

# UNFOLDING TRANSITIONS:

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*A Collaborative Investigation of the  
Education and Career Pathways of  
African Youth from Refugee Backgrounds  
in South Australia*

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BEd(Sec)(Hons)/BA

*A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of*

Doctor of Philosophy

School of Education

Flinders University of South Australia

December, 2013

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# Abstract

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Participation in, and access to, education and employment are key indicators of social inclusion and integration for refugees. Although the labour market integration of refugees has been a research focus, little is known about the experiences of African youth from refugee backgrounds as they make the post-school transition to education and employment in Australia. This study examined perspectives on the education and career pathways of African youth in metropolitan South Australia using an in-depth, qualitative, longitudinal case study approach. It sought to understand the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds and identify factors and processes that influence these pathways over time. This study involved extensive collaboration with a Reference Group (comprising educators, service providers and researchers), and a group of African Community Mentors (comprising leaders and elders of South Australia's new and emerging African communities). These collaborative relationships were developed and maintained throughout the study.

This research sought to identify factors and processes that influence the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds over time.

Multiple, semi-structured interviews were conducted over a 12-month period with: African youth ( $n = 14$ ) who were either attending school, or had recently made the post-school transition at the time of data collection; secondary school staff ( $n = 7$ ); Technical and Further Education (TAFE) staff ( $n = 4$ ); university educators ( $n = 5$ ); service providers ( $n = 3$ ); and African community leaders and elders with service provision roles ( $n = 5$ ). In addition, informal observations were conducted in the form of regular school visits and, where possible, student participants' school files were accessed and analysed.

Six key influences were found to shape the education and career pathways of African youth: previous schooling; English language skills; Australian mainstream schooling challenges and support; family support; academic achievement; and post-school preparation. A series of recommendations were developed from participant

interviews, and meetings with Reference Group members and African Community Mentors. From these recommendations, a professional development resource was developed for use in schools and pre-service teacher education courses. Together, the recommendations and the professional development resource are intended to contribute to our understanding of effective practice in supporting African youth from refugee backgrounds to make the post-school transition.

# Declaration

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I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person where due reference is not made in the text.

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Svetlana M. King

December, 2013

# Acknowledgements

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*In normal life we hardly realize how much more we receive than we give, and life cannot be rich without such gratitude. It is so easy to overestimate the importance of our own achievements compared with what we owe to the help of others.*

*Dietrich Bonhoeffer - Letters and Papers from Prison (1943-1945)*

As this quotation suggests, successfully completing this research would not have been possible without the support of the following people:

- My supervisors, Professor Larry Owens, Doctor Neil Welch, and Doctor Julie Robinson, for their combined expertise, support, and willingness to engage with me on this journey as my guides. In particular, thank you Larry and Neil for your work as my co-principal supervisors – my thinking has certainly been challenged over the past four years! Thank you for your willingness to work with me on another research project, and for assisting me to develop my independence as a researcher.
- Members of the Reference Group and African Community Mentors:
  - Abdullahi Ahmed
  - Reagan Bledde
  - George Fomba
  - Bronwyn Jamieson
  - Pam Jones
  - Giuseppe Mammone
  - Mabok Deng Mabok Marial
  - Assina Ntawumenya
  - Kate Prescott
  - Renee Singh

Thank you for taking time out of your busy lives to engage in this research project, and for your energy, enthusiasm, guidance, ongoing support and encouragement over the past four years. I am inspired by the work that you do; it served as a constant reminder for why I conducted this research.

- Fellow PhD students, both domestic and international, for many a conversation over lunch, in the corridors and office doorways of the postgraduate area in the

School of Education at Flinders University. In particular, I am very grateful to Mr Ernest Ngendahayo and Dr Steven Mutesa Lekalgitele for taking the time to educate me on the finer points of African culture, and for teaching me basic conversational Kiswahili, which aided very much in forming connections – Asante sa na!

- Friends who have tolerated countless thesis-laden conversations. Thank you for lending your ears, and for your advice and support.
- Staff at Fairview High School<sup>1</sup>, for their support of the research. In particular, I would like to thank Helen and Sandy for their administrative support.
- Shamsa Aden Abdullahi, for assisting with the translation of participant information.
- The 38 individuals who volunteered their time to participate in this study. Thank you for the candid and open way in which you shared your stories and experiences. I have been privileged to learn about your experiences.
- And finally, to my very supportive family:
  - My mother, Branka, for taking the time to listen to my constant soliloquies about research, for simplifying things when they became overly-complex, and for utilising her culinary skills to assist me in catering for numerous meetings
  - My father, Ross, for providing me with many hours of massage therapy during times of stress, and for encouraging me to take a walk outside every now and then
  - My sister, Jovanka, for assuring me that overseas travel will cure almost any form of brain block (“Trust me, you’ll be more productive if you have a break”), and for reminding me of the lighter side of life
  - My two four-legged companions on the journey and supportive ‘research assistants’ – Bo Montgomery and Barnaby ‘Barney’ – for providing just the right amount of distraction to keep me on task, but not bolted to my desk

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<sup>1</sup> This is a pseudonym to protect the identity of the participating school.

# Dedication

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*Ross William King*

*September 20, 1945 – January 11, 2014*

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Ross William King, who was a constant source of unconditional love and unwavering support throughout my life. He played a crucial role in shaping the formative years of my life. I will be forever indebted to him for making me the person I am today. Dad held my hand on this PhD journey, providing practical and emotional support which helped me to overcome many challenges and hurdles. I am so very grateful to have had such a positive and powerful role model in my life. I am fortunate that he was present at the time of submission of my thesis. My greatest sadness is that he will now only be present in spirit to witness the final stage of my PhD journey and beyond...

and

*Ivan Pecek*

*September 16, 1935 – August 26, 2013*

This thesis is also dedicated to my godfather, Ivan Pecek, who, like the young people in this study, survived war and subsequently overcame many of life's challenges, trials and tribulations. He lived his entire life with strength and determination. He was – and indeed will remain – an inspiration to me.

# Author Note

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Every human being is on a journey. Every day, as we go about our routines and daily tasks, we catch a glimpse of these journeys as our paths inevitably cross – at the bus stop, in the street, at the supermarket... These encounters are often brief and quickly forgotten. We also cross paths with one another in a much less superficial manner and with greater frequency – in the places where we live, work and study. We journey with others through our interactions with family, friends and colleagues. It is this latter ‘crossing of paths’ in which I have been privileged to engage, on my journey as a PhD student.

As explorers have demonstrated time and again, it is important to maintain records of journeys taken. This study is a record of my four-year journey, as I crossed the paths of an inspiring group of people; some younger in chronological age than I, but with life experiences beyond compare. I have been privileged to bear witness to the unfolding lives of 14 African youth as they made the transition from secondary school. I have observed their sheer determination and incredible resilience in meeting life’s challenges. I have also been inspired by those who work with and support these young people who, despite and in spite of multiple, complex challenges, remain dedicated to their work.

The stories in this study detail our separate, yet very much connected journeys, as we sought to understand the focus of this journey – the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. Over time, I have engaged with these young people in different ways – providing practical assistance with homework, greetings and brief discussions of progress in school corridors, and formal interviews in which they shared their thoughts, feelings, triumphs and anxieties in embarking on their post-school journeys.

In many ways, this thesis has been a journey. Consequently, I have used the language and discourse of journeys and travel in this thesis... itinerary, preparation, charting, foundations, mapping, tales, perspectives, discoveries, and new directions.



And now it is time for you, the reader, to prepare; for you are about to embark on a journey, crossing the paths of individuals whom you may never have encountered, even superficially. I sincerely hope that you enjoy this 'journey of journeys' as much as I have...

# List of Acronyms

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APC	All People's Congress
ASP	African Service Provider
ASSOE	Adelaide Secondary School of English
BSSO	Bilingual School Services Officer
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
DECD	Department for Education and Child Development
ESL	English as a Second Language
IELC	Intensive English Language Centre
NAP	New Arrivals Program
NESB	Non-English Speaking Backgrounds
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
SP	Service Provider
SSO	School Services Officer
ST	School Teacher
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UE	University Educator
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VET	Vocational Education and Training

*Students' progress through the academic pipeline to college and work is sometimes portrayed as a ball coursing directly through a sturdy pipe ... Unlike the ball's direct route, students' developmental pathways look more like those of explorers navigating through worlds of families, peers, schools, and co-communities; as they seek their academic, career, and personal goals, they encounter barriers that may divert or stop their progress.*

*-- C. R. Cooper, Jackson, Azmitia, Lopez, and Dunbar (1995, p. 211)*

**ITINERARY** /uy-tin-uh-ruh-ree/  
detailed route; record of travel; guidebook  
(Moore, 1996, p. 581)

## SECTION I: ITINERARY

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*There is no moment of delight in any pilgrimage like the beginning of  
it.*

*-- Charles Dudley Warner*

Chapters in Section I:

1: Beginning the Journey: Introduction

# Chapter 1: Beginning the Journey: Introduction

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*There are many cross-roads, intersections, paths and tracks to choose from. With every step, a new and different cross road or intersection emerges – forwards, back, right, left, diagonal, in differing degrees ... At the beginning of the journey we are not sure where it will end, nor what will be discovered.*

*-- Morgan (2000, p. 3)*

This chapter marks the beginning of this journey and introduces the study through a discussion of the contexts that were pertinent to the research. This includes the personal context of the researcher, the African and Australian cultures, Australian education and employment, and the social contexts of this study. Following this, an overview of the current study is provided including the three research questions. The study's contribution to the research literature is then explored. This chapter concludes with an overview of the structure of this study and serves to navigate the reader to the sections and chapters that follow.

## **Personal Context**

I am the granddaughter of migrants who were forced to leave their homeland during the Second World War. Irena, my Ukrainian grandmother, was 15 years old when she was taken away from her family. German soldiers incarcerated her in a prisoner of war camp where she was forced to work in a munitions factory. It was here that she met Jovan, my grandfather. He was from Serbia and had been captured by German troops when he was serving in the Yugoslav National Army. They married and arrived in Australia in the late 1940s as displaced persons, with very few possessions. Throughout the following four decades, they rebuilt their lives in South Australia, establishing new social networks, developing English language skills, and in the case of my grandfather, engaging in employment. While

they embraced Australia as their home, they remained proud of their cultural heritage.

It was this family history that, in 2007, led to the development of a study examining the experiences of Serbian people who became refugees as a result of the Balkan conflicts of the 1990s (S. M. King, Owens, & Welch, 2009; S. M. King, Welch, & Owens, 2010). The qualitative case study was guided by Elder Jr. and Johnson's (2003) life course principles, and social constructivist theory (Palincsar, 1998). Data were collected from multiple, semi-structured interviews with 10 Serbian participants. These interviews resulted in the development of a series of narratives, detailing the events and experiences that occurred during key stages of participants' lives before, during, and after the conflict, including their resettlement experiences in Australia.

The study, completed in 2009, constituted my introduction to research and the area of refugee studies. From conducting this research, I developed a working understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by this particular group of refugees. This fostered my interest in pursuing further research, culminating in the development of the current study which examined the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in the context of the post-school transition.

In 2010, at the same time as commencing PhD candidature, I joined the Australian Refugee Association<sup>2</sup> as a volunteer tutor in the Homework Club program, and have been actively involved since that time. The Homework Club is a weekly program that is offered during the school year at various locations throughout metropolitan South Australia. Each Homework Club involves a team of volunteer tutors who provide individual homework and assignment support to secondary school students from refugee backgrounds. The two-hour program is overseen by a paid facilitator.

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<sup>2</sup> The Australian Refugee Association is a South Australian organisation that provides a range of services to refugees during the first five years of resettlement.

Through my engagement in this program, I have been able to utilise my skills as a registered secondary school teacher of English, Science, and Biology. In addition, involvement in this program has complemented the learning gained from engaging with the research literature. Consequently, I have developed theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives on the multiple, complex challenges encountered by African students from refugee backgrounds.

A key issue facing many African students is a history of severely disrupted schooling often lasting many years (J. Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006). Because of this lack of schooling, these young people often have limited English language and literacy skills (J. Brown et al., 2006; Department of Education and Children's Services, 2007a; Naidoo, 2009) and may have gaps in their conceptual understanding (Grant & Francis, 2011). At Homework Club, this is often manifested through students' difficulties in interpreting academic tasks, and understanding academic writing conventions. For example, two Year 10 students were completing a numeracy worksheet and were experiencing difficulties. In working with them, it became clear that they lacked the assumed knowledge presented in the questions. For example, they were unfamiliar with how many days are in a fortnight. After explaining these conventions, they were able to complete the worksheet with minimal assistance. In addition, my involvement in the Homework Club has indicated that some students experience difficulties in using information and computer technology (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008; Earnest & de Mori, 2008; Zufferey & Wache, 2012).

Ongoing involvement in the Homework Club has provided opportunities to develop positive relationships with African students from refugee backgrounds – the focus group for the current study. In developing rapport with students, I have developed an understanding of the social challenges they encounter at school. For example, some students have reported difficulties in communicating effectively with their teachers, in addition to establishing peer relationships. As a tutor, I have also been able to gain an understanding of the issues that, although external to the school, shape students' educational experiences. For example, in working with a Year 12 student from Liberia, I was able to ascertain that she was acting as the sole

carer of her young niece and nephew while her sister was hospitalised for treatment of a chronic medical condition. I also learned that she was very unhappy with her living arrangements. She cited an example of asking her sister for money to purchase items for school and her request was denied. I was able to share my concerns for this student with the Homework Club facilitator who subsequently arranged this student's transition to group housing.

## **African and Australian Cultural Contexts**

Australia has an extensive migration history (Harries, 2003) and is recognised as one of the top 10 countries offering protection to those fleeing violence and persecution (RCOA, 2006a). Humanitarian migration has contributed to Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity. In recent times, specifically between 2003 and 2009, Australia has provided humanitarian assistance to 43,236 people from Africa (DIAC, 2013). Given the size of this population, developing a greater understanding of the experiences of this group of migrants in Australia is warranted.

Refugees from Africa face an ideological transition from a collectivist society in which interdependence and the function of the group is highly valued (Triandis, 1995) to Australia, a predominantly individualist society. Consequently, cultural norms including kinship, spirituality, and collective beliefs and practices (Theron, Theron, & Malindi, 2013) can be challenged following migration. This can be particularly difficult for young people who are growing up in the context of multiple, often competing (A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012) influences including the family, community, and Australian culture (Amigo, 2010; Cassity & Gow, 2005a; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b). Understanding how African youth from refugee backgrounds negotiate these expectations can aid in facilitating their integration into Australian society. This study examined the impact of multiple influences in shaping African students' education and career aspirations and post-school pathways.

## **Racism and Discrimination**

Many Australians in the mainstream community possess hostile attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers. These racist ideologies have been propagated by mass



media representations which often portray negative images of refugees (J. King, 2004; Leudar, Hayes, Nekvapil, & Turner Baker, 2008). African migrants constitute a 'visible minority' in Australian society (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012). Consequently, they face the threat of racism and discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, the manifestation of their religious beliefs, clothing, and patterns of social interaction (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2007; Fozdar, 2009; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008). Successfully transitioning to Australian culture not only involves an examination of how people from refugee backgrounds adapt, but also how the Australian community supports and facilitates their integration. In examining the social contexts of African youth, this study explored the challenges of developing cross-cultural relationships and their impact upon integration more broadly.

## **Education and Employment Contexts**

The transition to a new culture is made in the context of the refugee experience which is characterised by a profound loss (Ahearn Jr., 2000; Kinzie, 2007) of multiple personal, social, material, and cultural resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Ryan, Dooley, & Benson, 2008). The process of rebuilding one's life and regaining resources (Kinzie, 2007) is a key challenge of resettlement. Engagement in education and employment is a means by which newly arrived refugees can access resources needed to facilitate integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b) by promoting wellbeing and social inclusion (Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009). Engaging in society through work and study can act as protective resources to overcome challenges and reduce vulnerability to adverse environmental conditions (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995). The current study explored the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in the context of the post-school transition.

### **Australian Education**

Schools are important social contexts for students from refugee backgrounds and serve many functions that facilitate integration and social inclusion. Schooling provides students with opportunities to engage in cross-cultural interaction (Ager & Strang, 2008; Matthews, 2008; L. Wilkinson, 2002), and develop English language skills and academic skills that promote participation. Schools are also an avenue

through which to acquire formal qualifications (Gifford, Correa-Velez, & Sampson, 2009). This study explored the interaction between schools and African students from refugee backgrounds in order to better understand the role of schooling in shaping the education and career pathways of African students. It also explored the challenges that teachers face in meeting the needs of their African students.

When young people from refugee backgrounds arrive in South Australia, they are strongly encouraged to attend either a New Arrivals Program (NAP) (for young people of secondary school age and young adults), or an Intensive English Language Centre (IELC) (for primary school aged children). These programs are designed to assist new arrivals to develop English language skills and facilitate an understanding of cultural practices to promote wellbeing and a sense of belonging (DECS, 2007b). NAP/IELC attendance can facilitate transitions into other contexts such as mainstream schooling, further education, and employment (DECS, 2007b). This study examined the role of the NAP/IELC in shaping African students' experiences in mainstream schooling.

Australia offers multiple post-compulsory education options. Tertiary pathways include higher education, and vocational education options. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a form of post-secondary learning that leads to qualifications in particular occupations. This training is delivered by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions and includes apprenticeships and traineeships. VET provides pathways to further education and employment, and provides 'second chance' learning opportunities to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hargreaves, 2011). In Australia, the VET in Schools program is designed to facilitate the transition from secondary school to further study or work. Research has noted that some individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, consider that VET pathways are 'second-class' when compared with university education (Walker, Tilbury, Volet, Tungaraza, & Hastie, 2005). This study explored the aspirations of African youth from refugee backgrounds, including their perceptions of the status of various post-school options.

## Employment in Australia

In Australian society, work fulfils a number of important personal and social functions for individuals and their families. Meaningful employment is fundamental to the wellbeing of individuals from refugee backgrounds (Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009). Employment provides individuals with a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging, and can create a context that facilitates integration into the Australian community (Blom, 2004). Work can provide individuals with a sense of dignity and financial security (Codell, Hill, Woltz, & Gore Jr., 2011) and equips them with resources that shape lifestyle, relationships, wellbeing, and health. Access to sustainable and satisfying employment is, therefore, critical to the integration of individuals from refugee backgrounds. For young people, engaging in employment is an important milestone in the transition to adulthood (Arnett, 2000; Howard, Galambos, & Krahn, 2010).

It is clear from the literature, however, that the job opportunities amongst migrants are typically limited to the low-skilled sector of the labour market (Tilbury & Colic-Peisker, 2007). A number of factors have been identified as contributing to the limited employment opportunities amongst refugee and migrant populations. For example, employment options can be constrained by a lack of cultural knowledge (Guerrero & Rothstein, 2011; Watson, 2011) and limited social networks (Damm & Rosholm, 2010) that could otherwise facilitate 'word of mouth' job searches. Factors such as lack of work experience (Refugee Council of Australia, 2009; Watson, 2011) and few references (Fozdar, 2009) were found to constrain employment options for this group in Australian society. In addition, discrimination (Mestan, 2008; RCOA, 2009; Tilbury & Colic-Peisker, 2007) on the basis of accent, name, appearance, religious customs (Fozdar, 2009), and language ability (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Guerrero & Rothstein, 2011; Watson, 2011) has been identified as a barrier to accessing employment (H. Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wilkinson, 2000). Finally, traditional cultural and gender roles (Fozdar, 2009) have been found to affect employment opportunities amongst newly arrived refugees, particularly for women (Syed & Pio, 2010). The current study explored the factors and processes that shape the employment options, education and career aspirations, and post-school pathways of African youth.

## **Social Contexts**

The social context was of central importance in conducting the current study. Relationships were developed in various ways throughout the research and these are discussed below.

### **A Community of Collaboration**

It is well recognised that collaboration can aid in identifying and addressing complex problems (Head, 2004; Roberts, 2007). In refugee research, a collaborative approach is particularly useful given the complexity of the refugee experience (Castles, 2003).

In this study, a 'Community of Collaboration' was established and was central to the research design. This collaboration took the form of regular contact and information sharing (Head, 2006) with a Reference Group and a group of African Community Mentors. Individuals involved in this study's collaborative community were those with knowledge, expertise, and experience (Head, 2006; Lawrence, Dodds, & Brooker, 2010) in working with African youth from refugee backgrounds. These individuals met at key stages of the research and were engaged in all phases of the study (Whelan, 2004). This included facilitating participant recruitment, determining topics for discussion at interviews, and developing recommendations arising from the study's findings.

Collaboration aided in developing a sense of community, respect, and trust amongst those involved (Cook & Friend, 2010). The Reference Group and African Community Mentors constituted a supportive network (Conoley & Conoley, 2010) and individuals displayed a strong commitment to achieving the study's objectives. From a researcher's perspective, the Community of Collaboration provided access to ongoing mentoring, support, and feedback that ultimately enhanced the study's outcomes (Head, 2006).

Collaborating with others aided in ensuring that the research was conducted in an ethically responsible and culturally appropriate manner (Fisher et al., 2002). It also

increased the likelihood that the research would have relevance to, and benefit, the intended audiences (Bryson, Patton, & Bowman, 2011; Hawkins, 2004).

## **Relationships**

Relationships perform vital functions in people's lives. Individuals live their lives interdependently as members of families, communities, partnerships, clans, tribes, peer groups, and social networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder Jr. & Johnson, 2003). Connections with others can assist people to overcome the challenges (Wong, Chang, He, & Wu, 2010) of their daily lives and as they make major transitions (Pettit, Erath, Lansford, Dodge, & Bates, 2011), such as the transition from secondary school (Semo, 2011). This study explored the role of key relationships in shaping students' education and career aspirations, their sense of self- and collective efficacy and agency, their coping strategies, and their experiences of schooling and the post-school transition.

This research also viewed the researcher/participant relationship as central in shaping the study's findings and analysis. In this study, relationships were established with participants prior to data collection and were developed and maintained over time (Riessman, 2008). These relationships were supported by the use of multiple interviews which enhanced the development of rapport with participants (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998; Burns, 1997; Seidman, 1991). Conducting multiple interviews aided in capturing participants' changing perspectives and multiple realities (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998) by providing opportunities for them to elaborate on the meanings of the experiences they had shared. It also provides researchers with an opportunity to reflect upon the interview data.

## **Narratives**

Stories play a central role in shaping our experiences as human beings (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Jago, 1996). Just as our lives evolve so, too, do the stories we tell (Riessman, 2008). The events and experiences in our lives are shaped by previous experiences and, in turn, contribute to future experiences (Rushton, 2004). Stories enable us to connect the events in our lives in order to explain, understand, and

derive meaning from, our experiences (Fivush, 2008; Jago, 1996; Morgan, 2000; Speedy, 2008; White, 2000).

