



# Migration trajectories of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom: A study of their social integration experiences

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate social integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom, focusing on the influence of participating in social activities and building connections with the local community. The research aims to understand how these factors contribute to the overall social integration of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom. Study shows that many of the participants form meaningful social connections with natives in their host communities. However, few expressed a preference for maintaining cultural boundaries and avoiding social connections. Findings show that, sense of belonging within the host community was found to be influenced by personal ideologies, experiences, cultural background, and attitudes. The outcome of this study provides deeper understanding of the challenges faced by migrants during the process of acculturation, it also reiterates the significance of establishing inclusive and supportive environments to facilitate migrants' integration into the host community.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, ethnic relations, social connection, sense of belonging, social integration

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## **List of Abbreviations**

EU: - European Union

EU GDPR: - European Union General Data Protection Regulation

Non-EU: - Non-European Union

OECD: - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

UK: - United Kingdom

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The migration of individuals from one country to another has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in today's interconnected world (Triandafyllidou, 2018; Castelli, 2018). One notable group of migrants is the Nigerian students who choose to pursue higher education in the United Kingdom (Sahara Reporters, 2022). The United Kingdom has seen a significant influx of Nigerian students in recent years, reflecting the global trend of increasing mobility in pursuit of educational opportunities (Statista, 2023; Ogunbode, Akinjobi and Musa, 2022). This migration pattern prompts significant inquiries into the experiences of Nigerian students while studying in the UK and their efforts to become part of the local community. The process of social integration involves forming relationships, engaging in social activities, and developing a sense of belonging within the local community (Beckett, Lu and Sabati, 2022; Barker, 2021; Otsuji and Pennycook, 2011). It is a multifaceted journey influenced by various factors such as cultural differences, language barriers, stereotypes, and the receptiveness of the host community (Ward, Masgoret and Gezentsvey, 2009). Gaining insight into the social integration dynamics among Nigerian students in the UK is essential for nurturing inclusivity, advancing cross-cultural understanding, and overall welfare improvement.

This study seeks to explore how social participation impacts the social integration of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom. Furthermore, this research acknowledges the broader societal context and the significance attached to fostering positive relationships between migrants and the citizens of the host country. Recognizing the importance of social integration not only benefits the individuals themselves but also contributes to the overall cohesion and diversity of the host society.

Generally, this research contributes to the growing body of literature on migration, acculturation, and social integration, focusing on Nigerian students in the United Kingdom. By gaining a deeper understanding of their challenges and experiences, the facilitation of a successful integration process into the host society can be achieved.

## 1.1 Research Background

Mobility and migration patterns are part of the social, cultural, and economic relation that has existed between countries globally; irrespective of its complexities (De Haas, Castles & Miller, 2020, s.40). The advancement in technology has increased the rate at which the world is becoming more interconnected and the mobility of people (Fox, 2019, s. 2). There is an increase in the number of international migrants with a greater degree in Europe and Asia than other regions; with an estimate of about 281 million international migrants globally in 2020 (World Migration Report, 2022). Nigeria is among one of the countries currently witnessing mass emigration of its citizens to Europe, Canada, Asia, and the United States, with quite a significant percentage being students and medical practitioners.

The migration of students is not a recent phenomenon as it has been occurring for several decades (Abbott & Silles, 2016; Raghuram, 2013); however, the rate of international student mobility has increased in recent years (OECD, 2022). Sizeable number of Nigerian students now explore options of studying in developed countries, given that the latter offers quality education and opportunities after schooling (Ogunode, Akinjobi & Musa, 2022; Iseolorunkanmi, Rotimi, Adebola, Lawal, Henry & Adebisi, 2021; Ploner & Nada, 2020; Oyebamiji & Adekoye, 2019). The Nigerian educational system has been criticised for poor quality, inadequate funding of higher education, unstable academic calendar, lack of scholarships or fundings, and lack of quality infrastructure among others (Ogunode, Akinjobi & Musa, 2022). Therefore, inflow of Nigerian students is becoming apparently significant in Europe, the United Kingdom, the United States, and parts of Asia. Recently, the number of Nigerians migrating to the United Kingdom, especially through the educational route has skyrocketed. As at the first quarter of 2021, the United Kingdom hosted 531,000 immigrants in total; however, as at the fourth quarter of 2022, the number of immigrants had surged to 1,163,000 (Statista, 2023). This indicates there was a significant absolute increase of 632,000. According to Erudera News (2023), during the academic year 2021/2022, the United Kingdom hosted a total of 679,970 international students, with 559,825 students migrated from non-EU countries, with China, India, and Nigeria being the leading contributors to the international student population. UK's Home Office data shows that, there is a tremendous increase in the number of study visas granted to Nigerian nationals seeking to study in the UK. Specifically, by the end of June 2022, a total number of 65,929 study visas were issued to Nigerians; this shows 686 percent increase when compared to 2019 where 8,384 study visas were granted. Corroborating

the surge, UK's High Commissioner, Richard Montgomery, stated that in 2022, the United Kingdom approved 3 million new visas, with Nigerians accounting for 325,000 of visas granted; thus, implying that Nigerians make up more than 10 percent of the immigrants arriving in London and the United Kingdom (Erudera News/June 24, 2023). According to Statista (2023), the United Kingdom has a significant Nigerian student population, with approximately 44,195 Nigerian students as of 2023.

The United Kingdom is identified as the second most favoured destination globally for international students (British Council, 2019), this reflected in the choice of students from Nigeria. The United Kingdom is notable for cultural diversity and therefore attracts a significant number of international students (Alesina, Harnoss and Rapoport, 2016; Somerville and Sumption, 2009; Vertovec, 2007). Often, most of these students look towards a permanent stay, and with the increased rate of Nigerian students studying in the United Kingdom, alongside the increase in the number of dependants that accompany them to the country, there is constantly the questioning of whether it poses as a threat to the United Kingdom (Esses and Hamilton, 2021). The fact that most countries are becoming multi-ethnic has made the integration of migrants become a point of focus for several migrant friendly European countries.

In the past years, migration to the United Kingdom was primarily large groups of post-commonwealth migrants; therefore, diversity within the United Kingdom comprises of distinct, homogeneous ethnic communities consisting of post-colonial economic migrants and their families (Hunter and Boswell, 2015, s. 234). However, with the influx of migrants from various countries across the globe in recent times, there has been a significant proliferation of ethnic groups residing in the United Kingdom. Typically, the United Kingdom's social landscape has undergone tremendous radical transformation with the growth of smaller ethnic groups significantly contributing to shaping this new dynamic (Vertovec, 2008, s. 1028).

## **1.2 Research Problem**

Integration refers to the process through which migrants maintain their previous culture but also establish a good relationship with people in their host-country (Décieux & Murdock, 2021). Overtime, this has been considered as one of the primary ways through which social and economic realization of both the migrants and their host country can take place. Hence, it usually comes in



the form of cultural integration, structural integration, and social integration (Luthra, Platt, & Salamońska, 2018). Social integration has to do with the contact with other persons within the society, which could be native neighbours, academic colleagues, and co-workers (Becker, 2022; Lubbers, Molina, & McCarty, 2021). There is no doubt that the maintenance of a good relationship between migrants and the citizens of the host country is quite important (Martinovic, Van Tubergen & Maas, 2008). Social integration is a successful part of migration as it is advantageous to migrants feeling valued and included. In like manner, it aids the promotion of social cohesion while reducing discrimination and prejudice (Taylor and Foster, 2015; Gowricharn, 2002). In essence, social integration does not just benefit individual migrants, but also has an influence on the broader society (Berry, 2001). The most vital of which is that it helps decrease the rate at which inter-ethnic conflicts and discrimination occurs (Martinovic, Van Tubergen & Maas, 2008).

Ethnic relations also play a critical role in facilitating interactions between people of different races and ethnic groups within a society. In an increasingly diverse world, the integration of international students has become a topic of global interest (Juvonen, Lessard, Rastogi, Schacter and Smith, 2019; Rienties, Luchoomun and Tempelaar, 2014; Ward, 2009). Studies have shown that the experiences and integration outcomes of international students can have significant implications for social cohesion and cross-cultural understanding (Pace, 2021; Ward, Masgoret and Gezentsvey, 2009). The migration trajectories of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom are thus selected to explore the complexities of cross-cultural encounters and the dynamics of ethnic relations.

### **1.3 Research Aim and Question**

The aim of this study is to provide insight to the social integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom, with a focus on understanding their level of participation in social activities and the strategies for balancing cultural preservation and adaptation in the host community.

