in poor neighborhoods and attend schools that have limited resources. In other cases, immigrants' children attend schools that are specifically designated for newcomers. The Sudanese youth in the mid-size town that was the site of this study were free to choose which schools to attend. Most of their parents had at least

an undergraduate degree, had a common religion, Islam, and most were from the northern parts of Sudan. Some of their parents had been doctors, lawyers, teachers, nurses, and computer programmers among other professions in Sudan. When they arrived in the United States, these parents lost their professional identities as described above. At the time of the study, most of them worked as manual laborers because their degrees were not recognized in the United States.

Under normal circumstances, immigration to the United States is stressful, but for political refugees like the Sudanese, it includes a process of profound loss. These Sudanese refugee youths came to the U.S. with their parents to regain many of the things they lost in their home country: peace, happiness, and community, among others. Like refugees before them, this Sudanese community may find themselves feeling torn apart. Some may be deeply mourning the loss of their homes, country, and culture, and others desperately struggling to find a place where they belong in the strange new environment. The refugees' sense of loss has been intensified by war-related trauma that they may have experienced. Perhaps their village was destroyed and loved ones murdered, imprisoned, beaten, or separated during the war in Sudan.

Despite all these problems, this group of Sudanese refugees was greatly interested in accessing the U.S. school system. It is in school where refugee children are exposed to the English language, come into contact with other immigrants, and come to know their teachers and peers from the majority culture, and it is also in school where they develop their academic skills and acquire lifelong knowledge needed to fully integrate into their new environment (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2008). Many of the Sudanese teenagers in this study were literate and multilingual, although they spoke languages other than English. They aspired not only to improve their English language skills but also to further their academic training.

Significance of the Study

By giving a voice to these Sudanese refugee youth in U.S. public high schools, this study expands our understanding of their educational and occupational aspirations. It also demonstrates the effect of their religious and cultural perspectives on individuality and connectedness in their development.

Rapid changes in the student population in this mid-size town have caused many challenges for teachers. Understanding the students' background and culture is essential for the students to have a more successful educational experience. Even though these immigrant children were not distinguished by census data, teachers were available in these schools to teach English as a Second Language. However, most teachers were not trained to work with the various cultures and ethnicities of the new immigrant students. This study helps to address questions, such as what experiences the newcomers had prior to their coming to the United States, to assist teachers in better understanding them.

Terminology

In this study, the words "educational and occupational aspirations" are used to mean the levels of education Sudanese refugee youth aspire to attain and the careers they would like to enter when they finish their education. By "culture" is meant the interplay among individual Sudanese youth, their relationships, social context, and institutions. The word "religion" describes their belief in the supernatural that governs their everyday activities.

"Individuality" in this study means personal demographics. "Connectedness" refers to the involvement of parents, siblings, other relatives, and people originating from the same country in the students' academic and occupational aspirations and achievements.

Organization of the Study

This study uses the following framework for description, coding, and analysis in order to provide a richer portrait of the Sudanese refugee youth in U.S. public high

schools. Chapter I, the introduction, covers background information; statement of the problem; the significance of the study; and the objectives, terminology, and organization of the study. Chapter II, the literature review, examines educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant children versus nonimmigrant U.S. youth and the effects of aspirations on academic achievement and career outcomes, discusses three blocks of theories, and concludes with a summary. Chapter III describes the methodology. Chapter IV presents the results and analysis; in this chapter, I describe the Sudanese youth in detail by including the following information: the family theme and background, for example, age, gender, grade, length of stay in United States; religion affiliation; residence; whether they live with both parents; both parents' educational backgrounds; and parents' occupations prior to emigrating and after arriving in the United States. This information is followed by the educational and occupational aspirations of the participants, the formation of educational and occupational aspirations, the strategies employed to achieve educational and occupational aspirations, and a summary. In Chapter V, I summarize the discussion, draw conclusions, discuss limitations, and provide recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Research on the educational and occupational aspirations of students has produced a vast amount of literature dating back to 1960 and earlier. By 1970, there were already 700 articles published on the educational and occupational aspirations of different populations living in the United States (Williams, 1974). Despite numerous studies in this area, there has been a renewed interest in this topic in recent years given the disparities identified in educational and occupational aspirations across different ethnic groups in the United States. Refugees, asylum seekers, and other immigrants from various parts of the world continue to come to the United States in large numbers, and as the proportions of diverse populations in this country increase, researchers are again challenged to revisit the status of educational and occupational aspirations of these newcomers.

In my attempt to depict the status of research on the variation of educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant youth, I created seven categories based on the empirical evidence on the educational and occupational aspirations of U.S. youth and what each study conceptualized as the major factors in the variation in students' aspirations. First, I examine comparative studies on the educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant versus non-immigrant U.S. youth. Second, I focus on the relationship between educational aspiration and academic achievement. Third, I discuss the relationship between socio-economic status, educational aspirations and achievements, and career outcomes. Fourth, I analyze the effects of unequal educational opportunities, discrimination, and stereotypes on aspirations. Fifth, I review how family beliefs, obligations, and cultural assimilation affect students' aspirations. Sixth, I consider studies on the aspirations of youth conducted outside the United States. Finally, in section seven, I use previous sections to derive and summarize the major theoretical

approaches used by researchers in discussing educational and occupational aspirations of U.S. youth.

Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Immigrant and Non-Immigrant Youth in the U.S.

Most research on educational and occupational aspirations of immigrants and refugees is motivated by the need to understand how immigrant students perform in U.S. schools. If they are performing well or poorly, what is it that explains the differences in the aspirations between native-born youth and minority youth from other countries? In explaining the differences in educational and occupational aspirations across ethnic and racial groups, one of the variables that is correlated with academic achievement is aspirations in addition to SES, family structures, support networks, race, ethnicity, and academic tracks and courses taken by immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers' children.

One of the detailed studies that used immigrant status and race as variables in computing the determinants of high school students' aspirations was conducted by Kao and Tienda (1998). This study found that having an immigrant parent had almost ten times the effect of income and three times the effect of income on the odds of attending college. This study did not discuss whether being born in the United States and how long the immigrant parent had stayed in the United States had an effect on the students' aspirations. Age at entry and duration of stay of immigrant parents and children in the United States are important if aspirations are formed earlier and if the cultural assimilation of immigrants affects academic performance, educational, and career aspirations (Fuligni, 1997; St. Hilaire, 2002; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez Orozco, 2002). Fuligni (1997) argued that despite the difficulties associated with being an immigrant, many do not have as much difficulty with school as some researchers portray them, and despite their low socio-economic background, their families are supportive of their children's educational success. Feliciano and Rumbaut (2005), examining educational

aspirations of young adult children of immigrants in California, found the educational aspirations of males to be lower than that of females, who were more likely than males to aspire to and attain the highest status occupations even in areas that tended to be male dominated. Kao and Tienda (1998) showed that in 8th, 9th, 10th, and 12th grades, being a Black female raised the probability of aspiring to obtain a college degree and that results were different for Asian and Hispanic females. Being a Black male was important in forming college degree aspirations in 8th grade, but the effects of being a Black male on college aspirations drastically changed in 10th and 12th grades.

Kao and Tienda (1998) and Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) argued that if immigrant youth enroll in U.S. high schools by the 10th grade, they are more likely, compared to the native-born students, to choose courses that will enable them to pursue a college education. They further suggested that immigrant students are more likely to follow an academic track and take advanced courses in math and sciences. Vernez and Abrahamse (1996) acknowledged that there are variations among immigrants of different racial and ethnic groups just as there are variations among natives. Academic performance as an indicator of preparation for college showed that Asian immigrants generally performed best followed by Black immigrants, with Hispanic immigrants in the lower range. These authors further stated that immigrants are more likely to plan to go to college and report working hard to achieve goals they have set for themselves. The value placed on education as a means to upward mobility is often high among immigrant youth (Taylor & Harvey, 2005), given that immigrant parents have high expectations for their children.

Relationship between Educational and Occupational Aspirations and Academic Achievement

Studies attempting to explain the formation and maintenance of educational aspirations among youth may infer that high educational aspirations are important or necessary for high academic achievement and career success (Covington, 2000; Kao &

Tienda, 1998). Although studies have agreed with the proposition that educational aspirations and academic performance are highly positively correlated, the correlation does not explain how aspiration translates into education, and as such, the mechanisms of how aspirations influence educational performance remain debatable. This problem is compounded when the same variables are positively or negatively correlated with both the educational aspirations and the academic achievement of students. Although most of the empirical studies have stressed the fact that educational aspiration levels are strongly correlated with academic achievement of youth, only a few studies have shown that educational aspirations have a positive influence on academic achievement among these youth (Fuligni, 1997; Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999). In contrast, some studies have shown that academic achievement influences education and outcomes influence occupational aspirations (Alwin & Otto, 1977; Kao & Tienda, 1998). Sewell, Haller, and Straus (1957) reported that a child's intelligence had a strong effect on his or her aspirations and achievement, which was independent of the education of the child's father or mother. The education of both parents, however, boosted aspirations first by the parents' ensuring that the students were in good standing academically and second through encouragement and planning for college. Overall grade scores like GPA, math, or English language scores influenced aspirations (Taylor & Krahn, 2005). Kao and Tienda (1998) found that repeating a grade lowered expectations and aspirations for a college degree when students were in 8th and 10th grades. Fuligni (1997) and Fuligni et al. (1999) found that academic attitudes such as the value of high grades, especially in math and English language, were correlated with high educational aspirations.

Other authors, including Suarez-Orozco (1989) and Valdez (1998), suggested that reward structures such as a high GPA or class rank are not confined to classrooms. Rewards for high academic goals and values can be realized by the student, the family, and the community, and are equally important in motivating students to set higher goals and to achieve them. Performance and learning goals, whether in competency,

understanding, and performing academic tasks, can be driven by self-interest to outperform others even if it is at the expense of others. Although this theory is achievement driven, it helps explain the strong positive association between learning goals and school grades. To realize self-worth, status, and success in a society or in the eyes of parents, young students will consider the measures of education that reflect these rewards and will set their educational and career aspiration to match these expectations. As parents help define these rewards to their children, and with their support and motivation, students are likely to set high aspirations. The relatively low aspirations among Black and other minority youth can be explained by the lack of information about college entrance requirements and career options and the uncertainties in monetary reward structures after completing college (Kao & Tienda, 1998).

In addition to a student's abilities and talents, school and family resources, and learning technology, setting educational and occupational goals by a student is almost equivalent to setting minimum parameters of motivation, effort, and drive. Aspirations (or expectations) are a set of social and academic goals that students, parents, teachers, or education agencies establish to obtain student-specific desired educational and career achievements. Students, parents, and teachers may collaborate to set or influence specific academic goals for a student, but sometimes students are driven mainly by their own desires in setting educational aspirations.

Aspirations have been found to play an important role in educational and occupational outcomes (Sewell & Shah, 1968; Sewell et al., 1969), but other studies have also reported that academic abilities and achievement influence aspirations in early school grade levels (Williams, 1972). Qian and Blair (1999) found that overall academic performance had some effect on educational aspirations of African Americans but a greater effect among White, Hispanic, and Asian students. Some mixed results were obtained when different ethnic groups were considered. The level of past education decreased the educational aspirations of Mexicans but increased that of Cubans (Portes,

MacLeod, & Parker, 1978). The development of strong academic scores in math and English language at an early age was important. It sent a signal regarding the amount of effort and resources the student and their parents needed to invest to set specific academic goals during the students' middle and high school years. Lopez and Stanton-Salazar's (2001) study of second-generation Mexican Americans in San Diego showed that students had high hopes of attending college, with 67% of the U.S.-born and 57% of foreign-born students aspiring to attend college. Their GPA scores positively and strongly correlated with amount of homework, parents' help with homework, teachers' help with homework, friends' help with homework, self-esteem, and family cohesion (Covington, 2000).

Effects of Socio-Economic Status on Educational and Occupational Aspirations and Academic Achievements

Socio-economic status is an index often computed using different weight for parents' education, occupation, income, wealth, home investment, resources for education, and the neighborhood. Kao and Tienda (1998) found that social economic status was the single most important factor in students' establishing and maintaining high aspirations throughout high school. Kao and Tienda, therefore, concluded that Blacks and Hispanic students were less likely to maintain their aspirations throughout high school because they came from families with lower social economic status. Kao and Tienda (1998) stated that early aspirations of minorities were less concrete than those of White and Asian students. They further argued that Hispanic and Black students were not as informed as White and Asian students about exploring options for college and therefore had less concrete occupational goals. Alwin and Otto (1977) found that a school's socio-economic context had positive effects whereas a school's ability context had negative effects on aspirations. Students' ability in a high-ability school had a depressing effect on aspirations because of high competition; an individual's performance was depressed by other students' high academic performance, thus lowering their

aspirations when compared to students in low ability school contexts. The school context variables were obtained from averages of SES, gender, and ability variables. In the second stage, social influence variables such as parents' encouragement, teachers' encouragement, and peers' college plans were considered. These two variables in turn affected students' aspirations. But the authors also maintained that variables like school context, gender, SES, and academic ability had direct effects on aspirations. The difference between this approach and other approaches was the use of the school context variables and consideration of social influence and academic certification as intermediaries.

Kao and Tienda (1998) analyzed how educational aspirations were formed and maintained from 8th through 12th grades. Two theories addressing why Hispanic and Black students had lower educational aspirations than White and Asian students were used. The status attainment theory stated that if White students had a higher SES than minority students, they would have higher educational aspirations. The second theory, blocked-opportunities, postulated that minority students tended to form oppositional attitudes to the mainstream culture based on high educational aspirations and expectations. Students with such attitudes were more likely to have lower aspirations than those attempting to maintain high aspirations.

Incomes and parents' knowledge can be used to create home learning resources. At school, the availability of classroom resources and an environment conducive to learning produces better educational outcomes, which ultimately push students ahead. High socio-economic status (SES) is expected to lead to high educational outcomes and vice-versa, but blocked opportunities due to legal sanctions and education policies like tracking, discrimination, and stereotyping, tend to pull students backward academically, thus sustaining a low SES in following generations.

One school of thought has argued that resources and opportunities for education explain much of the differences in educational outcomes. According to this idea, parents

who are educated and have high incomes can foster strong educational values and ethics and raise the academic expectations of their children. Does the ability to afford learning resources currently and in the future raise the aspirations of the child, and if so, how? The presence of better learning opportunities at school and at home is expected to enhance educational aspirations of students through their academic achievement. The variable, home education resources, performs better than parents' income in explaining college aspirations among 8th-grade students (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Through investments in education, parents can signal to their children the value they place on the academic attainment of their youth, and with encouragement and family support, aspirations of the youth are formed and shaped. But parental encouragement and high educational aspirations are not rooted in family income and ability only.

Sewell and Shah (1968) found that SES influenced students' aspirations indirectly and did not explain much of the variance in aspiration levels. They also found that students from a lower class with a lower SES aspired to achieve high educational goals despite their status. If SES played a role, then it must be the case that lower-class parents are disproportionately investing more of their limited resources in the education of their children to match the aspiration levels of students with a high SES background. Otherwise, there are variables within the family, such as their values and expectations, and the activities parents and their children engage in, which create an environment of high hopes, aspirations, goals, support, and encouragement. Hanson (1994) examined the extent to which gender, race, and class explained losses in talents due to reduced aspirations, lowered expectations, and unrealized expectations, and found that White students and males were more likely to have losses in their talents than non-Whites. A high level of family and school resources are important only if good use is made of them. Hanson (1994) concluded that non-Whites were likely to convert their available resources into maintaining high expectations. However, race created some differences in aspirations when SES was taken into account. Having a lower SES twice increased the

risk in loss of a talent perhaps due to the divergence between expectations and realized academic achievement. Race and gender showed positive signs regarding the possibility of loss in a talent in early periods of schooling but negative effects in later schooling years. Factors that led to variation in losses of talents among young women and young men had unequal effects on aspirations and expectations of females and males. Factors such as locus of control, friends, educational values, and scores in standardized math tests were more important in females' aspirations than in males.' In addition to these variables, mother's and father's expectations and their age at birth of first child had some negative effects on aspirations (Green, 2008; Kao & Tienda, 1998).

Qian and Blair (1991) found that SES had a significant effect on academic attainment of White high school students but not on that of minorities. Parental status was also more important for White students' than for African-American students' academic attainment. The authors found academic performance to be a significant factor in the determination of the students' aspirations, but the effect was weaker when compared to other groups. However, in explaining aspirations, Qian and Blair (1999) found family income to be an important factor in increasing aspirations for Whites students only. The effect of parental education was mixed. If parents had high school or college degrees, aspiration levels of their children did not increase until or unless their parents had a Ph.D. or equivalent, but for the African-American students, the effect of parents' education was both weak and not statistically significant. The effects of parental involvement were about the same for Whites, African Americans, and Hispanics, but were almost half as effective among Asian students. Family income was important only for Whites. From Qian and Blair's (1991, 1999) studies, it appears that students' educational aspirations are not well explained by their parents' income and education, but by their parents' actual (and perceived) aspiration levels and involvement. The effect of SES is weak and indirect; otherwise, poverty would be expected to lead to low educational aspirations. While controlling for variables like SES and family background,

much of the variation in levels of aspirations, especially across different ethnic groups, remains to be explained.

Qian and Blair (1991) found that SES had a significant effect on academic attainment of White high school students but not on minorities. Parental status was also more important for White students' than for African-American students' academic attainment. They found academic performance to be a significant factor in the determination of aspirations, but the effect was weaker when compared to other groups.

Some researchers concluded that students' socio-economic background and teachers' expectations about them were two main factors contributing to the gaps between African-American, Latino, Asians, and White students. Low educational expectations among poor students and some races as mirrored by teachers seemed to be problematic. This was echoed in numerous studies (e.g., Green, 2008; Pinder, 2000; Walton & Cohen, 2007). The claim that poverty is associated with low educational aspirations has been discounted by evidence of high educational aspirations and expectations among immigrant youth who are disproportionately represented in low income brackets.

Effects of Unequal Educational Opportunities, Discrimination, and Stereotypes on Educational and Occupational Aspirations

The blocked-opportunity theory is intended to explain low educational outcomes of minority youth, especially Blacks, and has also been used to explain high educational outcomes of some immigrant populations, especially Asians, who instill strong educational values and commitment to achieve higher grades, anticipating that their children will face occupational discrimination (Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; MacLeod, 1987; Ogbu, 1992) and that they have to achieve at high levels to have an opportunity to succeed (Mickelson, 1990; Sue & Okazaki, 1990).