Narratives are contextual (Riessman, 2008; Rushton, 2004). Behaviours are understood and take on meaning when they are considered in the context of an individual's life (Seidman, 1991). Contexts contribute to the forms that our stories take and ultimately shape the interpretation and meanings that we assign to events (Morgan, 2000).

Central to the process of storytelling is the social context (Seaton, 2008; Winslade & Monk, 1999). Stories are framed by social interaction (Riessman, 2008) and are, therefore, participatory (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Sharing stories is, thus, a means by which we can develop and strengthen relationships over time. The current study involved the use of narratives to collect and present the data in order to remain authentic to the way in which we experience our lives (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991).

## **The Current Study**

African youth from refugee backgrounds constitute a disadvantaged group in Australian society because they face a unique set of complex challenges that are unlike many of their Australian-born counterparts. For example, African youth have often experienced many years of severely disrupted schooling (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004; J. Brown et al., 2006; Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2003) which can create significant academic and social challenges as they enter mainstream schooling in Australia (Bates et al., 2005; J. Brown et al., 2006; McFarlane, Kaplan, & Lawrence, 2011). These challenges can persist long after African students leave secondary school (Brodie-Tyrrell, 2009).

Few Australian studies have examined the education and employment outcomes of young people from refugee backgrounds (Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009) with the exception of Stevens (1993) and, more recently, the Pathways and Transitions study (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008). Stevens (1993) conducted a quantitative study which examined the employment outcomes of 92 Cambodian

youth from refugee backgrounds, aged between 15 and 19 years. She examined "... the extent to which adolescent refugees were included within the educational and occupational spheres of Australian society" (Stevens, 1993, p. 173) and collected descriptive data related to this aim.

The Pathways and Transitions study (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008) sought to identify the structural issues associated with access to employment and education of young people from refugee backgrounds in Victoria. This study involved consultations with service providers and agencies in the state, to identify themes and key principles for productive work with this group of students (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008). The study did not involve an in-depth examination of the aspirations, experiences and challenges of the young people themselves as they made the post-school transition. Other research has identified the involvement of young people from refugee backgrounds as a key omission in the research literature (Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

Even after these studies, very little is known about the education and career aspirations and post-school pathways, experiences and challenges confronting youth from refugee backgrounds in Australia. This study sought to address the scarcity of research by examining the education and career pathways of African youth in South Australia in the context of their transition from secondary school. Specifically, this longitudinal qualitative case study sought to address the following three research questions:

1. What are the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?
2. What are the key influences that shape the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?
3. From the perspectives of different stakeholders, how might African youth from refugee backgrounds be better prepared for the post-school transition?

## **Significance of the Study**

Education and employment are key markers of integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b). The post-school transition is, therefore, not simply about

participation in education and employment but rather, is symbolic of integration into the Australian community. Conducting research that investigates ways in which to facilitate participation and engagement in work and further study is, therefore, warranted. Consequently, this study makes a number of important contributions to the literature.

This study involved extensive collaboration with a range of stakeholders including educators, service providers, and African community leaders and elders. In addition, participants were consulted during the analysis of data and contributed to the development of the study's recommendations.

The current study involved an in-depth examination of the experiences of 14 African youth over a 12 month period as they made the post-school transition to work, further education and training. It included an exploration of their education and career aspirations and sought to identify and understand the experiences, challenges, opportunities, and barriers that are encountered over time and influence these aspirations. This included an exploration of the educational, cultural, social, and economic factors and processes that influenced their post-school pathways. In addition, the aim of this study was to understand the experiences and challenges of a range of stakeholders who educate, support, and mentor, African youth from refugee backgrounds.

A product of this study was the creation of a professional development resource for use in secondary schools by teachers and support staff, and in pre-service teacher education courses (see Appendix J). This resource is designed to be interactive and is targeted towards the identification of the needs of both African students and their teachers. The findings of this study can, therefore, be used to increase awareness of the complex and unique needs, challenges, and obstacles facing African youth and those who work with them.

## **Structure of the Study**

This study is divided into five sections and eight chapters, and is framed around the concept of a journey. An outline of the structure of this study is presented in Table 1.



Table 1. Outline of the structure of the study

<b>Section</b>	<b>Chapter</b>	<b>Description</b>
<i>I: Itinerary</i>	1: Beginning the Journey: Introduction	This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the study.
<i>II: Preparations for the Journey</i>	2: Learning from the Experiences of Others: A Review of the Literature	In this chapter, literature is reviewed and a rationale for conducting the current study is established.
<i>III: Charting the Journey</i>	3: Foundations for the Journey: Philosophical Foundations	This chapter provides a critique of the study's philosophical foundations.
	4: Mapping the Journey: The Research Design	In this chapter, the study's research design and procedures are discussed.
<i>IV: Chronicles of the Journey</i>	5: Tales of Transition: Results Part I	This chapter presents the case studies of the 14 young people who participated in this study.
	6: Perspectives on the Journey: The Voices of Educators, Service Providers and African Community Leaders: Results Part II	This chapter presents the experiences and perspectives of educators, service providers, and African community leaders who support African youth from refugee backgrounds in and around their education and career pathways.
	7: Unfolding Pathways: Analysis and Discussion	This chapter describes the unfolding pathways of African youth, drawing upon the study's findings and making connections to the research literature.
<i>V: Reflections on the Journey</i>	8: Discoveries and Future Directions: Conclusions	This final chapter provides a reflection on the current study by presenting the key findings and recommendations. In addition, new research directions are offered in light of the study's findings.

## Chapter Summary and Directions

This chapter provided an introduction to the current study by describing the contexts that were central to this research. In addition, this chapter established the context of the study by exploring its contribution to the existing research literature. Finally, an overview of the structure of this study was provided. The following chapter presents a review of relevant literature, which aids in establishing a context and rationale for conducting the current study.

**JOURNEY** /jer-nee/  
act of going from one place to another, esp. at a long distance  
(Moore, 1996, p. 589)

## SECTION II: PREPARATIONS FOR THE JOURNEY

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*Do not go where the path may lead.*

*Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.*

*-- Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Chapters in Section II:

2: Learning from the Experiences of Others: A Review of the Literature

# Chapter 2: Learning from the Experiences of Others: A Review of the Literature

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*To know the road ahead, ask those coming back.*

*-- Chinese Proverb*

Embarking on a journey ideally involves preparation. One form of preparation includes learning from the experiences of others. This chapter prepares for the 'road ahead' by examining literature from the fields of refugee studies, education, and career development. In doing so, it establishes the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the current study, providing a rationale for conducting the research. This chapter is divided into four sections: (i) global, national and local perspectives on refugee issues; (ii) migration and resettlement in Australia; (iii) education and career pathways; and (iv) the post-school transition.

This literature review highlights the limited research attention that has been given to the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in the context of their transition from secondary school<sup>3</sup>. While important conclusions can be drawn from the existing literature, an examination of the research raises key questions which form the basis of the current study:

1. What are the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?
2. What are the key influences that shape the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?
3. From the perspectives of different stakeholders, how might African youth from refugee backgrounds be better prepared for the post-school transition?

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<sup>3</sup> For the purpose of simplicity, subsequent reference to the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds refers to the context of the post-school transition.

## **Refugees: Global, National and Local Perspectives**

Becoming a refugee affects all aspects of one's life. It is, therefore, not surprising that refugee issues are studied within and across a variety of disciplines (Castles, 2003). Consequently, this literature review draws upon research conducted in various disciplines and fields. This section reviews current and key literature pertaining to global, national and local refugee issues, with an emphasis on refugees from Africa – the focus of the current study.

### **Who are Refugees?**

In order to officially qualify as a refugee, an individual must meet the criteria set out in the definition from the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees which was established to cope with the population of displaced persons after World War II (Davies, 2004). This definition states that a refugee is:

any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his/her nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself/herself of the protection of that country (Refugee Council of Australia, 2006c).

Despite this official definition, the current study adopts a broader perspective which acknowledges that “it is the refugee-like experience rather than the official designation as a refugee ... that defines the relevant population” (Coventry, Guerra, MacKenzie, & Pinkney, 2002, p. 13). Consequently, this study involves African youth who migrated to Australia with visas within the humanitarian migration stream including Refugee (200), Special Humanitarian Program (202), and Woman at Risk (204) visas.

An examination of the literature reveals a lack of consensus on the terminology used to describe individuals who resettle in host countries as refugees. Some authors refer to these individuals as ‘refugees’ (e.g., Ager & Strang, 2008; Balfour, 2009). In the context of literature pertaining to youth, the term ‘refugee young people’ is used (e.g., Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2006; Couch, 2007; Olliff & Couch, 2005). The

refugee label, however, no longer applies because upon arrival in Australia, these people become permanent residents. The term 'refugee' is, therefore, "an identity of [the] past and not [the] present" (Gifford et al., 2009, p. 35). In addition, youth and case workers have noted that 'refugee young people' and 'refugee youth' are not labels with which these youth choose to identify (A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012).

Terminology that is used to describe students with disabilities places the person first, followed by a description of their disability (e.g., a child with autism as opposed to an autistic child). This aids in moving away from a deficiency orientation by reducing stigmatisation and segregation (Osher, 1996). In the same way, those who migrate to host countries as refugees need not continually be defined by their status as humanitarian entrants. Some authors have indicated this by using the term 'people with refugee experience' (e.g., Department of Education and Children's Services, 2007a) and those 'from refugee backgrounds' (e.g., Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009). This terminology adopts a more inclusive paradigm and a strengths-based perspective, demonstrating respect to individuals while acknowledging their previous refugee experiences.

In this study, the terms 'African youth from refugee backgrounds' and 'African students from refugee backgrounds' are used interchangeably. The terms 'students', 'youth' and 'young people' refer to those aged between 12 and 25 years of age (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a) who are attending high school or have recently made the transition from secondary school<sup>4</sup>.

## **The Global Refugee Situation**

In recent years, the world has seen an increase in the number of persons of concern<sup>5</sup> (Hugo, 2009; Khawaja et al., 2008). For example, in 2006, there were 32.9 million persons of concern, and refugees comprised the largest group with a population of

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<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of the participant selection criteria.

<sup>5</sup> A 'person of concern' is defined as an individual who is in need of protection and assistance by the United Nations refugee agency (UNHCR, 2001 cited by International Catholic Migration Mission, n.d.). This category comprises seven groups: asylum seekers; refugees; internally displaced persons (IDPs); returned refugees; returned IDPs; stateless persons; and others in a refugee or returnee-like situation (RCOA, 2006b; UNHCR, 2007).

9.9 million (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2007). At the end of 2009, the number of people forcibly displaced from their homes as a consequence of conflict and persecution rose to 43.3 million (RCOA, n.d.). In 2011, there were 42.5 million displaced people worldwide, and over 3.5 million of these people originated from Africa (UNHCR, 2012).

These figures illustrate the magnitude of the global humanitarian crisis. Given that these issues affect countries worldwide, it is little surprise that protecting those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes constitutes a major challenge facing the international community (Department of Immigration and Citizenship, 2011). The increasing numbers of those experiencing human rights abuses and the probability that such issues will persist in the future suggest that research in the area of refugee studies is warranted.

### **The African Refugee Situation**

Africa has been, and remains, a site of struggle and conflict. The causes of civil war in the region are inherently complex. Despite this, it is important to have, at the very least, a basic understanding of the events that cause people to flee their homes. This section of the literature review provides a brief overview of the events that occurred in the six countries from which the student participants came – Sudan, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi. It is not intended to present a comprehensive review of these complex political situations.

To aid in this discussion, a map of Africa is provided (see Figure 1) and serves as a geographical reference point. This map identifies the six countries of the student participants, and the order in which they are discussed.



Figure 1. Map of Africa (ICEF Monitor, 2012)

### **Sudan.**

Conflict in Sudan began in 1956 after the country gained independence from Egypt and Britain. At this time, the constitution did not address whether the state was Islamic or secular (U.S. Department of State, 2012) and the Arab-led government sought to unify the country along Arabic and Islamic lines. This was met with resistance from non-Muslims, triggering a revolt by the Southern army and over half a century of conflict between the Arab Muslims in the north and the black African Christians in the south.

During the early 1990s, peace solutions were sought to end the conflict. The following years, however, were characterised by failed peace attempts and continued fighting. During the conflict, thousands fled Sudan, walking for weeks through the bush in search of safety (UNHCR, 2012).

In July, 2011, South Sudan became independent from the north, after 99 per cent of southern Sudanese voted in favour of secession (BBC News, 2012f). Issues such as

shared oil revenues (BBC News, 2012g) and exact border demarcations (BBC News, 2012f) have continued to create tension between the two states.

The Sudanese conflict, based on cultural and religious differences, is considered the “longest uninterrupted civil war on earth” (SAIL, 2010) and is “... one of the world’s most prolific creators of refugees and internally displaced people” (Browne, 2006, p. 21). The conflict in Sudan resulted in major destruction and displacement, claiming the lives of more than 2 million people, forcing an estimated 600,000 to seek refuge in neighbouring countries, and internally displacing approximately 4 million people (U.S. Department of State, 2012). Angel, John and Jurup were among those who fled to neighbouring countries in search of asylum<sup>6</sup>.

### **Somalia.**

The United Republic of Somalia was established in 1960, when the north and south, colonised by the British and Italians, respectively, merged to become independent. What followed was a series of inter-clan power struggles that continue today. The United States and the United Nations have made attempts to restore order, but to no avail (BBC News, 2012e).

Many lives have been affected by the ongoing civil conflict in Somalia. For example, between December, 1991 and March, 1992, 25,000 people were killed, 1.5 million became refugees, and at least 2 million became internally displaced (Bradbury & Healy, 2010). Since 2006, an estimated 1.3 million people have been displaced from their homes, 3.6 million have required emergency food aid, and Somalis are reported to be fleeing the region at a rate of 60,000 per year (Bradbury & Healy, 2010). In 2011, there were almost 1.1 million Somali refugees under the responsibility of the UNHCR, constituting the third largest refugee group under its protection (UNHCR, 2012).

Amidst civil conflict, Somalia has been a casualty of natural disaster. In 2004, the Indonesian earthquake generated tsunami waves that hit the Somali coast, resulting in hundreds of deaths and the displacement of tens of thousands (BBC News,

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<sup>6</sup> Chapter 5 presents the stories of the student participants.



2012e). Somalia has also experienced terrible drought in which millions of people verged on starvation, and tens of thousands fled to neighbouring countries in search of food (BBC News, 2012e). Conflict, coupled with the inability to overcome famine and disease, has resulted in the deaths of up to 1 million people (BBC News, 2012e).

To this day, Somalia remains a site of civil conflict. It has been suggested that the conflict is propagated by a desire for elite groups to exercise power and control over assets of economic value (Kivimäki & Auvinen, 2002). Clan identity has also been identified as the cause of conflict in the region where “as soon as one clan becomes dominant, the others resent it and form a counterweight” (Dowden, 2009, p. 98). Clan division, however, is not a recent issue but rather, a legacy of ancient times where pastoral production required cooperation, clans were important, and disputes were common (Kivimäki & Auvinen, 2002). Furthermore, colonial and dictatorial strategies that emphasised a divide and conquer approach further contributed to clan division (Kivimäki & Auvinen, 2002). The situation in Somalia is extremely complex, with some eight warring factions, each with their own sub-factions (Kivimäki & Auvinen, 2002). The families of five student participants (i.e., Monica, Ayan, Habsa, Fatuma and Fathia) were among those who fled Somalia, travelling to Kenya in search of asylum.

### **Liberia.**

Liberia is the oldest republic in Africa, achieving independence in 1847 from the United States of America. During the following 133 years, Americo-Liberians, descendants of slaves, held political power and indigenous Liberians were prevented from exercising the right to vote. These inequalities triggered a military coup in 1980 in which the Liberian government was overthrown. The nation’s new leader, Samuel Doe, a member of the Krahn tribe, then assumed full political power and promoted members of his tribe, dominating Liberian military forces and politics (Moran, 2013). The favouring of the Krahn people created tension with other ethnic groups. During Doe’s political reign, Liberia became increasingly characterised by human rights abuses, ethnic tension and corruption, and the deterioration of living standards (U.S. Department of State, 2010a).

In late 1989, Charles Taylor, a former supporter of Doe, invaded Liberia from the Cote d'Ivoire with a small rebel group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). Children were among the rebels. Because of Doe's repressive government, the NPFL gained the support of Gio, Mano and Mandingo Liberians (GlobalSecurity, 2005a). Soon after, however, the rebel movement separated along tribal lines, resulting in a three-way civil war. Further divisions occurred and by 1991, there were seven warring factions. It was at this time that the conflict entered Sierra Leone.

In 1997, Taylor was elected president of Liberia (BBC News, 2012c), maintaining the "tradition of concentrated power" (Moran, 2013). Consequently, the conflict continued until August 2003, when a peace agreement was reached. This agreement pressured Taylor to resign as president, prompting him to move to Nigeria in exile. Taylor was indicted for war crimes in a UN Tribunal in Sierra Leone. In addition to human rights abuses, Taylor was accused of trading weapons for diamonds with Sierra Leonean rebels, therefore prolonging the conflict (BBC News, 2012c).

The 14-year civil conflict in Liberia is estimated to have killed approximately 250,000 people (BBC News, 2012c). An estimated 50,000 children were killed, with many more injured, abandoned or orphaned (GlobalSecurity, 2005a). Because of the involvement of children in the rebel movements, the majority of young Liberians have borne witness to atrocities and some committed atrocities themselves (GlobalSecurity, 2005a). David, Sayhosay and Belee were among the one million Liberian people who were displaced from their homes (U.S. Department of State, 2010a).

### **Sierra Leone.**

Tensions in Sierra Leone rose when Siaka Stevens, a member of the All People's Congress (APC), became the country's new prime minister. While in power, Stevens amended the country's constitution, banning all other political parties. This inspired opposition, resulting in several unsuccessful coup attempts.

Stevens maintained control of Sierra Leone until 1985, when Joseph Momoh was named the new APC candidate. During Momoh's political reign, the multi-party system was re-established in order to strengthen the country's democratic foundation (GlobalSecurity, 2005b). Momoh's democratic intentions, however, were not deemed serious (GlobalSecurity, 2005b) and the APC became increasingly characterised by abuses of power (U.S. Department of State, 2010b).

Civil war officially began in Sierra Leone in March 1991, when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) began a campaign to overthrow the government (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, 2005). This coup resulted in months of fighting, during which time, villages were attacked in eastern Sierra Leone and along the Liberian border (U.S. Department of State, 2010b). During this time, the RUF gained control of diamond mines in the Kono district, pushing the Sierra Leonean army back towards Freetown.

During the 11-year conflict, multiple military coups were staged, resulting in changes to those in political power. The war in Sierra Leone ended on January, 18, 2002, when Kabbah (originally elected president in 1996) was re-elected and the Sierra Leone People's Party declared an official end to the war (GlobalSecurity, 2005b).

Causes of the conflict are unclear. Some authors have suggested that the war was fuelled by economic resources and the diamond trade (AFROL, n.d.). Others, however, argue that the fundamental causes of the conflict concerned economic and political exclusion and injustices (D. J. Francis, 2001).

During the conflict, atrocities were committed against civilians. For example, during 'Operation No Living Thing', rebel groups brutally killed, dismembered and mutilated anyone who was unwilling to cooperate (AFROL, n.d.; GlobalSecurity, 2005b). In addition, civilians were abducted for forced labour, sexual servitude, and human shields during attacks (AFROL, n.d.). Victims of these atrocities ranged from small children to the elderly. In addition, missionaries and aid workers were abducted, humanitarian relief convoys were ambushed, and refugee sites were raided (AFROL, n.d.). It is estimated that 50,000 people were killed, and more than

half of Sierra Leone's population of 6 million (BBC News, 2012d) were displaced as a consequence of the war (GlobalSecurity, 2005b). Abie and her family were amongst those who fled Sierra Leone, seeking asylum in neighbouring Guinea.

### **Burundi.**

After gaining independence in 1962, all societal power in Burundi was awarded to the Tutsi (Dowden, 2009), specifically the Tutsi-Hima (Calmeyn, 2002). During their control, the oppressive elite Tutsi socially and politically marginalised the Hutu majority (Calmeyn, 2002). It is generally agreed that these ethnic tensions are a legacy of colonial times in which the Tutsi elite were favoured by colonial authorities (Insight on Conflict, 2011).

In 1993, Burundi's first democratic elections were held and the first Hutus were elected to government under the leadership of Melchior Ndadaye. The replacement of Tutsi dominance at all levels of government triggered retaliation (Dowden, 2009) and within a matter of months, Ndadaye was assassinated by Tutsi soldiers. This event triggered years of Hutu-Tutsi violence in which 300,000 people, mainly civilians, were killed (BBC News, 2012a). This internal conflict was coupled with fighting in Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Tanzania, and Uganda (Insight on Conflict, 2011). During this time, conflict resolution attempts were made, but were always met with resistance from Hutu rebel groups (BBC News, 2012a) and renewed fighting.

In 2005, the first parliamentary elections were held since the start of the civil war. As a result, all groups agreed to an inter-ethnic power-sharing political model. Despite the current ethnically diverse government, the peace process remains fragile (Insight on Conflict, 2011).

The cause of the 12-year civil conflict has been identified as ethnically fuelled (BBC News, 2012a) where the central issue is the distribution of power between the Hutu, Tutsi and Twa groups (Calmeyn, 2002). The Burundian conflict resulted in the deaths of between 200,000 and 300,000, the internal displacement of some 540,000, and has caused 280,000 (largely Hutu) people to seek refuge in Tanzania (Calmeyn,

2002). Sabrina and her mother were amongst those who travelled to Tanzania to escape the Burundian conflict.

### **Democratic Republic of Congo.**

The conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has its origins in the 1960s, following the country's independence from Belgium. In 1965, Joseph Mobutu took control of the DRC in a military coup. Once in political power, Mobutu renamed the country Zaire. Under Mobutu's political power, the country experienced economic ruin and political disintegration (Laakso & Hiekkanen, 2002), and was characterised by increasing corruption (BBC News, 2012b). Throughout the following years, rival governments were established that both supported and opposed Mobutu's government which effectively perpetuated corruption in the region.

Mobutu held political power until 1997 when Tutsi rebels gained control of much of the eastern part of Zaire, triggering a rebellion. By May, Rwandan troops invaded Zaire to support the Tutsi and other anti-Mobutu rebels and together, they removed Hutu extremists, taking control of the country's capital, Kishasa. At this time, Laurent Kabila was appointed president and renamed the country the Democratic Republic of Congo (Laakso & Hiekkanen, 2002). During the following years, rebels, with support from Rwanda and Uganda, launched an attack on Kabila which triggered counter-attacks from Kabila's supporters, who had support from Angola, Zimbabwe and Namibia.