The main research question is:

*How does social participation impact the social integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom?*

The secondary question stemming from this includes:

*To what extent does the level of participation in the local cultural and social activities affect the social integration of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom?*

## **1.5 Research Motivation**

In recent years, there is an observable increase in the inclination of Nigerian students towards pursuing their Bachelor's, Master's, and Doctoral degrees in developed countries. This trend is indicative of the growing recognition and value placed on international education as a pathway to personal and professional growth. Among the popular destinations, the United Kingdom stands out as a significant host country, experiencing a substantial influx of Nigerian students for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies. The projected EU net migration surplus between 2015 and 2020 stands at approximately 6.81 million migrants, making the region have the highest number of immigrants (Statista, 2022). I am particularly drawn to this topic due to my personal experiences as a Nigerian student who migrated to Sweden. The allure of the studying and working environment here, which presents a significant advantage when compared to my home country, has piqued my interest; having found Sweden to be home away from home with a distinctive cultural landscape that is characterized with traditions, music festivals and delectable cuisines. Historically, United Kingdom is known for embracing global scholars and nurturing a diverse academic milieu, I am intrigued by the prospect of investigating how Nigerian students integrate socially in a nation renowned for its multicultural fabric and diversity, especially as it could be erroneously assumed that the recorded increase of migrants in the United Kingdom could mean migrants' social experiences are encouraging.

## **1.6 Concepts and Definitions**

### **1.6.1 Integration**

Integration has to do with the participation and inclusion of people within the society, irrespective of their race, ethnic group, religion, language, or background. The main purpose of integration is to engender social cohesion, a sense of belonging, and same opportunities for every individual in the society.

### **1.6.2 Ethnic Relations**

This refers to the social interactions that takes place between various ethnic groups in a society. It involves the areas of human interactions such as communication, cooperation, cultural exchange, and conflict which takes place between people of different ethnic backgrounds. Ethnic relations are important for the promotion of social cohesion, peaceful co-existence, and diversity.

### **1.6.3 Social Integration**

This refers to the extent to which migrants can participate in their host society, as well as form meaningful social connections with the locals and other people in their host country. The social integration of migrants has the capability of making them feel connected to the host society as well as have a sense of belonging.

### **1.6.4 Social Exclusion**

This refers to the state of individuals and/or groups who are unable to fully participate in their host country. It also encompasses the discriminatory feeling that an individual or group of individuals face in their host community. And it is known to hinder integration and has long-term effects on individuals and the society at large.

### **1.6.5 Sense of Belonging**

Sense of belonging refers to a migrants' perception of his or her connection and acceptance within his or her host country. It borders around the experiences of acceptance and inclusion, and it is usually subjective in nature. Migrants' sense of belonging can be influenced by their experiences, culture, values, and identity. At the long run, it usually influences people's self-esteem and social integration process.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter, the focus will be on empirical studies that are related to social integration of migrants, as well as studies that indirectly contribute to the discussion.

### **2.1 International Migration and Integration Challenges of Nigerian Students**

West African students have been present in British universities since the 18th century, a period initiated by European business proprietors who sought the support of well-educated Africans for coastal trading (Killingray, 1994). In recent times, human capital flight from Nigeria to other developed countries has been explored across literature, revealing that people migrate for various reasons such as political, economic, educational, family, career development, and better standard of living among several others (Usman, Ozdeser, Çavuşoğlu, and Aliyu, 2022; Popogbe and Adeosun, 2020; Okoro, Omeluzor and Bamidele, 2014).

Delving into the causes behind the disposition of Nigerian students towards pursuing higher education abroad, Ogunode, Akinjobi and Musa (2022) found that inadequate funding of higher education programs, lack of scholarships, admission challenges, poor quality of higher education, insecurity challenges, lack of infrastructures and libraries, among others make it more difficult for Nigerian students to further their higher studies in their home country. Basically, the younger generation lacks significant motivation when it comes to pursuing higher education. Also, the social and economic implications of this on their future and standard of living has resulted in continuous

migration. These factors were also identified by Iseolorunkanmi, Rotimi, Adebola, Lawal, Henry and Adebisi (2021) as the contributory factors to the migration of Nigerian postgraduate students to South African universities. In their opinion, the Nigerian government has neither helped the situation of things, especially as its commitment level towards the educational sector has not been forthcoming.

Examining the contemporary mobility decisions of African graduates' destination selection alongside their experiences of integration in Estonia, Abdulai and Roosalu (2020) found that African students were mostly motivated to study in European universities because of the university's reputation, low tuition fee, and the possibility of better employment opportunities. It was also found that Estonian universities teach some of their courses in international programs in the Estonian language thereby making it challenging for international students; while some African graduates are unable to work in Estonia because of language barrier. This has been a major contributory factor to the integration of African students into the Estonian society. Abdulai and Roosalu's study provide a background to the challenges of integration of African students in Estonia; however, it does not explore the experiences and views of the students about their social integration in the Estonian community.

## **2.2 Social Identification and Interaction**

Migration of students has been studied across literatures and quite a number of studies found that there is a higher rate of migration among African students to European countries, the United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Sweden, and the Baltic countries (Donkor, Mazumder, Hosseinzadeh and Roy, 2020; Gonzalez-Fortes, Tassi, Trucchi, Henneberger, Paijmans, Diez-del-Molino, Schroeder, Susca, Barroso-Ruiz, Bermudez and Barroso-Medina, 2019; Lucas, 2005). Integration issues are in relation to the circumstances that either enables or deter migrants from meeting the requirements for participating in a society (Ward, Masgoret and Gezentsvey, 2009; Munro, 2008). Language barrier and discrimination are some of the challenges faced by migrants in Estonia (Islam, 2022; Khoma, 2020). The discrimination experiences based on race and/or nationality is known to have negative effects on social and academic performances of migrants (Vorobeva and Jauhiainen, 2023; Straiton, Aambø, and Johansen, 2019). Though, various studies

have been conducted on migration trajectories of African students (Mulvey and Mason, 2022; Castagnone, Nazio, Bartolini and Schoumaker, 2015; Schapendonk and Steel, 2014).

Becker (2022) identified that there is an existing relationship between migrants' national identification and their interaction with natives within their host community. Becker investigated the forms of contact that migrants have, which in turn influences their national identification with the host country. The study found that having mostly native friends was positively associated with feelings of national association than relating with co-workers did. Similarly, it was found that variables such as education and employment situation had a way of negatively influencing migrants' national identification; while migrants' possession of language skills, being a second-generation migrant, and having a citizenship were linked with having a higher level of national identification. The study concluded that integration programs that target increasing migrants' national identification should give more attention to helping migrants build relationships with natives.

In a study examining the challenges faced by Black-African students pursuing international education in the United Kingdom (Hyams-Ssekasi *et al.*, 2014), financial difficulties emerged as a predominant obstacle causing substantial distress and hampering academic focus. While explicit incidents of racial harassment were not reported, the students expressed feelings of social exclusion and encountered unwelcome attitudes from the local student community, negatively impacting collaborative work. Transitioning to the experiences and adjustment challenges of Nigerian international students in UK higher institutions, Raji (2019) collected responses from sixty-five (65) participants, revealing that while comprehension of tutors, language, and financial obstacles influenced their acculturation process, these factors were not as significant as the social and external challenges they faced. The integration into the host community, coupled with experiences of racial discrimination from peers and some staff, notably affected their resilience in adapting to the new environment. The overall study concluded by emphasizing the necessity for supportive measures to facilitate international students' adjustment to university demands, aiding their social stability.

Investigating the attachment styles as predictors of adaptation strategies of African immigrants in the United Kingdom, Asekun, Ikhimoya and Oluwa (2020) drew from a sample of 300 participants and found that the fearful attachment, characterized by a tendency to withdraw or

dismiss others too easily, resulted in a cautious approach to interacting with the host community. Similarly, those who had a secure attachment style bonded and related more effectively with the host community. The study highlighted the need for understanding the psychological dispositions of immigrants for predicting their interactions in their host environment. Asekun and Arogundade (2017) highlighted that increasingly complex environment for Nigerians living abroad, especially as there are issues of identity and stereotypes to deal with, has resulted in the pressure to maintain a positive image in the host country, and has also led to psychological struggles among the immigrants.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The study will be an inductive study which will employ the qualitative method of inquiry. Since the research will explore the experiences of Nigerian students who migrated to the United Kingdom for study, adopting a qualitative method of inquiry will help understand the challenges involved in terms of their social integration. Understanding, interpreting, and analysing the participants' experiences can only be more accurately done by directly communicating with the participants. Using an exploratory study, I will use purposive sampling to choose my participants, since the study is based on Nigerian students who have migrated to the UK to study. Through personal contacts which I have built over the years, I would be getting in touch with possible respondents for the study. In addition to this, snowballing technique will also likely be used by asking the participants to link me up with more potential respondents.

### **3.2 Research Theory**

Developed countries across the world are gradually becoming more of a multi-ethnic society given the inflow of migrants (Massey, Arango, Hugo, Kouaouci, Pellegrino and Taylor,

1993, s. 431). According to Esser (2004, s. 46), integration into the existing social systems has to do with inclusion. The more people reside within a community the more they tend to develop some sense of belonging (Vergunst, 2009). In essence, migrants tend to respond to their new environment's cultural practices either positively or negatively. This would inevitably influence their participation in the community and relationship with others. Therefore, I will be engaging the acculturation theory.