According to McBrien (2005), cultural misunderstanding can cause prejudice and discrimination, which in turn may complicate matters for students who are already struggling with language barriers and cultural changes in their new environment. Furthermore, educators find it challenging to teach refugee, asylum seekers, and immigrant children in classrooms with limited resources and may not be well equipped to handle the newcomers. Teachers who are not well trained to handle or understand the difficulties and experiences of refugee children may misinterpret the students and their families, thus causing other problems (McBrien, 2005). Students who grow up in an environment where there is racial discrimination and hostility may have a long-lasting effect on the way they perceive themselves and socialize with others. This may decrease their motivation to complete their schoolwork along with other negative consequences (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). African-Americans may be more race-conscious than class-conscious possibly because they are concealing their attitudes and aspirations so as not to be mistaken as "acting white" (Gibson, 1991) or due to their own experiences and that of others in their neighborhoods regarding job opportunities and employment. They may see lack of equal opportunities with Whites and may believe that high levels of education are not helping their people equally (Ogbu, 1994).

Behnke, Piercy, and Diversi (2004) studied Latino youth ages 11-16 and their parents using a small sample of 10 families obtained from an after-school program. Only students from families with both male and female parent figures were selected because the researchers wanted to study the aspirations of both parents and the effects on their children's aspirations. Some of these families had recently arrived in the United States and some of their children had attended school in their country of origin. About half of the parents could report the educational and occupational aspirations of their children, but many of these parents had high aspirations for their children. Only 2 students out of 20 aspired to go to college. Parents' explanation for lack of knowledge about their students' future education included lack of time due to demanding work schedules and long hours

at work, lack of information and understanding about ways and procedures of developing high aspirations, lack of English, and low levels of education. The youth shared with their parents the problem of lack of information regarding achieving desired careers. About half of the students were very much concerned about racism at their schools and in their local communities. They reported that teachers ignored them even if they were the first to raise their hands, and teachers did not want to answer their questions. These students thought that teachers believed in White people more than in them, and the students had lost trust in their teachers. Fellow students laughed at them when they attended school. Thus racism, low English proficiency, and difficulty with their homework resulted. Students also had problems identifying occupations and careers they were interested in, and 4 out of these 10 families had no knowledge about careers they wanted or thought their children wanted.

The mismatch between high educational aspirations and low academic performance found in other studies of African Americans contradicts Qian and Blair's (1999) results. If an increase in academic performance does not translate into high aspirations as in other minority and White students, low academic performance among African Americans is expected to be associated with even lower academic aspirations, unless other factors exert stronger effects. Mickelson (1990) and Ogbu (1992) argued that such high aspirations occur when a student mimics the dominant theme of going to college but may not actually show strong academic performance. The aspirations of these students cannot be discounted as less concrete based on the gap between aspirations and academic performance, because among African Americans, academic performance has not been an effective factor in explaining college aspirations. The gap due to low academic achievement may not be related to exaggerated aspirations but with other variables that work to their academic detriment. Ogbu (1992) and others argued that Black students develop attitudes that oppose scholastic development. This claim has

been refuted by in-depth studies that tend to show that high aspirations reflect optimism (Kao & Tienda, 1998).

In a focus group of Black and Hispanic students in Chicago, Kao and Tienda (1998) examined the "oppositional academic attitudes" and "acting white" phenomena[1]. Discussions with Hispanic students did not reveal "oppositional identity," the peer pressure to perform poorly suspected among Black students, but it is not yet clear how strong the concept "oppositional attitude" is among Black American youth according to the quotation from Kao and Tienda (1998). The "acting white" concept did not appear to persuade many students to abandon the pride and esteem associated with high academic achievement but may exist among a few Black students

Kao and Tienda (1998) found that aspiration levels of Black youth declined relative to other ethnic groups, even though it was higher in the 8th grade. They contended that previous research exaggerated the extent to which negative experiences such as discrimination, lack of language skill, poverty, immigrant status, and inequalities in education resources have impacted the aspirations of youth from these groups, because minority students tend to overcome their social risk and barriers by overachieving academically (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Asians appear to have high aspirations and attainment. Blacks have high aspirations levels, but their attainment and achievement are relatively lower than that of Whites and Asians. Some authors also have maintained that the value of education to Black women and men is very high. Their aspirations are also

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[1] Moreover those who perform poorly are ridiculed by fellow students. This notion also assumes that Black students have a monolithic view of White students' scores and that they disregard low scores by White students in their perceptions and only see high mean scores to be associated with Whites. They are either blind to the distribution of grades in their schools or brainwashed to believe the "acting white" hypothesis. Evidence of Black students' scores in upper percentiles and existence of White students' scores in lower percentiles by any measure weakens the association between high scores and Whites. The question then is whether Black students are aware of the relative distribution of grades and performance of other students in their classes. And if they are, then they are aware of the academic performance of other minorities and immigrant youth who perform just as well or better than that of some White students (Personal communication with an African-American graduate student, 2007).

high because they see education as a way to overcome the effect of racism (James, 1993). Although family income, parents' education, home resources, and immigrant status are important to the likelihood of graduating from college, the effects of these and other variables on the aspirations of females and males have been shown, but whether these variables affect immigrant and non-immigrant youth in a similar manner has not been studied, despite findings that immigrant status increases aspirations to graduate from college (Kao & Tienda, 1998).

Apart from pre-existing risks like low SES and inadequate language skills, minority and immigrant youth often face discrimination in their schools and their communities. Immigrant youth are disproportionately represented in lower tracks when English language ability is used as a measure to stratify students (Donato. Menchaca, & Valencia, 1991). Extensive studies on track placement indicate that this practice has a more negative effect on the achievement of lower track students than on those in middle and high tracks. The morale, behavior, and attitude toward learning of lower track students are often affected negatively unlike higher track students, who are given the opportunity to enroll in college preparatory courses and who show higher academic achievement, higher aspirations, more self-worth, and lower high school drop-out rates (Ansalone, 2001; Hallinan, 1988). James (1993) suggested that exposure to systematic racism and blocked opportunities in careers goals by African American youth limit their confidence and optimism. Recent immigrant students may be sorted to lower ability tracks if English language scores are used. Inequalities in returns on investments in education arising from discrimination in the labor market and financial barriers to college can create disillusionment. Tracking may interfere with student relations in terms of who becomes their friend. As high ability students get sorted and separated, any learning benefits to be gained by interacting with others is reduced. Buchmann and Dalton (2002) studied the effects of peers and parental influence on high school students in 12 countries

including the U.S. In 6 countries where the education system was undifferentiated, parental attitudes had strong effects on students' aspirations.

Effects of Family Beliefs, Obligations, and Cultural Assimilation on the Educational and Occupational Aspirations of Immigrant Youth

Most studies come to the conclusion that explaining differences in aspirations among ethnic groups requires some knowledge about family aspirations and cultural beliefs in general. Many cultures from Asia, South and Central America, and Africa are different from the dominant U.S. Western culture. Ideal Western culture tends to emphasize individual autonomy and freedom, independence, and individual rights, and tends to reward individual achievements rather than group success (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Spence, 1985). Minority immigrants, however, tend to hold a collectivist view, with an emphasis on group or family authority and interdependence among family members. The adaptation of these youth to the dominant U.S. mainstream culture often conflicts with parents' beliefs and cultural values. But because parental aspirations and expectations are very high and strongly held, such cultural conflicts have not significantly affected the educational aspirations of immigrant children. Asian American children buy into their parents' expectations and value good grades in order to satisfy their parents. They also want to express their commitment to assisting their families in the future by preparing for high-income careers (Fuligni, 1999; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998).

Most Asian and Latin America cultures emphasize collectivism in which the goals and interests of the family group are paramount; children are often asked not to disregard family needs at the expense of their own and to respect authority. As part of family obligations, students are expected to participate in chores like shopping for food; cooking meals; caring for other members of the family; and joining family members in daily meals, holidays, and special events like graduation, weddings, and anniversaries. Although these activities are typical of other American households, Asian and Latin

American families attach great value to them and expect their children and other family members to spend a considerable amount of time on these obligations. All members of the family are expected to support each other and engage in home maintenance, support living together or in close proximity, and care for their elderly. The adolescent autonomy found in most other American households is not welcome. Fuligni et al. (1999) and Fuligni (1997) classified these family obligations into three categories of current assistance, respect, and future assistance. These studies showed curvilinear relationships between different levels of the three variables and educational aspirations. Medium levels of each of these three variables were associated with higher aspirations.

Taylor and Krahn (2005) found that parents' aspirations for their children had a strong positive effect on their college aspirations, producing a high probability of 69%. Household income, school engagement, and peers had moderate effects, while family structure, language first learned, and parental supervision had very little effect on the probability of aspiring to obtain a university degree. Immigrant parents expected their children to be responsible for their daily schooling activities such as homework and school plans, take care of their younger siblings, and help their parents with brokerage. Most mothers also talked to their children about education using storytelling and sentiments to motivate and encourage their children to study hard (Lopez & Stanton-Salazar, 2001). A study by Davies and Kandel (1981) found that the encouragement of parents through their perceived aspirations had stronger effects than peer students' plans and influence.

The hopes of youth tend to remain high in the first generation but decrease in subsequent generations (Fuligni, 1997; Fuligni et al., 1999). Statistical tests show that as the length of stay of an immigrant family in the United States increases, educational aspirations of parents and their children decrease (Fuligni, 1997; St. Hilaire, 2002; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2002). The U.S. Department of Education's (Baker & de Kanter, 1981) report on bilingualism concluded that bilingual students had below-

average scores in English skills and other academic subjects. Rumbaut and Portes' (2001) survey of high school students in San Diego (California) and Dade County (Florida) showed that there was a negative correlation between length of stay and GPA and aspirations. Duration of stay in the United States is expected to improve English reading skills and academic performance among those who have stayed longer in the U.S. and among second generation children of immigrants, but surprisingly this is not the case. Lopez (1996) found that the proportion of students who were monolingual increased with the number of generations, and some studies indicated that an increase in generations was associated with low aspirations and academic achievement. Fuligni (1997) found that first- and second-generation students from East Asian, Latino, Filipino, and European backgrounds had higher mathematics and English grades compared to natives with similar backgrounds. The argument of the positive effect of monolingualism on academic achievement does not hold when the length of stay of an immigrant is considered. Many studies (Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Fernandez & Nielsen, 1986; Matute-Bianchi, 1986; Sung, 1987; Tienda, 1984) later showed that bilingualism was associated with higher academic achievement. Zhou (1997) concluded that each language is deeply rooted in its culture and its use involves a host of other complex cultural undertakings. Speaking a native language allows better communication between parents and children, and better utilization of cultural instruments like praise, persuasion, and storytelling to augment positive emotions and family pride, which translate into self-esteem and identity.

As students try to be proficient in their native language and in English, both their English language and math scores improve, which in turn increases and reinforces their aspirations. Better English language skills allow immigrant children to interact well with non-immigrants at school and in their communities to obtain the best of both worlds.

Risk factors like community size, household income, and parents' education seem to explain very little of the variation in educational aspirations of youth. Taylor and

Krahn (2005) concluded that "the educational values promoted within visible minority immigrant families appear to leave a mark on young people in these families and may assist them in dealing with some of the barriers they may face within the education system." The hopes of teenagers can be raised by their parents and their friends. Taylor and Krahn (2005) found strong correlations between aspirations and teenagers' own school involvement, friends' school involvement, and parents' own aspirations. Hanson (1994) also found that having friends who value education reduces the chances of losing talents better than variables like gender and SES.

The effect of religion on aspirations and academic achievement is not widely studied according to cases I reviewed, but Qian and Blair (1991, 1999) found that being Catholic raised the educational aspirations of White students but reduced the aspirations of African-American students.

Some International Comparisons

In recent years, research on educational aspirations has been redirected toward explaining the gaps in aspiration levels between Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and White youth. Although there are a few studies of aspirations of immigrant youth of African descent from the Caribbean, it is hard to find studies on aspirations of immigrant youth from the diverse cultures of Africa. Studies have often assumed that family structures and cultural orientation are insignificant in explaining the variation in students' educational aspirations. Variables like family income and parents' education, expected to be powerful in understanding aspirations and academic achievement, are weak predictors of aspirations among ethnic and immigrant populations.

Much has been said about cultural beliefs and values carried by immigrants to the United States, but the education parents and their children obtained in their country of origin may have some relevance to parents' and students' educational and career aspirations in the United States. Social inequality or education policy can have effects on students' aspirations at an early age. A student can benefit from "catching on effects" or

"school context effects" (Alwin & Otto, 1977) due to competition and interaction with high-ability students. Tracking or ability groups is a widespread phenomenon in U.S. schools (Ayalon & Yuchtman-Yaar, 1989; Buchmann & Dalton, 2002). In other countries, tracking does not begin early at the elementary school level but is used in secondary schools and colleges where students are sorted to different institutions of higher learning based on their abilities at different stages. This stratification based on academic abilities has a very strong effect on student' aspirations regarding higher education, and neither peers nor parents' attitudes has a strong effect.

Taylor and Krahn (2005) found that Canadian visible-minority immigrant youth were very resilient and placed a high value on education as a means toward upward occupational and income mobility. Among the poorest households with less than $30,000 in Canada, 75% of the youth aspired to obtain a college degree. The aspirations of these immigrant youth was higher than the average, with 79% of them hoping to attend college compared to 57% of the Canadian-born minority. Factors such as gender, family structure, parents' education, household income, overall grades, college preparatory courses, and region and community size accounted for only about 13% of the probability that a student aspired to obtain a college degree, decreasing it from 79% to 66% and further factoring out parents' school involvement, parents' education and parents' supervision reduced the chance by another 7% to 59%. The key point here is that parents' aspirations for their children had a strong positive effect, producing a high probability of 69%. Household income, school engagement, and peers had a moderate effect, whereas family structure, language first learned, and parental supervision had very little effect on the probability of aspiring to obtain a university degree.

Dandy and Nettelbeck (2002) studied youth from Chinese, Vietnamese, and Anglo-Celtic families in Australia. The authors were interested in the relative effects of IQ, aspirations, study time, and ethnicity on math achievement. Controlling for IQ, which had the strongest predictive power for all groups, the variable ethnicity seemed

correlated highly with aspirations more than with study time but was seen as an ethnic-related variable. They concluded that motivational variables such as study time, homework, and aspirations can enhance math scores and that stereotyping by teachers regarding math abilities or complex social and motivational factors, such as effort, parental expectations, and attitudes, may also enhance achievements of students with Chinese and Vietnamese backgrounds, given that IQ failed to predict differences in math achievements across these three groups.

Matomela (1997), studying high school students in South Africa, found that class rank and age were positively correlated with educational aspirations, and the two other variables, mothers' and fathers' education, had insignificant positive effects on aspirations but had the greatest potential to increase students' aspirations in the country. In Kenya, the education system is hierarchical, elitist, and highly unequal (Wellings, 1982). Proceeding to high school is often associated with high academic abilities, which generates high educational and occupational aspirations. Wellings (1982) and Kenafric Industrial Services (1992) showed how difficult it is to attend college given the educational inequalities in a country like Kenya. Students still aspire to overcome resource barriers, tracking, and other ability filters to obtain even a second degree, and their high aspirations are hardly explained by their SES or educational inequalities

Theoretical Approaches and Concepts

The vast literature on educational aspirations of students in the United States shows that some studies consider learning effort and involvement of parents in their children's education as an important resource and investment needed in the development of students' aspirations; however, another group of scholars have concentrated on students' attitudes, academic limitations, educational opportunities, family values, family structures, cultural obligations, and acculturation as important in distinguishing students with high aspirations from those with low aspirations. The literature on educational aspirations can be grouped into three major theoretical approaches. The first conceptual

block examines what motivates students to seek some level of education or career. This theory attempts to explain the close association between aspirations and academic achievement and the role of parents' expectations and students' goals in the formation of educational aspirations. The second concept examines the availability of or lack of educational opportunities and resources both at school and at home and the effects on students' aspirations. The third conceptual block addresses the importance of family values, beliefs, and cultural endowments in relation to managing and negotiating mainstream peer and cultural pressure on academic performance and aspirations. These three theoretical blocks presented in the next sections are used to conceptualize the formation of aspirations among youth.

Goals, Motivation, and Achievement Theory (GMAT)

This theory examines the relationship between goals, motivation, and school achievement. Discussing the relationship between educational goals (aspirations) and achievement, Covington (2000) advanced this theory by stressing that goals and achievements are separated by degree of motivation. According to this theory, aspirations are about achievements and achievements are about aspirations. Covington (2000) postulated that the quality of learning and the propensity to continue learning hinges on the interaction between the goals set by students and the motivating properties of such goals, such as expected reward structures or satisfaction. GPAs and scores in math and English language can influence aspirations (Taylor & Krahn, 2005), and variables like time spent on homework and students' aspirations enhances math scores (Dandy & Nettelbeck, 2002). A student with high educational aspirations tends to generate better achievement scores, and based on current achievement, a student evaluates the likelihood of achieving a certain level of education and will define the aspired level of education.

According to GMAT, differences in aspirations can arise from differences in expected rewards resulting from student-specific incentives and investments in education

(Biddle, 1979; Covington, 2000; Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Sherwood, 1989). In addition to students' abilities and talents, school and family resources, and for any given learning technology, setting educational and occupational goals by a student is synonymous with setting minimum parameters of motivation, effort, drive, and achievement.

As yet, differences and variations in aspiration levels among youth that are accounted for by differences in rewards of higher education can only be significant if there are large differences in reward structures, like wages and occupations, for the same levels of education across races, ethnicities, and immigrants in the United States. However, so far, such differences have been considered negligible. This leads to a discussion of the role of home and school resources and opportunities in the formation of students' aspirations.

Resources, Opportunity and Blocked-Opportunity Theory (ROBOT)

The Blocked-Opportunity concept refers not only to tacit discrimination but also to the structural, institutional, and social barriers to high educational outcomes and commensurate careers. Ogbu (1992) explained the differences in academic outcomes in which voluntary migrant Asians and Hispanics were more motivated to achieve better grades and high income careers than involuntary groups like African Americans, whose social conditioning and coping strategies produced oppositional culture and low academic performance. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1992) supported this theory based on observations of other cultural groups like Chicanos, but not Asians or Whites, where peer sanctions for succeeding exist. But Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1989) and Kerckhoff (1976) argued that African Americans have strong educational values, and any gap or mismatch can be explained by low SES and barriers in educational resources.

This theory assumes that high socio-economic status (SES) in the form of higher parental education, income, and proficiency in English language automatically leads to higher educational aspirations and achievement and competes with educational risks like

discrimination. Blocked opportunities in school and in the labor and career markets can create cultural and identity misnomers. Home learning resources, involvement in school activities by parents, availability of classroom resources, and an environment conducive to learning are important for better educational outcomes and expectations. A high socio-economic status (SES) is therefore expected to lead to high educational outcomes and vice-versa, but blocked opportunities due to legal sanctions, discrimination, academic tracking, and stereotyping can lead to academic stagnation and even sustain a low SES in other generations. This blocked-opportunity view advanced by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) postulated that minority students tend to form oppositional attitudes to the mainstream culture, which embodies high educational aspirations and high academic expectations. Even though the scant evidence seemingly suggests that a student may form such attitudes, there is no clear evidence that the same students have lower aspirations and low test scores because of their attitudes and not based on other factors. Perhaps it is the low test scores that lead to the development of negative group attitudes and opinions, but at the individual student level, individuals implicitly hold the dream of higher education and high academic performance but ultimately attach a very small possibility to their dream.