In July 1999, the six countries who were embroiled in the conflict signed a ceasefire, but this was not followed and fighting continued. Additional peace attempts were made but failed. Conflict continued in the region until February 2013, when the 11 warring parties (Laakso & Hiekkanen, 2002) signed a peace accord to aid in ending the conflict. Actions are currently being taken to charge those responsible for war crimes through the International Criminal Court. Despite the official end of conflict in the DRC, the nation remains volatile (BBC News, 2012b).

An estimated 3 million people have been killed, either directly from armed combat or due to malnutrition and disease (BBC News, 2012b). The conflict is said to be

fuelled by politics and economics, particularly surrounding the mineral wealth of the country (BBC News, 2012b). It has been suggested that Uganda and Rwanda became involved in the fighting because of a desire to safeguard their borders (Laakso & Hiekkänen, 2002). Michelle and her family fled the DRC to the neighbouring country of Zambia in search of asylum.

### **Summary of the African situation.**

From this discussion, it is clear that situations of conflict in Africa are inherently complex and have diverse origins including ethnically fuelled power struggles, and access to resources. In some instances, the impacts on civilians have extended beyond armed combat and are exacerbated by natural disaster. Regardless of their origins, it is clear that these conflicts have shaped the lives of millions of people and have significantly contributed to the global refugee situation. The substantial numbers of displaced people in this region provide a rationale for conducting research with refugees from Africa.

### **Refugees: Lives in Transition**

When individuals become refugees, their entire social world is overturned which often results in a loss of life's repetitious, recursive patterning (Clayton, 2009). Becoming a refugee "... changes where you go, what you do, who you see (or where, what and who you don't)" (Luzia, 2010, p. 360). It is not surprising, therefore, that profound loss is a defining characteristic of the refugee experience (Ahearn Jr., 2000; Kinzie, 2007), typically involving multiple losses of personal, material, social and cultural resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Ryan et al., 2008). For many, losses of personal possessions, separation from family members, and shattered social networks are experienced before they even leave the homeland (S. M. King et al., 2009; S. M. King et al., 2010). Regaining access to lost resources constitutes a difficult and often impossible task (Kinzie, 2007) and these stressors can 'travel' with people as they resettle in new countries (Brough, Gorman, Ramirez, & Westoby, 2003). The current study explores African students' access to, and utilisation of, resources that contribute to their education and career pathways. This includes access to social support networks, material possessions, cultural resources, and financial support.

For African people who are forced to flee their homelands, seeking humanitarian aid typically involves moving to a refugee camp. Others, however, live in cities such as Cairo and Nairobi<sup>7</sup>. Two refugee camps exist in Kenya – Dadaab in the north-east and Kakuma in the north-west. Kakuma refugee camp is one of the world’s oldest and largest camps (J. Marshall, 2006) and is a semi-permanent settlement that is preoccupied with addressing emergency situations, rather than meeting the longer-term needs of refugees (Browne, 2006). Conditions in Kakuma are difficult. Temperatures typically hover between 35 and 40 degrees Celsius during the day due to the arid climate (J. Marshall, 2006), and access to food is often limited (Pittaway & Muli, 2011). Where rations are provided, the food typically lacks variety and is below the minimum recommended dietary intake of 2100 calories per day (Browne, 2006). Consequently, those who live in Kakuma face the threat of malnutrition (J. Marshall, 2006). Ration cards are also used as a commodity, being traded for other goods or accumulated over time (Browne, 2006). In addition, life in a refugee camp is “far from orderly, or even safe” (Browne, 2006, p. 9). There is corruption amongst law enforcement (Browne, 2006), fighting between refugees and local Kenyans, and women are under constant threat of abduction, rape and sexual mutilation (J. Marshall, 2006). Prolonged exposure to such situations invariably impacts upon people’s physical and psychological health (Harrell-Bond, 2000) which frequently has lasting, lifelong consequences (Moen & Erickson, 1995).

## **Migration and Resettlement in Australia**

Those who have been forcibly displaced from their homes have three options: (i) repatriation; (ii) local integration into the first country of asylum; or (iii) resettlement in a third country (Browne, 2006). In 2011, nearly 80,000 of the 42.5 million displaced persons were granted resettlement in 22 countries, of which Australia was one, admitting 9,200 refugees (UNHCR, 2012).

Australia has an extensive migration history (Harries, 2003). Since World War II, over 700,000 individuals in need of humanitarian assistance have been received by

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<sup>7</sup> It is estimated that between 15,000 and 60,000 refugees live in Kenya’s capital, which is contrary to the intention that refugees should live in camps or rural settlements (Browne, 2006).

the country (DIAC, 2011). Australia is among the top 10 recipient countries for refugees (RCOA, 2006a) and is considered to take more refugees than any other country relative to its population (Browne, 2006).

The composition of Australia's Humanitarian Program is developed in response to the needs of individuals in the midst of civil war and conflict (Hugo, 2009). The program is reviewed annually and involves: assessments conducted by the UNHCR regarding the resettlement needs of refugees who are overseas; community consultations between the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, and Australian individuals and organisations; and a consideration of Australia's capacity to assist (DIAC, 2011).

Figure 2 provides an overview of the composition of Australia's offshore resettlement program by region from the 2003-04 to the 2008-09 financial years. The graph indicates that during this six-year period, Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program was targeted towards the resettlement of individuals from the Middle East and South West Asia, Africa, and Asia and the Pacific. Between 2003-04 and 2006-07, the program predominantly provided protection to individuals from Africa.

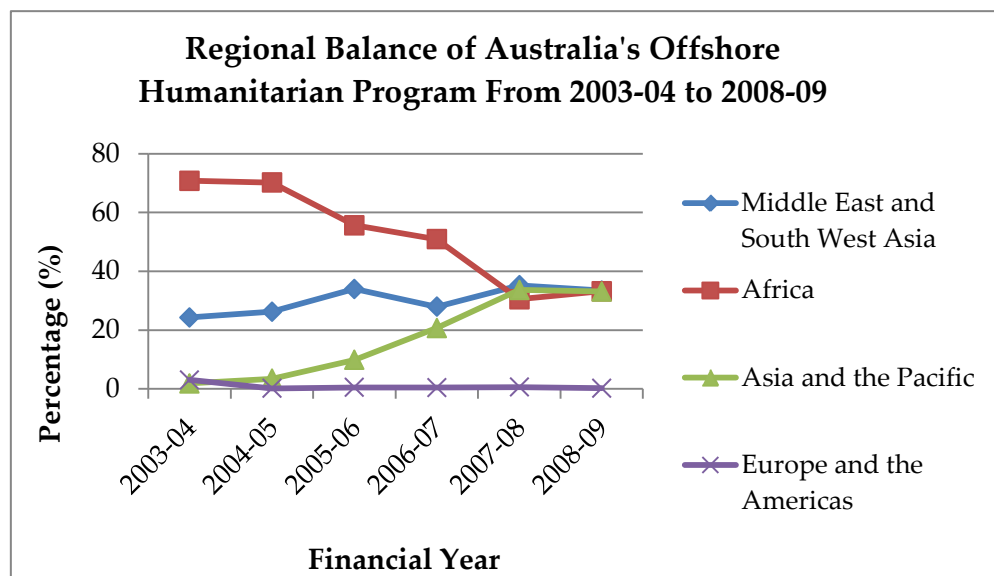


Figure 2. Regional balance of Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program from 2003-04 to 2008-09<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Data were obtained from DIAC (2011).



Between the 2003 and 2009 calendar years, Australia received 95,841 humanitarian visa entrants, 43,236 (45.11%) of whom were from Africa (DIAC, 2013). Amongst the African humanitarian entrants, 28,734 (66.46%) were aged 24 years and younger upon arrival (DIAC, 2013). During the same time period (i.e., 2003-2009), South Australia received 9,818 of these humanitarian visa entrants and 5,492 (55.94%) originated from Africa (DIAC, 2013). Of this number, 3,826 (69.66%) were aged 24 years and younger at the time of arrival (DIAC, 2013).

Given the numbers of young people arriving under the humanitarian migration stream, it is little surprise that each year, Australian secondary schools receive approximately 3,000 new enrolments of young people from refugee backgrounds (West, 2004). These immigration trends are also reflected in further and higher education participation. In 2010, for example, there were 2,010 students from humanitarian backgrounds attending university (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011). The trends towards providing humanitarian assistance to individuals from Africa coupled with the strong presence of young people in the statistical data contributed to the decision to focus on African youth from refugee backgrounds in the current study.

Resettlement is typically motivated by a sense of safety, security, and opportunity (Benson, 2004; Wille, 2011) involving access to food, accommodation, and freedom from the dangers of civil war. The process of resettlement, however, often involves a series of inherently complex transitions (Weichold, 2010) which can create additional challenges. The degree to which these challenges are embraced influences the ability to adapt (Khawaja & Meuter, 2008). The following section discusses the key challenges that impact upon the integration of young people from refugee backgrounds, with a focus on the factors and processes that shape their education and career pathways.

### **The Role of Cultural Identity Transformation in Shaping Resettlement and Education and Career Pathways**

Africa is culturally, linguistically and genetically diverse (Browne, 2006). Despite this diversity, three central, common elements have been identified across African

cultures. These include kinship, spirituality (including religion and ancestry), and collective practices and beliefs (Theron et al., 2013). African cultures are, therefore, framed by collectivist ideology in which cooperation (Neblett Jr., Hammond, Seaton, & Townsend, 2010) and interdependence (Triandis, 1995) are emphasised.

When African refugees migrate to Australia, they do so in the context of the transition from a collectivist culture to a predominantly individualist society in which there are different orientations of time (Marlowe, 2009) and different approaches to social interaction. This transition involves acculturation which was defined by J W Berry (2001) as contact between two or more cultural groups in which both parties undergo change, but the non-dominant group experiences the greatest impact. These impacts can cause acculturation stress for newly arrived refugees (Milner & Khawaja, 2010).

For young people from refugee backgrounds, personal, familial and community identity transformations occur in the context of adolescence – a time of change (Berk, 2005) in terms of identity development (Call & Mortimer, 2001; de las Fuentes & Vasquez, 1999; Erikson, 1963, 1965) and the evolution and development of relationships with family and peers (Berk, 2005; Cotterell, 2007). The tasks of adolescence are often more difficult and complex for young people from refugee backgrounds (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008), given that they are faced with the challenge of “growing up in a new culture ... in the shadow of the traumatic experiences of the recent past” (Coventry et al., 2002, p. 40). The transition to a new culture and the transition to adulthood, therefore, complicate each other (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a) where, in addition to family and community, the mainstream culture exerts its influence (Amigo, 2010; Cassity & Gow, 2005a; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b). Here, young people can struggle to fulfil multiple and sometimes competing expectations (A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012).

The current study explores the role of cultural identity transformations in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. It examines the impact that acculturation can have on engagement and participation in education and the role that expectations play in shaping African students' education and career decisions.

### **The Role of the Family in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

Migration can trigger role changes within newly arrived families (Pittaway & Muli, 2011; Titzmann, 2012). In many instances, this involves young people being forced to take on adult roles (A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012), a process referred to as 'adultification' (Burton, 2007). Research suggests that children may be required to take on adult roles and responsibilities (RCOA, 2010) because they are perceived as more competent (Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002). These roles can include caring for younger siblings (O'Sullivan, 2006a), completing household duties, and engaging in interpreting and translating for family members with limited English language proficiency (Gifford et al., 2009; O'Sullivan, 2006a; Titzmann, 2012). These responsibilities can impede academic performance by affecting school attendance (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008), removing attention away from homework (Dooley, 2009), and shaping the quality of relationships that young people have with their peers (Olliff & Couch, 2005; L. Wilkinson, 2002).

The cultural values and norms that underpin these roles and responsibilities, in addition to the practical implications of these duties can affect participation in post-school education (Banerjee & Verma, 2012; S. F. Martin, 1992; O'Sullivan, 2006b). In many cultures, female family members have disproportionate responsibility for carrying out domestic duties (Basow & Rubin, 1999; Boyd, 1999; Mareng, 2010; Poynting, 2009) irrespective of other roles they perform. Research has noted that female youth from refugee backgrounds can experience difficulties in dividing their time between family responsibilities and formal education requirements (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Earnest & de Mori, 2008). Women's roles can, therefore, limit their choices (Casimiro, Hancock, & Northcote, 2007; Trani & Bakhshi, 2013) and they may even be discouraged from engaging in education or the labour market (S. F. Martin, 1992). Conversely, other cultures may strongly encourage female family members to pursue further education. This may be a result of the lifting of sanctions that had previously prevented women from studying in their countries of origin (Walsh & Shulman, 2006). This illustrates the influence of culture in shaping gender roles (Arnett, 2000; Clausen, 1995; Kirk, 2010; Ridgeway, 2009; Settersten Jr., 2003; Wood, 1993). Culture and gender are important in the current study, as demonstrated in the theoretical framework that guided the research (see Chapter 3).

### **Obligations.**

Following migration, many newly resettled African refugees are obliged to financially support family and kin who remain behind in Africa (Mondain & Lardoux, 2012). These remittances are used to assist with basic survival needs, medical treatment, marital and funeral costs, and attempts to seek asylum (Akuei, 2005; Lim, 2009). Providing this financial support has been described as a means by which to fulfil social obligations (Lim, 2009), and negotiate and maintain social relationships (Hammond, 2010) and transnational ties to family (Lim, 2009). Transnational remittances illustrate the importance of interconnection, interdependence and being part of the collective (Lim, 2009) which, as discussed, is a core component of African cultural identity.

Fulfilling these obligations can be difficult when newly arrived families are themselves experiencing financial difficulties (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b; Harris & Marlowe, 2011). This can be a constant source of stress (Pittaway & Muli, 2011) which is compounded when those who remain in refugee camps perceive that family in host countries are financially wealthy (Lim, 2009). In some instances, transnational remittances are prioritised over some resettlement efforts (Anjum, Nordqvist, & Timpka, 2012). For example, research has found that newly arrived refugees often forego participation in further education in order to engage in paid employment to financially support the family (Banerjee & Verma, 2012; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Hammond, 2010; Lim, 2009; RCOA, 2010). Research has also found that amongst university students, financial difficulties associated with transnational remittances can impact upon time spent studying (Earnest & de Mori, 2008).

When generations within the same family experience different levels of acculturation stress, this can affect the structure and functioning of families and may lead to a loss of traditional roles (Kinzie, 2007; Snyder, May, Zulcic, & Gabbard, 2005). For example, acculturation stress can cause intergenerational conflict (Milner & Khawaja, 2010; Women's Health Statewide and The Migrant Health Service, 2005) such as arguments between parents and children regarding different cultural expectations. Intra-familial conflict can also arise when there are changes to family structure, roles and circumstances following migration (S. F. Martin, 1992; C

McMichael, Gifford, & Correa-Velez, 2011). For example, young people can experience family conflict when they are living with separated parents and their new partners (Mondain & Lardoux, 2012). In some instances, this conflict can begin in the home country and reach 'breaking point' in the resettlement country (Brough et al., 2003). These challenges can compound family challenges and serve to further traumatise individuals, a common occurrence amongst newly arrived families (A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012). Family challenges have been identified as a cause of refugee youth homelessness (Couch, 2011). Such conflicts exacerbate the stressors and difficulties experienced by families from refugee backgrounds.

### **Factors influencing family support.**

A number of factors have been found to influence the ability of parents to support their children's education. Family members are often dealing with their own resettlement challenges and this can affect the support that they provide to their children (Gifford et al., 2009). Limited language skills (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2011) can affect parents' ability to understand the Australian culture and their roles as parents within society (Atwell, Gifford, & McDonald-Wilmsen, 2009). In addition, limited literacy skills amongst parents can constitute a significant barrier to home/school communication (Rah, Choi, & Nguyen, 2009). Consequently, parents may not necessarily understand their role in their children's education in the Australian context. This has been attributed to the exposure to different cultures of schooling (Ramsden & Taket, 2011). In some African countries, for example, responsibility for children's education is given to the teacher, and parents have limited involvement in their children's schooling (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008). Parental engagement in children's education in Australia has also been found to be constrained by other issues such as lack of time and limited availability of child care (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; Jennings & Bosch, 2011). Language and cultural differences can, therefore, make it difficult for parents to support their children as they navigate the post-school transition (Glick & White, 2004).

Family can aid in building resilience by providing direct support as well as facilitating access to social networks in the wider community (de Terte, Becker, &

Stephens, 2009). For some young people, however, migration occurs independently of family, effectively limiting the amount of support youth receive from family. This can be particularly difficult when young people are experiencing multiple resettlement difficulties (Luster, Qin, Bates, Johnson, & Rana, 2008). In addition to a lack of social support, when the whereabouts of family members are not known (i.e., they are missing), this can be a source of constant worry which can impact upon resettlement (Gifford et al., 2009).

These findings suggest that family can be both a source of assistance and strength, and a source of stress (Coventry et al., 2002; Gifford et al., 2009; Udo-Ekpo, 1999). The current study examines students' family contexts in order to identify factors such as access to resources, family responsibilities and obligations, and the impacts of structural changes that shape young people's education and career pathways. The influence of identity transformations on African students' engagement in education and employment are also examined.

## **The Aftermath of Traumatic Events in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

It has long been recognised that during civil conflict, many individuals experience traumatic events (e.g., McFarlane et al., 2011; Trani & Bakhshi, 2013; Živčić, 1993). Such events can include shattering experiences of extreme terror, shock or fright (Gilmore, 2001) in which basic human needs and assumptions about security, trust, and support, are destroyed (Quinn, 2007). For many refugees, traumatic experiences unfold as a chain of events (Kinzie, 2007) and have both psychological and emotional consequences that influence the social functioning of individuals (Atkinson, 2002). For example, in a sample of Sierra Leonean child soldiers, Betancourt, Borisova, de la Soudiere, and Williamson (2011) identified symptoms of depression and anxiety as a consequence of witnessing, experiencing and perpetrating violence such as murder and rape. Traumatic events also occur in refugee camps and countries of asylum (Kinzie, 2007), where there are constant threats to physical and psychological safety (Browne, 2006; Harrell-Bond, 2000; J. Marshall, 2006). In addition, events in the country of resettlement can reactivate traumatic symptoms (Kinzie, 2007). This can affect the long-term psychological and

social functioning of individuals by creating or exacerbating existing mental health problems (Abi-Rached, 2009; Benson, 2004).

The impacts of traumatic events are not experienced by individuals alone. Rather, traumatic experiences affect families and significant others (Atkinson, 2002; Figley, 1986). As Jones (2004, p. 205) explained, "... having family around you helps, if the family members themselves are coping." This highlights the influence of social support and relationships in shaping people's mental health and wellbeing. In communal societies, this may be even more important, where individuals are likely to engage in collective coping strategies such as group discussion to aid in problem-solving (Renner & Salem, 2009) with a view to developing collective resilience (Sang & Fielding, 2007). In this way, collective efforts can facilitate access to social support, provide opportunities to expand resources, increase the capacity to deal with the stressor, and reduce the impact of risk factors (Lyons, Mickelson, Sullivan, & Coyne, 1998).

The extensive literature examining the post-traumatic effects experienced by refugees (e.g., Guay, Billette, & Marchand, 2006; Lopes Cardozo, Kaiser, Gotway, & Agani, 2003; G. N. Marshall, Schell, Elliott, Berthold, & Chun, 2005; Mollica et al., 2001) provides evidence of the cumulative effects of traumatic experiences which can persist long after the initial event and affect coping and adjustment (Figley, 1986). Following migration to the host country, refugees can experience a reactivation of their post-traumatic symptoms (Kinzie, 2007). For example, Craig, Sossou, Schnak, and Essex (2008) conducted a study of 126 Bosnian refugees who had been resettled in the United States for an average of nine years. The authors found that a significant proportion continued to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (66.6%), complicated grief (54%), anxiety (40%) and depression (31%). This research appears to adopt a Western biomedical model of trauma which ignores the role of social determinants such as family, social networks, and access to social support (Khawaja et al., 2008; Martin-Baro, 1994). Post-traumatic symptoms can impact upon engagement and participation in education in the host country by affecting concentration (Banks & MacDonald, 2003; Grant & Francis, 2011) and

memory (Brodie-Tyrrell, 2009). Indeed, childhood trauma has been identified as a risk factor in school dropout (Porche, Fortuna, Lin, & Alegria, 2011).

## **The Role of Previous Schooling in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

For refugee children and young people, access to schooling in the country of asylum can aid in creating a sense of stability and act as a symbol of opportunity (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). Different forms of education exist in these emergency situations and are supported by a number of international aid organisations such as CARE Canada, Don Bosco, the International Rescue Committee and other religious-based organisations (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004).

Voluntary formal education for children is available in many refugee camps (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004) but the conditions are such that the curriculum provided is often basic. Classrooms are typically overcrowded (Bonfiglio, 2010) and involve multi-age and grade classes (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). In addition, student/teacher ratios are often very high (Browne, 2006). For example, in Dadaab refugee camp, the student/teacher ratios for primary and secondary school are 77:1 and 52:1, respectively (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). This is compounded when teachers lack qualifications that meet minimum requirements, which is common in these situations (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). In addition, refugee youth often have limited access to resources to support learning in refugee camps (Mareng, 2010) such as stationery, textbooks, and information and computer technologies (ICT). Lack of ICT literacy can act as a major barrier to engaging in education in the host country (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008; Earnest & de Mori, 2008; Zufferey & Wache, 2012).

The language of instruction in refugee camp schools varies according to location. For example, in Dadaab, students are taught in Somali during Grades 1 to 3 and then in English from Grades 4 to 8 and during secondary school (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). In Kakuma, students study in English (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). Different languages of instruction can have implications for resettlement. For example, when the country of resettlement is English-speaking,



students who have been taught in languages other than English are likely to experience communication difficulties following migration when compared to those who have previously developed English language skills.

While opportunities are available to engage in education, participation rates are low and do not reflect the population of young people in refugee situations. In 2004, for example, more than 27 million refugee youth were not engaged in educational activities (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). Furthermore, statistical data demonstrate that school participation decreases as children move through the education system. For example, only six per cent of all refugee youth are enrolled in secondary school (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). In addition, gender differences in school participation have been noted, where female students are less engaged as a consequence of the expected domestic roles that they assume (Mareng, 2010).

Given the low educational participation rates amongst refugee youth, it is little surprise that young people from refugee backgrounds typically experience severely interrupted schooling (CMYI, 2003; Grant & Francis, 2011; Stevenson & Willott, 2007), often lasting many years (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). In many instances, these disruptions are not only experienced in the country of asylum, but also the home country, as is the case with many refugee youth from Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Burundi (Bonfiglio, 2010).