The acculturation theory, which is a social theory, proposes that cultural change and psychological adjustment occurs when there is contact between people of different race or cultural background. Interaction as one of the dimensions of social integration has to do with relational character of migrants with others, which eventually shapes their formal and informal communication, emotive content, social relation, and intra- or inter-group character. According to Asselin, et al. (2006, s.140), migrants' acculturation is defined by individual differences, norms, and the attitudinal disposition of the host community.

Already integrated migrants can participate and/or hold responsible positions in the society (Penninx, 2019, s. 5). According to Penninx (2019), integration, which has to do with adaptation, often explores migrants' communication (language), economic (participation in the economic life), social (social relations with the majority), residential (ability to choose neighborhood), family (marriage with majority), political (political rights), and personal (identification).

Another possible effect of acculturation is assimilation, whereby migrants replace their culture, customs, and traditions with that of the host country; integration, where migrants maintain their own culture, yet adopts that of the host country; separation, where migrants maintain their culture and avoids contact with that of the host; and marginalization, where migrants are exempted from their own culture and that of the host country. The theory holds that the process can lead to psychological outcomes such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and depression. This study will focus solely on the social networking of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom. This is because the question of students' experiences of belonging within their community has been said to have an influence on their academic performance, psychological and emotional wellbeing, and their decision to settle in the host country.



### 3.3 Research Methods

In this study. An investigation was conducted to understand how chosen participants perceive and assign significance to the act of establishing social bonds within their host community. Additionally, the study aimed to assess how these connections influence their broader journey towards social integration. As Creswell (2014) identifies, qualitative research methods rely on data within the natural setting of the participants. considering the specific phenomenon that is being investigated, employing a qualitative research design will allow for an exploration of my participants' narratives, this method will facilitate a more profound comprehension and interpretation of the meanings inferred from their lived experiences.

Prior to the data gathering process, I proposed to interview seven (7) respondents but, I was able to conduct an in-depth interview with only five (5) participants. This was because most of the possible respondents whom I contacted gave feedback of their interest but faced the challenge of being able to schedule time for an interview session. To make up for this, a survey questionnaire was designed and sent to them to fill at their convenience. Eventually, seven (7) respondents filled out the survey questionnaire. While going through the individual survey responses and sorting, I found that two (2) of the survey questions were improperly filled. Since, there was no means of scheduling a follow-up response with them through interview sessions, I decided to exclude them from the analysis section. Therefore, the total number of participants for this study was ten (10), who are Nigerian students in the United Kingdom that migrated for study. The study is based on primary data and the interview process was employed in collecting data from the participants. According to Creswell & Creswell (2018), the interview process is sufficient for understanding and making meaning out of their lived experiences and the factors that led to their migration.

A semi-structured interview was employed to enable respondents to exhaustively share their experiences and interpret their daily interactions, since open-ended questions was used (Morawska, 2018; s.113). I started with a broad question and allowed the participants to determine the course of the data that emanated from the interviews. This helped them to unreservedly discuss their perspectives while we co-construct meanings from their experiences. Various perspectives of the participants' experiences can be explored through this (Moses and Knutsen, 2019, s. 192; Creswell and Creswell, 2018, s. 50). Considering that the participants are based in the United Kingdom, the interviews were carried out digitally, via zoom, and were conducted in English. In conducting

interviews, there is the possibility that the place where a respondent is would likely affect the extent to which the respondent would be open on the topic, thereby affecting the extent to which the respondent might want to go in answering questions; however, to reduce this, I encouraged the participants to schedule the interview for a date and time that would be most convenient for them to be engaged in a discussion. As Fedjuk and Zentai (2018) stated, it is best that an interview is flexible enough to accommodate conveniency in time and place for the respondent.

According to Fedjuk and Zentai (2018; s. 183), there is the need to consider possible variations that may have to take place in terms of design and data-gathering methods during the research. Thus, during the data-gathering process, when I was unable to schedule a one-to-one interview with some of the respondents, I followed the advice of my supervisor and carried out in-depth interviews with those who were open to granting it, and for those who could not, I made them fill out a survey instead. This helped me get several perspectives.

After the conduct of the interviews, it was transcribed and subjected to reading several times before analysis was done. The discussion chapter will be segmented into themes to address the issues emanating from the interviews which are in line with the research question raised. To eliminate the possibility of bias before drawing on conclusions, data triangulation was done during the process of analysis.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

Validity and reliability are particular to the data collection stage of a research (Iosifides, 2018, p. 96). Validity shows the extent to which a researcher ensures that the research questions measure the underlying phenomena that is being studied (Moses and Knutsen, 2019, s. 132). As such, I ensured that the questions capture the phenomena being studied, and that it is not framed in a way that leads the participants' responses. After the questions had been framed, I received feedback from my supervisor as regards the appropriateness of the questions to the subject matter. Also, I did not ask questions that would elicit a 'yes' or 'no' from the respondents to get a multifaceted response from them (Morawska, 2018, s. 118). As Moses and Knutsen (2019, s. 132) stated, it is vital that the questions are not leaning towards manipulating the respondents' views about the issue being studied. The interview guide was therefore followed, although not too strictly,

as it is critical to carrying out valid research. However, I made certain that the participants did not drift into discussions that are completely irrelevant to the study.

I also ensured that the research is conducted in a trustworthy manner. The participants' willingness to participate in the research for the right reasons was ascertained. Also, the participants were those who were willing to share their experiences. Personal bias might influence the responses that the participants gave, since experiences and perspectives are subjective in nature. Nevertheless, in a bid to ensure reliability of the study, careful attention was given to the meanings of the participants' responses. Detailed references were made to the respondents' experiences so that the reader can sufficiently decide on how related the findings of the study are. Thus, the interviews and data are accurately measured and interpreted with precision.

### **3.5 Ethical Concerns**

When carrying out research, it is important that one keeps ethics in mind. Personal data such as age and institution of study was not required from participants for this research. This is because of the need to protect their personal data privacy.

However, since the information that was elicited from the participants has to do with their personal experiences and opinion, data will be stored in my home directory in Malmö University. This is because of the security it provides for sensitive personal data.

After processing the data collected for this study, the data will be saved for a period of five years in the directory, after which it will be entirely deleted. The reason for which it would be left for that period is that it would provide an opportunity to verify in a case where it is requested for by Malmö University for legal or ethical purposes.

Also, in line with the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the consent of the participants was sought before eliciting information from them on the subject matter. This was done by seeking their approval to record the interview sessions with them, and to process the information elicited for the purpose of research. A consent form was given to the participants to fill voluntarily to serve as a proof of their willingness to participate in the interview session (Van Liempt & Bilger,

2018, s. 273). In the consent form, I made sure to mention the type of information that will be elicited from them, the purpose for which the information is being elicited, and the period that the data will be kept for and how it will be safely stored. The signed consent forms will be safely archived and will be presented upon request.

To establish a comfortable atmosphere during the interviews, I introduced myself and briefly shared my personal motivation for studying the social integration of Nigerian students in the UK. By discussing my own experiences in Sweden, I aimed to create a sense of relatability, motivating participants to open about their own experiences. Sensitivity, on my part as a researcher, was needed given that the respondents shared several experiences, memories, opinions, and other information (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018; s. 173). Nonetheless, caution was imperative. I meticulously collected data from the participants, ensuring it was not accepted at face value. Instead, I employed an approach that facilitated a comprehensive comprehension of the studied phenomena and guided the formulation of conclusion based on the shared experiences.

Prior to initiating the interviews, I reiterated to participants that their involvement in the research was voluntary. I emphasized their right to refrain from answering questions they were uncomfortable with and the option to stop the interview whenever they felt uneasy. Additionally, I informed them about the use of their information and the possibility to retract their consent at any stage, either before, during, or after the data collection process. I also assured participants of their anonymity and that their educational institutions, in line with the researcher's obligation to protect respondent's privacy (Van Liempt & Bilger, 2018, p.272). Therefore, I used pseudonyms for all the participants. This is to avoid a case where someone would know who they are. The following pseudonyms were adopted for the ten (10) participants: Chris (P1), Anthony (P2), James (P3), Emily (P4), Alexander (P5), Henry (P6), Daniel (P7), Victoria (P8), Jack (P9), and Caleb (P10). The 'P' added is to denote reference to a participant's view.

### **3.6 Philosophy of Science: The Constructivist Perspective**

Although the philosophical stance of a researcher does not always appear explicit in a research study, it is important that a researcher identifies them (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, s.3). Epistemological and ontological issues are usually in connection with the researcher's

methodological choice (Iosifides, 2018, s. 94). This research used the constructivist perspective, which presumes that there are subjective meanings that individuals give to their experiences in the areas of social relationship (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, s. 50). In essence, the constructivist assumes that objective truth does not exist but that it stems from people's engagement with the realities of the world.