The blocked-opportunity theory is intended to explain low educational outcomes of minority youth, especially of Black youth (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gibson & Ogbu, 1991; MacLeod, 1987; Ogbu, 1992). But this theory is also used to explain high educational outcomes of some immigrant populations, especially Asians, who instill strong educational values and a commitment to achieve higher grades, expecting that their children will face occupational discrimination and must achieve at high levels to have an opportunity to succeed (Mickelson, 1990; Sue & Okazaki, 1990). The blocked-opportunity refers not only to tacit discrimination but also to structural, institutional, and social barriers to high educational outcomes and commensurate careers. Ogbu (1992) reported differences in academic outcomes between voluntary migrants, Asians, and

Black Americans. Hispanic youth were found to be more motivated to achieve better grades and high income careers than involuntary groups like African Americans, whose social conditioning and coping strategies produced oppositional culture and low academic performance. Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (1991) supported this theory based on observations of other cultural groups like Chicanos, but not Asians or Whites, in which peer sanctions for succeeding exist. But Ainsworth-Darnell and Downey (1998) and Kerckhoff (1976) argued that African American have strong educational values, and any gap or mismatch can be explained by low SES and barriers in educational resources.

Apart from pre-existing risks for higher level education, such as low SES and inadequate language skills, some youth, especially minorities and immigrants, may face discrimination in their schools and their communities. Immigrant youth are also disproportionately represented in lower tracks when English language ability is used as a measure to stratify students (Donato et al., 1991). Extensive studies on track placement indicated that it has a negative effect on the achievement of lower track students than those in middle and higher tracks. Their morale, attitudes, and behavior toward learning are often affected negatively unlike students who are given the opportunity to try college preparatory courses and show high academic achievement, higher aspirations, higher levels of self-worth, and lower high-school dropout rates (Ansalone, 2001; Hallinan; 1988).

James (1993) suggested that exposure to systematic racism and blocked opportunities in careers goals by African-American youth can limit their confidence and optimism. Tracking may interfere with student relations, in terms of who becomes their friends and peers. As high ability students are sorted and separated, any learning benefits to be gained by low ability students interacting with high ability groups is thwarted, as students tend to conform to the educational expectations of their own ability group.

Family Background and Obligations Theory (FBOT)

Given that there are many family variables, such as size and community, beliefs, expectations, obligations, values, religion, and language, that show some significance in enhancing aspirations and education, it is convincing to attribute to the family some theoretical role in understanding student aspirations. Moreover, variables such as household income and parents' education, expected to be instrumental in understanding aspirations levels and academic achievement of students, turn out to be weak predictors in explaining aspiration levels of immigrant students. This has necessitated the need for further analysis of aspirations beyond the effects of variables like socio-economic status (SES), such as the role of the family and cultural capital in the formation and shaping of students' educational aspirations. Immigrant children and parents often face changes in socio-economic status (SES), given that parents' relative income and occupation often change upon arrival in the United States. What if student aspirations are formed before coming to the United States and are only revised given the new conditions they face? The *carryover effects* of country of origin regarding the value of education and cultural beliefs of immigrant parents tend to persist for some duration of stay in the United States, even if their socio-economic status in the country of origin and in the United States are comparable. The education that parents and children obtain in their country of origin may also have some relevance to students' educational and career aspirations before and after entry into the United States through the formation of expectations and beliefs in education. These aspects have not been considered in studies of immigrant youth.

FBOT postulates that family background factors, such as education, income, family structure, ethnicity, and culture, affect students' beliefs and behavior. According to this theory, assimilation into the mainstream culture and the allocation of students' time are based on family beliefs and obligations to the extent that parents can influence their children. Fast assimilation into the mainstream culture has been emphasized by

some scholars, but whether assimilation and acculturation affect aspirations of immigrant youth and their socio-economic development has been of much academic interest in recent years. The nature and speed of assimilation and adaptation of immigrant youth have been controversial issues facing not only scholars but also immigrant parents and their children. Hernandez and Charney (1998) stated that when an immigrant student becomes more Americanized, they are more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as substance abuse, unprotected sex, and delinquency. A study by Fuligni (1997) showed that some immigrant families stressed the importance of family obligations and cultural beliefs to their children, who then considered these constraints in their decision making regarding use of time, for example, in the choice of peers and time spent with peers. To maintain high educational outcomes, immigrant parents and children often negotiate some balance in the use of family resources and their time between family obligations and educational activities (Fuligni, 1997) and choose the path and speed of assimilation into the mainstream culture that leads to better educational outcomes. This phenomenon, called "the immigrant paradox," claims that the more Americanized immigrant youth become, the worse they perform in schools compared to their foreign-born children. The youth who are more acculturated speak better English, but they tend to do less homework and may be developing an oppositional culture (Garcia Coll, 2009).

FBOT is premised on the role of ethnicity and culture in adaptation and assimilation into the mainstream culture. It helps explain how a family mitigates social barriers to education and educational risks associated with low SES, reflecting to some extent the aspirations of parents, family, and teachers. Family intervention through control and motivation can compensate for the negative effects of factors like low SES and discrimination on aspirations and learning. From the studies examined, it appears that households discuss and enforce aspects of family obligations and cultural beliefs to ensure better schooling for their children. Fuligni et al. (1999) classified family obligations into three categories: current assistance, respect, and future assistance. By

comparing different levels of these three variables and educational aspirations, they found medium values of each of these three variables to be associated with higher student aspirations. Parents expect their children to be responsible for their daily schooling activities like homework and school plans, to take care of their younger siblings, and to help their parents with chores.

Conceptual Background

It is often assumed that at some age, each student has aspirations, but broadly why each student holds a specific aspiration level, when and how they arrive at that measure, and who and what influences their educational and career aspirations are questions important for understanding existing differences in educational aspirations across different youth populations documented by research. Research does not tell us how often students' aspirations change over time and whether such changes can be attributed to changes in their academic scores or trends in academic scores. Students can use their academic scores and other factors to revise their education goals and aspirations, but the information students use to actually revise their aspirations and under what circumstances is also important in understanding the dynamics and differences in aspirations across student populations. This information gap existed among the African American youth in Kao and Tienda's (1998) study of the phenomenon of changing and concrete aspirations.

Children who are born in the United States or enter the United States at some age (or grade) are endowed with certain attributes like language, respect for authority, discipline, family obligations, and even religion. Parents also enter the United States with certain socio-economic backgrounds and have some motives for migrating to the United States; they also have ambitions, expectations, and aspirations for their children. These ambitions and aspirations are crystallized into specific family goals, which include specific careers, income levels, and belonging to a social class, and some measure of dignity, self-worth, and esteem for themselves and their children. At an early age, children are frequently asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

as an attempt to mold future career preferences of a child or find out if a child has embarked on particular aspirations. The answers given often cover a wide range of occupations, from being a police officer to being a doctor, often reflecting their admired role models, parents' occupations, and what their parents and teachers communicate to them.

It can be assumed that all parents raise their children to be somebody, and there is frequent disagreement about who the father, the mother, and significant relatives want students to be when they grow up. The expectations and aspirations of others may not conform to students' own aspirations or influence them, especially if they have developed aspirations on their own. If this assumption is relevant, then parents will nurture, care, invest in, and try to influence the beliefs and preferences of their children. One of these beliefs and preferences is their educational and career aspirations, and empirical studies have shown some correlation between the aspirations propagated by parents and those of their children. The extent to which parents and significant others can influence students' educational aspirations varies from family to family and across different cultures.

One of the older theories of aspirations, the field aspiration theory by Lewin (1951), stipulated that individuals make rational utilitarian choices by efficiently maximizing satisfaction or minimizing dissatisfaction in a particular field. Sherwood (1989), however, suggested that individuals have a matrix of goals covering many fields and emphasized investments in the form of effort, time, and income as an extension to the satisfaction maximization theory. According to Sherwood (1989), resources are invested and, as such, returns are also expected. This makes educational resources and opportunities an essential component of any theory of aspiration, and these are the often-mentioned constraints and risks each student faces when adopting different strategies for achieving their goals.

What students care about and what students are concerned with become useful concepts when trying to understand what drives and motivates them toward specific

educational and career goals (Lewin, 1951; Sherwood, 1989). Assume that a student cares about his or her own goals and is also concerned about the dissatisfaction that arises from deviating from parents' aspirations, peers' expectations, or family norms in the broader sense. Students who are repeatedly told at school and at home to achieve high GPAs each school year are likely to care about this goal. They may also care about hanging out with their peers. Achieving their own goals has benefits, but planning and achieving these goals is associated with some costs of deviating from what is planned, what parents want, and what peers expect the student to do. This is the notion of role theory, which states that expectations held by a group, like the neighborhood, family, parents, peers, and teachers, will influence students' beliefs and behavior (Biddle, 1979). Based on this theory, a student may ask the following questions: "What do others expect of me? What do I expect myself to do and what should I do given this pressure?" The literature gives examples of Black students who were said to be "acting White" when they deviated from average, mainstream, or neighborhood norms. With the threat of social sanctions by peers, the incentive to achieve better grades and aim high then decreases, depending on how the student is affected by peer sanctions and levels of satisfaction from involvement with some types of peers. Similarly, a student whose peers value better grades but end up getting low grades may feel dissatisfied and may try to conform to peers' expectations and work harder. When the expectations of parents are added, students are confronted with another set of norms to consider. And the benefits and costs of each deviation may be taken into account.

I describe students who indicated that they cared about current and future satisfaction. The students also cared about their parents, even as their parents cared about them. But did the students care about some of the things their parents cared about? In particular, were there things that caused dissatisfaction for students and their parents? A combination of current student attitudes toward education, their responsiveness to both current and future tangible and emotional rewards, and real prizes for achieving certain

educational outcomes, plus any imputed sanctions and dissatisfaction arising from the failure to meet desired educational outcomes, are important in understanding the formation of educational aspirations. Students' attitudes and values are reflected in their choices in terms of benefits and dissatisfaction from some level of education but without disregarding their parents' expectations and aspirations. But attitudes and valuation of benefits and regrets can be influenced by the cultural capital immigrants bring with them from their country of origin. A student collaborating with parents, teachers, and peers tends to adopt education strategies expected to yield higher levels of academic achievement and hence the likelihood of achieving overall educational and career goals. Students know to some extent the effect of additional years of education on expected rewards (or income). Students also have an idea about their academic abilities based on their current GPAs and the academic requirements for enrollment in college and beyond. Academic performance can be influenced by learning effort and SES, but an environment and culture of discrimination and stereotyping can influence academic attitudes and goals of some students. What matters in the final analysis is how a student and his or her parents cope with such challenges.

As the ability to achieve different levels of education increases, the likelihood that a student will state some educational aspirations increases given that the aspired level of education or career is what is likely to guarantee satisfaction. A statement of aspiration level is therefore synonymous with making choices toward achieving some level of satisfaction from education, given personal risks associated with peer interaction, assimilation into the mainstream culture, and the constraints imposed by the culture. These education and career preferences are motivated and guided by the following principles.

A set of goals or objectives are formed at some age and are motivated by a combination of factors (Lewin, 1951; Sherwood,1989). These goals are an integral component of family discourse that can be influenced by parents, teachers, and peers and

are revised according to academic performance and ability to finance higher levels of education. A set of values and beliefs about education can be signaled to students by their parents, the community, and the career market. These values reflect the socio-economic benefits of education, the benefits of interacting with peers, and the risks associated with peer pressure and cultural beliefs. Attitudes, effort, and opportunities for learning both at home and at school can affect academic performance and the likelihood of stating some educational aspirations according to how they have affected students' performance.

The underlying complex relationship between educational and occupational aspirations is hard to establish clearly in terms of causation and magnitude of influence. But setting academic goals and developing career aspirations provide the motivation needed to achieve target levels of education and careers. No matter what children choose, there is always something that drives and motivates them to make an effort to achieve goals that they have set for themselves. For example, a high income career can be a motivating factor for some students, while parental expectations and pressure from peers, teachers, and community may drive a student toward meeting some expectations. Parents, teachers, and the community can use social sanctions and rewards to enhance students' aspirations and their academic performance. The extent to which academic and career goals are achieved ultimately depends on the socio-cultural endowments and efforts made by the student, the parents, and the community.

The nurturing of students from early childhood instills parental influence over their behavior, attitudes, and preferences regarding education levels and occupations. Sudanese parents, with the help of religion, begin communicating their expectations to their children at an early age. However, students at some age start to develop their own educational goals, which may reflect to some extent what their parents and teachers have communicated to them. As schools and teachers use academic scores like GPA to rank and stratify students, they send signals of academic abilities to students and parents. Parents have expectations for a student's GPA given that they spend their time and

monetary resources in the schooling of their children. On the other hand, students also try to achieve some level of GPA by spending time learning at school and at home.

Researchers have argued that aspirations, whether educational or occupational, are formed early in a child's life but change over time due to the experiences and environment in which a particular child is raised. It is further understood that aspirations tend to decline as children mature and become aware of what is or is not possible and the constraints that accompany their choices (Gutman & Akerman, 2008). At an early age, aspirations are mainly influenced by factors other than academic abilities. Existence of parent–student discourse on educational aspirations and academic achievements allows parents to use stories and their experiences to boost the aspirations of their children. In addition, parents use different strategies ranging from authority, praise, and rewards to role playing to encourage their children to perform well. With time, students learn their own academic strengths and weaknesses, and trends in academic performance start to play a significant role.

A student in Sudan can aspire to obtain some level of education by considering the rewards of careers associated with the level of education chosen. By contributing to family resources and fulfilling family obligations both currently and in the future, a student also expects some rewards. Current satisfaction can be obtained each school year from GPA scores, and students can also obtain satisfaction by interaction with peers, given family GPA expectations and time use requirements. Students may also worry about dissatisfying their parents by violating family expectations, obligations, and cultural norms. In the future, satisfaction can be obtained from the expected rewards. The differences in levels of aspirations across students eventually depends on students' tolerance for low grades and sanctions from parents, the value they attach to different levels of education, and the extent to which they feel obligated to current family needs and expect satisfaction from income and the ability to support their family. Students make choices that will minimize their dissatisfaction but increase their level of

satisfaction from education. A typical student may care about current and future satisfaction from their education while considering what their parents care about. In particular, I considered students who wanted to reduce their level of dissatisfaction and that of their parents in some proportions.

In Sudan, sanctions such as corporal punishment and repeating a grade are implemented, sending signals to students that they have to meet certain expectations both at school and at home. Students who perform exceptionally well are recognized in front of the entire school and awarded gifts. The Sudanese students therefore work hard in order to perform well in their classes and be in a position where they cannot be forced to repeat a grade while their friends are promoted to the next grade. They also work hard at this stage to avoid corporal punishment and to be recognized in front of the entire school and at the same time to please their parents. This, however, changes when they reach 5th grade because in addition to working hard to avoid sanctions, they must work hard to pass the national exams given in 8th grade. Only those who pass national exams in 8th grade are admitted to 9th grade. At this stage, they already know how far they can continue with their education depending on their academic abilities.

The differences in levels of aspirations across students eventually depend on students' academic abilities, their tolerance for low grades and sanctions from parents, the value they attach to different levels of education, the extent to which they feel obligated to current family needs and expected satisfaction from income, and support from their family.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a case study research method conducted by use of interviews. Yin (1994) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). In Yin's (2009) research method, he defines case study as described above but gives specific examples of real-life events such as "individual life cycles, small group behavior, organization and managerial processes, neighborhood changes, schools performance, international relations and maturation of industries."

I chose to use a case study research method because this design allowed me to focus on how individuals interacted with each other in their environment. It also allowed the construction of meaning through capturing as much as possible the participants' thoughts regarding their educational and occupational aspirations. I was very interested in discovering how the students in this study arrived at their educational and occupational aspirations rather than just testing an existing theory. This method allowed individual Sudanese immigrant youth to share their experiences regarding educational and occupational aspirations from their perspective.

To accentuate the research further, I used informal conversation to capture some material that I thought was important as background. Informal conversation (Mertens, 1998; Patton, 1990) has been described as the kind of interview that occurs spontaneously so that a participant may not know that an interview is taking place. This form of interview was used with only one student because I had provided this particular student with transportation to the library where the rest of the interviews took place. I also used semi-structured interviews as a technique for collecting these data (Lofland & Lofland 1984; Patton, 1990). I used an interview script consisting of a set of questions as a

starting point for the interviews of which the students were aware. (See Appendix B.) My goal was to capture the complexity of these Sudanese refugee youth who had been uprooted from their familiar environment and taken to a land that was strange to them in terms of the people, the culture, and the education system, and to provide a description of the findings to my readers.

Sample and Site

My study sample consisted of Sudanese refugee youth from the northern part of Sudan who ranged in age from 14 to 17 years. They were selected from two high schools in a mid-size town in the U. S. Midwest. This population was interesting to study given that they have strong family networks, tend to know one another, and live in proximity to one another in their new environment.

To qualify for this study, a student had to be a Sudanese refugee youth in 9th through 12th grades living in and attending one of the two public high schools in the mid-size town. The first step in gaining access to these students involved attending one of the Sudanese monthly informational meetings in which there was intense discussion about resources. The person who invited me to the meeting took the opportunity to introduce me and invited me to talk briefly about my research. Through discussion and interaction with the Sudanese parents, I became aware that there were 22 students in two local public high schools, with the majority of 20 enrolled in one school and only 2 in the other school. Some of the parents gave me their phone numbers and home addresses to contact them at a later date, whereas I obtained other numbers from the chairperson who first consulted the parents to find out if she could give me their contact information. I waited for IRB approval, which took 3 months, before I contacted the students. By the time I finally got approval, some of the parents did not remember that they had given me their contact information earlier. I contacted the 22 Sudanese youth in Grades 9 – 12 via mail and requested their participation in this study.

The letter I mailed to the youths indicated when I expected to hear from them and the approximate date when I would conduct the interviews. The date came and went, and there was no response from the Sudanese youth or their parents. I became concerned that they did not want to participate in my study, that I had not given them sufficient time to respond, or that they had forgotten who I was. As I wondered what I could have done better to get a quicker response from the Sudanese youth and their parents, I decided to visit the Sudanese center to answer some of my questions. It became apparent that I needed to visit or interact more with the Sudanese refugees. Therefore, the leaders of the Sudanese community advised me to visit their social gatherings and introduce myself to the parents and the youth one more time. This meant attending several social gatherings, introducing myself, and socializing with the Sudanese. I attended a total of eight parties and social gatherings.