It is widely recognised that young people with limited formal schooling experience typically encounter significant academic and social challenges as they enter host country school systems (Bates et al., 2005; McFarlane et al., 2011). For example, students often lack prior knowledge, have delayed cognitive development (J. Brown et al., 2006), and may possess a limited repertoire of suitable learning strategies (DECS, 2007a; Grant & Francis, 2011). In addition, these young people typically lack knowledge of cultural expectations and understandings of schooling (J. Brown et al., 2006). Consequently, they can experience difficulties engaging in appropriate social interactions and communication in the classroom (DECS, 2007a; Grant & Francis, 2011).

African students from refugee backgrounds can also be expected to encounter challenges in adapting to school systems and structures. Specifically, they can experience significant difficulties in transitioning to an age-graded system (Bates et al., 2005; RCOA, 2010; L. Wilkinson, 2002). For example, these young people can experience pressure to 'keep up' with peers who may be chronologically younger in age but have greater academic abilities than African youth (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b). Placing students into classes that do not adequately meet their academic and social needs has been identified as a factor contributing to students' educational disengagement (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a, 2007b). In addition, inappropriate placement of students has been associated with limited short- and long-term employment options for students from refugee backgrounds (Coventry et al., 2002).

Given that early experiences often predict later outcomes (Englund, Kuo, Puig, & Collins, 2011) and previous educational achievement contributes to post-school pathway success (C. R. Cooper, Cooper Jr, Azmitia, Chavira, & Gullatt, 2002; Glick & White, 2004), it is likely that many African youth from refugee backgrounds will encounter challenges as they navigate not only their schooling in Australia, but also the post-school transition. The current study explores African students' previous schooling experiences including the nature and quality of the education they receive prior to their migration to Australia. It also examines the influence of language development through prior schooling. These previous experiences are examined in terms of their impact in shaping the experiences and challenges encountered in making the transition into and out of Australian mainstream schooling.

### **The Role of English Language Proficiency in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

Learning the language of the host country is a key challenge of resettlement (Atwell et al., 2009; Burgoyne & Hull, 2007; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012; Wille, 2011). This was confirmed in a study of Sudanese youth from refugee backgrounds in Australia which revealed that English language proficiency was the main source of acculturative stress (Poppitt & Frey, 2007).

English language skills are an important precursor to social integration and participation in Australian life (Milner & Khawaja, 2010). They can enhance feelings of belonging (Wille, 2011) and facilitate the establishment of friendships (A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012). English language skills can also create opportunities to engage in education and employment (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012; Fadel & Mestan, 2008). Limited language proficiency can, therefore, constrain the ability to integrate into mainstream society.

The difficulties associated with developing English language skills can be compounded when individuals lack literacy skills in their native language (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; Grant & Francis, 2011; Pittaway & Muli, 2011). Consequently, when students lack literacy skills in any language, "... the scribbles on a page have no meaning and might as well be decorations" (Wrigley, 2008, p. 2).

Some African people come from pre-literate societies in which there is no written form of language (Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2011). Others, however, are non-literate as a consequence of limited opportunities to learn to read or write (Tshabangu-Soko & Caron, 2011). In these situations, oral language proficiency is often greater than written language skills (Grant & Francis, 2011). This is typically the case amongst students who have had severely interrupted schooling (J. Brown et al., 2006; Olliff & Couch, 2005). It is, therefore, unrealistic to expect that these students will have strong literacy skills or be able to acquire English literacy skills without extensive support (Wrigley, 2008).

English language skills are a strong predictor of school achievement (Anlezark, 2011; C. R. Cooper, 2002; Hargreaves, 2011). Students with limited English language proficiency can experience significant difficulties in developing subject-specific grammar, spelling, vocabulary (J. Brown et al., 2006; DECS, 2007a; Naidoo, 2009), and conceptual knowledge (Grant & Francis, 2011). Students with limited English language skills and/or a history of interrupted schooling can also experience challenges in completing homework tasks (J. Brown et al., 2006).

Limited English language and literacy skills can have lasting impacts. For example, poor literacy and numeracy skills have been identified as a barrier to successful

transitions to adulthood (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2011; Williams, 2011). English language proficiency can perform an exclusionary function in which individuals are prohibited from engaging in certain post-school endeavours such as education courses (Valtonen, 2004). In addition, limited English language skills have been found to affect participation and academic achievement in higher education (Earnest & de Mori, 2008; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Roessingh & Douglas, 2011; Turner, 2007).

Given the importance of language proficiency, the current study explores the role of African students' English language and literacy skills in shaping their academic and social experiences in mainstream schooling. It also examines the influence of limited English language proficiency on senior school subject choices, post-school options, and education and career decisions.

## **The Role of Schooling in Australia in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

The school constitutes an important social context for students from refugee backgrounds to develop English language skills, academic skills and acquire formal qualifications (Gifford et al., 2009). In addition, the school plays a key role in supporting students to establish relationships that support integration (Ager & Strang, 2008; Matthews, 2008; L. Wilkinson, 2002). Facilitating post-school transitions, therefore, requires a focus on the experiences of young people during their formative school years and an examination of how their post-school plans develop over time (Hillman, 2010). Examining these issues constitutes the focus of the current study.

When young people from refugee backgrounds arrive in South Australia, they are strongly encouraged to attend either a New Arrivals Program<sup>9</sup> (NAP) or Intensive English Language Centre<sup>10</sup> (IELC). For most newly arrived youth, this program constitutes their first experience of education in Australia. Current funding provisions enable newly arrived students to attend the program for up to 18

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<sup>9</sup> NAPs are designed for secondary school aged children and young adults.

<sup>10</sup> IELCs are designed for primary school aged children.

months. The NAP and IELC are designed to assist new arrivals to develop English language skills and facilitate an understanding of cultural practices to promote wellbeing and a sense of belonging (DECS, 2007b). Engagement in this program, therefore, supports transitions into other contexts. Figure 3 (adapted from DECS, 2007b) provides an overview of the possible transition pathways from both the NAP and IELC.

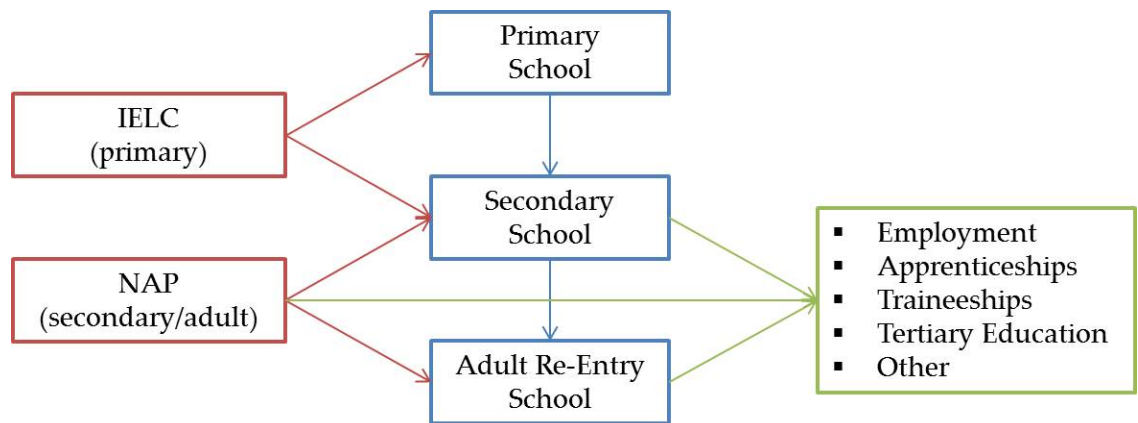


Figure 3. Possible transition pathways from NAP and IELC schools (adapted from DECS, 2007b)

While these programs are useful in orienting newly arrived students to the Australian culture and school system, it has been argued that they do not provide sufficient preparation for mainstream schooling (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; O'Sullivan & Olliff, 2006; RCOA, 2009). This has been attributed to a lack of funding (O'Sullivan & Olliff, 2006). Restricted time in the NAP/IELC can be particularly problematic for students with a history of severely disrupted schooling (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008). In transitioning to mainstream schooling, the responsibility for students' literacy skill development is transferred to mainstream teachers (Oliver, Haig, & Grote, 2009) who may not be equipped to meet these students' learning needs (Amigo, 2010; J. Wilkinson, Major, Santoro, & Langat, 2012).

This study examines the experiences of African youth from refugee backgrounds in making the transition to the Australian education system, including the NAP/IELC. In doing so, this research explores the challenges associated with this transition and

the impact of these challenges in shaping African students' school experiences and post-school pathways.

## **Understanding South Australian Schooling and Post-School Pathways**

For young people from refugee backgrounds, the transition to schooling in the host country constitutes a key challenge. Navigating this transition successfully requires the acquisition of cultural capital (Valtonen, 2004) of the dominant culture; that is, access to, cultural resources that are needed to combat challenges and become culturally competent in mainstream society (Naidoo, 2009). For many young people from refugee backgrounds, however, a lack of cultural capital can affect their engagement and participation in education which is compounded when families also lack cultural capital (Naidoo, 2009).

Research has demonstrated that newly arrived students and their families often lack knowledge and understanding of how schooling operates in the host country (Banks & MacDonald, 2003). For example, parents may not necessarily understand their own role in their children's education in the Australian context (Atwell et al., 2009). This has been attributed to exposure to different cultures of schooling (Ramsden & Taket, 2011) where, in some African countries, parents assume less active roles in their children's schooling (when compared to Australia) and the primary responsibility for children's education is assigned to the teacher (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008). In addition, research examining the experiences of university students from refugee backgrounds has revealed that adapting to the culture of the university is a key barrier to participation (Earnest & de Mori, 2008; Turner, 2007; Zufferey & Wache, 2012).

The challenge of developing cultural knowledge associated with education in the host country can be compounded when African families have limited English language skills and limited or no literacy skills in any language. This can constitute a significant barrier to home/school communication (Rah et al., 2009) and can constrain the support that family provide for their children's schooling. In addition, families with limited English language proficiency can have difficulties in

interacting with members of the mainstream community (Čolić-Peisker, 2002) which can inhibit the development of social and cultural capital (Crul & Schneider, 2010). Language and cultural barriers can, in turn, make it difficult for family members to support their children as they navigate the post-school transition (Glick & White, 2004).

Cultural capital, therefore, plays a key role in shaping school and post-school experiences. Consequently, supporting young people and their families to develop cultural capital needs to be given a high priority (C. R. Cooper, Chavira, & Mena, 2005; A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012). Cultural brokering has been identified as a means by which to facilitate the development of cultural capital. Educators, counsellors, community members, siblings and peers can act as cultural brokers, assisting students to: navigate the education system and interpret its 'rules'; assist with interpreting and translating; promote English language development; and facilitate the development of social skills (Yohani, 2011). The involvement of cultural brokers has been found to benefit students from immigrant backgrounds. For example, a study of Mexican immigrant youth in the United States found that access to advisors with a similar cultural identity aided in building bridges between the home, school, and community (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009). Similarly, cultural brokering in the form of mentoring has been identified as an effective strategy in retaining nursing students from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Wilson, Andrews, & Leners, 2006). Long-term support coupled with access to role models and mentors is needed to facilitate knowledge of post-school pathways to ensure that young people make informed education and career choices (Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Despite the importance of cultural brokering, Australian research has reported an absence of appropriate role models for young people from refugee backgrounds (RCOA, 2009).

Given its importance in shaping experiences of education and transition, the current study examines the opportunities that African youth and their families have to develop cultural capital. This includes knowledge and understanding of the Australian school system and post-school options, and access to mentoring and cultural brokering throughout students' schooling. In exploring these elements, the

current study examines the role that cultural capital plays in shaping the education and career aspirations and subsequent decisions of African students and their families.

## **The Role of Social Networks in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

Social networks play a key role in people's lives as indicated by the extensive literature in this area (e.g., Allan, 1998; Jordan, Matheson, & Anisman, 2009). Social support is a function of social networks (Ertel, Glymour, & Berkman, 2009) and involves the provision of assistance that is either perceived or experienced (S. Cohen, Gottlieb, & Underwood, 2000; Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). It is through social networks that individuals accrue social capital (Englund et al., 2011; Feighery, 2013; Holland, 2009; Kuusisto, 2010; Parcel, Dufur, & Zito, 2010). Social capital refers to an individual's social networks (Abi-Rached, 2009; John W Berry, 2010; Englund et al., 2011; Celia McMichael & Manderson, 2004; Zontini, 2010) that generate and facilitate access to emotional and practical resources (Burton, 2007; Duberley & Cohen, 2010; Hebert, Sun, & Kowch, 2004; Holland, 2009; Kuusisto, 2010; Ramsden & Taket, 2011). Access to such resources can aid individuals to increase their cultural capital (Portes, 1998).

Affirming social interactions promotes positive health and wellbeing (Bogels, Bamelis, & van der Bruggen, 2008; S. Cohen et al., 2000; Ertel et al., 2009; Guay et al., 2006; Hobfoll, 1989; Pilgrim, Rogers, & Bentall, 2009) and can aid in buffering the effects of stressors and difficulties (Wong et al., 2010). Consequently, access to social support can enhance a person's capacity to cope across different contexts (Hebert et al., 2004; Moen & Erickson, 1995; Pettit et al., 2011). For example, a study of African American students in a predominantly White college in the United States found that informal networking provided an avenue to access social support which aided students to problem-solve and make sense of their experiences (Grier-Reed, 2013).

Given these benefits, it is evident that access to social capital can assist young people in making key developmental transitions (Billett et al., 2010; Pettit et al., 2011). For example, research has found that high social capital can enhance



educational engagement by increasing aspirations, academic performance, and school retention which facilitate transitions to post-school education and training (Semo, 2011).

Social capital is developed in the contexts of people's lives such as the family, school, community, and places of worship (Weller, 2010). When people interact with those who are similar to themselves, such as family, neighbours and close friends, they develop bonding social capital (Boateng, 2010; Putnam, 2011). Conversely, bridging social capital can be developed through interactions with individuals who are more distant such as service providers and colleagues (Boateng, 2010; Putnam, 2011). Newly arrived immigrants typically have restricted access to social capital as a consequence of limited social interactions (Celia McMichael & Manderson, 2004). Limited access to pre-established social networks can increase people's reliance on members of their cultural community who previously migrated to the host country for support (S. M. King et al., 2009). For African refugees, however, there are often limited opportunities to develop bonding social capital (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004) because of the lack of established ethnic communities. Lack of social support can decrease social and emotional functioning (Trani & Bakhshi, 2013).

### **The importance of relationships in educational contexts in shaping education and career pathways.**

Relationships are fundamental to teaching and learning (A. J. Martin & Dowson, 2009). The school, therefore, constitutes an important context for young people from refugee backgrounds to develop bridging social capital. Supportive school relationships can assist students to 'bridge the gap' between the culture of the school and the home (Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009) thereby facilitating feelings of safety in the school environment (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009) and promoting wellbeing (Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010). Higher academic goals, expectations, and motivation have been attributed to school connectedness (Kiang, Supple, Stein, & Gonzalez, 2012). For newly arrived students without family in Australia, the support and stability that is provided by the school may constitute the only avenue through which to access social support (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008).

Social interactions are shaped by cultural norms and values. When African youth from refugee backgrounds arrive in Australia, they are faced with the challenge of adjusting to different patterns and modes of interaction. An Australian study of help-seeking behaviours amongst South Sudanese university students found that students' interactions with educators were influenced by their sense of interdependence and the importance of relationships, whereby they preferred to seek assistance from those that they knew (Turner & Fozdar, 2010).

At school, newly arrived students can find it difficult to establish friendships (RCOA, 2009). Difficulties include practical challenges such as limited English language proficiency (McFarlane et al., 2011; Riggs & Due, 2010). In addition, dissimilar social and cultural worlds can make it difficult to form friendships (Allan, 1998; L. M. Brown, Way, & Duff, 1999; Titzmann, Michel, & Silbereisen, 2010). Parents' discouragement of forming affiliations with non-immigrant friends (Call & Mortimer, 2001) and those from ethnic groups with which there is a long-standing history of conflict, can also affect students' social support networks at school. This is consistent with other research that has identified a preference amongst individuals to be with others who are similar to themselves (Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly III, 1992).

Limited social networks can create feelings of isolation (Onsando & Billett, 2009), loneliness and a decreased sense of belonging (Pittaway & Muli, 2011). When students lack feelings of belonging and acceptance, this can lead to educational disengagement and early school leaving (Barry & Reschly, 2012; Cotterell, 2007; McBrien, 2005). In addition, limited cross-cultural interactions can restrict the capacity to develop bridging social capital (Holland, 2009; Putnam, 2011; Weller, 2010).

### **The impact of racism, discrimination, and social inequality in shaping education and career pathways.**

African migrants are considered a 'visible minority' in Australian society (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012) and, consequently, face the threat of racial abuse and discrimination on the basis of their skin colour, clothing, the manifestation of religious beliefs, or patterns of social interaction (Fozdar, 2009; Fozdar & Torezani,

2008; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; Khawaja et al., 2008). Experiences of racism and discrimination are common amongst newly arrived young people from refugee backgrounds (A.-M. Taylor & Keegan, 2012). Racial abuse has been found to operate in various social contexts such as the school (Brough et al., 2003; Gifford et al., 2009) and Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions (Onsando & Billett, 2009). Racist ideologies in the wider community have been found to be propagated by mass media representations which often convey hostility towards refugees (J. King, 2004; Leudar et al., 2008).

Racism can compound resettlement difficulties amongst refugees in host countries (Danso, 2002). Experiences of racism and discrimination can threaten wellbeing by creating feelings of alienation, rejection and exclusion (Ager & Strang, 2008; Gifford et al., 2009; McFarlane et al., 2011). Racial abuse can, therefore, act as "... a constant reminder that you do not really belong ..." (Wakholi, 2007, p. 5). This, in turn, can impact on self-esteem, and social and academic self-efficacy, ultimately impeding success at school (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). Such experiences can, therefore, affect school engagement which can have implications for post-school education and career decisions.

Relationships form a key element of the current study, as demonstrated in the theoretical framework underpinning this research (discussed in Chapter 3). This study examines African students' social networks in a range of contexts including the family, school, and community. It also examines their access to, and utilisation of, resources accrued from these social networks such as information and advice about career options, and practical support. This study seeks to examine how students develop bonding and bridging social capital, and how this influences their schooling experiences, post-school aspirations, and subsequent education and career decisions. Given this group's status as a visible minority, the current study also examines African students' cross-cultural interactions and the impacts on their experiences of education and employment. It also explores the coping strategies that African youth use to overcome the challenges associated with racism and discrimination.

## Section Summary

From this review of the literature, it is evident that African youth from refugee backgrounds encounter significant difficulties at school due to a complex set of needs that are unlike those of Australian-born youth and previous cohorts of migrants from refugee backgrounds (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008). This means that there are multifaceted experiences and challenges that have the potential to shape the education and career pathways of young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia. The current study seeks to understand the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds and identify the influences that shape these pathways (Research Questions 1 and 2).

Despite what is known about the challenges facing African youth from refugee backgrounds in Australia, limited educational research has focused on this group of young people (Cassidy & Gow, 2005b) with few exceptions (e.g., J. Brown et al., 2006; S. Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). The current study, therefore, contributes to this literature. In addition, there appears to be a lack of preparation in host country school systems to meet the needs of these students (Amigo, 2010; Bates et al., 2005; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; Pittaway & Muli, 2011; J. Wilkinson et al., 2012). The current study seeks not only to understand the experiences and challenges facing African youth but also to identify the needs of educators in working with them, with a view to identifying effective strategies for addressing the needs of both teachers and students. This culminates in the development of a series of recommendations that seek to address the third research question.

## Education and Career Pathways

This section of the chapter provides a review of literature pertaining to education and career pathways including the education and career aspirations and expectations of young people from refugee backgrounds. This is followed by a discussion of education and career decision-making, and the factors and processes that influence these decisions including family expectations, work experience, and education and career counselling.

## **The Role of Education and Career Aspirations in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

When refugee youth first arrive in Australia, they typically have limited knowledge of the available career options (Gifford et al., 2009). Over time, however, they develop a greater understanding of the options and adjust their education and career aspirations in response to the 'reality' of challenges such as the impact of disrupted schooling (Gifford et al., 2009). The distinction between aspirations and expectations has been noted in the career development and refugee literature, where the latter are often more realistic than the former (C. R. Cooper, Chavira, et al., 2005; Glick & White, 2004; Whiston & Keller, 2004). The current study seeks to examine the transformation of education and career aspirations into expectations and subsequent post-school pathways amongst African youth from refugee backgrounds.

Research has found that immigrant parents typically have high aspirations and expectations for their children in the resettlement country (J. Brown et al., 2006; Fozdar & Gallegos, 2009; Oliver et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2005) which are often focused on educational attainment (Pittaway & Muli, 2011). For example, Cooper's (2002) research of Latino students' academic pathways in the United States revealed that parents' aspirations for their children included professional careers in medicine, law, and teaching. Similar findings have been noted amongst newly arrived families in Australia (O'Sullivan, 2006b; Walker et al., 2005).

Research conducted with resettled refugees from Africa has demonstrated that for some, there is an ambition to return to the homeland. For example, a study of West African refugees in Sweden reported that participants aspired to become educated and establish a professional career in Sweden before returning to assist with community rebuilding efforts in the home country (Anjum et al., 2012). This is consistent with Australian research conducted with newly arrived African refugees (Cassity & Gow, 2005a; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008). These research findings suggest that cultural identity, with its emphasis on kinship and collectivism (Theron et al., 2013), may play an influential role in shaping the aspirations of African youth from

refugee backgrounds. The desire to return to Africa, both physically and emotionally, was explained by Udo-Ekpo (1999, pp. 102, 104):

... the longing for Africa is not just a longing for a physical place but an imaginary state of being – a state of knowing your place in the world and, by implication, who you are as a person ... Africa is not just ‘out there’ as an alien geo-political force, it is in our collective consciousness; it is in our heads, hearts, and minds ... This intellectual engagement with ‘Mother Africa’ is embedded in the fabric of our being, and in the constitutions, principles, and structures of the emerging African community organisations in Australia.

In Australia, there are multiple post-school education pathways. Vocational Education and Training (VET) is a form of post-secondary learning that leads to qualifications in particular occupations. This training is delivered by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) such as Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutions and includes apprenticeships and traineeships. VET provides pathways to further education and employment, and provides ‘second chance’ learning opportunities to those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hargreaves, 2011). The VET in Schools program is designed to facilitate the transition from secondary school to further study or work (Nguyen, 2010).