As a Nigerian student, who also migrated to Sweden, I understand that there is the possibility for my own personal experiences in relation to the factors that led to my decision to migrate as well as my experiences in integrating into the community. Nevertheless, I avoided exhibiting personal perspectives and maintain an unbiased position in carrying out the study. Qualitative methodological approach considers data derived as the basis through which the examined phenomenon is described, analysed, and explained in relation to the realities of the participants (Iosifides, 2018, s. 95). The epistemological and ontological views of the constructivist approach is that a researcher must depend on the respondents' perspectives of the factors that led to their migration and their integration experiences (Zapata-Barrero, 2018, s. 86). Although there are likely to be differences in the push and pull factors that led to the participants' migration, and differences in their integration experiences, the discourse will be taken to be the reality of the participants. Following Creswell and Creswell (2018, s. 8), making use of open-ended questions sufficiently catered for an expression of their perspectives for me to construct meanings out of their experiences.

### **3.7 Data Analysis**

Interviews were recorded and transcribed afterwards. However, only the portions relevant to the study were transcribed to eliminate all excesses. Analysing qualitative data requires that one codes the patterns and themes that emerge from the data (Zapata-Barrero, 2018, s. 76). Coding was therefore employed to group into themes and find similar patterns in the data obtained. Before this was done, I familiarized myself with the data by reading through severally, and highlighting the themes and patterns that appear conspicuous through the interviews. Afterwards, I organized the themes into descriptive codes and labelled each part of the transcribed interview texts that represents the theme and/or ideas. Open-ended questions that were asked from participants of the in-depth interviews were coded into groups with similar responses to draw a theme for the

similarity in their social integration experiences. Once all texts had been coded, I then grouped similar codes to make themes that capture the findings of the study. After which the data was presented and interpreted in a clear way. In analysing data, the researcher must ensure that he maintains openness and reflexivity in interpretation (Fedyuk and Zentai, 2018; s. 193); hence, the voices of the respondents were maintained and used to understand the research problem.

## **Chapter 4: Acculturation Theory**

### **4.1 Definition of Acculturation**

Acculturation describes the process through which the practices, beliefs, and values of an individual or group of people is influenced by means of their interaction and exposure to the practices, beliefs, and values of another group (Sam and Berry, 2010). By implication, it is a dynamic process that takes place when immigrants from a minority culture get to interact with and adapt to the prevailing culture of the host community, which is sometimes referred to as the dominant culture or the local culture (Bourhis *et al.*, 2010; Hui *et al.*, 2015). As a result of the interactions, one of the groups tends to undergo changes in their values, beliefs, and behaviours. Such changes can be subtle or pronounced and can result in an alteration or adaptation. Acculturation theory therefore refers to the process where individuals adopt new practices, beliefs,

and values which eventually leads to alterations in their original culture. John W. Berry, a Canadian psychologist, extensively worked on cross-cultural psychology and acculturation and came up with the model often referred to as the Berry's Acculturation Model. This theory helps in understanding how individuals and groups adapt to and interact with new cultures when they encounter them.

According to Mana, Orr and Mana (2019, s. 452), the conceptual building blocks of the model of acculturation tendencies (BAM) are the contents of collective values that borders on maintaining one's cultural identity and characteristics and maintaining relationships with other ethnic groups. Individuals who prioritize both cultural preservation and positive intergroup relationships are observed to support an integration-oriented approach (Ward and Rana-Deuba 1999, s. 423). Adaptation of an individual into his new cultural environment is a dynamic process, with the acquisition of knowledge, behavioural and attitudinal adjustments being at the forefront as this helps in easily navigating and integrating within one's host community. The initial feeling of cultural dissonance is a state where people may experience a sense of unfamiliarity or discomfort when they are first faced with a different culture outside of theirs. Moren-Alegret, et al (2016, s. 113) ascertained that interaction between people from different cultural backgrounds usually experiences a clash of their unique beliefs, values, and behaviours because of possible misinterpretations or misunderstandings. However, self-motivation and mutual understanding incites the process of cultural exchange which is crucial to fostering acculturation.

## **4.2 Types of Acculturations**

The model identified that there are four acculturation strategies which anchors on two factors that helps define the four acculturation strategies. The first factor is cultural preservation, which deals with how much an immigrant wants to keep his or her own culture; while the other, cultural interaction, is about the extent to which immigrants interact with their host culture. Consequently, the two factors culminate in the four acculturation strategies which includes integration (which is a high maintenance of culture and high contact with the host culture); assimilation (which is a low maintenance of culture and high contact with the host culture); separation (a high maintenance of culture and low level of contact with the host culture); and marginalization (a low maintenance of culture and low level of contact with the host culture) (Ward and Kennedy, 1994).

### **4.2.1 Integration**

Integration implies the process whereby immigrants mix part of the new culture with their own while retaining some parts of their original culture alongside the new one (Castles, 2002). In a way, it is finding a balance by blending cultures to fit into structures in the host community, such as schools and communities. Integration is therefore more of structural assimilation than it is of cultural and behavioural assimilation as immigrants maintain distinct cultural and behavioural traits (Rambaut, 2015). Consequently, within the context of immigrants' social integration, it can be referred to as a deliberate and active effort by immigrants to be involved in the cultural and social activities of their host community. In essence, it does not just involve adapting to the new culture, but also forming meaningful connections and interactions with the host community.

### **4.2.2 Assimilation**

The assimilation strategy, within the acculturation framework delineates a process in which those from a minority or immigrant group actively adopt and fully integrate into the dominant culture of the host community. This approach involves internalizing the values and beliefs of the host community (Hui *et al.*, 2015). Assimilation occurs when individuals make effort to reduce the distinction between their original cultural identity and that of the host culture. Sam (2006) defines it as when immigrants prefer not to preserve their cultural identity and actively engage in regular interactions with other cultures. Within the context of social integration of immigrants, the assimilation strategy entails when immigrants make efforts to associate themselves closely with the norms, practices, and social structures of the host community. In doing this, they seek to become seamlessly integrated into the social fabric of their host community. According to Rambaut (2015), this usually involves changes in cultural practices, language proficiency, and social affiliations and interactions with the major culture of the host community. In the long run, this has the capability of contributing to a sense of belonging and participation in the host community.



### **4.2.3 Separation**

The separation strategy is identified when those from a minority or immigrant group preserve their original cultural identity while also maintaining some distance from the dominant culture of the host community (Berry, 2005). This is characterized by a commitment to sustaining unique cultural practices, values, and social connections, with a deliberate effort to minimize interaction and integration with the host culture (Stephens, 2016). As put by Boski (2008), individuals place priority on retaining their original culture and simultaneously desire to steer clear of interactions with others. Within the context of immigrants' social integration, it signifies that there would be a deliberate choice by the immigrant to maintain a separate cultural identity within the host community. With respect to this, immigrants may engage with those from their own cultural community by maintaining social connections majorly within their own ethnic group. This has the capability of creating social boundaries for immigrants, especially as they limit interactions within the broader society.

### **4.2.4 Marginalization**

This occurs when people from an immigrant or minority group experience exclusion from both their original cultural identity and the dominant culture of their host community (Berry, 2005). As such, they do not actively participate in their original cultural practices or even with the cultural norms of their host community. According to Rudmin (2003), this can primarily result in a form of social isolation or discrimination, whereby those involved feel disconnected from their own cultural practices and from the larger society. From the context of social experiences, immigrants may experience a sense of alienation which makes it challenging to form meaningful social connections. As put by Berry (2005), it entails the existence of a limited desire for cultural preservation and minimal interest in forming relationships with others.

## **4.3 Application of the Theoretical Framework in the Analysis**

Ngo (2014) highlighted that the acculturation theory provides an understanding of the dynamics and outcomes of the complex nature of interactions that exists between immigrants and the dominant culture of a new society. Engaging in local events and activities serves as a means

through which Nigerian students can connect with their host community. Hence, their participation in social activities plays a role in them adjusting to the new culture and environment, with the level and nature of participation determining the extent of their social integration. I therefore used this to explain the various aspects of the participants' experiences in terms of the adoption of new cultural practices, upholding their own cultural identity, the nature of their interactions socially, as well as its influence on their psychological well-being. When there is an active involvement of immigrants in social interactions, cultural events, and community activities, there is the likelihood that they would build connections, and gain a sense of belonging within the host community. This is premised on the fact that by means of this, they are exposed to the prevailing customs and values in the United Kingdom, thereby facilitating their cultural adaptation. Similarly, social participation usually helps break possible barriers and create a support system that would help increase feelings of integration. On the other hand, limited social participation of immigrants may hinder their integration process. The existence of barriers – such as cultural misunderstandings, prejudice, language barrier, discrimination – in engaging with local activities has the capability of limiting immigrants' sense of belonging.