During each of my visits, I discovered that the chairperson had made arrangements for someone to introduce me to the parents and also to explain my purpose for being there. The major language used at these gatherings was Arabic, and I do not speak Arabic. I felt as if I were intruding, despite their attempts to make me feel welcomed. Fortunately, I always found somebody I knew at the social gatherings, and each person tried to do whatever he or she could to make me feel comfortable. After attending a total of five social gatherings followed by phone calls, 15 students and their parents agreed to set up times to meet with me whereas 7 declined either because they were traveling or moving to another state or because they did not feel comfortable participating in the study. Some parents told me they did not feel comfortable having me in their homes because they did not have nice furniture. When I suggested an alternative site, some parents stated that their English was not good enough to be able to comprehend the kinds of questions I would ask their children. Initial stages of this research involved a pilot study. The first two students who responded were both from the same school, and these students became my pilot study subjects.

Data Collection Methods and Process

To collect data for the pilot study and research, I followed case study research methods. The two prevailing forms of data collection associated with case study inquiry are interviews and observations. I asked parents and students for locations, times, and dates suitable for meeting with them. Some of the parents did not want to be present when I interviewed their children whereas others agreed to accompany their minors. I asked each of the parents to read and sign a consent form.

I went to the locations at the agreed-upon time. However, to my surprise, some of the students were not there, but instead their parents were waiting for me. I asked the parents where the students were, and I was informed that the parents had either sent them somewhere or they were visiting friends. I was perturbed by their answers because the parents were aware that I was going to their homes to interview their youth and yet they had arranged for their children to go somewhere else. I ended up rescheduling some of the interviews. The second time around, I found the students, but this time the parents were not there. This suggested that the parents wanted to meet with me first without their children to find out who I was and if I could be trusted with their children. Most of the parents let me interview their children in the privacy of their homes, a few at the Sudanese center, and yet others at locations of their choice ranging from the library to restaurants. I felt honored by being given the opportunity to enter their homes. All the parents and their youth were very polite, kind hearted, and delightful to converse with. They offered me food, drinks, and snacks. I was not sure whether to say yes or no because they always served these items and placed them directly in front of me.

Oral Interview

Interviews or question asking are considered the principal data collection methods for this kind of research. Yin (1994) argued that it is very important to consistently ask why events appear to have happened or to be happening. I conducted one-on-one interviews by letting the participants give answers without interrupting them. Prior to an

interview, I went to the location agreed upon, which was at the parking lot of the first student's apartment complex accompanied by the student's parent; there we were going to decide whether to meet in the apartment or at the library. When I arrived, I found the student waiting but without his parents. After exchanging greetings, I asked him where the signed consent form was and where his parents were. The student informed me that his mom was not going to join us. I was a little worried and asked if I could talk to his mom to find out what was going on. The student's mom told me she had a commitment and would not be joining us. I asked if she would like to reschedule, but the answer was, no, no, no. She indicated that there was no need to reschedule and that she trusted me to take her son to the library where I could interview him without interruption. I was not sure whether this was the right thing to do. However, since I had the consent signed and the mom authorized me to take her son to the library, I felt honored and trusted. As the young man and I drove to the library, we engaged in informal conversation. The questions that emerged from the conversation were not predetermined. The questions were individualized and only relevant to the individual being asked the questions. Upon reaching the library, I wrote down the student's responses to use in this research. In each of the interviews I conducted, I always began with informal conversation followed by semi-structured questions in the form of a script involving students' demographic information. For example: What is your name? How old are you? What grade are you in? When did you come to the United States? Did you have to go to a refugee camp prior to coming here or did you come straight from Sudan? Do you live with both parents? (See Appendix B.) My aim was to capture as much as possible of the participants' thoughts about their educational and occupational aspirations. I encouraged the process of thinking by posing new questions after the first answers were given by the participants. This was then followed by a discussion of what the students wanted to be when they grew up.

The next person who became part of my pilot study allowed me to go to their home to conduct the interview. I was asked to remove my shoes prior to entering the home and I obliged with the request. The mom welcomed me and offered me something to eat and drink. She spent 1 hour talking to me and getting to know me. It was difficult for me to ask her to stop so I could interview her son. When she finally allowed me to interview her son, the son wanted her to leave so that I could talk to him without his mother being in the same room. He kindly asked his mother to leave. The mother did not hesitate.

Throughout the pilot study, I became aware of the fact that not many students and parents knew what I meant by educational and occupational aspirations. I also discovered that I needed to explain why I was interested in Sudanese youth and not in other refugees in this small city. I found it challenging to write down everything that the students were saying and keeping up with the interviews. I was losing my train of thought as I was writing everything down, and I also repeated myself. With the information above in mind, the pilot study was followed by the actual study.

Recording Data

Prior to starting the interviews, I reminded the students that I was going to tape record our conversation and asked them to turn in their IRB-approved consent document indicating that both the student and the parents agreed to taping the conversation. (See Appendix A.) I utilized both tapes and written notes to record the interviews. I recorded all interviews but wrote down buzz words, and I was fortunate to have tape that was clear. Howe and Lewis (1993) suggested that individual participants need to identify themselves before they speak. However, for the sake of confidentiality, I asked the participants to identify themselves by pseudonyms. By taking notes at the beginning of the interviews, I captured exact phrases and statements made by the Sudanese youth. After a few attempts, I found myself lagging behind and sometimes repeating myself, or losing my train of thought; therefore, I wrote down only buzz words and taped the rest of

the interviews. I tried my best to complete notes and make them usable in the event the tape recorder stopped working. However, I was very fortunate that the tape recorder worked well throughout my interviews. I followed Morgan's (1988) suggestion that regardless of the method of data collection, an interviewer should take field notes after each session to facilitate data analysis. Privacy is important during interviews, and in order to enhance the process, I interviewed participants individually at private places of convenience for them. I interviewed participants in the privacy of their homes, at the public library, at the Sudanese center, and at a restaurant based on individual and parental requests.

Observation Method

In my quest to learn more about the Sudanese refugee youth, I employed Yin's suggestion that in order to make meaningful observation, it is necessary to be a good listener (Yin, 1994, 2009). A good listener is able to assimilate large amounts of new information without bias. This means that as an interviewee recounts an incident, a good listener will hear the exact words used by the interviewee, capture the mood and affective components, and understand the context from which the interviewee perceives his or her world (Yin, 1994, 2009). As the Sudanese refugee youth recounted their ordeal of traveling from Sudan to other countries, I noted how they expressed themselves, their body language, and the exact phrases they used as I wrote what they said and the way they said it. I used what I observed to further assist me in describing the settings, the activities of the Sudanese youth, and the meanings of what was observed from the perspective of the participants. This meant that I paid attention to how things occurred by observing how the Sudanese youth answered certain kinds of questions, how certain participants gave meaning to certain words and actions, how the Sudanese youth's attitudes were translated into actions, and how the Sudanese students responded in

different ways[2]. Patton (1990) asserted that observation provides knowledge of the context in which events occur and may enable the researcher to see things that the participants themselves are not aware of or are unwilling to discuss. As an observer, I used several observation strategies. These included watching students at social gatherings when they were unaware that I was observing them. I maintained a passive presence, trying to be as unobtrusive as possible and not interacting with participants at these gatherings. I engaged in limited interaction, intervening only when further clarification of actions was needed. In other cases, I exercised more active control over the observations, such as during formal interviews, to elicit specific types of information.

Researcher's Role

Case study researchers consider the level of involvement of a researcher as crucial. Therefore, in my quest to understand the Sudanese youth, I became both an observer and a participant observer. As an observer, I watched what the students were doing without their knowledge that I was observing them. This was important especially while students attended various social gatherings and engaged in community activities. As a participant observer, I was involved in some of their activities but remained an observer; I also attended several social gatherings and interacted with parents and participants.

Adaptation and Flexibility

Yin (1994, 2009) argued that it is very important for a researcher to be adaptive and flexible. Following Yin's advice, I paid careful attention to the purpose of this research and at the same time was willing to change procedures or plans if unanticipated events occurred. For example, initially I had intended to interview students at the

[2] The idea is from *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education* by Fraenkel & Wallen (2003)

Sudanese center or at their homes, but when parents suggested a different environment, I accommodated their requests.

Data Analysis

The information I collected from my interviews and observations was tape recorded and written down. The first step was to transcribe the taped information after the last interview of each day even though sometimes I was too tired to complete the transcribing. I typed the notes that were hand-written and saved them in a file on my computer. I believed that by doing so, the information was still fresh and I could still remember what each student said after reading the buzz words. After completing all the interviews and transcribing them, I used software known as QSR international NVIVO 7. My first encounter with NVIVO 7 was when I attended a lab presentation on how to use it. I thought the presenter did a good job and I liked what NVIVO 7 could do for someone conducting qualitative research. However, I did not start using NVIVO 7 immediately and by the time I started using NVIVO 7 again, I had forgotten what I had learned from the presenter. I visited the lab several times to find somebody who knew how to use the NVIVO 7 to help me. The first three people did not know anything about using NVIVO7 but they referred me to another person. Three visits later I caught up with the person who knew how to use NVIVO 7.

I coded my data into meaningful segments using QSR International NVIVO 7, qualitative software. I liked the way NVIVO 7 kept track of frequencies and the distribution of variables I was interested in. This helped to highlight patterns and themes that I would probably not have identified by reading the cases only. The use of NVIVO 7 assisted me in categorizing data in three stages: first in categories, second in streamlining those categories into broad areas, and finally in focusing on my objectives and designated codes for analysis. From coding, I was able to see different themes arise from my data, which helped me provide a complete record of the interviews and facilitated the analysis of the data. My ability to use NVIVO 7 was limited, but with the lab tech's help, I was

able to code and do all that I needed to do to complete my analysis. I was also able to borrow a laptop from the department that had NVIVO installed to assist me with the process.

In the analysis, the interview data were broken into segments to discover meaning units and themes in the segments as suggested by Gall and Gall (2003). Gall and Gall stated that it is important to compare the meaning units and themes across the segments. In so doing, I was able to synthesize and validate my findings by checking with participants. To emphasize the importance of content analysis, Kreuger (1988) suggested that content analysis begin with a comparison of words used in an answer. I considered the emphasis or intensity of the Sudanese refugee youths' comments. Other considerations were related to the consistency of comments and the specificity of responses that the Sudanese refugee youth gave during follow-up probes. For example, I derived common themes and categories from my interviews and observations and coded them as variables in terms of the educational and occupational aspirations of the Sudanese refugee youth in U.S. public schools. Second, I looked for goals that they had set and the person who had influenced them in setting their goals. Third, I examined how variables like parents' education and occupation, religion, culture, and their community shaped their aspirations.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the results of the student interviews I conducted in 2006-2007. The results are presented in three sections. The first section presents the demographics of the Sudanese immigrant youth. The second section discusses the answers to one of the major questions: "What are the educational and occupational aspirations of Sudanese refugee youth?" The third section addresses the question, "How are their educational and occupational aspirations formed?" The aim of this section is to understand why and how these students arrived at their educational and occupational choices. The final section discusses the strategies students adopted to achieve their educational and occupational aspirations.

Demographics and Migration

The Sudanese students in this study were Muslim and came from the northern parts of Sudan. They ranged in age from 14 to 17 years and were in Grades 9 through 12. The Sudanese students first moved to Middle Eastern countries with their parents before coming to the United States. They came to the United States because they had relatives or acquaintances already living here. When they first arrived, they resettled in larger U.S. cities in Maryland, Virginia, Washington, DC, and Miami. From the larger cities, the students moved to small and mid-size cities and towns in the United States, depending on where their parents had acquaintances or relatives. At the time of this study, the Sudanese students lived in a mid-size city in the Midwest. All the Sudanese students were born in Sudan except two, who were born in Saudi Arabia where their parents had gone to seek refuge from Sudan. Despite the fact that these two students were born in Saudi Arabia, they still referred to themselves as Sudanese because their parents came from Sudan, and they were awarded refugee status in the United States based on the fact that they were Sudanese.

The Sudanese students had strong social and family networks and most of them were close to and knew one another. They had a Sudanese community center where the families could seek information and socialize. The language spoken in their homes and at social gatherings was Arabic even though some of these students were fluent in English, especially those who had started their schooling in the United States.

When they arrive in the United States, Sudanese students face various challenges in their schools, in their neighborhoods, and in society at large as they struggle to fit into a society that is so different from their own. In U.S. society, Sudanese refugee youth may be grouped with others who look like them, but the Sudanese youth may not necessarily identify with those groups. When respondents were asked to identify themselves, they did so in terms of gender, religion, and race as indicated in Table 1. The respondents identified their gender as either male or female, and all respondents indicated that they were Muslims. It was interesting to learn that when asked to indicate their race, only 3 out of 15 students identified themselves as Black but went on to say, "but not African American." One student identified himself as "not Black but Sudanese." Three of the respondents stated that they were not Black but African. Interviewer: "It is good that you identify yourself as African but African means you are from the African continent. When I talk about race, I mean your skin color. Do you consider yourself Black?" The respondents who stated that they were not Black reported that, when given a choice, they always picked "other" because it was always an option. Furthermore, one of the respondents stated that identifying himself as Black did not differentiate him from African Americans who were born and raised in the United States. Some of the respondents' skin appeared to be lighter than those from the southern parts of Sudan. One of the respondents gave a brief synopsis on the reason why they spoke Arabic only as opposed to the other African languages that were spoken in that part of Sudan: "History tells us that Nubians intermarried with Arabs and the result was the current

Sudanese who were forced by the Arabs to speak their language, Arabic only. This means we are bi-racial."

Table 1. The Sudanese Refugee Youths' Identification

Students	**Gender**	**Race**
Baruk	Male	Not Black but Sudanese
Mustafa	Male	Black but African
Fatima	Female	Not Black
Rabab	Female	Black
Ibrahim	Male	Not Black
Faruk	Male	Not Black
Faida	Female	Not Black
Baraka	Female	Not Black
Samia	Female	Not Black but African
Osman	Male	Not Black but other
Badhurudin	Male	Not Black
Majid	Male	Black but not African American
Ahmad	Male	Not Black but African

At the time of the interviews, the Sudanese refugee youth ranged in age from 14 to 17 years. When they first arrived in the United States, they ranged in age from 5 to 15 years. All students had begun schooling in Sudan. The Sudanese students had experienced some socialization there, even though when they came to the United States some of them had to start over because the U.S. educational system wanted them to retake courses regardless of their previous schooling. Furthermore, according to the U.S. educational system, they were too young to be in the grades where they claimed they belonged. In addition, they had to learn the English language to be able to perform well in school. It was surprising to hear the students who came when they were 5 to 7 years old recall their experiences in Sudan, because they came to the United States when they were so young and had to start their education over from the beginning. Those who were 5 years old when they came to the United States still remembered their experiences in Sudan as young children.

Table 2. Year of Arrival and Length of Stay, Age at Entry, Current Age, and Countries Lived in Prior to Coming to the United States

Student ID	**Year of arrival and length of stay**	**Age at entry and grade**	**Current age(at the time of interview)**	**Countries lived in before coming to USA**
Baruk	1999 10	7 12	17	Saudi Arabia, UIE, Egypt
Mustafa	1996 10	7 11	17	Russia, Egypt, USA
Fatima	1990	09	14	Egypt, USA
Osama	2002 4	11 10	15	Sudan, USA
Ibrahim	1998 7	8 10	15	Sudan, USA
Faruk	2000 5	9 09	14	Egypt, USA
Faida	1997 9	8 12	17	UAE, USA
Rabab	1997 8	7 10	15	London, USA
Samia	1999 7	9 11	16	Egypt, USA
Osman	2003 3	12 09	15	Saudi Arabia, USA
Badhurudin	2003 3	15 12	18	Saudi Arabia, USA
Majid	1995 12	5 12	17	Egypt, USA
Ahmad	2002 7	8 09	15	Saudi Arabia, USA

The respondents attended one of two high schools in a mid-size town in the Midwestern United States, with the majority attending one of the schools. The Sudanese students preferred one school over the other because the majority of them lived in close proximity to the first school. Those who lived closer to the second school did not attend it because they preferred to be closer to the other Sudanese at the preferred high school. When they first moved to the mid-size town with their parents, most of them lived in subsidized housing in a given area. But as time passed, 5 students reported that their families had acquired homes through Habitat for Humanity and had moved to other areas within the city. One student's family moved to another subsidized housing area not far from the place where the majority continued to live. One student's family brought money with them from Saudi Arabia and was able to purchase a home. That particular student said, "My parents are currently unemployed but they brought with them a lot of money from Saudi Arabia where my dad was a doctor. We were able to buy a house and

we have money left over which we are currently using before my parents get jobs." Another student's family bought a house with the help of their families who moved to Saudi Arabia and other places in the Middle East and had kept in touch with them and provided them with financial support.

When these students first moved to the United States, they were accompanied by at least one of their parents and other relatives. At the time of the interviews, 6 students out of 13 still lived with both parents. The remaining students had fathers who either moved to other states in search of employment or had gone back to Sudan because they were divorced or because they returned to their jobs in Sudan leaving their families behind. However, some of the respondents in this study said that they were in touch with their fathers and visited them during summer breaks.

I looked at the academic performance of those who lived with one parent and compared it with those who lived with both parents, and there was no significant difference in performance. Both groups of students expressed high educational and occupational aspirations.

Table 3. Family Structure and Status

Student	**Live with both parents**	**Live with one parent**	**Reason for living with one parent**
Baruk	Both		
Mustafa		Mom	Parents are divorced
Fatima		Mom	Dad works in California
Rabab	Both		
Ibrahim		Mom	Divorced
Faruk	Both		
Faida		Mom	Dad lives in Sudan
Baraka		Mom	Dad lives in Sudan
Samia		Mom	Dad died
Osman	Both		
Badhurudin	Both		
Majid		Mom	Dad works in California
Ahmad	Both		

Table 3 shows whether the respondents lived with one parent or both parents and the reason why one parent was not living with them at the time of interviews. The information was then used to determine whether being in a single family had an impact on the kind of educational or occupational aspirations of these students.

Socio-economic Status

When war first breaks out in a country, the first groups of people who escape from the country or have the means to acquire a different life for their families are the elite. This can be seen in the case of Cubans who moved to Miami and other parts of the United States from 1959 to 1962 (Perez, 2001). However, when the elite move out of their countries of origin in search of a better place for their families, they often do not know what awaits them. This was the case with the Sudanese refugee parents in this study. In every student family interviewed, there was at least one parent with a college degree. All Sudanese parents had held prominent positions in Sudan. They were professors, lawyers, dentists, engineers, teachers, scientists, and computer programmers, among other positions. They catered well to their families, and the students proudly informed me about their life styles in Sudan. The Sudanese students attended private schools that were considered the best in Sudan, and all had maids who cooked and cleaned for the families.