As discussed, newly arrived young people and their families often lack knowledge of available post-school education and career options (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008; C. R. Cooper, Chavira, et al., 2005; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a); specifically, non-university pathways including TAFE, apprenticeships, and traineeships (Fozdar & Gallegos, 2009; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b; Walker et al., 2005). This has been identified as a factor shaping parental expectations for their children’s education and career pathways. For example, Walker et al. (2005) noted that parents often attribute lower status to non-university pathways and non-professional careers. The authors noted that for those from sub-Saharan African countries (e.g., Sierra Leone, Nigeria, and Ghana), VET is often seen as a ‘last resort’ because it is associated with fewer opportunities for socioeconomic mobility (Walker et al., 2005).

Similarly, other research has noted that amongst refugee and migrant youth in Australia, trades are associated with lower social status when compared to university-related professions (Fozdar & Gallegos, 2009). Fozdar and Gallegos (2009) noted that parental attitudes played a key role in shaping young people's perceptions, which supports the notion that family expectations can influence the attitudes of children (Alloway, Dalley, Patterson, Walker, & Lenoy, 2004; Dooley, 2009; Hillman, 2010).

While research attention has been given to the education and career aspirations of immigrant youth, little is known about how these aspirations are transformed in reality (Glick & White, 2004). Understanding the reasons that choices are made, and the attitudes and factors that influence these decisions can provide critical insights into young people's experiences of the post-school transition (Alloway et al., 2004; Goyette, 2008; Hillman, 2010). The current study seeks to identify African students' education and career aspirations and the factors that influence them including the role of culture and cultural identity, the influence of family expectations, knowledge of education and career pathways, and perceptions of various post-school pathways. Given the differences between aspirations and expectations as identified in the literature, this study explores the transformation of African students' aspirations into expectations over time and examines the factors, processes, and motivations that contribute to their post-school plans.

### **The Role of Education and Career Decision-Making in Shaping Education and Career Pathways**

Post-school preparation involves decision-making which can be considered a goal-directed process that involves an examination of the perceived available choices (Cassel, 1973) by comparing the impact of costs with the expected value of returns over time (Kalyuzhnova & Kambhampati, 2007). Individuals, therefore, often make decisions within a structure of opportunity and constraint in the context of "... personal life history, current life circumstances and individual dispositions ..." (Adamuti-Trache, 2011, pp. 64-65). Similarly, Heinz (2009, p. 399) defined education and career decision-making as an accumulation of experiences and "past chains of decisions and outcomes." This suggests that education and career decision-making

is both temporal and developmental, where plans and goals are developed on the basis of a timeline that is shaped by expectations about the sequences of major life events (Neugarten, 1969, 1976; Neugarten & Neugarten, 1996).

### **The role of career exploration in decision-making.**

A number of authors have noted the importance of engaging in career exploration as part of the process of education and career decision-making (C. Brown, Darden, Shelton, & Dipoto, 1999; Hall, 1992; Prideaux & Creed, 2001). For African youth from refugee backgrounds, career exploration can be constrained. As previously discussed, newly arrived students often lack social and cultural capital associated with Australian education and career pathways (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; Olliff & Couch, 2005; RCOA, 2009; Stevens, 1993). Lack of information about the world of work can create a developmental 'stumbling block' (Prideaux & Creed, 2001) which can constrain career exploration, resulting in less effective career decision-making (Billett & Johnson, 2012; C. Brown et al., 1999). The challenge of limited cultural capital is compounded when young people's families also lack knowledge of post-school pathways (CMYI, 2003). When parents develop uninformed expectations for their children, this can leave young people feeling pressured to fulfil 'unrealistic' expectations (S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007a; C McMichael et al., 2011; O'Sullivan, 2006a; Olliff & Couch, 2005; RCOA, 2009). In addition, for African youth who migrate to Australia as teenagers, career exploration in the Australian context is severely limited because they often lack opportunities to engage in part-time employment and engage in dialogue with those who work in a range of occupations. This is unlike many Australian-born school students (Alloway et al., 2004), who typically have many years in which to engage in career exploration in the Australian context.

Work experience has been identified as a core component of post-school transitions (Billett & Johnson, 2012) and a key influence on career exploration and planning amongst Australian-born students (Alloway et al., 2004). Limited research, however, has examined the role of work experience in supporting career exploration and shaping the education and career decisions of young people from refugee backgrounds.



### **The role of significant others in education and career decision-making.**

Choices are the product of individual deliberation but can also be conveniently made when they are imposed by others (Cassel, 1973). This is consistent with the study's assumption that decision-making is a social process (Heinz, 2009; James & Beedell, 2010) involving complex systems of relationships that are shaped by multiple levels of context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1975). When young people come from collectivist cultures, the aspirations and expectations of the family and community may need to be considered before a decision is made (O'Sullivan, 2006b). For example, an Australian study found that many Somali parents cited professional careers in law and medicine as the preferred pathways for their children and this was found to influence the education and career decision-making of the young people (Ramsden & Taket, 2011). In this way, decisions can be framed as community events (Phillips, Christopher-Sisk, & Gravino, 2001).

### **The role of self- and collective efficacy in education and career decision-making.**

Bandura stated that people inherently strive to control the events of their lives (1995a) and avoid situations that they believe will exceed their coping skills (1977). In this way, decision-making can be considered to be underpinned by adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies (Friedman & Mann, 1993) where multiple coping resources (e.g., perceptions of social support) facilitate adaptive coping strategies such as help-seeking (Fallon & Bowles, 1999; Norris et al., 2008) and fewer coping resources (e.g., perceptions of a lack of control) contribute to maladaptive coping (Sweeny, Melnyk, Miller, & Shepperd, 2010). The coping strategies applied to decision-making can be manifested in the search for "... information that confirms [people's] attitudes, beliefs, and decisions," or the avoidance of conflicting information (Sweeny et al., 2010, p. 343).

Associated with coping strategies are self-efficacy beliefs, defined as the confidence that an individual has to undertake the tasks associated with career development (Prideaux & Creed, 2001). Bandura (1995a) explained that self-efficacy beliefs can influence people's thoughts, feelings, motivations and actions and these beliefs have been found to be shaped by gender (Bandura et al., 2001; Betz, 2000). According to

Bandura and his colleagues (2001), when people's perceived self-efficacy is high, they are more likely to consider wider career options. Individuals can also possess collective efficacy, involving a focus on interdependence, collective action, and the use of resources (Bandura, 2000).

### **The role of schooling in education and career decision-making.**

It has been suggested that successful post-school transitions are characterised by well-informed and appropriate career advice (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2011). For example, Hargreaves (2011) noted that the value and quality of career guidance and counselling can influence the decisions that individuals make. Schools have been identified as playing an important role in providing this career counselling (McMahon & Carroll, 2001; Moor, 1976). According to South Australian research, central elements of effective counselling include positive student/teacher relationships, and teacher involvement in assisting students to make subject choices that are related to their post-school plans (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2011). Similar findings were reported in a Queensland study of school students' education and career decisions. The authors noted that student-centred career advisors were a key resource when compared to those who utilised an information-centred approach which was considered passive (Alloway et al., 2004). These approaches to research, however, ignore the importance of serendipity and chance in shaping young people's post-school transition experiences (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Buys, Buys, Kendall, & Davis, 2001). That is, post-school pathways do not always follow a linear progression. This is likely the case for many African youth from refugee backgrounds given the complex set of challenges they face.

Academic achievement also plays a key role in determining post-school options and shaping education and career choices. Academic achievement has been found to extend beyond reporting on subject performance or performance with certain teachers (C. R. Cooper et al., 2002) to act as a key predictor of post-school pathways (Alloway et al., 2004; C. R. Cooper, 2011; Hillman, 2010; Lenton, 2005; L. Wilkinson, 2002). In Australia, this culminates in the formation of an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR) which is a performance indicator relative to secondary

school students across the country and is used in allocating student places at university. Academic performance can, therefore, strongly shape the education and career options that are available.

Although there is a wealth of literature which examines decision-making, little is known about how goals are appraised and reassessed during educational transitions (Vasalampi, Salmela-Aro, & Nurmi, 2010). The current study examines the influence of previous experiences, opportunities, challenges and barriers in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. This includes an examination of the factors that facilitate and inhibit cultural capital and career exploration (i.e., opportunities to engage in work experience and access to school-based career guidance and counselling), the influence of school, teacher, family, and community expectations, the impact of self- and collective efficacy beliefs, the role of significant others, and the influence of academic achievement. The current study also examines the factors that shape African students' subject choices, and the impact of these decisions in shaping their post-school pathways. It explores the factors and challenges that influence approaches to education and career counselling with African students from refugee backgrounds, and the extent to which counselling influences their decisions.

## **The Post-School Transition**

Transitions typically affect multiple aspects of a person's life (Ecclestone, Biesta, & Hughes, 2010), involving the construction of meaning between the past and the future in the context of social networks, opportunities and institutions (Heinz, 2009). For young people from refugee backgrounds, migration involves a series of complex transitions – to a new country, a new culture, and a new school (Cassity & Gow, 2005b). In addition to these 'major' transitions, young people engage in multiple, daily transitions between the home, school, and community. Immigrant youth, therefore, find themselves engaged in a process of bridging multiple worlds (C. R. Cooper, 2002, 2003, 2011; C. R. Cooper et al., 2002; C. R. Cooper, Denner, & Lopez, 1999; C. R. Cooper, Dominguez, et al., 2005; C. R. Cooper et al., 1995; E. Cooper, 2005). Bridging these worlds and making transitions involves the navigation of sociocultural, socioeconomic, linguistic, psychosocial, gender, and structural

borders, often with little support (Phelan, Davidson, & Yu, 1998). Understanding the post-school transition, therefore, requires consideration of a broader, more complex relational web than that which occurs in the school context (Feighery, 2013).

The transition from secondary school has become increasingly complex in recent times (James & Beedell, 2010; Whiston & Keller, 2004) as a consequence of educational and labour market changes (Feighery, 2013; Heinz, 2009). For African youth from refugee backgrounds, this transition is made all the more difficult given the complex challenges they face. The disappearance of basic jobs due to technological innovations and foreign competition in the labour market have created a barrier to employment amongst immigrants (Portes, Fernandez-Kelly, & Haller, 2005). Furthermore, Christie and Sidhu (2002) suggested that unskilled labour has become devalued in Australian society. In addition, the unpredictability of the global financial situation has impacted upon high school leavers (Feighery, 2013). Heinz (2009) suggested that this has resulted in post-school pathways that are fraught with uncertainty. While this can create difficulties for Australian-born youth, those from refugee backgrounds are likely to face additional challenges, given the complex issues that they face. Consequently, African youth from refugee backgrounds have very limited choices in terms of their post-school options. A number of authors have argued for the need to examine the post-school pathways of immigrant youth (e.g., C. R. Cooper et al., 2002; Kiang et al., 2012; H. J. Krahn & Taylor, 2005). To date, however, the post-school transition experiences of young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia have received very little research attention (Stevens, 1993; Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008).

Stevens' (1993) quantitative study examined the school to work transition of 92 young Cambodians who arrived in South Australia as refugees during the 1980s. The participants had low aspirations because of a perceived inability to undertake further education, lack of knowledge of educational opportunities in Australia, and lack of previous formal schooling (Stevens, 1993). Despite these low aspirations, educational participation and achievement was high, as was and entrance into the labour market (Stevens, 1993). This study adopted a quantitative approach to understanding the school to work transition and, therefore, did not capture the

lived experiences of the participants (i.e., their life histories). Understanding young people's previous experiences could add valuable insights into the motivation and reasoning behind certain education and career decisions.

More recently, the Pathways and Transitions study (Victorian Settlement Planning Committee, 2008) sought to identify structural issues associated with access to employment and education for young people from refugee backgrounds. The study involved consultations with services providers and agencies to identify themes and key principles in working productively with this group of young people. This research found that young people often experience intense feelings about their previous life experiences in the context of uncertain futures in Australia. The researchers also reported that young people typically have mismatched perceptions when compared with those of Australian institutions and requirements. Structural factors included: accessibility to affordable housing and associated infrastructure challenges; limited resources such as access to public transport; and difficulties in obtaining a driver's licence. Although the Pathways and Transitions study contributes to our understanding of these issues, it is limited in the sense that it did not involve an in-depth examination of the aspirations, experiences or challenges of young people themselves as they made the post-school transition. That is, only the perspectives of service providers and agencies were presented in this study. Despite these studies, very little is known about the education and career pathways of young people from refugee backgrounds in Australia.

According to Hillman (2010), facilitating post-school transitions requires a focus on the experiences of young people in the formative school years and an examination of how their post-school plans develop over time. Similarly, Cooper (2002) and her colleagues suggested that understanding how students embark upon post-school pathways and persist, and what indicators predict success can benefit multiple stakeholders. Longitudinal, developmental research can, therefore, aid in understanding key transitions that occur throughout the life course by generating understandings of the mediation of risk and opportunity (Thomson, 2011) and how events and experiences exert their influence beyond the immediate context (Henderson et al., 2007). Despite the centrality of change and transition to the

refugee experience, few studies have adopted a longitudinal approach (Gifford, 2013). The current study utilises a qualitative longitudinal approach to study the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in an attempt to capture the complexity of multiple contexts over time. It explores the various contexts which influence the experiences, challenges, opportunities, and barriers encountered by African youth that shape their education and career pathways. In doing so, this research seeks to understand students' social worlds and establish how they navigate social borders (Phelan et al., 1998) throughout their schooling and during the post-school transition. This longitudinal study is enhanced by the involvement of multidisciplinary collaboration which, as Lerner and Castellino (2002) explained, increases the validity of the research, and facilitates community empowerment and capacity<sup>11</sup>.

## **Section Summary**

It is widely acknowledged that engagement and participation in education and employment are key markers of integration for newly arrived refugees (Ager & Strang, 2008; S. Francis & Cornfoot, 2007b). Engagement in work and study has been associated with enhanced wellbeing and social inclusion for individuals from refugee backgrounds (Correa-Velez & Onsando, 2009) because of the opportunities available to form relationships and develop social and cultural capital (Anjum et al., 2012; Tilbury & Colic-Peisker, 2007). Consequently, education and employment can be considered to act as protective resources that aid in overcoming multiple challenges and reducing vulnerability to adverse environmental conditions (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995).

Limited research has been conducted with adolescents from refugee backgrounds in Australia (Poppitt & Frey, 2007). Stevenson and Willott (2007) suggested that this may be due to the fact that these youth share similar barriers to educational engagement when compared to other disadvantaged groups and are, therefore, subsumed within broader research. For example, traumatic pasts are shared with children who have been abused, poverty is a challenge shared by youth from low

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<sup>11</sup> A detailed discussion of the research framework and design is presented in Chapters 3 and 4, respectively.

socioeconomic backgrounds, interrupted schooling is common amongst Traveller and Gypsy children, and language difficulties affect other youth from non-English speaking backgrounds (Stevenson & Willott, 2007). It is, however, important to understand the *context* in which these experiences and challenges occur. The intention in the current study is to capture important, temporally located factors and experiences that contribute to the education and career decisions of African youth from refugee backgrounds.

## Chapter Summary and Directions

In recent years, Australia has become home to a significant population of young refugees from Africa. In examining the available literature, it is possible to develop an appreciation of the complex, unique set of challenges that these young people encounter in the Australian school system. It is also evident that such challenges can have lasting impacts that affect African students' schooling experiences and post-school outcomes. Conducting research that examines the education and career pathways of African students from refugee backgrounds is, therefore, warranted. Understanding how African youth experience schooling in Australia, develop education and career aspirations, and subsequently make decisions can aid in facilitating their transition from secondary school. This transition is not simply about participation in education and employment. Rather, it is symbolic of integration into the Australian community.

In the following section (i.e., *Charting the Journey*), two chapters are presented. The first chapter provides a detailed examination of the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of this study. In the second chapter, the research design and procedures that were used in this study are discussed.

## **SECTION III: CHARTING THE JOURNEY**

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*Even with the best of maps and instruments, we can never  
fully chart our journeys.*

*-- Gail Pool*

Chapters in Section III:

3: Foundations for the Journey: Philosophical Foundations

4: Mapping the Journey: The Research Design



# Chapter 3: Foundations for the Journey: Philosophical Foundations

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*The contexts of landscape movement encompass at least two key formal elements: route and path. Route refers to the direction, mode, and distance of movement whereas the path refers to the physical and cultural properties of the route ... As connections between travel behavior and recollections of travel experiences unfold, the distinction between route and path may be either blurred or sharpened as needed to draw attention to certain area of knowledge or to derive a fable from the experience.*

-- Zedeno, Hollenback, and Grinnell (2009, p. 3)

Learning from the experiences of others constitutes one aspect of preparing for a journey. Following this, explorers must establish their own journey's route and path. In the context of this study, the route and path constituted the foundations of the research. These foundations included the paradigmatic, methodological, and theoretical frameworks that underpinned this study and form the focus of discussion in this chapter.

## **Paradigmatic Framework**

The aim of this research was to understand the social worlds of participants (Finlay & Evans, 2009) by gaining insights into their experiences, including the meanings and perceptions they assigned to those experiences (Crotty, 1998; Hitchcock & Hughs, 1989). In an effort to gain an in-depth understanding of the post-school transitions of African youth from different perspectives, this study was approached from an interpretivist (qualitative) lens. Interpretivism relates to the underlying assumption that "... the social world is *constructed* by each of us differently, with words and events carrying different meanings for each person and in each situation" (Thomas, 2011, p. 51). This approach was considered appropriate because

it allowed for a more collaborative approach to the research, which has been discussed in previous research conducted with African refugees (Tilbury, 2006).

Qualitative research often involves the formation of relationships with participants that are built upon trust and the development of rapport (Liamputtong, 2007). In this study, I established and developed relationships with those involved both in and around the study as a means by which to engage with individuals appropriately and respectfully. These relationships involved ongoing dialogue (Liamputtong, 2007) with participants throughout the study which aided in engaging in more authentic interactions with those involved.

Multiple stakeholders were involved in this study. This demonstrates an acknowledgement and valuing of the different understandings of reality that are held by individuals (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Involving different stakeholders enabled me to obtain a greater, more holistic understanding of the post-school transition of African youth by gaining insights into different perspectives.

Listening to a number of voices is closely associated with the need to engage in the construction of shared meaning (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998), which is often a characteristic associated with interpretivism. Two key aspects of this study demonstrate the value placed on co-constructed meanings, namely the involvement of multiple stakeholders as participants, and the collaborative framework adopted in this study (discussed in Chapter 4).

In addition to valuing realities *among* individuals, this study acknowledged that understandings of reality can also evolve over time *within* individuals (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). This was particularly important in this study, given its longitudinal approach to examine changes over time. Attempts to capture continually evolving realities were made using numerous interviews with participants over a period of 12 months. The rationale for using several interviews is discussed later in this chapter.

In summary, this study was approached using an interpretivist lens and recognised that realities, meanings and understandings are multiple, complex, and can evolve over time, both within and among individuals. As with any research, this philosophical position informed the selection of the study's methodology. The features of case study methodology are discussed below.

## **Methodological Framework**

There has been some debate about the exact location of case study within the research literature. Some argue that case study is both a methodology and a research design (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000). Others suggest that it is both a tool and a strategy (Orum et al., 1991). Case study has also been described as both a process and a product of research (Stake, 2000a, 2005). What these tensions reveal is that case study methodology has diverse research applications.

This study sought to harness the versatility of case study. That is, this methodology was used as an overall framework for this study, and played an integral role in informing different aspects of the research which included: (i) the underlying philosophical assumptions of this research (i.e., interpretivism); (ii) the selection of data collection methods; and (iii) decisions about the presentation of the data.

Having clarified its location within the research literature and its application in this study, it is important to provide a definition of case study. The following section provides a description and explanation of case study as it has been conceived in this research.

### **Case Study Defined**

Case study research involves a focus of enquiry around a specific instance or complex social phenomenon (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1976; Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2003). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was the post-school transition of African youth from refugee backgrounds. The purpose of this research was to provide insights into this phenomenon (Stake, 2003, 2005). In order to achieve this aim, the current study involved "... spending extended time on site,

personally in contact with activities and operations of the case, reflecting, and revising descriptions and meanings of what is going on" (Stake, 2005, p. 450).

The primary method of data collection involved multiple semi-structured interviews with a number of stakeholders. From these interviews, the pathways taken by 14 students were described. This study presents these pathways from the perspectives of the youth themselves in addition to other stakeholders. Data were also collected from informal observations during visits to the participating school and from student participants' school files. Given the methods of data collection and the number of post-school pathways examined, this study can be defined as a qualitative collective case study (Stake, 2000a, 2003) involving the investigation of a number of case studies in order to understand a given phenomenon (Stake, 2005).

In this study, post-school pathways were examined from different perspectives, which resulted in the development of insights from different sources over time (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000). This also aided in obtaining "... a more holistic study of complex social networks and of complexes of social action and social meanings" (Orum et al., 1991, p. 6).

#### **The case study as a bounded system.**

Thomas (2011) stated that a case can be considered (i) a container which holds the complex ideas under investigation; (ii) a situation or set of circumstances; and (iii) an argument or rationale. What is consistent amongst these three ideas is the notion that the case is a 'bounded system' (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000; Stake, 2000b, 2003, 2005), defined by a set of boundaries (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2000b). These boundaries constitute 'edges' around the case, which contribute to defining the direction and extent of the investigation (Thomas, 2011). In the current study, the student case study was defined as an African student from a refugee background who was in the process of making (or had recently made) the post-school transition. A set of participant selection criteria (discussed in Chapter 4) aided in creating the boundaries for the case studies in this research.

## Characteristics of Case Study

This section describes some characteristics of case study. These characteristics are described in terms of their application to the current study.

### **Context.**

Context plays a central role in case study research (Thomas, 2011; Yin, 2003). In the current study, the post-school pathways under investigation operated across a number of contexts (Stake, 2003), and the influence of these contexts evolved over time. Contexts were, therefore, considered critically important in terms of how they relate to, and shape, the meanings and experiences (Stake, 2005) of the post-school pathways investigated.

The current study sought to understand the various contexts in which the post-school transition occurred. Examining these multiple, evolving contexts assisted in gaining a more holistic understanding of the complexities associated with the post-school pathways studied (Stake, 2003; Yin, 2003). This research assumes that social life constitutes a "... meaningful whole ..." (Orum et al., 1991, p. 12) and, as a result, recognises the importance of considering the holistic nature of human systems (Merriam, 1998; Orum et al., 1991; Snow & Anderson, 1991). Because of this underlying assumption, it was important to examine the interconnectedness of human affairs in order to understand the complexity of the post-school transition pathways under investigation. The current study explored the interconnectedness of 14 students' lives as they made the post-school transition. It considered the influences of various identities and contexts in shaping post-school transition experiences and subsequent education, training and employment pathways.