It is therefore within the context of the theory that I would analyse the research question “How does social participation impact the social integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom?”, given that the acculturation theory plays a vital role in forming and understanding the overall experiences of immigrants.

## **Chapter 5: Analysis of Findings**

This chapter presents the primary findings and discussion of the study, which aims to explore the social integration experiences of Nigerian students who migrated to the United Kingdom, with respect to their level of participation in the local cultural and social activities, as well as how they navigate the complexities and impacts of acculturation on their social networking. To do this, I explored the lived experiences of Nigerian students enrolled in both undergraduate and postgraduate programs in the United Kingdom. The main objective of this chapter is to shed light on how social participation impact the social integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom. By delving into their experiences, we gain a better understanding of the specific challenges and dynamics they face while navigating the process of integrating into the social environment of the United Kingdom. My analysis of the research question will be grounded in the acculturation theory, as relevant to the social life and social activities of immigrants, so as to understand how Nigerian students are able to navigate the process of adapting in the United Kingdom. Also, I will support the research analysis with the research theory as explained in the previous chapter. Similar studies conducted previously, which offer valuable insights into interpersonal connections and social integration, will be incorporated into this research to present a holistic viewpoint.

### **5.1 Social Dynamics and Integration Experiences of Nigerian Students in the United Kingdom**

In this sub-section, I will explore the intricate social dynamics and integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom. This exploration is guided by a dual focus, which is examining the factors that influence and limit participation in social interactions within the host community and analysing the influences on integration tendencies among the participants. Through the analysis, I aim to reveal the factors that shape the social fabric and integration trajectories of Nigerian students in their adopted academic and cultural environment. According to Berry (1997), it is typical for one group to undergo more significant change in comparison to the other group. Although this is not an implication that acculturation cannot affect both groups, however, it usually has more pronounced impact on the minority or immigrant group. Eventually, this signifies that while acculturation is a mutual process, the eventual outcomes are often experienced by one of the

interacting groups. This section responds to the research question: *What are the social integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom?*

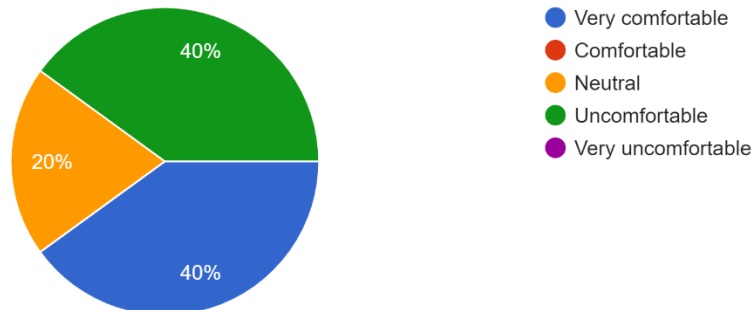
Immigrants are usually faced with choices with respect to preserving their cultural identity and their level of interaction with the host culture. One of the ways through which the social integration of migrants can be measured is by evaluating the type of social activities and interactions which they get involved in. Participants could not necessarily be asked questions relating to language skills, given that the lingua franca of the migrants and the host community is English language. However, I was able to collect data on their level of involvement in social activities and networking with the locals. I therefore asked them about the type of social activities they engage in, and the extent to which they find such comfortable. Also, I asked if they had been able to form meaningful relationships with the locals and other nationals since their stay in the United Kingdom. I found the 40% of the survey respondents fall under the category of those who are very comfortable participating in social activities, while 40% were uncomfortable with it, and 20% neutral about it.

The involvement between migrants and the host community usually occurs in various settings such as educational institutions, workplaces, public events, community centres, social gatherings, and other social settings. School activities was found to be one of the key structures that also initiated social connections for few of the participants, especially as they needed to attend group meetings and meet-ups to work on community projects. This aligns with the acculturation theory's emphasis on how engagement with new cultural environments shapes immigrant's adaptation processes. Within this context, school activities served as a mechanism for promoting social integration. Involvement in communal activities within the academic setting shows the use of educational structures to establish social connections, thereby fostering their integration into the broader social fabric of their host community.

*Figure 1: Participation in social activities organized in the host society.*

How comfortable do you feel participating in social activities organized by UK students or local communities?

5 responses



Orton (2012, s. 9) asserts that interaction has to do with the daily activities through which migrants interact with one another and with the communities in which they settle in. In essence, social interaction borders around the social activities that the migrants get involved in, which is liable to provide opportunities for building relationships and eventually integrating into their new social environment. This is one of the issues Mulcahy (2011, s. 1) flagged as important as regards the provision of support for integrating immigrants. Most of the participants do not engage in social activities; however, it was identified that for the participants who did, they tend to go to the movies, adventures in parks, hiking, football, academic events, and volunteer jobs for academic purposes.

### **5.1.1 Factors influencing integration tendencies among participants within their host community.**

This sub-section explores how various factors shape the integration tendencies of the participants within their host community in the United Kingdom. When immigrants seek to form meaningful relationships and interactions with members of their host community, a process of integration unfolds as they tend to go beyond surface-level engagement to build a sense of belonging within their host community. Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010) opine that:

*Who we feel ourselves*

*to be is thus influenced by where and when we live our lives. To the extent that*

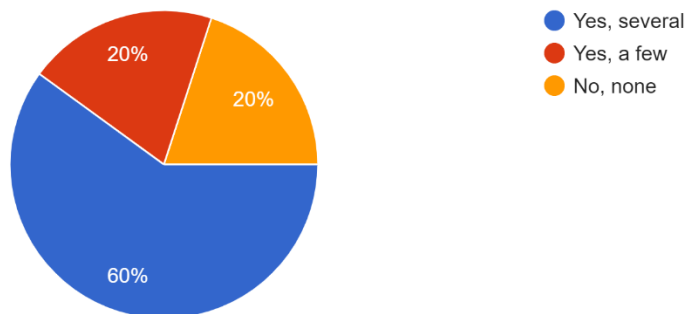
*certain periods of history and certain geographical locations offer people living in them common features, our personal identity is, at least in part, shared with others from the same time-period and location (s.309)*

By implication, immigrants' process of integration is significantly influenced by the time and place they live. This depicts that the cultural and historical context of the host community usually plays a role in immigrants' sense of identity. Sharing certain characteristics with the host community makes it easier for social connections to be formed, especially as acculturation is also influenced by immigrants' environment. Creating a sense of belonging within the broader community is crucial to the integration process of migrants. Five (5) out of the ten (10) participants expressed the intentional effort made to navigate the intricacies involved in preserving their cultural identity while simultaneously embracing the values and norms of their host society. As individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds engage with one another, there is the possibility for adopting aspects of each other's behaviours, languages, beliefs, values, social institutions, and technologies. This sub-section aims to focus on how effectively and to what extent Nigerian students in the United Kingdom manage these changes when confronted with the culture of their host community. The analysis will focus on their adaptation as individuals, drawing insights from the framework of acculturation presented by Sam and Berry (2010, s. 472).

*Figure 2: Meaningful relationships with nationals of host society and other countries*

Have you formed meaningful friendships with people from other country other than yours during your time in the United Kingdom?

5 responses



According to Mana, Orr and Mana's (2019) explanation of the acculturation theory, integration emerges as a distinct acculturation tendency when an individual or a group is open to both preserving their own culture or identity and fostering relationships with members of the new culture (s.452). This concept implies a nuanced balance sought by immigrants, involving the simultaneous preservation of their cultural heritage and integration into the new culture. Such integration, as theorized by acculturation frameworks, facilitates the formation of a new identity that acts as a bridge connecting immigrants with individuals from their host community. Chris (**P1**) exemplifies this approach, emphasizing the existence of diverse cultures and identities in the United Kingdom, he appreciates the co-existence of different ethnic groups with distinct languages and traditions. His cultivation of a positive and open-minded attitude towards cultural diversity and forming networks with people of other cultures aligns with the notion proposed by Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010), that individuals from diverse backgrounds gradually build interactions and perspectives. Chris's stance reflects the integration tendency, showcasing a harmonious blend of cultural preservation and active engagement with the host community.

*There is so much to learn about other people's culture, and it is so beautiful that there are several ethnic groups that I have come across ever since I came to the UK. Maybe it's because most people with cultural affinity tend to have a way of residing around each other (**Chris P1**).*

He identified with the concept of ethnic enclaves, where people from similar cultural backgrounds may live near maintain a sense of community and give each other support in a foreign country (Espinoza-Kulick, Fennelly, Beck and Castañeda, 2021; Danzer and Yaman, 2013). The awareness of social dynamics helps shape the acculturation experiences, thus reflecting how immigrants navigate their cultural integration. The experience of Jack (**P9**) also showed that integration into a new community involves learning about the customs, traditions, values, and behaviours of the host community.