However, when these students came to the United States because of the situation in their home country, their parents could no longer continue to be lawyers, doctors, professors, and so on, given that their degrees were not recognized in the United States. The dentists, lawyers, doctors, professors, and computer programmers had to become direct care staff, food workers, preschool teacher assistants, and lab techs, among other jobs that are associated with people with less education, as shown in Table 4. Two parents had decided to go back to school to get degrees that would be recognized in the United States, whereas others claimed that they were too old to balance going back to school and catering to the needs of their children.

The change in status brought considerable restraint to Sudanese families because they no longer held the prestigious jobs they had in Sudan. Although they currently hold the positions shown in Table 4, two of the fathers worked for the U.S. military as translators and Arabic teachers. These two fathers had to move to other states, leaving their families behind; they considered the state where their families currently resided to be safer than the other states where they worked. Two fathers moved back to Sudan and other parts of the world where their degrees were recognized in search of better jobs, and they had left their families in the United States. Some of the Sudanese fathers had divorced their wives and returned to Sudan to jobs they loved, leaving their families in America. What did this mean for the respondents? It was the first time the respondents had been moved out of their usual environment. It was also the first time they had lived without their fathers for a long time, and it was their first time in a new environment where people did not speak the same language and did not look like them. The classrooms were different and the behaviors portrayed by the people in their new environment were different from their own. All of these challenges had to be faced by the students within a very short time.

Most of the Sudanese started their lives in the United States on public assistance and most continued to live on public assistance. The parents' current low socio-economic status in terms of the amount of money they currently made meant that the Sudanese youth had to assist their parents in taking care of their younger siblings and go without some of the things they used to enjoy in their home country. The Sudanese students had to ensure that their siblings did their homework and were fed while their parents worked long hours away from home. The neighborhoods in which these students found themselves were characterized by low socio-economic status. The amount of money the parents paid for rent was dependent on the salary they made per month. At the time of the interviews, 50 Sudanese refugee families lived in this particular

neighborhood, and all families provided social networking for the entire Sudanese community.

Table 4. Parents' Past and Present Occupations

Student	**Father's highest level of education**	**Mother's highest level of education**	**Father's occupation in Sudan**	**Mother's occupation in Sudan**	**Father's occupation in U.S.**	**Mother's Occupation in U.S.**	**Parents attend or attended school in U.S.**
Baruk	Did not complete high school	Bachelor's degree	Army general	High school teacher	Not employed	Food worker	Mother currently a graduate student
Mustafa	Master's degree	Master's degree	Professor at the university	Professor at the university	Parents' are divorced; do not know what my dad does	Librarian	No
Fatima	Bachelor's degree	Bachelor's degree	Musician	House wife	Teaches Arabic	Lab tech	No
Rabab	Bachelor	Bachelor	Computer tech	Teacher	Unemployed	Pre-school teacher	No
Ibrahim	Masters	Masters	Lawyer	Lecturer	Not in US	Direct care	No
Faruk	Bachelor	Bachelor	Newspaper artist	Lecturer	Stocks at Wal-Mart	Preschool assistant	No
Faida	Doctorate	Bachelor	Doctor	Computer programmer	Not in U.S.	Food Worker	No
Baraka	Doctorate	Bachelor	Doctor	Computer programmer	Not in U.S.	Food Worker	No
Samia	Bachelor	Bachelor	Army general	Accountant	Died	Direct care	No
Osman	Doctorate	Bachelor	Dentist	Housewife	Direct care	Food worker	No
Badhurudin	Doctorate	Bachelor	Dentist	Housewife	Direct care	Food worker	No
Majid	Masters	Masters	Lawyer	Housewife	Teaches Arabic	Lab tech	Yes dad
Ahmad	Doctorate	Bachelor	Doctor	Teacher	Unemployed	Unemployed	No

Table 4 shows parents' educational levels, jobs they held in Sudan, and positions held in the United States at the time of the interviews. It indicates that most mothers had at least a bachelor's degree and most had master's degrees whether or not they were housewives in Sudan. However, all the fathers except one had bachelor's, master's, or

doctorate degrees. The one father who did not have a college degree was recruited into the Sudanese army at an early age before he could complete high school. This information is important because it helps to determine how well these students achieved in school based on their backgrounds. Research has indicated that the more highly parents are educated, the better chance their children have of completing at least high school. Did the parents' current occupations have any impact on the educational and occupation aspirations of these Sudanese youth? To summarize Table 4, in every case, parents had college degrees except for the father who was recruited into the army before he completed high school; however, with experience in the military, he earned the title of Army General and his wife had a college degree. Six parents had doctorate degrees, 6 had master's degrees, and 17 had bachelor's degrees. Given the parents' educational experiences, it was likely that they would try to help their children obtain at least a high school degree in the United States.

Educational Aspirations

School begins for Sudanese elite children when they are between the ages of 3 and 5 years in Sudan. By the time Sudanese students reach 1st grade, their work is graded and ranked in comparison with other students' work. Sanctions such as corporal punishment and repeating a grade are implemented at this stage, sending signals to students that they have to meet certain expectations both at school and at home. Students who perform exceptionally well are recognized in front of the entire school and awarded prizes. Sudanese students work hard in order to perform well in their classes and to avoid being forced to repeat a grade while their friends are promoted to the next grade. They work hard at this stage to avoid corporal punishment, to be recognized in front of the entire school, and at the same time to please their parents. However, this changes when they reach 5th grade because in addition to working hard to avoid sanctions, they have to begin preparing to pass the national exam given in 8th grade. Only those who pass this national exam in 8th grade are admitted to 9th grade. At this stage, Sudanese students

already know how far they can continue with their education depending on their academic abilities. These students are taught to set goals and work hard to achieve those goals.

Sudanese refugee youth arrive in the United States having begun schooling in Sudan. In Sudan, they experience Sudanese culture, are socialized into the Sudanese education system, and adapt to the various norms of education and life. The education system in the United States places students of a certain age in a certain grade; therefore, the Sudanese students are often placed in lower grade levels based on their age and English language ability. Placement in a lower grade, however, did not seem to discourage these students from having high educational aspirations and meeting goals that they set for themselves.

I asked the 13 respondents in this study, "How far would you like to continue with your education?" There was a range of educational aspirations among the Sudanese refugee youth. While most of them expressed interest in going to college and completing at least a bachelor's degree, their educational aspirations varied in terms of how far they wanted to continue their education after earning a bachelor's degree. Completing high school was assumed because none of the students said that they wanted to complete high school first and then go to college. All respondents in this study except Mustafa, who said, "I am just planning to get through high school," reported wanting to go to college and earn degrees. Mustafa appeared to be confused about what he really wanted to do in the future. At one point, he said he would like to attend auto mechanic school and if that did not work out, he would like to go college and become an engineer, but he had doubts about himself: "I do not know how I will go to college given my GPA, but I would like to go to college."

It was interesting to observe that most of these students expressed interest in continuing with their education. Seven of the 13 students wanted to attend graduate school whereas 5 of the students wanted to earn bachelor's degrees and obtain jobs. At

the time of interview, 5 students were in 9th grade. Out of these 5 students, 4 students had GPAs that ranged from 2.5 to 3.5, and 1 student had a 1.8 GPA. The 3 students in 10th grade had GPAs that ranged from 2.9 to 3.2. Of the 3 students in 11th grade, 1 student declined to provide his GPA and the other 2 had GPAs of 2.9 and 3.0. Of the 4 students in 12th grade at the time of interview, 2 students turned 18 after I recruited them but before I interviewed them. Although I did not know that I could not interview them, I found out later that I could not include the data that I collected from them in this study. The other 2 students, who were still 17 at the time of interview, both had 3.5 GPAs. These results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. GPA and Educational Aspirations

Student	**GPA**	**Satisfaction**	**Goal**	**Educational Aspirations**	**Length of stay in the U.S. (years)**
Baruk	3.6	not	better	College and medicine	10
Mustafa		not	better	College	10
Fatima	3.5	not	better	College and medicine	6
Rabab	3.0	not	better	College and medicine	4
Ibrahim	2.8	not	better	College and law	7
Faruk	2.5	not	better	College	5
Faida	3.0	not	better	College and medicine	9
Baraka	2.9-3.0	not	better	College	5
Samia	2.9	not	better	College and dentistry	7
Osman	3.2	not	better	College and medicine	3
Badhurudin	3.5	not	better	College	3
Majid	2.8	not	better	College	12
Ahmad	1.8	not	better	College	4

Most of the students expressed interest in working harder to acquire better grades than they had achieved at the time of the interview. For example, Osman said, “My GPA is 3.2. I want my GPA to be 3.5 and above”; Baruk: “I believe I am working hard. I have a 3.6 GPA. I know that people who want to attend med school have to have a GPA which is 3.5 or higher to be admitted. I am working hard to meet that requirement”; Ibrahim: “I currently have the GPA I need to be admitted to the University of Iowa but I

need to put in more effort to get a better GPA. I intend to work harder to get better grades to be able to be admitted to law school. I am trying to work hard to get better grades. I will study more, probably 1 more hour a day"; Ahmad: "My GPA is 1.8. My goal is to work hard and become a teacher"; Rabab: "My GPA is 3.0; however, this is because I went to Sudan in the middle of the semester. I am working hard to get a GPA of 4.0. The whole point of my family being here is for me and my brothers and sister to get a better education. It is only wise that I improve and get a 4.0 GPA." A student with high educational aspirations tends to generate better achievement scores; based on current achievement, the student evaluates the likelihood of achieving a certain level of education and is able to delineate his or her aspired level of education as was the case with these Sudanese students.

Some of these students also wanted to improve their language skills in order to perform better than they were doing at the time of interview. It was interesting to listen to Ahmad, whose GPA was 1.8, express interest in going to college. He informed me that he was still in 9th grade and had a better chance of improving his GPA than most of the students because he reads a lot every day. Ahmad had been in the United States for 4 years. When he first arrived, he spoke limited English. At the time of interview, which was conducted in English, he answered questions without problems. He indicated that he has come a long way: "I could not understand English well when I first came because of the accent. English here is hard. I took English as a Second Language for 2 years before I could read and write in English. I am able to speak but not very good at it. I took other subjects. I had some problems but I have now got good. At the beginning, I could not understand the teachers because of accent."

Communication is a two-way dialogue. In this case, it appears that there was limited communication between Ahmad and his teachers, and as a result, he did not perform well and had a low GPA. He did not have the language skills needed to comprehend what was being taught and to ask the right questions that would enable him

to perform better. However, this did not hinder him from having high educational aspirations.

Another student, Mustafa**,** declined to reveal his GPA but claimed that he had a dream of going to college. He said, “I would like to go to auto mechanic school. If I do not succeed in going to auto mechanic school, then I would like to go to the university to become an engineer. I do not know how I will go to college given my GPA, but I would like to go to college. I know what they teach in school, but I choose not to do homework and I do not do well.” Interviewer**:** “It is interesting that you have identified your weakness. What are you going to do to improve your grades?” Mustafa: “I would like to have somebody help me with my homework sometimes.” Interviewer: “Have you asked for help from your sister or your mom?” Mustafa: “My sister sometimes helps me with my homework if I ask her for help. But I do not like to study; I like to go out and party. I do not like to do school work. My mother does not like me going out with my friends but I go anyway. I know I can do well in school when I want to.”

First and foremost, this student identified his weakness and knew what to do to improve but chose not to. By choosing not to do the right thing that would enable him to go to college, he was jeopardizing both his chances of being admitted to college and his future. This is the same student who said that he just wanted to get through high school. The question is, how long will it take him to realize that what he is doing is to his own disadvantage? Even though his parents were divorced, his older sister was in college at the time of interview and his mother decided to go back to college to complete a master’s degree, thus serving as a role model. Is having a role model a guarantee that an individual will work hard and do well?

All the respondents in this study knew where they wanted to go to college. Although the majority wanted to go to the two main state universities because they knew other Sudanese students already enrolled there, 3 wanted to go to a community college because it would be cheaper but not because they had low GPAs. These students also

wanted to go to community college because they believed that the quality of education was just as good as at a university. The credits they earned at the community college would be transferable to the state university and they would generally have smaller classes. The students who wanted to go to community college surprisingly had very high GPAs but were advised to make this choice by other Sudanese parents who already had children at that particular community college. Even though community colleges might be viewed differently by U.S. students, the Sudanese students viewed them as a beginning point and a cost-effective choice.

The claim that poverty is associated with low educational aspirations has been discounted by evidence of high educational aspirations and expectations among refugee and immigrant youth who are disproportionately represented in low income brackets (Hass, 1992). Poverty among refugee/immigrant student populations might be expected to lead to a low level of educational aspirations. The measurement of SES can also be confusing. Although parents' level of education may remain the same or increase after emigrating to the United States, the change in their occupations and the drop in their incomes as shown in empirical research has ignored the influence of SES measures in their country of origin. ROBOT postulated that parents who are educated and have high incomes can foster strong education values and ethics, raise the academic expectations of their children, and signal affordability. But does the ability of parents to afford learning resources currently and in the future affect the educational aspirations of their children? The answer depends on whether students perceive their parents' incomes as a hindrance to high school completion and enrollment in college in the future, or whether students from poor households use low SES as a motivating factor to reinforce the choice of an aspiration level that is likely to lift them from poverty. The social value of higher education might be relatively higher for students with a low SES background compared to students with a high SES background. Part of the answer to this question also depends on the extent to which the probability of achieving specific academic requirements varies

with changes in SES. The Sudanese students in this study showed that they had high educational aspirations regardless of their families' current family income. They were working hard, as can be seen in their GPAs and what they said about their education.

Occupational Aspirations

In the early stages of schooling, students' occupational aspirations are influenced by people in their immediate environment. As students role play, they tend to portray scenarios such as doctors treating their patients, teachers teaching, and police officers arresting people. As a result, these students might make decisions regarding what they would like to be through observation without realizing that they need a certain number of years of schooling to be able to achieve those positions. Examples are Faida and Samia. Faida: "I went through a stage where I wanted to be a police officer because my grandpa was a police officer. "Samia: "I wanted to be an army general because my dad was in the army." Others such as Baruk may have talked to or witnessed significant others suffering from a disease and as early as 3 years old may have decided that they wanted to be doctors. Baruk: "Ever since I was a little boy, I have always wanted to be a doctor. My grandmother became ill when I was 3 years old. My grandmother's illness made me curious as to what could be done to help her. My grandmother started talking to me about becoming a doctor when I was 3 years old."

As students continue to attend school between the ages of 5 and 10 years and begin to socialize and interact with other children from various backgrounds, they realize that other jobs are available to them beyond the occupations of people in their immediate environment. At this point, students are likely to venture out and instead of role playing only doctors and patients, teacher and students, or police officers and robbers, may start to role play other positions. The Sudanese students came to the United States with already formed occupational aspirations, but as they socialized with others within their school and community, they learned about other positions that were well paying and compared them with their academic achievement; in the process, they revised their

aspirations and made decisions regarding what they would like to pursue in the future. According to goal, motivation, and achievement theory, differences in aspirations can arise from differences in expected rewards resulting from student-specific incentives and investment in education (Biddle, 1979; Covington, 2000; Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Sherwood, 1989). The Sudanese students observed high-paying jobs and looked at their academic achievement, and having learned what was required or needed to enter that field, they revised their occupational aspirations based on the facts. According to this theory, aspirations are about achievements and achievements are about aspirations.

I asked the Sudanese refugee youth, "What would you like to be when you grow up?" Table 6 shows their reported GPAs, educational and occupational aspirations, and satisfaction with their GPAs. Whether their aspirations were realistic is indicated by their level of occupational certainty.

Table 6. GPA, Occupational Aspirations, and Certainty

Student	**GPA**	**satisfied/goal**	**Occupational aspirations**	**Occupational certainty**
Baruk	3.6	not better	Doctor	Engineer
Mustafa		not better	Auto-Mechanic	Engineer
Fatima	3.5	not better	Doctor, Surgeon	
Rabab	3.0	not better	Doctor	
Ibrahim	2.8	not better	Lawyer	
Faruk	2.5	not better	Sportscaster	
Faida	3.0	not better	Doctor	
Baraka	2.9-3.0	not better	Architect	
Samia	2.9	not better	Dentist	
Osman	3.2	not better	Doctor	
Badhurudin	3.5	not better	Engineer	
Majid	2.8	not better	Football player	
Ahmad	1.8	not better	Teacher	

As shown in Table 6, 5 students aspired to be doctors; other aspirations were engineer (1), architect (1), dentist (1), football player (1), sportscaster (1), teacher (1),

lawyer (1), and auto mechanic (1). Becoming a doctor was the most frequently reported occupational aspiration compared to other positions.

These students were working hard despite the fact that they were adapting to a new society that might not necessarily understand what they were going through. The Sudanese students once belonged to elite families (see Table 3 in Chapter III), but at the time of this study, some of their families were struggling financially.

Table 7. Parents' Current Occupations and Youths' Occupational Aspirations

Students	**Parents' current occupation**		**Youths' occupational aspirations**
	Mother	**Father**	
Baruk	Food worker	Unemployed	Doctor
Mustafa	Librarian	Do not know	Mechanic or engineer
Fatima	Lab tech	Teach Arabic	Doctor
Rabab	Pre-school assistant	Unemployed	Doctor
Ibrahim	Direct care	Lawyer	Lawyer
Faruk	Pre-school Assistant	Stocks at Wal-Mart	Sportscaster
Faida	Food worker	Not in US	Doctor
Baraka	Food worker	Not in US	Architect
Samia	Direct care	Dead	Dentist
Osman	Food worker	Direct care	Doctor
Badhurudin	Food worker	Direct Care	Engineer
Majid	Lab Tech Teacher	Arabic	Football player
Ahmad	Unemployed	Unemployed	Teacher

Table 7 compares the parents' current occupations with the students' occupational aspirations. Although parents' current occupations appeared to be undesired by these students, this did not negatively affect their aspirations. They were still striving to do their best with the support they received from their families, the community center, teachers, and peers. As I listened to them, I realized that they were very passionate about

their education. Current parents' occupation as a measure of SES indicated that most of these students were now identified as coming from low income families. Since their parents' current occupations were not desired by these students, it was difficult to distinguish whether current low incomes motivated them to achieve different occupations or reinforced opinions already formed in Sudan that they wanted jobs that were as good as or better than what their parents originally had. I explored this behavior by comparing students' occupational aspirations with their fathers' and mothers' occupations in Sudan. According to this comparison, students' occupational aspirations exhibited continuity or non-continuity. Continuity indicated that students wanted occupations similar or related to what their parents held in Sudan. Non-continuity meant that the respondents desired to have occupations that were different from what their parents held in Sudan because they believed they could be successful. I did not consider the positions parents were holding at the time of interviews because none of the participants expressed aspirations for similar jobs.