For most student participants, data collection began in the school context. The post-school transition, however, transcends contextual borders to include, for example, family and community contexts, other education and training institutions, and workplace environments. In the current study, the case study was considered "... a complexity entity located in a milieu or situation embedded in a number of contexts ..." (Stake, 2005, p. 449). Encompassing the multiple contexts of people's lives is

consistent with the possibilities of case study research (see Stake, 2003, 2005; Yin, 2003).

### **Multiple perspectives.**

In case study research, there is an emphasis on "... seeing something in its completeness, looking at it from many angles" (Thomas, 2011, p. 23). Taking a multi-perspective approach assists in achieving the aim of understanding a phenomenon in terms of its interconnected elements (Sturman, 1997; Thomas, 2011). In order to examine the interconnectedness of the education and career pathways of African students from refugee backgrounds, it was important to "... consider not only the voices and experiences of the range of actors of focal concern but also the perspectives and actions of other relevant groups of actors and the interaction among them" (Snow & Anderson, 1991, p. 154). In this study, African students from refugee backgrounds who were making the post-school transition did not constitute *the* focus but, rather, *a* focus. This research sought input from other key stakeholders who are involved in the post-school transition of African students from refugee backgrounds. Including numerous perspectives has been described as a feature of case study methodology (see Adelman et al., 1976; Orum et al., 1991; Yin, 2003).

The multi-perspective approach that was adopted in this study can be considered to have incorporated embedded (or 'mini') case studies (Stake, 2005). This was achieved by including the voices of individuals who play a role in the post-school transition of African students from refugee backgrounds. Decisions about which individuals to approach were made predominantly during data collection in response to participants' referrals. Selecting embedded case studies was, therefore, an unfolding process.

By incorporating multiple perspectives, researchers can be more attentive to the subtlety and complexity of the case study (Adelman et al., 1976). In this way, researchers can represent participants' conflicting viewpoints and discrepancies (Adelman et al., 1976). In addition, involving key stakeholders as participants can be considered to demonstrate the value and importance of social networks and relationships in shaping African students' education and career pathways.

### **In-depth and longitudinal.**

Research that employs case study methodology enables researchers to investigate a particular phenomenon in depth and over time (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000; Orum et al., 1991). This was a key consideration in the current study given that the aim was to examine the post-school pathways of 14 student participants over a period of 12 months. The decision to conduct interviews over this period of time was made for two reasons. Firstly, Saldana (2003) suggested that while there was no required minimum length for a qualitative study to be considered longitudinal, educational research can be considered longitudinal where fieldwork is conducted for a minimum of nine months. Secondly, time constraints reduced the period of data collection.

Qualitative longitudinal research aims to capture the life experiences of participants by a process of long-term immersion (Saldana, 2003). In this way, changes can be observed and interpreted (Saldana, 2003). Longitudinal studies are particularly useful and relevant when timing is important (Saldana, 2003; Thomson, 2011). In addition, time, in and of itself, constitutes data (Saldana, 2003). In this study, student participants were not interviewed at a single point in time but, rather, engaged in several interviews over the duration of the data collection period. Prolonged time in the field aided in building participants' trust and facilitated the development of rapport (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Conducting a number of interviews with participants over time facilitated the generation of rich, thick description. Rich description is concerned with "... the articulation in fine detail of the story-lines of a person's life ..." (Morgan, 2000, p. 15). These descriptions emphasise the complexity of the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. Because of the complexity of these data, combined with time constraints (Merriam, 1998), the number of participants was limited to 38.

### **Eclectic data collection methods.**

Case study methodology can be considered to possess a degree of flexibility in that it neither prescribes nor precludes the paradigmatic framework that can be adopted

(L. Cohen & Manion, 1989). By extension, case study researchers are not limited to the data collection methods that can be employed (Adelman et al., 1976; Hamel, 1993; Merriam, 1998). While case study methodology possesses this flexibility, consideration must be given to the selection of appropriate data collection methods. As Stake (2005, p. 450) advised, data collection methods should be chosen in order “... to learn enough about the case to encapsulate complex meanings while describing the case in sufficient descriptive narrative so that readers can experience these happenings vicariously and drawn their own conclusion.” In the current study, three data collection methods were employed: observations in the form of school visits; analysis of students’ school files; and multiple semi-structured interviews. These data collection methods are discussed in Chapter 4.

## **Establishing Quality**

The quality of qualitative research can be established using four tests of rigour which were originally described by Guba and Lincoln over 30 years ago. These tests have, however, been described more recently by other researchers (e.g., Owens, Shute, & Slee, 2000; Sandelowski, 1986). Outlined below are the four tests, including a discussion of how quality was established in the current study.

### **Test 1: Credibility.**

In order to establish the truth value of research, the credibility of a study must be established (Sandelowski, 1986). Credibility is concerned with the “... trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (Tracy, 2010, p. 842). Guba (1978) stated that research findings are credible when there is agreement amongst various sources of information. This can be achieved when the thick descriptions and interpretations of data are recognised by participants (Sandelowski, 1986; Tracy, 2010). After transcribing the interview data in the current study, summaries were prepared and discussed at the following interview, with each participant. This process enabled participants to validate their data and provide clarification where necessary.

Credibility can also be assessed by the recognition of the experience by others (including readers and researchers) who have only read about that experience



(Sandelowski, 1986). This is similar to the notion of 'naturalistic generalisation' described by Stake and Trumbull (1982, cited in Stake, 2000a), where "the reader comes to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced it" (Stake, 2000a, p. 442). Such naturalistic generalisations are "... arrived at by recognizing the similarities of objects and issues in and out of context ... Naturalistic generalizations develop within a person as a product of experience" (Stake, 2000b, p. 22). Readers of this study will, therefore, be actively engaging in their own assessment of the credibility of this research. In order to place the reader in a position in which to be able to assess the credibility of the findings by drawing their own conclusions, I have been conscious of providing thick, context-specific descriptions (Tracy, 2010).

Additional methodological decisions were also made in the design of this study in an attempt to ensure that the findings are credible. Firstly, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the period of data collection which describes and interprets my actions and experiences. Secondly, I engaged Reference Group members, African Community Mentors, and participants in the data analysis process. Their feedback contributed to facilitating the creditability of the study's findings and conclusions.

### **Test 2: Fittingness.**

Establishing the 'fittingness' of the data can be used to test the applicability of the research findings (Sandelowski, 1986). Fittingness can be established in two ways: (i) when the findings are able to 'fit' into contexts beyond that of the study; and (ii) when the audience evaluates the findings as applicable and meaningful in terms of their own experiences (Sandelowski, 1986).

In the current study, member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Stake, 1995) formed part of the procedure for establishing quality. This research actively engaged participants in an ongoing process (Sandelowski, 1993) of member validation in order to establish the validity of interpretations (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Sandelowski, 1993). In addition, the fittingness of the data was established by meeting with the Reference Group and African Community Mentors to determine whether the findings and emerging ideas were consistent with their combined personal and professional experience. A four-page written summary was provided

to each member and the emerging ideas were discussed. This process has been described by Saldana (2003) as a 'midstream audit'.

Triangulation was also used in this study to determine the degree of fit.

Triangulation is a process of clarifying the meaning of data by examining numerous perspectives (Stake, 2000a). Recall that capturing diverse perspectives can be said to be consistent with case study research (Adelman et al., 1976). According to Thomas (2011, p. 68), triangulation is "... almost an essential prerequisite" in case study research. Triangulation seeks to create a more comprehensive representation of the phenomenon under investigation by combining a number of sources of information (Creswell & Miller, 2000), theories, methods, and/or observers (Silverman, 2006), and seeks to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation (Stake, 2000a). In this study, triangulation facilitated the exploration of the "... diversity of perception ... [and] the multiple realities within which people live" (Stake, 2005, p. 454). This, therefore, contributed to the development of a deeper, more holistic understanding of the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds.

The current study involved four tiers of triangulation in terms of the theoretical framework, data collection methods, sources of data, and research design. Firstly, a number of existing theories were used to provide the theoretical foundation for this study (discussed later in this chapter). Secondly, this study utilised three data collection methods (i.e., data were collected using: observations in the form of school visits; interviews; and the analysis of students' school files). Utilising eclectic data collection methods enabled a broader range of issues to be addressed (Yin, 2003). Thirdly, the perspectives of different key stakeholders were incorporated into this study. This form of triangulation assisted in capturing the complexity of the data while also facilitating the corroboration of data (Yin, 2003). Finally, multiple interviews were conducted with participants over time. This methodological decision assisted in capturing the realities of individuals and the evolution of these realities over time by investigating changes in attitudes, beliefs, and post-school plans during the data collection period.

**Test 3: Auditability.**

Auditability is concerned with the ability of another researcher to follow the 'decision trail' (or 'audit trail' (Creswell & Miller, 2000)) made by the study's researcher and arrive at comparable conclusions in light of the data, the situation, and the perspective (Sandelowski, 1986). This test of rigour can be considered the 'qualitative equivalent' of the test of reliability (Sandelowski, 1986; Yin, 2003). Ensuring that the research is auditable can determine the consistency of the research (Sandelowski, 1986). In the current research, a decision trail has been made in the form of this study, which attempts to document the procedures conducted and the rationale behind their inclusion. Chapter 4 contains information about these procedures.

**Test 4: Confirmability.**

Confirmability is concerned with the degree of freedom from bias, and can be used as a test of neutrality (Sandelowski, 1986). According to Guba (1978), confirmability relates to the degree of agreement amongst various sources of information. This test of rigour can be achieved when credibility, fittingness and auditability are established (Owens et al., 2000; Sandelowski, 1986).

**Advantages and Disadvantages of Case Study**

As with any methodology, case study possesses both advantages and disadvantages. This section describes both the potential advantages and limitations of case study methodology.

**Context.**

One of the primary strengths of case study methodology is its focus on the importance of context (Snow & Anderson, 1991) as illustrated by the provision of rich, thick description (Orum et al., 1991). The provision of thick description adds credibility and creates verisimilitude (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Furthermore, such complex, holistic descriptions (Snow & Anderson, 1991; Stake, 1978) enable researchers to "... deal with the reality behind appearances, with contradictions and the dialectical nature of social life, as well as the sum of its parts" (Sjoberg, Williams,

Vaughan, & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 39). Engaging with the data at such a deep level, however, can prove time consuming (Merriam, 1998) and can, therefore, limit the number of participants in a study (Sjoberg et al., 1991).

### **Generalisability.**

Associated with the provision of highly contextual, holistic descriptions is the acknowledgement that case study methodology is limited because of its lack of generalisability (Merriam, 1998; Sturman, 1997). To minimise this issue, multiple case studies can be included in the research design (as opposed to being solely reliant on a single case) (Bogdan & Bilken, 1982).

As discussed in the previous section, case studies can be subject to naturalistic generalisation (Stake, 2000a) in the process of assessing the credibility of the data. The notion that readers can recognise the experience after only reading about that experience (Sandelowski, 1986) can place case study methodology at an 'epistemological advantage' over other research methodologies (Stake, 1978).

### **Audience engagement.**

Case studies are grounded in reality (Stake, 2000b). Because of this, case studies have the potential to be consistent with the reader's own experience (Adelman et al., 1976) and can be said to be in 'epistemological harmony' (Stake, 2000b) with the reader. Readers of case studies are, therefore, often able to employ their own everyday judgement processes in order to evaluate the implications of the research for themselves (Adelman et al., 1976). Because of this, the audience is able to engage in the construction of knowledge (Stake, 2003, 2005).

Case studies are capable of serving different audiences (Adelman et al., 1976; L. Cohen & Manion, 1989; Stake, 1978). In this study, the audience consisted of a diverse range of stakeholders (i.e., educators, service providers, and employers) in addition to individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The ability of readers to construct their own knowledge and understandings of the research was, therefore, a critical factor in the decision to employ case study methodology in this research.

While the engagement of diverse audiences is an advantage of case study research, it can come at the expense of the length of the resulting reports (Adelman et al., 1976; Merriam, 1998). In conducting research with and for individuals from CALD backgrounds, I was conscious of the length of, and the terminology used in, reports for individuals and community groups (language challenges are discussed in the Chapter 4).

## **Presenting the Journeys: A Narrative Approach**

As stated earlier, interpretivism is concerned with the meanings and interpretations that individuals apply to their experiences (Hitchcock & Hughs, 1989). One means by which researchers can come to understand these meanings and interpretations is through case study research. In order to capture this 'lived' experience, case study researchers often use a narrative approach to present the data (Orum et al., 1991; Stake, 2000b).

### **The Centrality of Stories**

According to Morgan (2000, p. 5), "a narrative is like a thread that weaves ... events together, forming a story," where each experience and event of our lives is "... cultivated from a prior experience and becomes part of the next one" (Rushton, 2004, p. 75). In this way, storytelling becomes an evolving process (Riessman, 2008), where the act of narrating, and the structure of the story, enable us to make sense of our lives and derive meaning from our experiences (Fivush, 2008; Jago, 1996; White, 2000). Morgan (2000, p. 5) succinctly summarised the central role of narratives in our lives:

As human beings, we are interpreting beings. We all have daily experiences of events that we seek to make meaningful. The stories we have about our lives are created through linking certain events together in a particular sequence across a time period, and finding a way of explaining or making sense of them ... We give meanings to our experiences constantly as we live our lives.

The resulting stories can, therefore, act as ‘reference points’ (Winslade & Monk, 1999) and can be considered to hold central importance in our lives.

## Stories as Relational

Narratives are relational (Seaton, 2008) in that they are framed by interactions (Riessman, 2008) and are produced within, and influenced by, social contexts (Seaton, 2008; Winslade & Monk, 1999). The audience (i.e., the listener), therefore, inevitably influences what is told and what remains silent (Hackett & Rolston, 2009). It is, thus, important to acknowledge that while storytelling is an authentic means to gather information about an individual’s life, it is ultimately a *representation* of the life that is lived as opposed to the actual experience (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998).

In the current study, the intention was to present the education and career pathways of 14 African youth from refugee backgrounds in such a way as to bring readers closer to these individuals and their realities. In addition to the individual student narratives are the voices of key stakeholders who accompany African youth as they make the post-school transition. This study sought to paint a picture of the “... complexity and plurality ...” (Orum et al., 1991, p. 23) of participants’ worlds and offer “... insights and illuminate meanings that *expand* ...” (Merriam, 1998, p. 41, emphasis not in original) readers’ experiences. In this way, I decided “... what the case’s *own story* is, or at least what ... [is] included ...” (Stake, 2000a, p. 441) in this study. This demonstrates the strong influential role of the researcher in shaping participants’ narratives<sup>12</sup>.

## Why Narrative?

Telling and listening to narratives form part of our experience as human beings (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and serve as metaphors for the ways in which we make sense of our lives and the world (Speedy, 2008). Research which incorporates storytelling can, therefore, be said to remain authentic to the way in which we experience our lives (Orum et al., 1991).

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<sup>12</sup> The influences of the researcher/participant relationship are described in Chapter 4 (see ‘Ethical Considerations’).

Narrative was considered the most appropriate method in which to collect and present the data in the current study for a number of reasons. Firstly, narratives emphasise the importance of context (Riessman, 2008; Rushton, 2004), where behaviours are understood and take on meaning when considered in the context of an individual's life (Seidman, 1991). Context, therefore, contributes to the forms of the stories of our lives and ultimately contributes to the interpretation and meanings assigned to events (Morgan, 2000). Through my interactions with the African Community Mentors, I have come to understand the importance of learning about individuals through the provision of information about context and background by hearing stories about their lives and the various roles they possess in the community. Telling and hearing stories is, therefore, a means by which a stranger can become a respected individual and friend.

Secondly, oral storytelling forms a strong component in the transmission of cultural knowledge. Composing narratives was, therefore, likely to be consistent with the experiences of African participants in this study. Furthermore, narratives can serve as a powerful medium through which to capture the complexity and particularity of refugee experiences (Powles, 2004). In addition to the direct form of communication that narratives offer (Powles, 2004), stories constitute a form of research that can be easily accessed and are readily available (Speedy, 2008).

Thirdly, this study sought to understand temporal changes associated with the post-school transition. Consequently, a narrative approach enabled me to capture the threads of each interview and weave them together to construct the stories told within this study.

Finally, narrative conversations can be particularly appealing for young people because they can "... warm to the respect they are shown and to the playfulness with which this approach allows them to address serious problems in their lives" (Winslade & Monk, 1999, p. viii). This research was well received by the African student participants in this study as demonstrated by the positive comments received by the students during the debriefing process at the conclusion of interviews. One student, for example, stated:

*I feel good to talk about my life because I feel like people need to hear this, and maybe to be happy for the life they have. Some people, they don't appreciate the life they have ... some people, they don't even know what is war ... They haven't known staying without eating for a whole day ... You can't blame them because they don't know. Instead, you have to tell them ... So if I can tell someone my life, and see the position I'm in ... It's very, very good. I'm happy to tell people about myself because I feel like people need to know ...* (Sayhosay, student participant)

## **Narrative Complexity**

Recall that case study research is concerned with examining the complexity of the case (Thomas, 2011). Using a narrative approach can enable research to capture this complexity because:

Our lives are multistoried. There are many stories occurring at the same time and different stories can be told about the same events. No single story can be free of ambiguity or contradiction and no single story can encapsulate or handle all the contingencies of life. (Morgan, 2000, p. 8)

While the stories that people tell are inherently complex, engaging in research involving the use of narratives creates additional layers of complexity. For example, this study can be considered a journey of journeys; an account of the journey that I have taken in investigating the education and career pathways of African youth. Similarly, readers of this study are also constructing an interpretive narrative based on the information presented. Riessman (2008, p. 6) captured the nature of narrative research in terms of overlapping layers, involving:

... stories told by research participants (which are themselves interpretive), interpretive accounts developed by an investigator based on interviews and fieldwork observation (a story about stories), and even the narrative a reader constructs after engaging with the participant's and investigator's narratives ...



This quote highlights the participatory role of those involved in the narrative (i.e., the researcher, participant, and audience) (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), which was a feature of the current study.

Narratives can serve a number of purposes and functions. Stories can create a means by which to argue (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), remember, persuade, engage, justify, entertain, and mislead (Riessman, 2008). Narratives can aid in creating a sense of belonging, or they may possess a political message (Riessman, 2008). A story can also inspire others to take action in order to enact positive social changes (Riessman, 2008). In this study, it is possible, then, that readers of the stories herein, may perceive multiple purposes of these narratives.

In case study research, theory is used to make sense of the case as a bounded system (Hammersley & Gomm, 2000). The theoretical framework also guides the collection and analysis of data (Yin, 2003). In the current study, a theoretical framework was designed in order to further understand the elements that underpin African students' education and career pathways.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In reviewing the research literature, 16 assumptions were chosen to underpin and guide this study. The theoretical framework for this study was not based on one or two theories but rather, was informed by a number of theories including Elder and Johnson's (2003) life course principles, self- and collective efficacy theories (Bandura, 1997, 1995b; Bandura et al., 2001), situational analysis (Annan, 2005), relationship theory (Allan, 1998; Allan & Crow, 2001), Arthur and McMahon's (2005) multicultural career counselling framework, social support theory (Rook & Underwood, 2000), and systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The reason for such a unique theoretical framework is that no single theory could adequately be applied to the numerous concepts examined in this study.

### **The Assumptions**

The assumptions were based around the overarching themes of context, life course, individual and collective agency, personal and family narratives, relationships,

social support, culture, social and cultural identities, gender, age/life stage, self- and collective efficacy, coping strategies, resources, work, career development, and Community of Collaboration. Table 2 provides a summary of the overall theoretical framework.

*Table 2.* Overview of the study's theoretical framework

<p><b>Context</b> Contextualised information that is embedded within the personal, familial and social contexts of students' lives will be collected.</p>	<p><b>Life Course</b> The pathways that people take during transition periods are shaped by personal and collective choices, lifelong learning, and previous developmental pathways.</p>
<p><b>Individual and Collective Agency</b> This study explores the role of individual and collective agency in relation to aspirations and choices.</p>	<p><b>Personal and Family Narratives</b> Personal and family narratives will be explored in order to elicit information about aspirations and transition experiences.</p>
<p><b>Relationships</b> This study explores the role of key relationships in shaping aspirations, sense of agency, selection and use of coping strategies, and transition experiences.</p>	<p><b>Social Support</b> This study explores the nature and types of social support provided to students, and the influence of those who provide it.</p>
<p><b>Culture</b> This study examines the influence of culture in shaping aspirations, life goals and transitions from school to adult settings.</p>	<p><b>Social and Cultural Identities</b> This study explores the role of social and cultural identities in shaping aspirations and transition experiences.</p>
<p><b>Gender</b> This study examines the role of gender in shaping everyday lives, aspirations, choices, opportunities, and transition experiences.</p>	<p><b>Age/Life Stage</b> This study explores the social and cultural expectations of age and how this shapes aspirations, choices, and post-school transition outcomes.</p>
<p><b>Self- and Collective Efficacy</b> This study explores antecedents of self- and collective efficacy beliefs and their impact on aspirations, choices, and transition outcomes.</p>	<p><b>Coping Strategies</b> This study explores the coping strategies used, and the resulting outcomes.</p>
<p><b>Resources</b> This study explores the resources participants have, and the influence of these resources on aspirations, choices, and the post-school transition.</p>	<p><b>Work</b> This study explores students' access to sustainable and satisfying employment including challenges, opportunities, and assistance.</p>
<p><b>Career Development</b> This study explores the interplay between inter- and intra-personal and environmental factors in shaping aspirations, choices, and post-school pathways.</p>	<p><b>Community of Collaboration</b> This study involves extensive collaboration between multiple stakeholders and a 'Community of Collaboration' will be ongoing.</p>

Each assumption has been framed such that it is directly relevant to the study, and includes a description of how it has shaped the research. These assumptions were developed by synthesising a range of sources and, therefore, cannot be attributed to sole theories or researchers. Where references are cited in support of an assumption, therefore, they may only be directly supportive of one particular aspect.

**Assumption 1: Context.**

Human behaviour needs to be studied in its social, cultural, relational and historical contexts in order to understand the meaning and significance of the behaviour. This assumption is supported, in part, by the work of Elder and Johnson (2003), Clausen (1995), and Stuhlmiller (1996). The current study involved the collection of contextualised information that was embedded within the personal, familial, academic and social contexts of students' lives. Students' aspirations, decisions, and post-school transitions were studied in the context of their personal and social lives, and examined the influences of family, peers, schools, and communities.

**Assumption 2: Life course.**

The pathways people take during periods of transition are shaped by personal and collective choices, lifelong learning, and previous developmental pathways. Development is an unfolding process where the past plays an important role in shaping the present and the future. This study explored the lifelong learning, personal and collective agency, and education and career pathways of African students from refugee backgrounds where Elder and Johnson's (2003) life course principles shaped the data that were collected. The work of other life course theorists also support elements of this assumption (e.g., Elder, George, & Shanahan, 1996; Elder Jr., 1995b; Settersten Jr., 2003).