*Social integration is all about networking and learning new things about the United Kingdom (**Jack P9**).*

An active engagement and adaptation to the norms of the host society is a process towards successful integration (Wang and Hannes, 2014). Similarly, James (**P3**), exemplifies a personal effort to navigate the intricate process of cultural adaptation. His ability to form relationships with

locals from both his school and neighbourhood underscores the intentional approach immigrants take to build social connections in a new cultural environment. This intentional effort is rooted in the understanding that feeling like an outsider may not only impact social integration, but it could also affect other aspects of their lives. This sentiment is shared by five (5) participants, who fall under this category, as they highlight a collective recognition of the importance of active participation in the host community to facilitate a smoother acculturation process.

*I just had to give up some part of my cultural background for the time being and adopt whatever the culture they have in Leeds, because that is my new reality (James P3).*

The recognition to embrace the culture of their new environment among participants reflects a self-directed approach indicating a willingness to adapt. The deliberate adoption of the host country/community's culture and practices, as stated by Bierwiazzonek and Waldrus (2016), underscores an intentional strategy for cultural adaptation. This approach is significant in acculturation theory, as it suggests that enhanced communication and understanding can result from an active interaction with the local community. Likewise, the conscious adoption helps promote a sense of belonging and curbs cultural dissonance.

Showing a pragmatic approach to the adaptation process, Anthony (P2) acknowledges the choices available to migrants in the face of challenges and personal differences faced during social interactions. He relates this perspective with the inevitability of social activities in relation to their educational pursuits. This underscores the proactive attitude that is necessary to navigate the social and cultural differences associated with studying in the United Kingdom. This aligns with the theory's assertion that effective integration often requires that individuals adjust in response to cultural norms, values, and social practices. Similarly, Caleb (P10) finds satisfaction in participating in social activities organized by locals in his host community, highlighting the positive intergroup interactions that contributes to the acculturation process as well as the building of a sense of connection within the new cultural context.

*I find it easy to integrate into the Scottish society because of their friendly nature. People are always curious to chat with strangers [migrants] and that makes it so easy (Caleb P10).*



Positive reception from the host community played a crucial role in facilitating Caleb's (P10) integration process. Elements such as a strong sense of local identity, social cohesion, a well-connected network, and a friendly-atmosphere, as highlighted by Moren-Alegret et al. (2016, s. 111) are identified as positive contributors to the integration of migrants residing in a community. The culture of openness, friendliness, and a willingness to engage with migrants in various interactions creates a positive environment, ultimately contributing to a sense of belonging and facilitates the integration process. Caleb's (P10) narrative further underscores the value of positive intergroup relationships in fostering cultural exchange and appreciation. Also, prior international exposure to diverse cultures had a positive influence on some of the participants' social integration experience. By means of this, their level of adaptability and open-mindedness towards cultural differences enabled their admiration of other cultures, as well as easy interaction with people from other cultural backgrounds. As Spencer and Charsley (2021) mentioned, having constructive engagements with different people in specific communities and/or country has a way of significantly contributing to an individual's sense of belonging as well as help them form a strong connection with their host country in the long run.

### **5.1.2 Factors Limiting Participation in Social Interaction within the Host Community**

An excerpt from Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010) best captures the analysis that will be made in this sub-section:

*"...Obviously if we feel that people are attributing large-scale theories about who we are and the value and belief systems that we have according to minimal clues, then this may become a frustrating barrier for us in our communication with people" (s.309)*

From the responses of the five (5) participants under the second category, I will be analysing the acculturation tendency where migrants do not actively seek relationships with those from their host society. Rather, they focus on preserving their own culture and identity by keeping their cultural boundaries intact and intentionally avoiding assimilation into their host society. The means through which people connect with each other within social groups and/or networks plays a crucial role in determining whether a sense of inclusion will be advanced or otherwise (Bauloz, Vathi and Acosta, 2019). These dynamics, which often exists in interactions among groups and networks,

tend to have either a negative or positive impact on social inclusion. As Mulcahy (2011, s. 118) stated, issues pertaining to immigration and integration is perceived to be dependent, to varying degrees, among the public in all European societies.

Engaging in social activities with individuals from the host community often evokes a sense of displacement among these participants, because of their unfamiliarity with the cultural nuances of the host community. Alexander (P5) highlighted the challenges he faced in navigating culturally acceptable social norms, unfamiliar traditions, a potential sense of identity crisis, and cases of discrimination, even though he shares the same official language. Similarly, Victoria (P8) expressed a lack of inclination to socialize with nationals or invest time in learning their culture. Schaeffer (2014) emphasizes that a lack of meaningful engagement with the host community's people and culture can undermine migrants' social cohesion, potentially impeding their full realization of social and economic rights due to existing barriers. Consequently, a notable proportion of the participants appeared to adopt a strategy of cultural separation in their social interactions, evident in their affirmative responses indicating fewer connections with individuals from the host community and other countries. This observation aligns with the patterns identified in the acculturation theory, where immigrants may lean towards preserving their cultural identity by limiting social engagement with the dominant or host culture.

According to Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010, s 25), people may not always exhibit enough rationality in their intercultural interactions when engaging objectively with individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds. Emily (P4) explained that the stereotypical nature and prejudice that exists about Nigerians significantly discouraged her from establishing connections with people from her host society.

*In terms of language, there are no major issues since our lingua franca is English. But there is this preconceived notion that most of them still have about Nigerians, and it shows in the interaction that some of them have with me.*

Negative and/or hurtful comments during an interaction has a way of impairing interest in forming meaningful relationships with people from her host society. Many of her colleagues and neighbours were said to have expressed racism in subtle ways, with it becoming more evident in their actions. According to Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010, s. 25), the negative impact of stereotyping and prejudice are undesirable for victims. Experiencing hurtful and subtle racist comments tend to

create conscious feelings of exclusion and psychological distress in such a way that undermines an individual's sense of belonging and hinders him or her from actively participating and establishing connections within the host community. The existence of racism, even in subtle forms, have a way of contributing to hostility and projecting an environment that is unwelcoming for the migrant. This created barriers to forming genuine relationships and hindered his willingness to participate further in social activities. This explains Daniel's (P7) sense of social detachment and lack of sense of belonging. He stated that:

*The country is habitable but was not built for love as no one is ready to shield anyone. Nobody shows concern about any other person like that. You just know you are on your own here. Like some people will tell you each man to his own.*

There is a perceived sense of individualism and self-reliance that drives a sense of isolation or the perception that individuals must solely rely on themselves rather than being interdependent. This limits the possibility of social connections and support networks. Most times when we encounter the culture of others and/or need to interact with them, we instinctively compare them to our own by perceiving that of the host society as unfamiliar and strange. According to Holliday, Hyde and Kullman (2010, s. 286), this depicts a conditioning that we tend to have adopted from birth to give an interpretation and comprehend each other within some certain frameworks. Emily (P4) experienced this when she got involved in a social activity. She found the experience offending, especially as there was a notion that her ethnic background has been negatively captured.

*I remember trying to converse with one of my neighbours, a national now, who invited me to participate in a parade. While I was trying to get an understanding of what the idea behind going out to show support for a local team that way, he just laughed and said 'you people are all the same. You don't even know a lot'. I felt offended when he said that because I never knew seeking clarification or trying to understand the motive of a thing had become such an offense.*

The sense of belonging is quite significant not just for its intrinsic value, but also because of the correlation it has with the promotion of a positive social and psychological development (OECD, 2015, s. 36). Victoria (P8) identified that the inability to form deep social connections with people from her host society was because of the stereotypical perception she noticed and the probable effects that it had on her. Believing that another is inferior or incorrect, based on their race,

highlights the way race influences experiences of the participants and social frameworks. She also identified that assumptions were made on her abilities based on her race among her colleagues. This indicates the extent to which some immigrant students struggle in socially integrating into their host society. This somewhat usually takes a toll on their sense of belonging and connection to people from their host society (OECD 2015, s. 6).

Educational institutions often reflect the same dynamics and characteristics of inequalities, biases, and power dynamics that are seen within the larger society. In essence, social divisions based on race mirror the realities that are evident in the larger community. And this potentially impacted the self-analysis of Victoria (P8). The experience of discrimination is one that significantly affects the process of migrants' adaptation and integration (OECD 2015, s. 41). I presume that Victoria's (P8) use of the word "barrier" indicates a sense of difficulty which is influenced by the negative experience and the inability to display resilience in preventing negative emotions from affecting him or concluded that the negative experience will stop him from forming other deep social connections.

The experiences for the participants impaired their will to be enthusiastic about integration. Although there were no overt acts of discrimination, there appears to still be some form of subtle discrimination that has the ability of impacting the social integration process. Subtle forms of discrimination take the form of stereotyping, exclusion from social networks, unconscious biases, or microaggressions; and these tend to lead to feelings of isolation or 'othering' (Ghahari et al., 2020). Microaggressions are described as subtle, unintentional, or unconscious insults or acts of disrespect which can occur in various ways such as comments and/or non-verbal gestures (Pierce et al., 1978, s. 66). Pierce et al. (1978, s. 66) defined microaggression as subtle, unintentional, preconscious, or unconscious insults and belittlement, which can manifest in physical gestures or verbal expressions. Victoria (P8) mentioned that she sometimes feels as though the nationals of her host country have a bias towards people from her race, and this eventually plays out in their social interactions.