Continuity

Table 7 reveals that 6 students chose occupations similar or related to what their parents held in Sudan but not what they held at the time of interview in the United States, thus showing continuity. For example, Ibrahim said, **"**I would like to be a lawyer like my dad. I always go to Sudan during the summer to spend time with my dad. I always admire what he does and would like to be just like him." This student's dad no longer lived with the family but lived in Sudan since his parents were divorced. This student's mother had been a lecturer at a university in Sudan but was now a direct care staff at an agency that provides services to people who are mentally challenged. Ahmad: "I would like to be a math teacher because I am good in math. My mom was a teacher in Sudan and my dad was a doctor" Faruk: "I would like to be a sportscaster because I like to play basketball and football. My dad was a cartoonist in one of the newspapers in Sudan." Faida: **"**My dad still lives in Sudan and he is a doctor. My educational goal is to go to

college, take biology, then go to med school and become a doctor. I would like to be a doctor like my dad." Baraka: "I would like to be a dentist. This is something I have picked for myself. My dad lives in Sudan and is a doctor. I would like to be a dentist so I can lead a good life like my dad." Osman: "I would like to be a doctor. My dad was a dentist in Sudan."

Non-continuity

The students who wanted positions that were different from what their parents held in Sudan were categorized under non-continuity. These students wanted these positions because they were better paying than what their parents once held, because of influence from other members of their family, or simply because they perceived those jobs as something they would be good at. For example, Baruk: "Ever since I was a little boy, I have always wanted to be a doctor. My grandmother has always said that I will be a doctor someday. My dad was an army general and my mother was a high school teacher." At the time of the interview, his mother was a food worker and his father was unemployed. Mustafa: **"**My mom has a master's degree in music and taught at the university in Sudan. She now works as a librarian. My dad taught at a university in Sudan too. I would like to go to auto mechanic school because I am good at fixing cars." Fatima: "I would like to go to medical school to become a surgeon. My dad was a musician in Sudan." Rabab: **"**My mom was an English teacher and my dad worked in the Army as a computer technician. I would like to be a doctor. Being a doctor is interesting and I am good in math and science. These subjects will help me become a doctor. I can take what I learn here back to Africa to help people there, especially children." Samia: "My mom was an accountant in Sudan but I would like to be a dentist because dentists are paid well. I have had a lot of dental problems since I was 8 years old. I have been to the dentist so many times that I would like to be a dentist." Badhurudin: **"**My dad was a dentist in Sudan but I would like to be a mechanical engineer because I do well in my

classes that will enable me to go to college." Majid: **"**I would like to be a professional football player, but if this fails, then I will be a business man."

In each case, the students opened up to me as they recalled the kind of life they had in Sudan and indicated they would like to lead a life like the one they had before the war in Sudan affected them. The Sudanese refugee youth in this study appeared to be working hard to go to college and achieve the kind of employment that would enable them to acquire a secure job in the future. This was reflected in their GPAs and the fact that they were not satisfied with their current GPAs and expressed wanting to do better. In two cases, Mustafa did not tell me his GPA and Ahmad's GPA was 1.8. Ahmad explained that he did not know English well when he arrived but he was working hard to learn the English language and take regular classes.

It is interesting that when the students were asked to identify their educational and occupational aspirations, all stated that they would like to go to college and acquire the kind of employment that would let them lead a better life in the future. None of the students said that they would like to graduate from high school and then go to college. When asked why they did not say that they would like to complete high school first and then go to college, the respondents answered that this was obvious because there was no doubt that they would graduate from high school.

Based on the reported educational aspirations and occupational aspirations of the Sudanese students and comparing those aspirations in terms of those who came from single-parent families and those who came from families with both parents, this study found no indication that those who came from single-parent families had aspirations different from those who came from families with both parents.

The Sudanese refugee youth appeared to have high educational and occupational aspirations as portrayed by the answers they gave during the interviews. Most of these students appeared to be working hard to achieve educational and occupational goals that they had set for themselves. This was supported by their GPAs and by their own reports.

All of the students said that they were not satisfied with their current GPAs and were working hard to get better grades. They reported doing their homework whenever they had assignments. Most of these students did not appear to have problems with doing their homework. In cases where they had problems with homework, they sought help from their teachers, peers, siblings, and their community.

Formation of Educational and Occupational Aspirations

In the quest to determine how and when educational aspirations and occupational aspirations are formed, respondents in this study were asked how and when they came to the decision to go to college and achieve a specific career. Their responses varied in terms of who or what influenced their choices and were categorized as follows: the influence of parents and significant others, culture and religion, students' ability, future income, and teachers' and peers' influences.

The Influence of Parents and Significant Others

Parents tend to instill certain beliefs and ways of doing things based on their upbringing and what they learn in their environment. Whether it is high educational or occupational aspirations or behavior, parents emphasize what they think is right for their young children and what would make them become productive members of a given society.

It is a well-known fact that parental involvement in education plays a fundamental role in shaping students' potential in performing well in school and obtaining eventual employment. The nurturing of students from early childhood instills parental influence on their behavior and attitudes. According to a Sudanese student, "My parents say that the reason why we are in the United States is to go to school and get better jobs in the future." Another student said, "Prior to coming, my parents told me the reason why we were coming was to better our lives by going to school and making sure we work hard and succeed." Baruk: "My parents sat down with me and had a long talk. They stressed how important it is for me to be successful in school. They reminded me why we are in

this country, to seek a better life. A better life can only be achieved through hard work. They advised me to work hard in school because if I set my mind to anything, I will succeed." Fatima: "My parents are very supportive of my goals and help me whenever I need help."

Studies show that parental involvement has the greatest impact on students' aspirations. Attempts to encourage parents to be involved in their children's education in the United States have been ongoing and involve the government, school administrators, and parent organizations across many states, counties, cities, and school districts (Burke, 2009). The Sudanese students reported that their parents were very much involved in their education whether or not they spoke English. This meant that for those students who had parents who spoke English, if the students had assignments that they did not understand, the parents would take charge and explain the assignment to them in a way that they could understand more easily. For cases in which the parents spoke limited English and might not be able to explain thoroughly what was expected in the assignments, students reported that their parents sought help for their children either from other relatives or from the Sudanese center. The Sudanese parents invested considerable time making sure their children were well educated. Through this involvement, these parents signaled to their children how much they valued their academic attainment; thus, the children's aspirations were formed and shaped.

Furthermore, these parents served as role models for their children. When asked how far they would like to continue with their education and the jobs they would like to acquire in the future, 6 students chose jobs that were similar to the jobs their parents held in Sudan. Seven students picked jobs that were better than the positions their parents held in Sudan because they reported they would like to lead a better life than what they experienced before. They also perceived those positions as jobs they would be good at. These students observed their parents, and in the process of observation, formed their educational and occupational aspirations.

Significant others also played an important role in the formation of these students' educational and occupational aspirations. Baruk: "Ever since I was a little boy, I have always wanted to be a doctor. My grandmother has always said that I will be a doctor some day. My grandmother became ill. My grandmother's illness made me more curious as to what could be done to help her get better. My grandmother and I were very close. When she eventually passed away, I made a promise to my grandmother and myself that I will be a doctor one day. I may not have been able to help my grandmother become better, but I can make a difference in someone else's life and that is what drives me to become a doctor. If it were not for my grandmother, I do not think I would be sitting here today saying that I would like to become a doctor."

In addition, these students attended various celebrations with their parents such as weddings, graduations, birthdays, and religious holidays held within the Sudanese community. During these celebrations, the parents pointed out the students who had performed well and gone to college; they told their children that they would like to see them do the same, and they would have a similar celebration or even better. The constant reminders and encouragement from parents and significant others from the Sudanese community let the students know that there were people who cared about their educational success.

Culture and Religion

In every culture, there are certain ways in which people bring up their children. While some parents may read to their children and consistently remind them of the need to work hard and become whatever they want to be, other parents prepare their children for specific careers. Others yet expose their children to specific careers with the hope that the children will grow accustomed to the job and eventually want to be what they see. Other children may observe people in their environment who are successful and admire their way of life and decide to work hard to be as successful.

Among the Sudanese, culture and religion appear to be intertwined. By being intertwined, I mean the two seem to operate together. As young children, the Sudanese observe their parents pray and, in the process, learn to pray before they learn to read and write. This is followed by the children attending madras (religion classes) where they learn to read the Koran and take regular classes where they learn other subjects. The Koran teaches, according to the students, that they have to have a plan for their future. Baraka: "Islam is my religion. Islam teaches that nothing comes easy. If you want something, you have to work very hard for it. You have to be dedicated to get what you want." From an early age, Sudanese students are taught to set goals. According to the Goal, Motivation and Achievement Theory (GMAT), setting educational and occupational goals by a student is synonymous with setting minimum parameters of motivation, effort, drive, and achievement. This theory postulates that the quality of learning and the propensity to continue learning hinges on the interaction between the goals set by the student and the motivating properties of such goals. A student with high educational aspirations tends to generate better achievement scores, and based on current achievement, a student evaluates the likelihood of achieving a certain level of education and will identify the aspired level of education.

The Sudanese students reported that their parents also emphasized the need to put God first in whatever they did. Baruk: "I was taught various ways to say no to temptations and to put religion first. Both parents believe that if we put everything in prayer, we will succeed. When choosing friends, look for people who have the same interests as you. You do not look for others with interests that will land you into trouble. Be proud of your religion and your background because it is through this that you will find strength that will help you overcome temptations. If you want to succeed in school and get a good job, pray and Allah will help you."

When people move from their country of origin to another country, they bring their culture with them. Culture may dictate the way they do different things and the way they view the world around them. It takes awhile for individuals to realize that their way of doing some things may not necessarily be similar or acceptable in the new environment. For example, the Sudanese students used to stand up in their classrooms in Sudan when their teachers walked in to show respect. When they first went to U.S. schools, they stood up when their teachers walked in but no one else did, which was awkward. However, they did not understand why other students did not stand when their teachers walked in. Ahmad: "Respecting teachers is very important because it helps me learn from them."

The Sudanese students reported that corporal punishment was enforced in their classrooms in Sudan. Homework was expected to be completed and those who did not were caned or "whipped," as Ahmad described it. In order to avoid being whipped, the students worked hard to make sure their assignments were completed each day. Therefore, for some of these students, working hard and succeeding was something they learned in Sudan. Some of these students' aspirations appeared to have been formed in their country of origin and were revised only given the new conditions they faced. The carryover effects of country of origin regarding the value of education and cultural beliefs tended to persist for some duration of their stay in the United States.

Even though the interviewer did not ask students to compare their schools in Sudan with schools in the United States, these students went back and forth making that comparison. Ibrahim: "In my former school in Sudan, there was corporal punishment but that is not allowed in my current school. I loved my school in Sudan because there was a lot of work and I learned a lot in math. I remember teachers liked to keep their classes straight. We were not allowed to talk in class not unless the teacher talked to you. We were expected to face one side in the classroom; that is different here in the United States. Teachers in America are different because they like to have fun." Ahmad: "We

got whipped a lot for simple mistakes. I therefore worked hard to avoid being whipped." Sanctions appeared to play a vital role in these students' motivation and achievement. The students had to deal with the effects of these signals as part of the discourse on educational aspiration and performance.

The students believed that religion played a fundamental role in their lives because it kept them from doing, according to one of the students, "sinful stuff like having sex before marriage and drinking. Instead of going out I stay home studying or hang out with my friends who have similar interests. To be a Muslim one has to know Arabic because Koran is in Arabic. Religion is very important in a Muslim's life. It encourages us to be educated and to use education to help ourselves and others."

Students' Ability

In order for students to adjust and succeed in a given environment, researchers have argued that the students have to be willing to work hard and have the ability to set goals and meet the academic challenges that come with the goals. In this case, the Sudanese students showed that they could set goals for themselves and work hard to meet those goals by choosing the right courses that would enable them to succeed. Baruk: "In order for me to succeed in becoming a doctor, there are certain classes that I am required to take. I think I have done a good job choosing those classes. I am all into math and sciences which are very important in this field of study. I know that becoming a doctor in this country requires hard work. I believe I am working hard. I have a 3.6 GPA. I know that people who want to attend med school have to have a GPA which is 3.5 or higher to be admitted. I am working hard to meet that requirement." Fatima: "I work very hard in school. I take extra credit classes and I spend extra time studying both at home and at school. My grade point average is 3.5. I maintain my GPA by studying at school during my free time. When given review sheets, I go over them thoroughly." Rabab: "My GPA is 3.0; however, this is because I went to Sudan in the middle of the semester. I do my homework every day but study three times a week. I am working hard to get a GPA of

4.0. I always study when I know there is a test coming." Ibrahim: "I currently have the GPA which I need to be admitted to the University of Iowa but I need to put in more effort to get a better GPA. I intend to work harder to get better grades to be able to be admitted to law school." Baraka: "My GPA is 2.9 or 3.0. I am not sure. I want to go to Iowa State." Osman: "My GPA is 3.2. I want my GPA to be 3.5 and above."

Future Income

Students were asked why they wanted the occupations that they had previously stated. They responded that they wanted those careers because they thought they would be good at those positions and earn the kind of money that would let them lead a better life in the future. Others wanted the positions because they would like to lead a comfortable life. Yet others wanted the positions because of humanitarian reasons: "I would like to be a doctor because I would like to go back to Africa and help especially children."

Academic achievements in the form of a high GPA increase the likelihood of realizing an educational goal. Some level of motivation is generated by the desire to achieve such goals, and goals or aspirations become concrete by increasing the probability of achieving them unlike aspirations not backed by adequate academic achievement. Motivation is about the effort and drive generated by current incentives and expected future rewards from achieving specific goals or aspirations. Expected monetary rewards from obtaining some level of education, like a college degree, are known for each career and are usually not very different across youth.

Teachers and Peers

Teachers play a crucial role in students' learning and, therefore, the environment in which the students learn has to be conducive to learning. Wilkinson and Ansell (1992) stated, "The emotional climate of the classroom is directly related to the attainment of

academic excellence, however defined. Students' feelings about what they experience in class – whether inclusion or exclusion, mastery or inadequacy, support or hostility – cannot be divorced from what and how well they learn" (p. 4). The Sudanese students in this study reported doing well because the teachers in their classrooms provided them with the support they needed to succeed. Teachers were accessible before and after school. Students went to school earlier than everyone and stayed after hours to complete their assignments so that if they had questions regarding the assignments, their teachers were there to assist them. Students reported that encouragement from teachers helped them stay motivated and focused on doing well in school. The Sudanese students said: "In U.S. teachers are fun and helpful. Teachers encourage me to finish my homework even though I am not very good at it. Teachers also help me with reading my story books and writing." "My teachers are also great." "Teachers in America like to have fun." "My teachers have helped a lot with Language Arts."

In addition, peer encouragement and support was vital at this stage because these teenagers were becoming dependant on peer relationships to establish self-image. Ahmad: "I usually go to my friends to study that are the friends who take the same courses with me. I have decided to take engineering as my major because my friends say they want to be in the same program. My parents want me to be a doctor but I have not decided on that yet. I might end up changing my mind." Faruk: "I plan to go to the University of Iowa or Iowa State University because most of my friends will go there." The aspirations held by the student's peers are the cornerstone on which the student bases his or her own aspirations (Williams, 1972). The Sudanese students provided strong support for each other, even though in some situations they felt that some American students were not supportive of their presence in their school and having a Muslim name. As a result, most Sudanese students decided not to socialize with American students to avoid being teased and shunned by them. Instead they looked for strength from one another. In so doing, they were able to encourage and assist one another with their

homework. In cases where they did not know answers to questions, they went to their teachers together to ask for assistance.

Older Sudanese students who had graduated from high school and gone to college served as role models for the younger Sudanese students. When they attended community functions, which included graduations, the community leaders discussed how proud they were of those who graduated. In addition, the graduates were recognized by everyone who brought them presents and praised them for a job well done. Being recognized by everyone in the community was very important to these students and therefore the students looked forward to their turns.

Strategies Employed to Achieve Educational and Occupational Aspirations

The Sudanese students in this study appeared to be working very hard to achieve goals that they set for themselves. This was reflected in the courses they took and the grade point averages they obtained. They asked their teachers a lot of questions, studied and complete their assignments on time, and handed in the assignments when they were due. They took their papers to the writing center where their work was proof read by professionals and they were given feed back before they turned in the assignments to their teachers. These students did their homework right away when they got home from school so they did not have to worry about completing their homework later. They independently limited the number of hours they watched TV. They stayed healthy by participating in sports. The parents were very much involved in their education even though in some cases they did not have the language skills needed to assist their children with completing their assignments. The parents sought help from other Sudanese who may have spoken English better than themselves. These parents also checked center point, which provided them with information about their children's progress and assignments.

Even though the American culture was overwhelmingly powerful, the Sudanese parents encouraged their children to continue to value their culture and what it meant to be a Muslim. Madras was held every week where the children were taught their culture and to read in Arabic. The Sudanese parents encouraged their children to learn their language and culture by socializing with people from their group. The parents consistently reminded their children the reason why they came to the United States: to better their lives by going to school and making sure they worked hard and succeeded.

The Sudanese students took time to do their homework during study hall when other students were making noise. One student said, "I have learned to block the noise so I can concentrate on what I am doing. I pay attention in class and ask lots of questions." These students found other ways of improving their GPAs by doing extra work to earn extra credit. Another student noted, "I take classes I enjoy, I manage my time well, I study during free time; study, study, study. I am generally a hard working person. I do most of my work at school during my free period. If I do not complete it, I take it home. I go over material at home that was taught at school. If I do not understand it, I use a textbook to understand it better, but if I still do not understand, then I go to school to ask my teachers. Most teachers are willing to help. In a given day, I study for about 2 hours. When I have a test, I study for about 2 hours to 3 hours. I study mostly independently."

Other strategies that these students included in their lives was going to the library to read for fun and also visiting book stores where there were lots of books to read. The students claimed that they were regular visitors to the Barnes and Noble bookstore where they enjoyed reading various books that they might not be able to afford to buy. These students also learned to remove themselves from situations where there was noise to environments that were quiet. A Sudanese student said, "I stay at the library and finish my homework before coming home. I do not like people talking around me when I am doing my homework."

The Sudanese students took advantage of a program that the school district had in place known as job shadowing. When professionals came to their schools, especially the ones who had similar jobs to what the students would like to have, they paid attention to determine the kind of challenges they might confront in their futures. After the presentations, the students asked a lot of questions, then asked if it would be possible for them to visit the professionals at their respective practices to see them in action. In other cases, the school district made arrangements for the students to go and visit others who may not have had time to come to their school. Most of these students have had a chance to interact with professionals.

It was crucial for the Sudanese students to have friends especially during this stage in their lives. These students asked their friends to study with them. When they were not able to come up with answers among themselves, they went to the center where they sought help with their assignments, especially those students whose parents were not proficient in the English language.