**Assumption 3: Individual and collective agency.**

Both individual and collective agency plays a key role in shaping people's lives. Individual and collective agency is important in determining the level of control that people feel they have over their own lives and the choices they make. A sense of agency is also critical for a person's wellbeing and perceived self-efficacy.

In non-Western communities in particular, important decisions are often determined by the group. An awareness and understanding of the notion of collective agency is crucial when conducting research with individuals from non-Western cultures. This assumption is supported by Bandura's work on self- and collective agency (Bandura, 2000; Bandura et al., 2001). This study explored the role

of individual and collective agency in relation to the education and career aspirations and choices of the student participants.

**Assumption 4: Personal and family narratives.**

Personal and family narratives are self-constructed stories that integrate a person's life experiences, interpretations of events, and interactions with others into a meaningful whole. The meanings that individuals gain from their personal and family narratives shape their understandings of their life histories, who they are in relation to others (i.e., their personal identity), and their aspirations and choices. Such narratives provide avenues for individuals to recall, interpret, and explain events, and make plans for the future. This assumption is supported, in part, by research in various fields (e.g., Jago, 1996; Winslade & Monk, 1999). The current study explored students' narratives in order to elicit information about their education and career aspirations, and their post-school transition experiences.

**Assumption 5: Relationships.**

Relationships are a central and necessary part of the human condition, and play a pivotal role in shaping people's lives, both in helping them to meet the challenges of daily life as well as major life events and transitions. Individuals live their lives interdependently as members of families, partnerships, clans/tribes, communities, peer groups, and social networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Elder Jr. & Johnson, 2003). These relationships are major sources of influence and can serve important adaptive functions. When key relationships are unsupportive or negative, this can severely impact on an individual's daily functioning and wellbeing. Elements of this assumption are supported by research examining the role of social networks in people's lives (Allan, 1998; Allan & Crow, 2001; Spencer & Pahl, 2006). The current study explored the role of key relationships in shaping students' education and career aspirations, their sense of self- and collective efficacy and agency, the selection and implementation of coping strategies, and their post-school pathways.

**Assumption 6: Social support.**

Social support influences how individuals cope with stressful situations and includes: emotional support; practical assistance; the presence of a supportive other

during stressful situations; and having an advocate. Extensive research demonstrates that social support is critical in assisting individuals to cope with a range of difficulties. There is also evidence to suggest that social support plays an important role in promoting health and wellbeing (e.g., Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; S. Cohen et al., 2000; Cotterell, 2007). The current study explored the nature and types of social support provided to African youth from refugee backgrounds, and the influence of those who provide it.

**Assumption 7: Culture.**

Culture shapes people's living patterns, their perceptions and values, notions of normality, how meaning is constructed, how they cope with different challenges, and how they interact with others. African youth from refugee backgrounds cross a number of sociocultural borders in order to integrate and participate effectively in Australian schools, workplaces and communities. This assumption is supported by research conducted in diverse fields (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Phelan et al., 1998; Poppitt & Frey, 2007). The current study examined the influence of culture in shaping students' aspirations, life goals, and transition to adult settings such as the workplace, tertiary education, and the community.

**Assumption 8: Social and cultural identities.**

Social and cultural identities shape how individuals form relationships, and interact with, support and perceive each other. An individual's identity is embedded within the contexts of family, community, social networks, and everyday patterns of life. An individual's social and cultural identities are shaped by ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, behaviour, clothing, and group memberships. Elements of this assumption are supported by research conducted in different fields (Birman, Persky, & Chan, 2010; Čolić-Peisker, 2003; Matsunaga, Hecht, Elek, & Ndiaye, 2010). The current study explored the role of social and cultural identities in shaping students' education and career aspirations, and their post-school pathways.

**Assumption 9: Gender.**

Gender is a key organising principle of social life, and shapes social interactions, roles, status, opportunities, and experiences. This assumption is supported by

gender studies (Boyd, 1999; Ridgeway, 2009) and life course (Clausen, 1995) research. This study examined the role of gender in shaping African students' everyday lives, work and educational aspirations, choices, the opportunities made available to them, and their post-school transition experiences.

**Assumption 10: Age/life stage.**

Cultural and social expectations associated with age influence individuals' roles, responsibilities, and life challenges. In many cultures, for example, teenage children are often required to take on adult roles within the family (e.g., caring for younger siblings and providing financial support for the family) (O'Sullivan, 2006a). This assumption is supported by life course research (Alwin, 1995; Elder et al., 1996; Elder Jr. & Johnson, 2003). The current study explored the social and cultural expectations of age and how this influenced students' aspirations, options, choices, and post-school pathways.

**Assumption 11: Self- and collective efficacy.**

Self- and collective efficacy beliefs play a key role in influencing people's aspirations and decision making strategies (Bandura, 1995a). Perceived self- and collective efficacy predicts education and career aspirations, and the amount of perseverance and effort used to achieve these goals (Bandura, 2000; Bandura et al., 2001). In collectivist communities, important decisions are made as a group, and collective efficacy beliefs play a crucial role (Bandura, 2000). The current study explored the antecedents of self- and collective efficacy beliefs and their impact on education and career aspirations, choices, and post-school outcomes.

**Assumption 12: Coping strategies.**

During transition periods, people are often confronted with personal and social challenges. The coping strategies employed to overcome these challenges, in turn, shape an individual's experiences and outcomes. Problem-focused coping strategies (e.g., help seeking, recruiting social support, and engaging in collaborative problem solving) can facilitate adaptation. Conversely, emotion-focused coping strategies (e.g., avoidance coping, the rejection of help seeking) can prove maladaptive. For those from collectivist cultures, notions of coping are typically highly collaborative.

These individuals are, therefore, more likely to employ social and communal coping strategies to overcome challenges. The selection of coping strategies is critically important (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Habarth, Graham-Bermann, & Bermann, 2009; Lyons et al., 1998). The current study explored the coping strategies that students used, including the resulting outcomes as they related to their post-school transition.

**Assumption 13: Resources.**

Education and career pathways are shaped by educational, economic, cultural, and social resources. These resources include English language proficiency, a knowledge base, skills, finances, relationships, social networks, transportation, and cultural values, norms and beliefs. For African youth from refugee backgrounds, a loss of resources as a consequence of displacement and resettlement can complicate access to, and the acquisition of, work and further education opportunities (Blom, 2004; Cobb-Clark, Connolly, & Worswick, 2005; Hobfoll, 1989; Ryan et al., 2008). The current study explored the resources that participants had, and the influences of these resources on their aspirations, choices, and post-school transition experiences. In particular, this study explored the critical influences of English language proficiency and literacy in shaping students' post-school options and pathways.

**Assumption 14: Work.**

In our society, work fulfils important social and personal functions for individuals and their families. Work provides individuals with resources that shape their lifestyles, relationships, wellbeing, and health. Employment provides a sense of purpose, identity, and belonging and, for new migrants, can create opportunities for integration in the Australian community. This assumption is, in part, supported by research which has examined the education and employment outcomes of resettled refugees (e.g., Blom, 2004; Casimiro et al., 2007). The current study recognised the importance of being able to access sustainable and satisfying work. This research explored the challenges, opportunities, and assistance provided to African youth as they engage in work in the Australian community.

**Assumption 15: Career development.**

Career choices are influenced by the dynamic interaction between interpersonal, intrapersonal, and environmental factors (Arthur & McMahon, 2005). The current study explored the interplay between these factors in shaping the development and evolution of students' education and career aspirations, choices, and post-school pathways. This includes an examination of their resources and relationships, and physical environments including the social and organisational structures of educational institutions (i.e., schools, TAFEs, and universities) and employment settings.

**Assumption 16: Community of Collaboration.**

In order to capture the complexity of the refugee experience, refugee research requires a collaborative approach that actively engages numerous stakeholders (Castles, 2003). Collaborative efforts throughout the course of a research project promotes the development of highly contextual conclusions (Annan, 2005). The current study involved extensive collaboration between multiple stakeholders including students, service providers, educators, researchers, and African community leaders and elders. A Community of Collaboration was established, and collaboration was an ongoing process, occurring throughout the study. Chapter 4 discusses the implementation of the collaborative framework in this study.

## **Chapter Summary and Directions**

This chapter described the foundations of the current study. It began with a discussion of the interpretivist paradigmatic framework and then explored case study methodology, including a discussion of its advantages and potential limitations. Ways in which to establish quality were then described. The narrative approach used to collect and present the data was then discussed before concluding with an outline of the 16 assumptions that constituted this study's theoretical framework.

The following chapter provides an outline of the study's research design. It builds upon the foundations described in this chapter, to chart this journey of journeys.



The next chapter, then, is pragmatic in nature, outlining the plans and procedures used to conduct this study.

# Chapter 4: Mapping the Journey: The Research Design

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*A goal without a plan is just a wish.*

*-- Antoine de Saint-Exupery*

This chapter provides a chronological record of the steps that were taken to conduct the current study and serves as a 'map' for this 'journey of journeys'. In this chapter, an overview of the six-phase design and the sampling method used in the current study are described. The establishment and development of the Community of Collaboration is then discussed which includes a description of the study's Reference Group and African Community Mentors. The procedures used in the selection and recruitment of schools and participants are outlined before describing the data collection methods used in this study. Ethical considerations associated with this research are then discussed before concluding with a discussion of the study's parameters and limitations.

## **Overview of the Research Design**

Six phases constituted the current study's design: (i) relationship building with individuals both in and around the research involving the establishment of a Reference Group and a group of African Community Mentors; (ii) recruitment of schools and participants, and regular school visits; (iii) development of interview guides; (iv) data collection using multiple semi-structured interviews and initial data analysis; (v) development of recommendations arising from the study's findings; and (vi) feedback and final analysis. Table 3 provides an overview of the study's overall design.

Table 3. Overview of the study's phases

<b>PHASE 1</b> Community Consultations and Relationship Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruitment of, and consultations with, community mentors (i.e., African community leaders/elders, educators, service providers)</li> <li>▪ Establishment of the Reference Group and African Community Mentors</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE 2</b> Recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recruitment of school, students and staff</li> <li>▪ Recruitment of other stakeholders</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE 3</b> Interview Guide Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Topics and questions sourced from: Reference Group, African Community Mentors, literature, school visits, and participant interviews</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE 4</b> Data Collection and Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Multiple semi-structured interviews</li> <li>▪ Examination of student participants' school files</li> <li>▪ Data analysis</li> <li>▪ Case study development</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE 5</b> Development of Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recommendations developed from: Reference Group, African Community Mentors, interview data, and literature</li> </ul>
<b>PHASE 6</b> Feedback and Final Analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Feedback sessions with study participants</li> <li>▪ Final analysis</li> <li>▪ Thesis write-up</li> </ul>

While Table 3 depicts the phases following a linear format, in reality, the research design was recursive, with each phase being revisited throughout the study. For example, the Community of Collaboration provided input and guidance throughout the five phases of this study. This approach to the research enabled each phase to be refined in light of feedback and the data collected. Similarly, participants' references to important topics during interviews prompted the development of additional questions which were added to interview guides.

## **Phase 1: Community Consultations and Relationship Building**

Policy advisors and politicians have recognised that addressing complex problems cannot be achieved by individuals working alone (Roberts, 2007). Rather, identifying and addressing complex and important issues can be facilitated by collaboration (Head, 2004). Collaboration refers to individuals working jointly on a project or activity (Roberts, 2007) and is associated with the development of professional partnerships (Cook & Friend, 2010).

Collaborative activities require a greater degree of effort and commitment when compared to other forms of interaction (Head, 2004, 2006). For example, collaboration occurs over a longer duration and requires a greater reliance on interdependence when compared with other forms of joint action such as cooperation or coordination (Head, 2006). It must also be noted that collaboration is distinct from consultation, where the former is a style of interaction with others and the latter refers to a process (Cook & Friend, 2010).

Collaboration can be characterised by shared responsibility in terms of decision-making, shared accountability, and shared resources (Cook & Friend, 2010). In working collaboratively, a sense of community, respect, and trust develops amongst those involved (Cook & Friend, 2010). By building long-term partnerships with those involved, the trust and respect that is developed builds the capacity to manage diverse views and forge compromises (Head, 2006). In order to engage in successful collaboration, a facilitative and enabling environment must be established. This environment can be developed by regular contact and sharing of information with those who are involved in the collaborative activity (Head, 2006).

### **Power Relations in Collaboration**

While power can be considered to be shared amongst collaborators (Head, 2004; Olivos, Gallagher, & Aguilar, 2010), it is important to consider the various levels of power that operate in any given collaborative exercise (Keast & Mandell, 2011). Specifically, Keast and Mandell (2011) suggested that every collaborative project involves three types of power, each exerting its own degree of influence. Firstly, a collaborative project can experience power over where the resources of a collaboration are sought to be controlled (Keast & Mandell, 2011). In the current study, this notion of power over was experienced through the constraints of the structure of PhD candidature. Secondly, power with/to is concerned with achieving the aims of a collaboration by utilising individual and collective capabilities and capacities (Keast & Mandell, 2011). In the current study, this power exerted the greatest influence. Reference Group members and African Community Mentors

were involved throughout the research process, playing a particularly important role in establishing the fittingness of the data, and developing recommendations.

Finally, a collaborative project can assist in developing power for those whose capacities have previously rendered them 'underpowered' (Keast & Mandell, 2011). Given initial discussions with African community leaders regarding the lack of involvement of the African community in designing and evaluating research that concerns their members, the current study sought to facilitate the empowerment of African communities by involvement in this research.

### **Why Collaborative Research?**

The current study involved extensive collaboration with African Community Mentors and a Reference Group comprised of those with knowledge and experience in working with refugee young people from African countries. The rationale for developing a Community of Collaboration is now discussed.

Firstly, this study incorporated the voices of multiple stakeholders, each with their own interests, concerns, priorities, and needs (Bryson et al., 2011). Collaboration assisted in ensuring that different stakeholders' perspectives were incorporated into this study, and facilitated the likelihood that the research would have relevance to, and benefit, the intended audiences (Bryson et al., 2011; Hawkins, 2004).

Establishing an advisory committee can assist in ensuring that research is conducted in a manner that is appropriate to the local culture (Liebenberg & Ungar, 2011).

Secondly, collaboration can facilitate access to individuals who have knowledge, expertise, and experience (Head, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2010) in working through the challenges that are the target of investigation (Fisher et al., 2002). In the current study, collaboration provided opportunities to engage in ongoing dialogue with individuals who work with African people from refugee backgrounds regarding the challenges encountered in navigating the Australian education system. This dialogue drew on the value of practical experience from those working in the field

(Head, 2006), and assisted in ensuring that the research was conducted in an ethically responsible, culturally appropriate manner (Fisher et al., 2002).

Thirdly, collaboration provides stakeholders with opportunities to have input (Whelan, 2004) into the research in terms of: participant recruitment methods and strategies; topics for discussion at interviews; and recommendations arising from the results of the study. For African Community Mentors, the collaborative approach used in this study provided an avenue to voice their concerns and those of their communities in a novel forum, and provided insights into current research literature and trends that were otherwise inaccessible.

Finally, we live in an interconnected world where complex problems involve and affect numerous individuals and groups, and where the responsibility to act is shared (Bryson et al., 2011). The current study viewed the facilitation of successful post-school transitions of African youth from refugee backgrounds as a joint challenge which affects different stakeholders. Equally, input from multiple stakeholders in terms of suggested improvements was critically important in this study.

### **Collaborative Research: Benefits and Limitations**

Awareness of the benefits of collaboration date back to the time of Aristotle, who stated that “two good men [sic] are better than one” (Aristotle, 2007, p. 77). This section describes both the benefits and limitations of collaboration in the context of research.

Collaborating with others can reinvigorate the researcher by injecting creativity, energy, optimism, and hope into the research (Conoley & Conoley, 2010). In addition, receiving mentoring support and feedback can enhance research outcomes (Head, 2006). Furthermore, collaborating with others can decrease the sense of isolation that can be experienced by PhD candidates.

Tilbury (2006) suggested that participants should be involved throughout each phase of the research, from establishing the research questions, to assisting with analysis. Engaging with others in this way, however, is particularly difficult to execute in practice (Tilbury, 2006). For example, effective collaborations require time, energy, and resources (Head, 2004; Roberts, 2007). In this study, the extent of the collaboration was influenced by time and structural constraints associated with PhD candidature, as Marlowe (2009, p. 45) describes:

Collaborative research requires a commitment towards doing and a sincere engagement with process that may need to step outside the researcher's initially established timelines and scheduled milestones.

Successful collaborations are heavily dependent on effective interactions with those who are involved (Friend & Cook, 2007; Roberts, 2007). In addition to establishing a facilitative environment for authentic interactions to occur, it is critical to select the 'right' individuals to engage in the collaborative activity (Head, 2006).

In the current study, the Reference Group and African Community Mentors constituted a supportive network (Conoley & Conoley, 2010) that was committed to the long-term goals of the research (Head, 2004). As a consequence, a great deal more was achieved than if the research had been conducted in isolation. The collaborative relationships that were established and developed in the current study provide evidence that "... a whole ... is somewhat greater than the sum of its parts ..." (Conoley & Conoley, 2010, p. 80).

Engaging numerous agencies in collaborative research can be problematic due to the inherent complexities (Head, 2006). In this study, challenges largely centred on the scheduling of meetings (discussed later).

### **Preliminary Contact**

In order to establish the Community of Collaboration in the current study, a number of preliminary contacts were made. The individuals who were approached were

identified through personal and professional networks. These contacts, the times approached during the course of the study, the purpose of making these contacts, and the outcomes of these meetings, are summarised in Appendix A.

## **The Community of Collaboration**

From the preliminary contacts made (see Appendix A), 10 individuals agreed to participate in the research collaboration. These individuals have diverse personal and professional experience in working with African youth from refugee backgrounds and, therefore, represented unique perspectives.

The purpose of the Community of Collaboration was to:

1. Provide feedback and advice on issues and challenges that emerged during the research (including challenges anticipated by collaborators, and those that I encountered during the research).
2. Facilitate and support the research from within the community (through the various positions held by members of the Community of Collaboration).
3. Assist in the development, promotion and implementation of the recommendations arising from this study.

### **Meetings.**

Meetings were conducted at locations that were convenient for members of the Community of Collaboration. These locations included Fairview High School<sup>13</sup> (the participating school), the Flinders University city campus, the African Community Centre, and a restaurant in the city of Adelaide. Meetings were approximately one and a half hours in duration and were held at key stages of the research. In total, six formal meetings were held during the course of the study. Agendas and minutes were kept for each meeting and these documents were provided to members as they

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<sup>13</sup> Please note that the names of schools and participants have been changed in order to protect the identity of those who were involved in the study.



became available. Table 4 provides an overview of the meeting schedule and the major topics that were discussed at each meeting.

*Table 4. Community of Collaboration meeting schedule*

Meeting	Date	Topics for Discussion
1	May, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Introductions</li> <li>▪ Research overview</li> <li>▪ Goals and aims of the Community of Collaboration</li> <li>▪ Current and potential challenges</li> </ul>
2	June, 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Update on progress</li> <li>▪ Current and potential challenges</li> <li>▪ Interview topic suggestions</li> </ul>
3	March, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Update on progress</li> </ul>
4	July, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Discussion of findings and initial discussion of the recommendations</li> </ul>
5	September, 2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continuing discussion of the recommendations</li> </ul>
6	April, 2013	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Development of a Cultural Understanding Quiz for inclusion in the professional development resource (see Appendix J) (developed between Meeting 5 and 6)</li> </ul>

At the initial meeting in May 2011, members received a package containing: an agenda for the first meeting; a document providing an overview of the purpose and role of the Reference Group; a two-page summary of the research; and information for participants. These documents are contained in Appendices B to H.

### **Separating to collaborate.**

Initially, the Reference Group (the name that refers to the Community of Collaboration) was designed to involve individuals from various African communities in South Australia. Unfortunately, due to a number of factors including work, family and community commitments, and time constraints, it was not possible to meet as a whole group. Given these practical constraints, it proved more effective to engage and meet with African Community Mentors separately. Meeting African Community Mentors away from the Reference Group proved beneficial as it enabled me to gain a greater understanding of the specific cultural differences that exist between the various African communities.

In addition to enlisting the support of members of the South Australian African communities, advice was sought from African international postgraduate students

in the School of Education at Flinders University at the time of the study. Together with the African Community Mentors, relevant and critical cultural knowledge was developed which was then applied during the course of the study.

Support to conduct this research from those involved in the Community of Collaboration was critical to its success. Engaging in dialogue with these individuals about the research assisted in ensuring that the study would benefit both the mainstream community and the African communities involved. African Community Mentors actively promoted and supported the study in their communities through, for example, facilitating participant recruitment. In addition to Reference Group members, many of the African Community Mentors held positions of paid employment in government and non-government organisations. They were, therefore, able to support the research through their respective employment roles.

## **Phase 2: Recruitment**

After becoming equipped with relevant cultural knowledge and suggestions regarding the approach of potential participants, school selection and recruitment occurred. This section describes how schools and participants were approached and invited to participate in the study.

### **Recruitment Method: Snowball Sampling**

Snowball sampling was the preferred method of recruitment of participants in this study. Snowball sampling (also known as referral or chain sampling) (Denton & Smith, 2001; Patton, 1990) involves a group of informants who put the researcher in contact with their friends and acquaintances, who are subsequently interviewed (Burgess, 1984). In this study, Reference Group Members, African Community Mentors and other contacts were used as a starting point from which to contact participants. As in snowball sampling, participants facilitated the recruitment of additional participants.

One disadvantage of snowball sampling is the tendency to arrive at a group of homogenous participants in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, level of education, norms and values (Dahinden & Efonayi-Mader, 2009). The impact of this limitation was reduced by utilising contacts that occupied different contexts (e.g., schools and service providers), thereby recruiting participants with diverse experiences and perspectives on the post-school transition of African students from refugee backgrounds.

Snowball sampling was considered the most appropriate recruitment method for three reasons. Firstly, relationships constituted a key aspect of this study. Utilising participants' social networks and contacts contributed to the diversity of perspectives on the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. In addition, snowball sampling enabled insights to be gained regarding the influences of key relationships that operate during the post-school transition. Secondly, the cultural backgrounds of the African participants and the African Community Mentors emphasise collectivism (Neblett Jr. et al., 2010). In collectivist societies, individuals' identities are critically shaped by their group memberships (Kim, 1994) and relationships (Triandis, 1995). In this study, snowball sampling was seen to demonstrate the value of key relationships of those involved both in and around the research and was, therefore, considered to show the greatest respect to participants and their cultural patterns of interaction. Finally, snowball sampling was thought to be particularly beneficial in this study given that it involved a specific group of people (i.e., African youth from refugee backgrounds) that can be difficult to access in the general population (Denton & Smith, 2001). This method of sampling, therefore, facilitated access to participants.