*I sometimes feel like the locals don't like us as such, so I don't really have that kind of freedom as such.*

Although microaggressions seem to be subtle, they made the participants feel marginalized while undermining their sense of belonging. This in a way impeded them from further engaging and

participating in social interactions. The unwelcoming environment which is eventually created because of this makes it challenging for them to form meaningful relationships with others or building social networks.

The participants' responses showed that to navigate the process of acculturation, some migrants seek to establish a shared understanding of the values and practices with the host community. This can involve the adaptation of certain behaviours, languages, social norms, and beliefs to align themselves socially. The importance of social and emotional support for migrants as they navigate the challenges and adjustments associated with adapting to a new cultural environment cannot be overemphasized. Berry (1997) mentioned that the stressful nature of the acculturation process can give rise to social and psychological difficulties. According to his analysis, the level, pace, and nature of cultural adjustments required can significantly affect the psychological welfare of migrants. In essence, if there is an excessive amount of change, inadequate support, pressure to adapt rapidly, or an inability to follow one's desired acculturation strategy, it can lead to acculturative stress. Acculturative stress was identified by Henry (P6) as he identified one of the experiences that contributed to acculturative stress for him.

*It is quite boring here in the United Kingdom than Nigeria. Cost of living, climatic condition and the hefty demands from jobs restrict my involvement in social activities.*

Henry's (P6) perception of the United Kingdom as a less engaging place when compared with his home country seems to be an expression of the emotional stress accompanying his inability to engage in social activities due to the differences in climate type and personal interests. For him, the differences he perceives became limiting factors to his engagement in social activities. In a way, he tends not to find social experiences in his host community fulfilling, being attributable to the high cost of living and inadequate time to engage in social activities. This clearly highlights Esser's (2010) position that when immigrants arrive in their host country, they bring various types of capital, which can be cultural, social, and economic with them; however, it's not all of it that can be effectively used to accomplish their most significant life goals in the new environment. The feeling of boredom which is exhibited depicts that a lack of excitement about or engagement with the local culture and activities impairs the participant from exploring social activities in the United Kingdom. The inability to explore social opportunities, join social clubs, or attend community events creates a barrier to integrating into the local community. The dissatisfaction that comes with

such became a contributing factor to a sense of stress and emotional discomfort. As he further reiterated:

*I cannot even say I want to enjoy social activities if it will drastically drain me financial-wise. So, I rather just catch up on social media and play mobile games at my leisure.*

This reflects the reluctance of engaging in social activities is a prioritization of financial considerations. As such, finances tend to also play a crucial role in the decision-making process, thus affecting choices regarding social connections.

Immigrants often begin their integration process by seeking cultural and economic similarities, which informs why they tend to live near their ethnic communities that are in the host country to receive mutual support (Lin, Wu and Li 2020, s. 3). This draws attention to the fact that the emotional and social needs of individuals can be linked to the promotion of their well-being as well as effective integration into a new environment. Feeling a sense of disconnect from the home country signifies one of the challenges faced when seeking to adjust to a new culture. Daniel (P7) stated that,

*Upon arrival in this country, I established connections with the existing community of Nigerians residing here...It is a form of resources, call it human resources, that helps in navigating and getting familiar with the new environment one finds himself.*

This initial association that serves as a support network has a notable impact on immigrants' social interactions, influencing the way they engage with others in their new environment over time. Identifying the place of social support and emotional connection reflects that there is a disruption that shifting to a new culture causes to their coping mechanism. Similarly, from the response, it is apparent that cultural differences in social norms and expectations are likely to impact a person's ability to establish emotional connections within their new cultural context, particularly as there tends to be a lesser inclination towards engaging in personal connections in the host community.

I found it noteworthy how often the term 'communal' was frequently used by the participants when they referred to their culture. This emphasizes a strong sense of interconnectedness and close social relationships. Hence, for them, they would undoubtedly derive a sense of identity through their relationships. According to Orton (2012, s. 13), in the absence of meaningful interactions,

migrants are likely to find themselves leading a separate life which is disconnected from the larger host community. In essence, the inability to engage often in active connections with others tends to limit the social networks that they can keep; thereby resulting in a lack of integration into the wider society. Similarly, finding themselves in an environment that prioritizes independence or individualism makes it challenging for them to establish meaningful social connections. This shift in culture caused some of the participants to yearn for the kind of social support and sense of belonging that they were used to in their home country. Chris (P1) stated that the idea of migrating with a member of their family sometimes is grounded in the need to curb emotional distress that may arise as a result of the inability to totally integrate within the UK's social environment. In his opinion,

*Not having people or even someone who you can easily flow with and relate with in a way that you have similar things to talk about can be distressing, especially in a foreign land.*

He expressed that in his home country, sharing everyday experiences with his friends and family was a reliable method of alleviating the emotional stress of the day. Unfortunately, he does not get that in the United Kingdom. For him, it usually appears like everyone is constantly busy and not open to being disturbed. As a result, there is a noticeable lack of emotional connection when it comes to finding individuals with whom he can share his joys and sorrows. Hence, since his emotional needs, in that aspect is not being met, he chose to not to give much consideration to networking and getting involved in social activities.

The agreement among the five (5) participants, who have a low level of social interaction with people from the host community, reveals a predominant tendency for some immigrants to interact socially with people from their own cultural background, emphasizing a greater level of acceptance within their own community.

## **5.2 Impact of Cultural and Social Activities on Social Integration Process**

Findings show that the networking process enables the exchange of information and support which are essential for understanding the social norms of the host community. As explained by the participants, the deliberate creation of positive environments, by citizens of the host society,

fostered cultural understanding and good networking. It was emphasized that adaptation to the existing cultural differences involves challenging one's cultural assumptions and being open-minded to embracing some aspects of the host community's culture. From the responses of the participants, it was deduced that they were able to balance the preservation of their cultural identity, while also not discarding that of their host society.

Individuals who possess a high level of cultural openness or adaptability tend to be more inclined to embrace other cultures and integrate into their host culture while experiencing little or no difficulties. And on the other hand, those who tend to have a strong attachment to their own cultural practices and values are more than likely to face a lot of difficulties in adapting to their host community's culture. It was observed that the inclination of the participants towards integration is attributable to their individual motives for social inclusion. The motive for social inclusion suggests that the participants desired to be accepted and included in their host community. Hence, there is the recognition of the importance of forming relationships and engaging with local members in their host community. By accepting and embracing various social aspects of the culture and social involvement with locals in their host community, social bonds were established and a sense of belonging within the larger society was obtained. The experiences of some of the participants reveals that building effective communication skills has a way of influencing connection with others as well as engaging in both academic and social activities. Participants who spent more time getting to learn the culture of their host community tend to find it much easier to get involved in social activities and adapt to their new sociocultural environment.

The feeling of belonging within the host community is in relation to how well migrants connect with the nationals as well as the culture of their host community. Inasmuch as belongingness is an essential aspect of the integration process, it was discovered that the feeling of belonging within the host country is based on individual subjection. Various factors, such as personal ideologies, experiences, cultural background, and attitudes tend to have influenced the participants' personal interpretation and internal sense of connection with their host community.



## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

In this section, the research concludes with a summary of the analysis and implications. Furthermore, potential possibilities for future research on this topic are suggested.

### **6.1 Concluding Remarks**

The aim of this research was to examine the social dynamics and integration experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom, by examining the factors that limit participation in social interactions within the host community, as well as the influences of integration tendencies among the participants.

Findings from the study indicates that the prevailing strategy among Nigerian students in the United Kingdom was ‘separation’ with minimal adoption of the ‘integration’ approach. On the other hand, participants in the study did not exhibit tendencies towards ‘assimilation’ or ‘marginalization’. In essence, there is a limited inclination towards actively blending and forming connections with the host community. Similarly, some participants did not show a strong inclination either to fully adopt the host community’s culture or to disengage from both. Consequently, the patterns identified signifies that there are diverse ways in which immigrants navigate the acculturation process.

Within the theoretical framework explained in an earlier section of this paper, I concluded on the findings of the study that it showed that most of the Nigerian students in the United Kingdom often find themselves maintaining minimal relationships with individuals from their host community because of the variance in culture, values, and beliefs. The process of socio-cultural adaptation was found to have been majorly influenced by the cultural differences between their home country and the host country, as well as the extent to which the Nigerian students were willing to interact with people from their host communities.