The Sudanese community as whole was another source of support. The Sudanese community held meetings often to discuss the fate of their children. During some of these meetings, issues that arose were the behaviors that some of their children portrayed that did not include the fundamentals of following their culture and religion. The students reported that their parents decided to assign a few elders the responsibility to talk to the children who did not listen to their parents. If the elders talked to the students and they declined to follow what was suggested because they decided to follow the American culture, some of these students were forced to go back to Sudan where they learned to respect their elders and follow their culture more closely before being allowed to return to the United States.

Observing other Sudanese students who graduated from high school and went to college also served as a form of encouragement to the respondents. Some of the students

said they would like to be just like the other students who had graduated and gone on to college.

In summary, the Sudanese students in this study had high educational and occupational aspirations. The Sudanese students strived to go to college and obtain degrees that would enable them to acquire better paying jobs in the future. These students had high educational aspirations because of their own academic abilities and strong social support from parents, significant others, teachers, peers, and their community. These students belonged to an elite group in their country of Sudan before the war. Therefore, being exposed to worlds of both riches and poverty encouraged them to work hard.

Coming to America was a privilege, as students put it. Their parents constantly reminded the students that they were in the United States to go to school and better their lives. This meant working hard and achieving set standards so that in the future, they would not have to work at the odd jobs that their parents currently held. The students also knew that working hard would enable them to support their parents in the future.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The objective of this study was to determine the educational and occupational aspirations of immigrant youth from Sudan. I also wanted to study how educational and occupational aspirations are formed and the strategies used to achieve those aspirations. Rumbaut and Ima (1998) stated that only 45% of refugees and other immigrants from Africa identify themselves as Black, yet researchers quite often consider refugees from different countries in Africa as one group with no distinction of nation of origin and culture. In this study, I interviewed Sudanese refugee youth living in a mid-size town in the Midwest to give them a voice in the literature regarding their educational and occupational aspirations. I expected to better understand their aspirations, how their aspirations were shaped in the process of cultural and educational adaptation, and the implications of their aspirations for their academic performance. Is their story similar to or different from that of other immigrant African youth? My hope is that based on my results, a teacher instructing an immigrant or a refugee child in a classroom will be more likely to ask, "What is this student's story and what can I do to better serve the student's needs?" When immigrant youth are performing poorly, is it because of language barriers or are there other factors? If they are performing well despite socio-economic and cultural challenges, what lessons can we learn from them as one small group among a growing immigrant youth population in the United States?

In the next four sections, I present a summary of the results, discuss the theoretical implications of the study, address some study limitations, and propose future research directions.

Summary of Results

The purpose of this study was to discover the educational and occupational aspirations of Sudanese refugee youth, how educational and occupational aspirations are

formed, and the strategies involved in the process. As a precursor to studying their educational and occupational aspirations, examining their identity, assimilation, and culture provided an idea of the environment in which they were operating. Most of the Sudanese students identified themselves as non-Black or "other." Only 3 out of 13 student participants identified themselves as Black. These students did not identify as White, but they indicated that they were more like Whites in terms of academic performance and the way they behaved. The Sudanese students interacted with White and Black students in school, but when they left the school setting, they maintained peer interactions with other students from Sudan while attending madras together, visiting each other's homes, and engaging in other activities organized by the Sudanese community.

The Sudanese students in this study came from families that were well-educated, with most of their parents having college degrees. These students had a high socio-economic status when they lived in Sudan, where they were able to attend the best schools because their parents had the necessary financial resources. However, that changed when they moved to the United States, where even though their parents were well educated, they were either unemployed or working in occupations that did not pay an income that would enable them to provide the lifestyle they had in Sudan before the war.

All the Sudanese students interviewed were Muslim, and religion played a very important role in their lives, especially regarding their upbringing, their relationships with peers, their community, and their education. In particular, religion was one of the integral components of their educational and career aspirations. These students lived near to each other and frequently interacted with other Sudanese students and families in a small community with a cultural and religious center. These students attended one of the two high schools in the area. Their parents believed that their children should remain in close proximity to one another to provide support when necessary.

A main result of this study was that the students reported having high educational and occupational aspirations, with all of them aspiring to obtain a college degree and some intending to pursue careers in medicine, dentistry, law, and engineering. They indicated that they worked hard and did well in their classes, having high GPA scores of 3.0 and above. Their GPAs on average were comparable to or even better than those of American-born students, especially considering that the Sudanese students constituted a small segment of the student population in their school. They chose classes that would enable them to go to college and to acquire well-paying jobs in the future.

Students who had high GPAs also wanted to attend graduate school and acquire occupations that required a higher GPA. Based on the literature, immigrants may have high educational and occupational aspirations, but their aspirations may not translate into higher GPAs. The students in this study had high educational and occupational aspirations and worked diligently to obtain high GPAs. I found a positive association between their aspirations and their academic achievement given that these immigrant students were willing to set goals and work hard to achieve them.

Socio-economic status was found in some studies to be related to high academic performance, but the Sudanese youths' cases were different. These youth now had a lower socio-economic status than they had in Sudan, even though they came from well-educated families. According to the vast literature on student aspirations, a high socio-economic status is usually associated with higher aspirations and higher academic performance. This means that based on previous studies, these students were not expected to perform as well academically or maintain high educational and career aspirations. However, it was necessary to consider their socio-economic status in their country of origin and its effects on their aspirations and academic achievements. There was no evidence that the drop in the incomes of their parents when they came to the United States had reduced their aspirations, but rather it appeared to provide an impetus for their aspirations and academic performance. The Sudanese students' change in socio-

economic class from high to low did not have a negative effect on either their educational aspirations or their academic performance.

Sudanese refugee youth arrive in the United State with different educational skills and experiences, having already been socialized into the Sudanese education system. Sudanese families start talking to their children about their expected levels of education and careers early in their lives. Therefore, when these children start school, they are prepared to set goals early. By the time they are in first grade, they are being graded and ranked. Students who do not perform well in Sudan are forced to repeat their grade, and those who succeed are rewarded with gifts and recognized in front of the entire school. When they come to the United States, they are sometimes demoted to lower grades because of their lack of language skills and their age. However, these factors did not seem to discourage the participants in this study from working hard and aiming for the top.

Among these Sudanese youth, parents and significant others played important roles in their educational and occupational aspirations. The Sudanese parents continued to talk to their children about what they expected from them in terms of behavior and level of education. They encouraged them to work hard, go to college, and choose occupations that would enable them to obtain high-paying jobs. These students also had peers with similar interests, and they encouraged one another to work hard and succeed. Because these students lived in close proximity to one another, they frequently visited each other and did homework together. They also went to the library to study together. When they had questions that they could not answer, they sought their teachers' help, indicating that their teachers were approachable.

The conversations these students had with their parents and significant others was further emphasized when they went to school and attended madras, a religious class that taught the children to set goals early in their lives and work hard to achieve those goals. As these students came into contact with other students with similar and different

backgrounds, they began to realize that there were other occupations available that might be of interest to them rather than the ones that their parents or significant others may have discussed with them. This did not mean that they deviated from what their families wanted them to be, but now they had other occupations to consider.

Toward Understanding the Formation of Educational and Occupational Aspirations

Young children are often asked, "What would you like to be when you grow up?" Some of these youngsters may have some notion of what they want to be emanating from the influence of their teachers; the role models they are exposed to; and what parents, family, and friends do as an occupation. Preferences or aspirations are not concrete in the early years and may change many times as a student matures. When children enter the school system, they are graded and ranked, taught to set goals early, and encouraged to work toward achieving them. When students are recognized and awarded gifts for a job well done and when students realize that they are capable of doing well in their classrooms, their goals become concrete aspirations and they assure themselves that they are not disappointing others or deviating from what their parents and community expect. Based on an understanding of how aspirations are formed, we can ask three important questions that affect a students' story. First, when a child is still young and is developing different academic skills, who and what influences are important? Second, what do these students care about regarding their education, and third, what motivates them to achieve their educational and career goals? What drives the Sudanese refugee students to work hard to acquire high GPAs? The answers are a combination of the following: (a) who influenced their goal-setting mechanisms, that is, when and by whom; (b) who and what motivated them to aspire to high levels of education and well-paying careers; and (c) what they were concerned about and what they cared about.

Motivation

The Sudanese students in this study led two lives; at the time of this study, they belonged to a low socio-economic class, yet they were motivated to work hard so they could lead a better life like the one they had in Sudan by making good money to live on. When students graduate, the Sudanese community holds graduation parties for them, and each member of the community is expected to attend. The students are recognized and rewarded with gifts. Other factors that motivate these students to work hard include the influence of peers from Sudan who share their work ethic, the time they spend doing homework, their self-esteem and self-worth, their academic abilities, and finally, prizes and rewards they receive for achieving academic expectations.

Teachers have valuable influences on their lives just like their parents. The Sudanese believe that it is important to respect their teachers and do as their teachers say in order to learn from them. They therefore seek their teachers' help when they need it, and teachers encourage them to work hard and succeed.

Concerns and Care: Effects of Deviating from Parental Expectations, Peer Pressure, and Family Obligations

As I conducted this research, I discovered several reasons why these Sudanese students worked so hard. They worked hard because they did not want to disappoint their parents. Disappointing their parents would mean that they were jeopardizing their future family obligations and financial support. Not working hard would mean that they were going against their religious convictions and teachings, which in turn interfered with their beliefs. There were social sanctions for not meeting the expectations of parents, significant others, teachers, and members of the Sudanese community. Corporal punishment was reinforced in their classrooms in Sudan; students who did not comply with the rules faced various punishments including spanking. The students believed that spanking signaled to them that certain behaviors were not accepted. They also had to complete their assignments before going to class each day to avoid punishment. When

these students were at home, their parents set up expectations for them and expected their children to meet those expectations.

When Sudanese students go against the norms, Sudanese elders are asked to talk to the students in order to change their behavior. In cases where students do not change their behavior as advised by the elders, the students are sent back to Sudan for some period before they can return to the United States.

In every culture, children are questioned, "What would you like to be when you grow up?" This question is an attempt to inquire about and mold the future career preferences of a child or to find out if the child has formed particular aspirations. In the case of the Sudanese refugee youth, religion played an important role by demanding that each individual set goals early in life. The goals can be either short or long term, or educational achievement in terms of GPA increases the likelihood of realizing educational goals. Students who collaborate with parents, teachers, and peers tend to adopt educational strategies that yield higher levels of academic achievement and hence increase the likelihood of achieving overall education and career goals. Values and beliefs can also influence choices. Setting academic goals and developing career aspirations provide the motivation needed to achieve target levels of education and career plans, and it was evident among these students that such values and beliefs were emphasized by their parents and community. This small Sudanese community had in place certain rewards and sanctions that were applied as deemed necessary.

To address the question of "who," the nurturing of Sudanese youth from early childhood instilled parental influence over their behavior, attitudes, and preferences regarding education level and occupations. Parents and significant others, with the help of religious beliefs, communicated their expectations to the students at an early stage. However, students at some stage begin to develop their own educational goals, which may reflect to some extent what their parents, significant others, and teachers have communicated to them. The Sudanese refugee youth in this study appeared to have strong

social support not only from their immediate families but also from teachers, peers, and the Sudanese community at large. Parents encouraged their children to work hard and also sought assistance for them from others in their community, especially in cases where they could not help their own children because of language barriers.

To address the question of "how," this study considered the students' educational environment in Sudan. These students started school early in Sudan, and by the time they reached first grade, they were ranked and graded, which signaled to them that they would have to work hard in order to rank well. Second, the Sudanese youth attended madras, religion classes where they were taught to set goals early and commit to meeting those goals. Third, corporal punishment was reinforced in their classrooms in Sudan. The students who did not comply with the rules were punished by being spanked, which signaled to them that certain behaviors were not acceptable. They also had to complete their assignments before going to class each day to avoid punishment. When children were at home, parents set up expectations for them and expected their children to meet those expectations. In return, parents paid for tutoring and sent their children to some of the best schools. Fourth, rewards played an important role in their education. At the end of every semester, the Sudanese youth who performed exceptionally well were recognized in front of the entire school and given rewards for a job well done. This, however, changed when they came to the United States because corporal punishment is not part of the U.S. educational system.

Theoretical Approaches and Implications

It is often assumed that at some age, students will have aspirations; but why each student holds a specific aspiration level, when and how they arrive at that level, and who or what influences their academic and career aspirations have not been well studied. At an early age, a child is often asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?", as an attempt to mold the future career preferences of a child or to find out if a child has embarked on particular goals as described in the previous section. The answers given

cover a wide range of occupations from police officer to doctor, often reflecting their admired role models, parents' occupations, and what their parents have communicated to them.

In the vast literature on students' educational and occupational aspiration, I found three major schools of thought or approaches that were used by authors to analyze student aspirations: the Resources and Opportunity or Blocked Opportunity Theory (ROBOT), the Family Background and Obligations Theory (FBOT), and the Goal, Motivation, and Achievement Theory (GMAT). To what extent did these approaches relate to my field observations? I attempted to show the relevance and limitations of these approaches in explaining the experiences of Sudanese refugee youth.

Resources and Opportunity or
Blocked Opportunity Theory (ROBOT)

This is the input-output theory of educational aspirations and achievement. As suggested by its abbreviation, it assumes that what matters is abundant parental and other educational resources and the equal opportunity principle to produce high educational and career aspirations among youth. The cultural ecological theory (Ogbu, 1978) characterizes differences in students' aspirations between voluntary minority groups and involuntary native-born minorities as arising from differences in social pressure from parents, peer attitudes, and differences in how parents value education that may result from discrimination toward minorities. Academic performance can be influenced by learning effort and SES, but an environment and culture of discrimination and stereotyping can influence academic attitudes and goals of some students, and what matters in the final analysis is how each student and his or her parents cope with such challenges if they exist.

The level and nature of influence from parents depends on their involvement in the education of their children, but their actions are limited by opportunities, time, and financial resources. That is why it is important that these theories consider what

motivates parents and what they care about as they make choices to influence both the GPAs and the aspirations of their youth. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) asserted that parents' beliefs and expectations for their children affect their involvement in school activities, which ultimately tends to increase students' chances of success in their education and gives them the confidence to respond to parental expectations and aspirations in the development of their own educational aspirations. Immigrants bring with them some capital, including financial resources, education, social support networks, and their culture. Parents may be well educated, but their incomes and employment in the United States tend to be low and uncertain.

Sudanese refugee parents spend their time working and engaging in child care, schooling activities, and cultural and religious activities because these activities strengthen the aspirations of their children and enhance their children's academic performance. These parents try to generate enough income and establish a good SES away from poverty. They spend more hours at work and can provide few resources for the education of their children given their current occupations. A low SES can be associated with less parental involvement in children's schooling in terms of time and money, and if the ROBOT theory holds, would lead to low aspirations and low academic achievement from these children. Although the Sudanese parents worked many hours to make ends meet and had to take time away from with their children, the students had the support of their neighborhood, student peers, and teachers to help with homework. Therefore, the implications of time and financial resources for their students' aspirations were unclear but seemed insignificant. Also, these students' aspirations seemed to be unaffected by the fact that they were not well integrated culturally with Black or minority youth in their schools.

Outside of school, these students interacted with peers from Sudan only, and the few students who faced language and other academic barriers were often helped by their

families and the neighborhood center, and as such, some minimal level of resources was necessary to foster their high aspirations and academic achievements.

The effect of socio-economic status on student aspirations and academic performance was influenced by a pool of other resources from the family and the neighborhood, and parental resources alone mattered less for these students' aspirations. The next two concepts, FBOT and GMAT, showed that some resources and opportunities were needed for the students to have high aspirations (ROBOT), but the families and the students were at the center in terms of the foundations in forming and maintaining educational and occupational aspirations. The role played by family in goal setting, defining what matters, creating incentives and disincentives, and setting up constraints on student operations regarding time use, academic and social expectations, and obligations was very important. We can see how this plays out in the following two theoretical approaches, FBOT and GMAT.

Family Background and

Obligations Theory (FBOT)

Most cultures from Asia, South and Central America, and Africa are different from the dominant U.S. Western culture, and adaptation of youth to the dominant culture often conflicts with immigrant parents' beliefs and cultural values. Do students accept parents' expectations and value good grades in order to satisfy their parents? Do they desire and commit to assisting their families in the future by preparing for high-paying careers (Fuligni, 1999; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998)? Immigrant students can receive support from parents and other family members whose valuation of the students' education is also very high, given that the student may have an obligation to support the family in the future with a high-paying job. Adherence to family obligations also requires students to assist their parents and siblings, show respect to their parents, and be prepared to assist their families in the future. These norms may affect students' choice of peers, time spent with their peers, study time, and strategies and relations with peers,

which may in turn affect both their aspirations and their achievement. Likewise, disagreements over the extent to which children can fulfill family obligations and the divergence between academic goals of parents and children can interfere with the process of building strong family bonds, parental involvement, support, and encouragement.

A student may care about a combination of current and future tangible and emotional rewards and prizes for achieving certain educational outcomes, plus any imputed sanctions and dissatisfaction arising from the failure to meet desired educational outcomes. Students' attitudes and values are reflected in their choices in terms of the benefits and dissatisfaction from some level of education but without disregarding their parents' expectations and aspirations. However, attitudes and valuation of benefits and regrets can be influenced by the cultural capital immigrants bring with them from their country of origin.

Parenting styles or strategies adopted by different parents have been shown to be correlated with achievement and aspirations, but results are mixed across races and income groups (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler 1997). Depending on cultural background, the rewards for high academic goals and values may be realized not only by the student but also by the family and the community. As a result, the community and the family may have a stake in motivating and supporting students to set higher goals and achieve them. Realization of success in society and in the eyes of a parent can compel a young student to consider measures of education that reflect these rewards (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). As parents help define rewards for their children and provide their support, students are more likely to set and maintain high aspirations.

The two approaches, GMAT and FBOT, therefore reinforce each other given that the family and its culture has its own process of setting goals and valuing education and that students' aspirations are influenced by others.

A student can aspire to obtain a certain level of education by considering the rewards of a career, such as the future income associated with the level of education

chosen. By contributing to family resources and fulfilling family obligations both currently and in the future, a student also expects some social rewards. The objective of a student can be that of maximizing satisfaction. Current satisfaction is obtained each school year from GPAs achieved, and students also obtain satisfaction by interacting with peers, given their family GPA expectations and time use requirements, to avoid dissatisfaction from violating family norms. Future satisfaction is obtained from expected rewards minus the dissatisfaction arising from deviating from parents' aspirations and expectations. The differences in levels of aspiration across students eventually depends on each student's tolerance for low grades and sanctions from parents, the value attached to different levels of education, the extent to which students feel obligated to meet current family needs, and expected satisfaction from income and the ability to support their family. Not meeting expectations may create a feeling of dissatisfaction. Students therefore make choices that will minimize their dissatisfaction while increasing their level of satisfaction from education.

In conclusion, education and career preferences are motivated and guided by a set of goals or objectives formed at a certain age and by a combination of factors (Lewin, 1951). These goals are an integral component of family discourse that can be influenced by parents, teachers, and peers, and are revised according to academic performance and ability to finance higher levels of education. A set of values and beliefs about education can be signaled to the students by their parents, the community, and the career market. These values reflect socio-economic benefits of education, benefits from interacting with peers, and risks associated with peer pressure and cultural beliefs (GMAT, FBOT).

Attitudes, effort, and opportunities for learning both at home and at school can affect academic performance and the likelihood of stating educational aspirations according to how they have affected a student's performance. A statement of aspiration level is therefore synonymous with making choices toward achieving some level of satisfaction from education, given personal risks associated with peer interaction,

assimilation into the mainstream culture, and the constraints imposed by culture. The time immigrant youths spend on schooling, on family activities, and on non-family activities with peers affects their academic standing (GPAs) and acculturation. Decisions regarding time use, although geared toward meeting own objectives and the expectations of others, are constrained by pressure imposed by parents, peers, the school, and the community (FBOT, ROBOT).

Goal, Motivation, and

Achievement Theory (GMAT)

This theory examines the relationship between goals, motivation, and school achievement. Current goals may encompass short-term goals like GPA and meeting or not meeting the expectations of others, whereas long-term goals may include obtaining college degrees and careers. Lewin (1951) and Sherwood (1989), however, suggested that individuals have a matrix of goals covering many fields and emphasized investments in the form of effort, time, and income as important extensions to the satisfaction maximization theory.

According to GMAT, differences in aspirations can arise from differences in expected rewards resulting from incentives and investments in education (Biddle, 1979; Covington, 2000; Elliot & Dweck, 1988; Sherwood, 1998), but a matrix of goals is essential. Such aspirations and achievements are separated by some degree of motivation over time. The goals set by students can be a source of motivation given that academic and career goals are associated with expected rewards, returns, and satisfaction. According to this theory, aspirations and achievements have a feedback effect. High GPA increases the likelihood of achieving an educational goal, hence the confidence in stating some level of aspiration. In Sudan and the U.S., schools and teachers use academic scores like GPA to rank and stratify students, which send signals of academic ability and achievement to students and parents. Parents have expectations regarding a student's GPA, given that they spend their time and monetary resources in the education

of their children and that the students try to achieve some level of GPA by committing their time to learning.

Expected monetary rewards from each level of education such as a college degree are known for each career and are usually not very different across refugee youth. But the certainty of monetary rewards for higher educational achievements can be affected by discrimination in the labor market and, as such, the expected rewards may differ. The social valuation of education by Sudanese immigrants both in the country of origin and in the United States tends to be high. Sudanese parents teach their children that education is necessary to overcome poverty, to neutralize discrimination, and to belong to a high socio-economic class such as they enjoyed in Sudan. Imputed socio-economic benefits of higher education can therefore be different across ethnic groups, races, and individuals, providing considerable impetus to work hard and earn a high income.

Sudanese refugee youth who enter the United States and either join a grade at some level of education or start a school grade are endowed with certain attributes such as language, respect for authority, discipline, family obligations, and religion. Their parents also enter the United States with a certain socio-economic background, and they have motives for migrating to the United States as well as ambitions, expectations, and aspirations for their children. These ambitions and aspirations are crystallized into specific family goals, which include specific careers, income levels, and belonging to a social class as well as having a measure of dignity, self-worth, and esteem for themselves and their children.

Although many parents raise their children to be somebody, there can be disagreement on what the father, the mother, and significant relatives want the children to be when they grow up. The expectations and aspirations of these “other people” may not conform to the students’ own aspirations, if the students have developed aspirations on their own. This problem was encountered among some of the Sudanese refugee youth in this study. Parents continued to hope that by nurturing and investing in their children,

they would have some influence on their children's beliefs and preferences. Empirical studies have shown some correlation between the aspirations propagated by parents and that of their children, but among these Sudanese refugee youth, there was continuity and discontinuity in student aspirations and careers relative to those of the parents. The extent to which parents and significant others influenced students' educational aspirations varied from family to family. Parents began communicating educational aspirations to their children at an early age, but each student at some point developed his or her own educational goals, which could have reflected to some extent the aspirations that the parents communicated and insisted on in the past.

The concepts of "care and concern" (Lewin, 1951; Sherwood, 1989) are relevant to the case of these Sudanese students. Students care about their own goals and are also concerned about the dissatisfaction that arises from deviating from parents' aspirations, peers' expectations, or family norms in the broad sense. Students are repeatedly told at school and at home to achieve a high GPA each school year, so they are likely to care about this goal. Students may also care about hanging out with their peers. Achieving their own goals has benefits, but planning and achieving these goals is associated with costs for deviating from what is planned, what parents want, and what peers expect. This is the notion of role theory, which states that expectations held by some group, such as the neighborhood, family, parents, peers, and teachers, may influence students' beliefs and behavior (Biddle, 1979).

Based on this theory, a student may ask the following questions: What do others expect of me? What do I expect of myself and what should I do given the pressure I feel? The literature provides examples of Black students who are said to be "acting White" when they deviate from average, mainstream, or neighborhood norms. With the threat of social sanctions by peers, the incentive to achieve better grades and aim high is likely to decrease, depending on how the student is affected by peer sanctions and level of satisfaction from involvement with peers. Similarly, a student whose peers value better

grades but ends up getting lower grades may feel dissatisfied and may try to conform to peer expectations and work harder. This is true in the case of the Sudanese students in this study. Adding the expectations of parents confronts a student with a set of norms to consider, and the benefits and costs of each deviation may be taken into account.

Limitations

My research design and outcome was for a small group of Sudanese refugee youth. Therefore, I recommend that other studies be conducted to determine if this research can be replicated with a larger sample. Instead of self-selection, in which students are from the same country of origin and have the same socio-economic status, same neighborhood, and same religion, a different sampling strategy can be used to eliminate self-selection bias. Including other Sudanese refugee students in the sample can help to identify whether similarities found in the current sample were responsible for the findings regarding high educational and occupational aspirations and relatively high GPAs. As such, it is premature to generalize and use these results to address other immigrant populations.

Many refugees suffer enormous physical and emotional traumas from war, limited resources, and living in refugee camps, and may have missed years of schooling, all of which can make it difficult to fully integrate into the U.S. educational system. However, this was not the case for these Sudanese refugee youth. The Sudanese students migrated from their country to other countries because their parents had the means to support them before coming to the United States. It is therefore recommended that further research be conducted to include refugees who have lived in refugee camps and those who may have suffered the horrors of war to determine if the results will be the same.

Future Research

Despite many studies on educational and career aspirations of immigrant and non-immigrant U.S. youth, there are few studies on the aspirations of students based on the students' countries of origin. These studies are needed to compare educational

aspirations of recent immigrant U.S. youth with that of students in their countries of origin in order to determine how their adaptation, assimilation, and experiences in the United States have affected their aspirations. Recent immigrants consist of refugees and those who voluntarily select to migrate to the United States, but little is known about the effects of self-selection on students' aspirations. Self-selection occurs if voluntary immigrants to the United States are predominantly those with similar characteristics.

Information on the effect of socio-economic status on educational aspirations of parents from other countries would help resolve whether poverty is an incentive or a barrier to high educational aspirations among immigrants' children. If poverty is a motivation for immigration, it can lead to a "carry-over effect" among immigrants. If educational aspirations of students with low SES are similar to if not higher than those of students with high SES in the same samples, then SES has very little to no effect or there is a curvilinear relationship between SES and aspirations whereby middle-level SES is associated with either lower or higher aspirations.

If middle SES is associated with lower aspirations compared to low and high SES, then additional explanations for the effects of SES are needed. Parental aspirations are positively correlated with their children's educational aspirations, but among immigrants it is not clear whether parental aspirations reflect experiences in their country of origin or differences in opportunities between the United States and the country of origin. Studies comparing U.S. immigrant parent aspirations with parents in the country of origin are rare. The researcher's personal experiences and observations of children growing up in poverty in Kenya have shown that poverty can provide an impetus to aim high. It is not surprising to find a significant proportion of students aspiring to go to college and then attending college, despite poverty in their families and the high level of competition for college admission. The motivation to break the poverty cycle in a family, the support received from a student's own family and others, and the obligation to support the family in the future are plausible explanations.

What is the process involved when the educational and career aspirations of children are influenced by parents? Do both parents agree, and if not, how do they reconcile their differences? There can be value added to the research by merging detailed information from parents with that of their children and comparing the aspirations of the mother, the father, and the student to determine the extent to which each parent's aspirations, career, and education matter.

The family obligation theory requires that youth assist their parents and siblings, show respect to parents, and be able to assist their families in the future. These norms may affect students' relationships with their peers, their study time, and eventually their academic achievement. Disagreements over the extent to which children can fulfill family obligations and the divergence between academic goals of parents and their children can interfere with the process of building strong family bonds, parental involvement, support, and encouragement.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Project Title: **The educational and occupational aspirations of Sudanese Refugee Youth in an American Public school in the Mid-West**

Research Team: **Anne Kiche, MA**
David Bills, PHD
Scott McNabb, PHD
Thomas Rocklin, PHD
Katrina Sanders-Cassell, PHD
Donald Yarbrough, PHD

- If you are the parent/guardian of a child under 18 years old or who will turn 18 years who is being invited to be in this study, the word "you" in this document refers to your child. You will be asked to read and sign this document to give permission for your child to participate.
- If you are a teenager reading this document because you are being invited to be in this study, the word "you" in this document refers to you. You will be asked to read and sign this document to indicate your willingness to participate.

This consent form describes the research study to help you decide if you want to participate. This form provides important information about what you will be asked to do during the study, about the risks and benefits of the study, and about your rights as a research subject.

- If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the research team for more information.
- You should discuss your participation with anyone you choose such as family or friends.
- Do not sign this form unless the study research team has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

This is a research study. We are inviting you to participate in this research study because you are a Sudanese refugee youth attending American public high school.

The purpose of this research study is to understand what educational and occupational aspirations the Sudanese refugee youth in American Public schools have and how religion, culture, individuality and connectedness within their community shape their aspirations. This will be addressed by asking the following three research questions:

1. What are the educational and occupational aspirations of Sudanese Refugee Youth?
2. How are educational and occupational aspirations formed?
3. What strategies and plans do these Sudanese adopt to help them achieve these aspirations?

HOW MANY PEOPLE WILL PARTICIPATE?

Approximately 22 students will participate in this study.

HOW LONG WILL I BE IN THIS STUDY?

If you agree to take part in this study, your involvement will last three months. However, you will not be interviewed continuously during the three months. We will interview you once for approximately 45 to 60minutess and a second time if you are selected for an in-depth interview. We may contact you following the interview if we need to clarify something within the course of the three months.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN DURING THIS STUDY?

If you decide to participate in this study, here is what to expect:

- You will be interviewed. We will ask questions about your grade point average only as a self-report and not from school records and what you tell us you aspire to become in the future.
  This interview will likely last 45 -60minutes.
- If you are asked (a) question(s), and you do not feel comfortable answering, you need to let the researcher know so you can move on to the next question.
- The interview will be scheduled at your convenience and will take place in your home or at the Sudanese Community Center in a private room.
- You will be tape recorded as you are interviewed if you permit it.
- Main points will be written down as the interview is conducted.
- The tape will be played back to you at the end of the interview if you so request.
- You will be given the opportunity to read the portion of the dissertation that pertains to you.

If there is any thing you feel is not reported accurately, you will be given the chance to correct it.

If you are selected for a second in-depth interview, this will be scheduled at your convenience and will take place in your home or at the Sudanese Community Center in a private room. During this interview you will be asked to go into details about your educational and occupational aspirations, strategies and plans you are going to adopt to achieve your aspirations. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Audio/Video Recording

One aspect of this study involves making audio recording of you. Our study is both descriptive and evaluative. It will deal with your grade point average only as a self-report and not from school records and what you tell us you aspire to become in the future. We would like to capture every detail in an audio tape recorder as you describe it including environmental influences on your educational and occupational aspirations.
If you choose to participate in this study but do not want to be recorded, please let the researcher know. You can still participate without being tape recorded.

[ ] Yes [ ] No I give you permission to make audio recordings of me during this study.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF THIS STUDY?

There may be some risks from being in this study. You may become uncomfortable answering some of the questions or discussing some topics covered in this interview. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and you may end the interview at any time.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS STUDY?

We do not know if you will benefit from this study. However, we hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study because the information collected may help to expand our understanding of the Sudanese Refugee Youth in American Public schools' educational and occupational aspirations. It will assist teachers in this community to better understand the students' background and culture which are essential for a more successful experience.

WILL IT COST ME ANYTHING TO BE IN THIS STUDY?

You will not have any cost for being in this research study.

WILL I BE PAID FOR PARTICIPATING?

You will not be paid for being in this research study.

WHO IS FUNDING THIS STUDY?

The University and the research team are receiving no payments from other agencies, organizations, or companies to conduct this research study.

WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

We will keep your participation in this research study confidential to the extent permitted by law. However, it is possible that other people may become aware of your participation in this study. For example, federal government regulatory agencies, auditing departments of the University of Iowa, and the University of Iowa Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves research studies) may inspect and copy records pertaining to this research. Some of these records could contain information that personally identifies you.

To help protect your confidentiality, we will only use your initials or number and store all information collected in a locked filing cabinets located in the privacy of the primary researcher's home. We will also use password protected computer files that only the researchers will have access to. If we write a report or article about this study or share

the study data set with others, we will do so in such a way that you cannot be directly identified.

IS BEING IN THIS STUDY VOLUNTARY?

Taking part in this research study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to be in this study, or if you stop participating at any time, you won't be penalized or lose any benefits for which you otherwise qualify.

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

We encourage you to ask questions. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact: Anne Kiche (319- 351-8287) or my University advisor Scott McNabb, (319-335-5372) or the chair of my research committee David Bills, (319-335-5366).
If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research subject or about research related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Office, 340 College of Medicine Administration Building, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, 52242, (319) 335-6564, or e-mail irb@uiowa.edu. General information about being a research subject can be found by clicking "Info for Public" on the Human Subjects Office web site, http://research.uiowa.edu/hso.

This Informed Consent Document is not a contract. It is a written explanation of what will happen during the study if you decide to participate. You are not waiving any legal rights by signing this Informed Consent Document. Your signature indicates that this research study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study. You will receive a copy of this form.

Statement of Person Who Obtained Consent

I have discussed the above points with the subject or, where appropriate, with the subject's legally authorized representative. It is my opinion that the subject understands the risks, benefits, and procedures involved with participation in this research study.

_____ _____
(Signature of Person who Obtained Consent) (Date)

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Gender -------
2. Age ---------
3. When did you come to the United States and with whom?
4. How old were you then?
5. Where did you last live prior to coming to the US?
6. What was life like there?
7. What did you like or dislike about it?
8. What were the schools like?
9. In what language were you taught?
10. What classes did you take?
11. If you were at a refugee camp which one was it?
12. How long were you there?
13. Tell me about your teachers and peers?
14. How was that school compared to your present school?
15. What are some of the things you did there that you are or not doing now?
16. How far would you like to continue with your education?
17. What would you like to be when you grow up?”
18. What kind of advise did you get from parents and other family members? Tell whether it was helpful or not. If it was in what way? If not why not?
19. What was your grade point average in the scale of 4 when you first arrived and now?
20. Tell me about goals that you have set for yourself?
21. What would you like to be when you grow up?
22. Tell me about goals your family has set for you?
23. What do you do to meet the goals?
24. What can you tell me about your work habits?

25. How long do you study each day after school?

26. How long do you study for a test?

27. Do you study independently?

28. Tell me about your:

a) Teachers? What form of help do you get from them?

b) Family? What do they do to help you meet your goals?

c) Peers? What programs do you and your peers participate in that help you encourage each other to meet goals you have set?

d) Community? What programs in the community are you involved in after school that helps you? And in what way do they help?

APPENDIX C

RECRUITMENT LETTER

Anne Kiche
817 Clark St
Iowa City, IA 52240

Dear Parent,
I am a student at the University of Iowa working on my doctoral degree in Educational Policy and Leadership Studies. I am conducting research on Sudanese Refugee Youth in American public high schools. I am interested in studying their educational and occupational plans and goals. I hope to discover how Sudanese refugee youth develop their plans for the future.

I am writing to invite your child to participate in my study. I obtained your information and that of your child when you attendant Sudanese monthly informational meeting at the Center. I would like to interview your child about different aspects of his or her life, including family, school, friends and other areas.

If you and your child decide to participate in my study, here is what to expect:

1. I will visit your child at home and interview him or her at their convenience, or we can meet at the Sudanese Community Center and use one of the private rooms. This interview will likely last 45 – 60 minutes during which with your and your child's permission I will tape record the interview.
2. I will write the main points down as I conduct the interview.
3. I will play the tape back to your child at the end of the interview if she or he so requests.
4. I will listen to the tape after the interview and type all the information and save it in a file and store it until the end of the end of the study. If there is any part of the interview that is not clear when typing the recorded information, I will call your child so he/she can clarify it for me.
5. After collecting data for my study I will analyze data and write a report.
6. Your child will be given the opportunity to read the portion of my dissertation that pertains to him or her. However, I will not use your child's proper names, anywhere in my report and will not include any information that would identify your child.

Again, your child's participation in this study is voluntary. By participating in this study, you will contribute to primary research on Sudanese refugee youth's educational and occupational aspiration. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (Anne Kiche, 319- 351-8287) or my University advisor (Scott McNabb, 319-335-5372) or the chair of this research committee (David Bills, 319-335- 5366). If you and your child have questions or are interested in being in this study, please sign below and return the portion in the enclosed self stamped envelope to me.

Volunteers will be selected by the researcher from among the applicants submitting this form. Your child will be notified of his or her selection by February 25, 2006.

Please return this form to Anne Kiche by using the attached-self addressed stamped envelope.

Thank you

Anne Kiche

Consent

I have agreed to let my child _____ participate in your study.

Parents' Signature_____

Student's Signature_____

APPENDIX D

PHONE CALL TO PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Parents:

Hello, my name is Anne Kiche. You may recall having met me at the Sudanese Community Center when I presented my research proposal regarding Sudanese Refugee Youth.

I received your mail indicating that you are willing to let your child participate in my research and your child is also willing to participate. I am calling to find out when would be a good time and place to interview your son or daughter. May I please speak to your son or daughter?

Son or daughter:

Hello, my name is … Thank you so much for responding to my letter regarding the research that I intend to conduct. I was wondering if I could set up date, time, and place to meet with you.

Thanks.

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