The study also showed that there is a wide recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity among some of the participants, and this largely influenced some of them in forming relationships with locals and the willingness to adapt to their host community’s culture. When immigrants choose to embrace both their cultural heritage and the culture of their host community, they tend to

establish a distinct and multifaceted identity, and this helps in forming connections with others who value the richness of the immigrants' cultural background and their willingness to adapt to their host society. The participants demonstrated a proactive and self-directed approach to cultural adaptation, by consciously adopting the culture and practices of their host community. The participants' desire to be socially included plays a significant role in their willingness to integrate into the new community. This highlights the importance of forming relationships and actively engaging with the local community. By developing effective communication skills and dedicating time to understanding the host community's culture, they enhance their social involvement and adapt more successfully to their new environment.

It was also found that some participants preferred to maintain their own culture and identity without actively seeking relationships with those from their new environment. Thus, they tend to keep their cultural boundaries while avoiding assimilation into the new culture. In a way, it was found that the way in which people interact and connect with each other in social groups and in the networks that they build is important in determining how included and integrated they will feel in their new environment. Findings also revealed the presence of subtle prejudice within the host community towards Nigerian immigrants. This subtle bias serves as an underlying factor influencing the inclination towards adopting a strategy of separation and minimal integration. The experiences of most participants showed that stereotypes, prejudice, and subtle discriminations make it difficult for them to form real connections with others and make them less likely to participate in social activities. Likewise, they expressed a form of social disconnection and isolation, which made them feel as though they do not belong. This is because they perceive that their host community prioritizes individualism and self-reliance, which therefore makes it challenging for them to form meaningful social connections and support networks. This made the participants highlight the importance of finding similarities with the culture of the host community as not having a familiar support network during the process of adapting to a new culture can have emotional effects on them. For instance, negative comments, microaggressions, and the perception of being "othered" contributed to feelings of exclusion, psychological distress, and hindered sense of belonging.

The challenges of navigating a new cultural environment resulted in some of the participants trying to prevent possible disagreements about culture by limiting their interactions

and relationships with their host nationals. Keeping their interactions within a smaller group of fellow students who share similar background with them reduced the likelihood of encountering cultural conflicts, especially as they felt more comfortable and largely understood when amid those who share similar cultural norms and experiences. This denotes that the participants widely acknowledged the significance of developing a sense of identity and understanding. However, this does not downplay the fact that individual differences play a role in shaping what each participant perceived as a cultural challenge in their experiences. This bordered around their individual personalities and coping strategies which in turn influenced their perception and response. For the participants in this study, the feeling of belonging within the host community is influenced basically by personal ideologies, experiences, attitude, disposition, and cultural backgrounds.

## **6.2 Recommendations for Further Research**

This thesis suggests conducting broader research studies to encompass the perspectives of a wider range of international students studying in the United Kingdom. This would enable the generalization of results to better understand the social integration experiences of different ethnicities. Furthermore, future studies could delve more extensively into the impact of these experiences on migrants' sense of belonging.

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Appendix I: Research Project Information and Consent Form

**Information letter:**

Information letter	Appendix 1
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<b>Project title:</b>	<b>Date:</b> 1-5-2023
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Migration trajectories of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom: A study of their social integration experiences	
<b>Study manager:</b> Seun Olusola Ajetomobi  <b>Your e-mail</b> <a href="mailto:Solaajetomobi@aol.com">Solaajetomobi@aol.com</a>	<b>Studying at Malmö University,</b> <b>Faculty of Culture and Society,</b> <b>S-205 06 Malmö,</b> <b>Phone +46 40 665 70 00</b>  <b>Education:</b> International migration and ethnic relation  <b>Level:</b>
<b>The following information should be included:</b>	
<p>This study is being carried out by Seun Ajetomobi, studying international migration and ethnic relation programme at Malmö University.</p> <p>The aim of the study is to investigate the experiences of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom, through their social integration experiences, and the extent to which they tend to participate in social activities and form relationships with the locals in their host community.</p> <p>The study will be carried out using interviews with seven (7) students who are currently studying in the United Kingdom for higher education. Selection of participants is based on personal contacts which I have with some of them, and using a snowballing technique whereby a participant can link me up with other willing participant(s). The interview session will last between 15-20 minutes.</p> <p>There are no risks involved in taking part in this study; however, you have the right not to participate.</p> <p>Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can choose to withdraw your consent at any time – either before the interview, during the interview session, or even after the data has been collected. Also, you have the right to ask for the transcribed copy of the interview session.</p> <p>We strive to guarantee confidentiality in the study in that no unauthorized person may have access to the material. The material is stored so that it is only accessible to me. In the reporting of results in the form of a degree project paper at Malmö University/or in another form of publication, you will be unidentifiable, and it will not be possible to link the results to of the study to you. It is my responsibility to keep my participants anonymous; therefore, I will not refer to your personal details such as name, age, and institution of study.</p> <p>This study will only be used for the purpose of a bachelor’s degree project paper at Malmö University.</p> <p>You are hereby asked to take part in this study, if you are satisfied with the information provided</p>	

above.

**Informed consent:**

Informed consent	Appendix 2
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<p><b>Project title:</b> Migration trajectories of Nigerian students in the United Kingdom: A study of their social integration experiences</p>	<p><b>Date:</b> 1-5-2023</p>
<p><b>Study manager:</b> Seun Olusola Ajetomobi</p> <p><b>Your E-mail:</b> <a href="mailto:Solaajetomobi@aol.com">Solaajetomobi@aol.com</a></p>	<p><b>Studying at Malmö University, Faculty of Culture and Society, S-205 06 Malmö</b> <b>Phone +46 40 665 70 00</b></p> <p><b>Education:</b> International migration and ethnic relation</p> <p><b>Level:</b></p>
<p>I have been verbally informed about the study and read the accompanying written information. I am aware that my participation is voluntary, and that I, at any time and without explanation, can withdraw my participation. The person/-s leading the study will strive to guarantee confidentiality in that no unauthorized person may have access to the material. The gathered material will be stored properly and used for research purposes only.</p>	
<p>I hereby submit my consent to participate in the above survey:</p> <p>Date: .....</p> <p>Participant's signature: .....</p>	

## Appendix II: Interview Guide and Survey Questionnaire

### **Interview Guide:**

1. Which country are you from?
2. What do you currently do in the United Kingdom?
3. What type of social activities do you engage in?
4. Can you tell me about your experience while participating in social activities in your local community in the UK?
5. How would you say your social participation or otherwise has influenced your integration process in the community as a student?
6. If you've formed meaningful relationships in the UK, what are the factors that influenced it?
7. What are the challenges that you can identify, if any, in terms of social integration since you migrated to the UK?

### **Survey Questionnaire:**

#### **Migration trajectories of international students to the United Kingdom: A study of their social integration experiences**

#### **Information about the study**

This study is being carried out by Seun Ajetomobi, studying international migration and ethnic relation program at Malmö University. The aim of the study is to investigate the challenges faced by international students in the United Kingdom, through their social integration experiences.

There are no risks involved in taking part in this study; however, you have the right not to participate. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you, however, choose to participate, I am guaranteeing confidentiality in the study in that no unauthorized person may have access to the material. The material is stored so that it is only accessible to me. In the reporting of results in the form of a degree project paper at Malmö University/or in another form of publication,



you will be unidentifiable, and it will not be possible to link the results of the study to you. It is my responsibility to keep my participants anonymous; therefore, I will not refer to your personal details such as name, age, and institution of study.

This study will only be used for the purpose of a bachelor's degree project paper at Malmö University.

1. Which country are you from? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Are you currently a student?

Yes

No

3. In what country do you presently study? \_\_\_\_\_

4. what is the motivation behind your migration to the United Kingdom to study? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What types of social activities do you engage in? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. How comfortable do you feel participating in social activities organized by UK students or local communities?

Very uncomfortable

Uncomfortable

Neutral

Comfortable

Uncomfortable

7. Can you state reason(s) for your response to the above question? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Has your social participation or otherwise influenced your integration process in the community and as a student?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

9. State a reason for your response to the previous question \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Have you formed meaningful relationships with people from your host society and from other countries other than yours during your time in the United Kingdom?

- Yes, several.
- Yes, a few.
- No, none.

11. If you haven't formed meaningful relationships, what factors do you believe have contributed to this? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. How would you rate your overall social integration experience as an international student in the United Kingdom?

- Very poor
- Poor
- Average

Good

Excellent

13. What are the challenges, if any, in terms of social integration since you came to the UK? \_\_\_\_\_

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14. What are your coping mechanisms in the face of such challenges? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. While studying in the UK, did you experience any form of the following?

Discrimination

Segregation/Labor market segregation

Racism

Prejudice

None of the above

Other \_\_\_\_\_

16. If you selected any of the above, can you please describe the specific instances of discrimination or prejudice you encountered? \_\_\_\_\_

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17. In what ways has the experiences influenced your participation within the UK community? \_\_\_\_\_

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18. What role(s) do you think your cultural background has played in influencing your experiences?

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