### **Recruitment of Schools**

Schools were invited to participate in the research on the basis of the following criteria (see Table 5):

*Table 5.* Selection criteria for school recruitment

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The school:

- Is located in the metropolitan area of Adelaide.
  - Had a significant number of African students from refugee backgrounds in 2011 who intended to leave secondary school by the end of 2011. That is, these students were:
    - Enrolled in Years 10, 11, 12, or 13 and/or
    - Approaching the school leaving age of 17 years
- 

Gaining access to sites to conduct research involves negotiation and renegotiation (Burgess, 1984). In the current study, negotiation processes were supported by staff from the South Australian Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) and African Community Mentors. DECD staff consulted their databases for schools with significant populations of African youth from refugee backgrounds and African Community Mentors were asked to identify schools that the youth in their communities were attending.

Initially, three schools were invited to participate in the research. The first school declined to participate due to time constraints. The second school did not return follow-up phone calls. After making contact with a third school, the assistant principal agreed to meet to discuss the research. At the meeting, the assistant principal provided consent for the school to participate, demonstrated a willingness to assist in the recruitment of student and staff participants, and accepted the invitation to become a member of the Reference Group.

#### **Fairview High School<sup>14</sup>.**

Fairview High School is a government secondary school located in metropolitan Adelaide, where approximately 30 teaching staff are employed. In 2011, 27 per cent of the student population of 332 were from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). Fairview High School has an emphasis on promoting academic achievement,

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<sup>14</sup> This denotes a pseudonym to protect the identities of those associated with the participating school.

personal development and citizenship (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). The curriculum caters for diverse student needs and has a whole-school focus on literacy (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). Opportunities are available for students to develop leadership skills through involvement in school decision making and the Student Representative Council (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). Fairview High School also offers a range of extra-curricular activities including swimming and sports day carnivals, camps and debating (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). In addition, the school has a strong relationship with the local community, providing opportunities for students to engage in learning experiences with local businesses (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010).

#### ***1.1.1.1 Visiting Fairview High School.***

Spending extended time on site, engaging in activities and dialogue with others is a characteristic of qualitative case study research (Stake, 2005). In this study, regular visits were made to Fairview High School (via a process of negotiation with the school) throughout the study.

School visits were conducted for three reasons. Firstly, ongoing contact with the school increased familiarity with the setting prior to the commencement of interviewing (Gillham, 2008; Seidman, 1991) by developing an understanding of the reality of the school, its context, and the social norms that operate within it (Gillham, 2008; Yin, 2003). Given that the aim of ongoing contact was to become immersed in the social context (Gillham, 2008), school visits involved unstructured observations (Thomas, 2011). Secondly, regular visits facilitated the development of rapport and mutual respect (Seidman, 1991) with individuals at Fairview High School. Finally, regular visits assisted in establishing participant interest, and initiated the process of informed consent (Seidman, 1991).

Visits to Fairview High School began in March, 2011. During one visit in May, 2011, the assistant principal provided information about the potential student participants. This included information about students' living arrangements, and details of learning disabilities.

#### ***1.1.1.1.2 Mothers' Group.***

In order to develop rapport with some of the mothers of potential student participants, I attended the school's weekly Mothers' Group from May 2011 until March 2013. The purpose of the group is to provide mothers from non-English speaking backgrounds with an opportunity to practise their English skills with other mothers, while learning a craft such as knitting or sewing. Attendance at the Mothers' Group resulted in the development of good rapport with the mothers, and facilitated the recruitment of two student participants.

### **Recruitment of School Staff and Students**

The Fairview High School assistant principal assisted in identifying potential student and staff participants and, therefore, acted as a gatekeeper. The processes of recruitment are described below.

#### **Staff recruitment.**

Two staff members from Fairview High School were recruited for participation in this study. Staff recruitment occurred via different methods. Firstly, information about the study was disseminated to all staff during a staff meeting in May, 2011 and invitations were extended to participate in the study. Secondly, a brief notice was prepared and emailed to all staff via the assistant principal. In addition, the assistant principal approached individual staff members inviting them to participate. Finally, a chance meeting occurred with the school's special education teacher, who happened to mention some issues that the students in the study were experiencing in terms of the post-school transition. This teacher was contacted again via email and later provided consent for participation.

In addition to the recruitment of two staff members from Fairview High School, five teachers from two other schools were recruited for participation in this study. Four teachers were recruited from Seraphim High School<sup>15</sup>, and the fourth teacher was recruited from Eastbank Senior College<sup>16</sup>.

Contact was made with one teacher from Seraphim High School through one of the study's supervisors. This teacher then assisted in recruiting other colleagues from the school. Contact was made with the teacher at Eastbank Senior College through one of the Reference Group members.

### **Student recruitment.**

The Fairview High School assistant principal provided information about students<sup>17</sup> who met the following criteria for participation in this research (see Table 6):

*Table 6.* Selection criteria for student participant recruitment

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The participant:

- Migrated to Australia as a humanitarian visa entrant.
  - Was attending a South Australian school in 2011.
  - Intended to leave secondary school within six months (i.e., was enrolled in Year 10, 11, 12, or 13 and/or was approaching the school leaving age of 17 years) during 2011.
- 

#### ***1.1.1.1.3 Initial information session.***

An information session for Fairview High School students who met the criteria for participation was conducted in June, 2011. The purposes of this meeting were to: meet potential student participants; provide information about the research (including the details of participation); and provide students with an opportunity to ask questions about the research.

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<sup>15</sup> This denotes a pseudonym.

<sup>16</sup> This denotes a pseudonym.

<sup>17</sup> This list included date of birth, country of origin, languages spoken, contact details, visa category, date of arrival in Australia, year level in 2011, and parents' names (where appropriate).

Many of the students present demonstrated enthusiasm regarding participation in the study. After the session, the assistant principal mentioned that one of the students who had attended said, “This [research] is what we need,” which affirmed the need for this research and strengthened the support that this study received.

#### ***1.1.1.1.4 Community engagement.***

Hynes (2003) stated that working with a voluntary refugee organisation can be helpful in building trust with participants and that this is of paramount importance in conducting research that is ethical. Working as a Homework Club tutor with the Australian Refugee Association is thought to have assisted in developing rapport with the student participants, thereby reducing potential fears associated with participation.

#### ***1.1.1.1.5 Translation of participant information.***

Following the student information session, participant information was translated into Somali and Kiswahili (discussed later). This information, together with an English translation, was then mailed to students and their families (where appropriate). A brief handwritten note was included which invited students to discuss participation with a parent, guardian, family member or friend (where appropriate). It also provided students who wished to participate with instructions regarding the return of signed consent forms.

#### **Recruitment of retrospective student participants.**

While the students who were recruited through Fairview High School could be considered ‘prospective’ cases, this did not preclude the involvement of students who had already made the post-school transition. These students were considered ‘retrospective’ cases.



John<sup>18</sup>, one of the prospective student cases, facilitated the recruitment of his older sister, Angel, who had completed Year 12 in 2010. Following Angel's initial interview, she discussed the research with her friend, Fathia (who also completed Year 12 at Fairview High School in 2010), who was willing to be involved. In addition, an African Community Mentor assisted in recruiting David, a university student who was, at the time of data collection, not engaged in university study for personal reasons. The input from these students was considered invaluable, given that the school context was consistent amongst all students, with the exception of David.

### **Recruitment of Other Stakeholders**

In addition to African youth who were engaged in the secondary school system, other individuals were invited to participate in the study. The recruitment process for each stakeholder group is described below.

#### **University educators.**

Five university educators were recruited to participate in this study. The recruitment of university educators for participation in this study proved easier than recruiting some of the other stakeholder groups. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Firstly, this research was conducted in a university where university structures were previously understood. This prior knowledge, coupled with university contacts, enabled appropriate individuals to be approached regarding participation. Secondly, universities are sites for the promotion and development of research. Because of this, university educators are likely to want to support research that is being conducted. Furthermore, university educator participants may have considered this study valuable in terms of how best to support African students from refugee backgrounds in university settings.

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<sup>18</sup> All names provided are pseudonyms.

### **TAFE educators.**

Initially, the recruitment of TAFE educators proved particularly difficult. While the contact details of particular individuals were provided by participants and utilised, those that were approached were not responsive, despite many attempts at making contact. Fortunately, one TAFE educator was recruited via a mutual contact. This participant then facilitated the recruitment of three colleagues. Consequently, four TAFE educators contributed to the current study.

### **African community leaders and service providers.**

Five African community leaders with roles in service provision, and three service providers, were recruited for participation in the research. The individuals who participated as African community leaders and elders were recruited with the assistance of existing contacts (*viz.*, snowball sampling).

### **Missing stakeholders.**

In this study, recruitment proved difficult for certain stakeholder groups. The difficulties that were experienced are discussed below.

#### ***1.1.1.1.6 Family members.***

The recruitment of family members of the student participants in the current study proved problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, four of the student participants were not living with family members at the time of the study. Abie and Sayhosay both reported ongoing family conflict between their biological fathers and step-mothers, resulting in their decision to live away from their respective families. Belee and Fatuma also experienced conflict resulting in both living independently. Secondly, when asked about individuals associated with their education and career pathways, six of the seven students living with family in Australia did not offer the names of family members. The seventh student specifically stated that her mother was not to be interviewed about her post-school transition. When questioned about this, Monica stated that it was “because I know what she’ll say,” implying that any

comments her mother made would be negative. Finally, financial and time constraints precluded the involvement of participants requiring an interpreter. This, therefore, eliminated many of the students' parents and guardians as participants. Additional time and funding could have provided important familial perspectives on students' education and career pathways.

Despite the absence of the perspectives of student participants' family members, a number of the African community leaders that were interviewed had children of school age and/or adult children. They were able to provide valuable insights into the perspectives of parents from both a personal viewpoint as well as from their observations and interactions in their African communities.

#### ***1.1.1.1.7 Employers.***

The recruitment of those who employ African youth from refugee backgrounds proved difficult. Attempts were made to contact employers that were known to employ individuals from African backgrounds, but these attempts proved unfruitful. Possible reasons for the lack of willingness to engage in this research as an employer may be varied. For example, employers may have been unwilling to be 'labelled' as an employer that hires African workers. Time constraints may also have influenced the decision not to be involved in the research.

A lack of input from employers did not preclude me from gaining an understanding of workplace-related experiences and challenges for African youth from refugee backgrounds. In conducting interviews with other stakeholders, I was able to gain an understanding of the factors that may influence the work experiences of African youth from refugee backgrounds. Student participants shared knowledge of the learning that they gained from work experience that occurred as part of the secondary school curriculum. Similarly, other stakeholders provided perspectives on the experiences and challenges facing African youth from refugee backgrounds in navigating workplace environments.

### **Phase 3: Interview Guide Development**

In order to ensure that all participants were asked about the same topics, interview guides were prepared for each stakeholder group (see Appendix I). These interview guides provided a framework for the main body of the interview and followed an orderly sequence. The interview guides provided direction for interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Kvale, 1996) but were flexible in terms of the order and wording of questions (Burns, 1997) and promoted the discussion of feelings and experiences (Kvale, 1996).

#### **Interview Topics and Questions**

Topics and questions to discuss during participant interviews were developed in collaboration with a number of sources. Firstly, the study's theoretical framework was used as a basis for the development of interview questions. Secondly, the literature was consulted in order to develop questions. A number of resources were consulted such as the 'Tree of Life' approach to narrative practice (Denborough, 2008) in addition to other published research (e.g., Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Stevens, 1993). Thirdly, Reference Group members and African Community Mentors were invited to offer topics for interviews. Fourthly, observations that were made and informal discussions with staff that occurred during school visits contributed to the development of the interview guides. Finally, questions were constructed over the course of the data collection period as themes and other important elements emerged. Here, the use of multiple interviews created the opportunity to gain additional insights related to experiences and challenges identified by other participants.

In this study, both closed, semi-structured, and open-ended questions were asked (Arksey & Knight, 1999). During interviews with participants, a number of other questioning techniques were also used. For example, non-directive questions were used which mirrored the participant's last few words (Burns, 1997; L. Cohen & Manion, 1989; May, 2001). In addition, reflective and active listening and paraphrasing were used to ensure that both the researcher and participants were

understood. This also provides encouragement for participants to continue (Burns, 1997). Encouragers such as single words and short phrases to reinforce and encourage, and non-verbal techniques (e.g., eye contact, head nodding and facial expressions) were also used (Burns, 1997). During interviews with participants from African cultural backgrounds, care was taken to ensure that non-verbal communication was consistent with participants' cultural norms. For example, silence was frequently used in order to create reflection time and provide space to speak (Kvale, 1996).

## **Phase 4: Data Collection and Analysis**

In the current study, data were collected from a number of sources through interviews with participants in addition to the examination of students' school files. The rationale for this approach was to develop "... converging lines of inquiry ..." (Yin, 2003, p. 98) in order to corroborate the information obtained. This section contains information about these data collection methods and also describes data analysis procedures.

### **Interviews**

An interview is a verbal interchange (Burns, 1997), a structured, purposeful conversation (L. Cohen & Manion, 1989; Kvale, 1996) in which information is elicited from an individual about his/her lived world, beliefs, and opinions (May, 2001), which are expressed in the individual's own words (Kvale, 1996; Liamputtong, 2007). The underlying assumption of the interview is that people possess essential and particular knowledge about their social world that is obtainable through verbal messages (Liamputtong, 2007). In this way, interviewing is consistent with an individual's ability to derive meaning through language (Seidman, 1991).

#### **Multiple interviews.**

A number of authors have raised the issue of the potential constraints in conducting a single interview with participants (e.g., Denton & Smith, 2001; Seidman, 1991).

Riessman (2008) also raised this issue and suggested that optimal conditions for storytelling include the opportunity to work with participants over a period of time. In the refugee research context, conducting several interviews with participants can aid in capturing the complexity associated with refugee experiences (Gabriel, 2008; Khawaja, 2011).

In this study, all participants, with the exception of two<sup>19</sup>, were interviewed at least twice. Conducting multiple interviews afforded a number of benefits including enhancing rapport with participants (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998; Burns, 1997; Seidman, 1991). In conducting interviews with a number of African community leaders in particular, it was evident during the second interview that the research was more positively received. Secondly, this research sought to understand the temporal dimensions of students' education and career pathways. Conducting multiple interviews with participants aided in capturing diverse and changing perspectives and realities, and highlighted transformations (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Finally, interviewing participants on more than one occasion enabled understandings to be clarified (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). It also provided opportunities for participants to elaborate on the meanings they had shared.

### **Semi-structured interviews.**

Semi-structured interviews were chosen for a number of reasons. Firstly, semi-structured interviews created flexibility which, in turn, established dialogical space in which to probe participants' responses (May, 2001).

Secondly, a semi-structured interview format emphasised interviewee participation (Bright, Ward, & Negi, 2011), which is consistent with the notion of engaging participants as collaborators (Morgan, 2000) in the co-construction of knowledge (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). This was considered particularly

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<sup>19</sup> Two participants, one a teacher and the other a university educator, were each interviewed once and then elected to engage in an email conversation for the second interview due to time constraints.

important given that many of the participants may have experienced disempowerment as a result of their refugee experiences (Lawrence et al., 2010, p. 26). Semi-structured interviews were, therefore, selected in an effort to give a voice to these participants.

Thirdly, a semi-structured format afforded opportunities to improvise during interviews (Arksey & Knight, 1999). This was particularly useful where participants had difficulty understanding certain terms. For example, a number of students experienced difficulty understanding the question: How do you define your cultural identity, or your ethnicity? Semi-structured interviews enabled an example to be provided in order to demonstrate the meaning of the question.

Finally, semi-structured interviews enabled participants to use their own frame of reference (May, 2001). This was especially important when interviewing participants for whom English was not their first language. Semi-structured interviews, therefore, facilitated the construction of participant narratives that were told in their own words.

#### *Limitations of semi-structured interviews.*

A number of potential limitations of semi-structured interviewing are worth noting. Firstly, the flexibility of semi-structured interviews can result in inconsistency in terms of the questions asked of participants. In order to overcome this potential limitation, interview guides were used with all study participants (as discussed above). Secondly, semi-structured interviews can be limited in the sense that participants can be precluded from sharing information that they consider important (Bright et al., 2011). In order to address this, each interview was concluded with the question: Is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't already discussed?

### **Debriefing the interviews.**

Debriefing has been defined as a bi-directional, educational process between the researcher and the participant (Eyde, 2000). In this study, debriefing occurred at the conclusion of each interview. This process was considered to be of paramount importance in that it provided an opportunity for both participant and researcher to clarify information and to ask questions (Sieber, 1992). Debriefing was initiated by the question: How are you feeling about being involved in this research?

Debriefing aided in establishing whether participants experienced any concerns as a consequence of their participation in the research and, hence, possessed a therapeutic element (Eyde, 2000). None of the student participants reported any negative feelings as a result of their involvement in the study. In fact, many expressed positive emotions associated with their participation, as Sayhosay stated:

*I feel good to talk about my life because I feel like people need to hear this, and maybe to be happy for the life they have. Some people, they don't appreciate the life they have ... They don't appreciate it. So, I feel, if I have the chance to explain my life, for people to listen and maybe be confident in themselves and focus, I would do so ... because some people, they don't even know what is war ... It's very, very good.*

In contrast, two university stakeholder participants expressed concerns that the information could be interpreted as labelling and segregating. These concerns were addressed by restating the aims of the research and were accompanied by the assurance that information would be appropriately recorded in the presentation of results.

Debriefing was also aimed at clarifying any misperceptions (Eyde, 2000). For example, one student believed that the researcher would be facilitating the post-school transition, rather than investigating the transition. During this interview, the aims and limitations of the research were explained and then understood.



**Audio recording.**

A total of 78 interviews were conducted with 38 participants. The duration of interviews ranged between 20 minutes and 1.5 hours. The decision to interview this relatively small number of individuals was made on the basis of the time-consuming nature of conducting multiple in-depth interviews (Seidman, 1991). The information gained from these interviews illuminated the complexity of the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the exception of one initial interview, where the participant refused<sup>20</sup>. In this instance, handwritten notes were made during the interview. Audio recording interviews facilitated natural engagement in conversation with participants, and enabled the raw data to be maintained for future analysis (Burns, 1997; Seidman, 1991). Audio recording can also aid in assuring participants that their words will be treated responsibly (Seidman, 1991).

**Transcription.**

Transcription is the process of converting oral interviews to the written form (Kvale, 1996) and can be said to occupy the border between the spoken and written word (Riessman, 2008). In this study, transcription was not assigned to another individual. This decision was made on the basis that transcription is not simply a technical task, but rather, an interpretive act (Riessman, 2008). Transcription can, therefore, facilitate understanding of the data (Seidman, 1991).

Following each interview, audio files were partially transcribed. Partial transcription refers to recording interview notes and transcribing only key sections of the audio recording, and was selected because the purpose of the interviews was to understand a range of ideas (Arksey & Knight, 1999). In addition, partial transcription was advantageous given the number of audio files to be transcribed,

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<sup>20</sup> At the second interview, the participant gave consent to have the interview audio recorded.

and the time constraints associated with the study (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Patton, 1990; Seidman, 1991).

## **Examining Student Files and Reports**

In addition to conducting multiple semi-structured interviews with participants, students' school files were examined. Data from these files were collected for a number of reasons. Firstly, information contained in the students' files could be corroborated with information obtained through student and staff interviews, which constitutes an important use of documents in case study research (Yin, 2003). Secondly, examining students' files enabled diverse information to be obtained about students over a longer time span (Yin, 2003). Information obtained included: New Arrivals Program reports; attendance records; information regarding disabilities; academic and extracurricular achievements; and, in some cases, previous school reports from Africa.

While examining students' files assisted in creating a more holistic understanding of the students' education and career pathways, it was not without its challenges. As Altheide (1996) suggested, the study of documents is influenced by context. That is, access and retrievability can prove problematic. For example, some students' files did not contain reports from their time in a New Arrivals Program.

## **Data Analysis**

Interview data and students' school files were analysed in different ways. In this study, the two forms of data and corresponding analyses converged in the form of a data analysis framework. This framework was developed in order to examine the processes and resources needed to embark upon different post-school pathways.

### **1. Interview Data Analysis**

The analysis of interview data was characterised by a number of important elements. These are described below.

#### *An ongoing process.*

Data analysis was an ongoing, recursive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006) involving the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of data, an idea that is consistent with case study research (Stake, 2005). Ongoing analysis assisted in informing subsequent interviews with participants and enabled questions to be asked about issues that participants mentioned during earlier interviews. It also assisted in the identification of changes through time (Saldana, 2003).

*Identification of commonalities and differences.*

As interview data were collected and transcribed, a cursory thematic analysis was conducted. This form of analysis was used to identify, analyse and report patterns of meaning within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was selected because of its ability to describe commonalities and differences across the data set, and because it is useful when participants are engaged as collaborators (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The examination of commonalities and differences across the case studies aided in describing the protective, risk and unfolding factors associated with various post-school pathways and trajectories. Considering the commonalities and differences between interview data not only aided in understanding each case study (Stake, 2005), but also illuminated the theoretical constructs that have relevance amongst individuals (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998).

*Participant involvement.*

In this study, participants were involved in the process of data analysis. Involving participants in this process demonstrates respect and, again, engages participants as collaborators (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Furthermore, participant involvement in data analysis can assist in ensuring that the researcher's interpretations are consistent with the participants' understandings and experiences (Orum et al., 1991).

Participant involvement in data analysis occurred during interviews and took the form of discussions around key issues, themes and ideas that emerged during initial data analysis. These discussions assisted in establishing the importance of issues,

themes and ideas beyond the initial case study and aided in identifying critical aspects of the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds.

## **2. Analysis of student school files**

Student participants' school files were examined, with a particular emphasis on the following elements:

- Attendance records for the 2011 school year
- Information regarding learning difficulties and disabilities
- 2011 and 2012 term and semester reports
- Previous school reports (e.g., New Arrivals Program, schooling in Africa)
- Work experience reports from supervisors
- Other information that could have a bearing on student school performance (e.g., family issues, medical concerns)
- Where available, information was recorded and used in the presentation of student case studies. This information was considered important in shaping the post-school options available to student participants.

### **Data analysis framework.**

A data analysis framework (see Figure 4) was developed in order to analyse the data in terms of protective, risk and unfolding factors affecting post-school pathways through time. The framework was constructed from the study's theoretical assumptions, and sought to synthesise the concepts into a meaningful, holistic and contextual frame relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. This framework formed the basis of the second results chapter (i.e., Chapter 6).

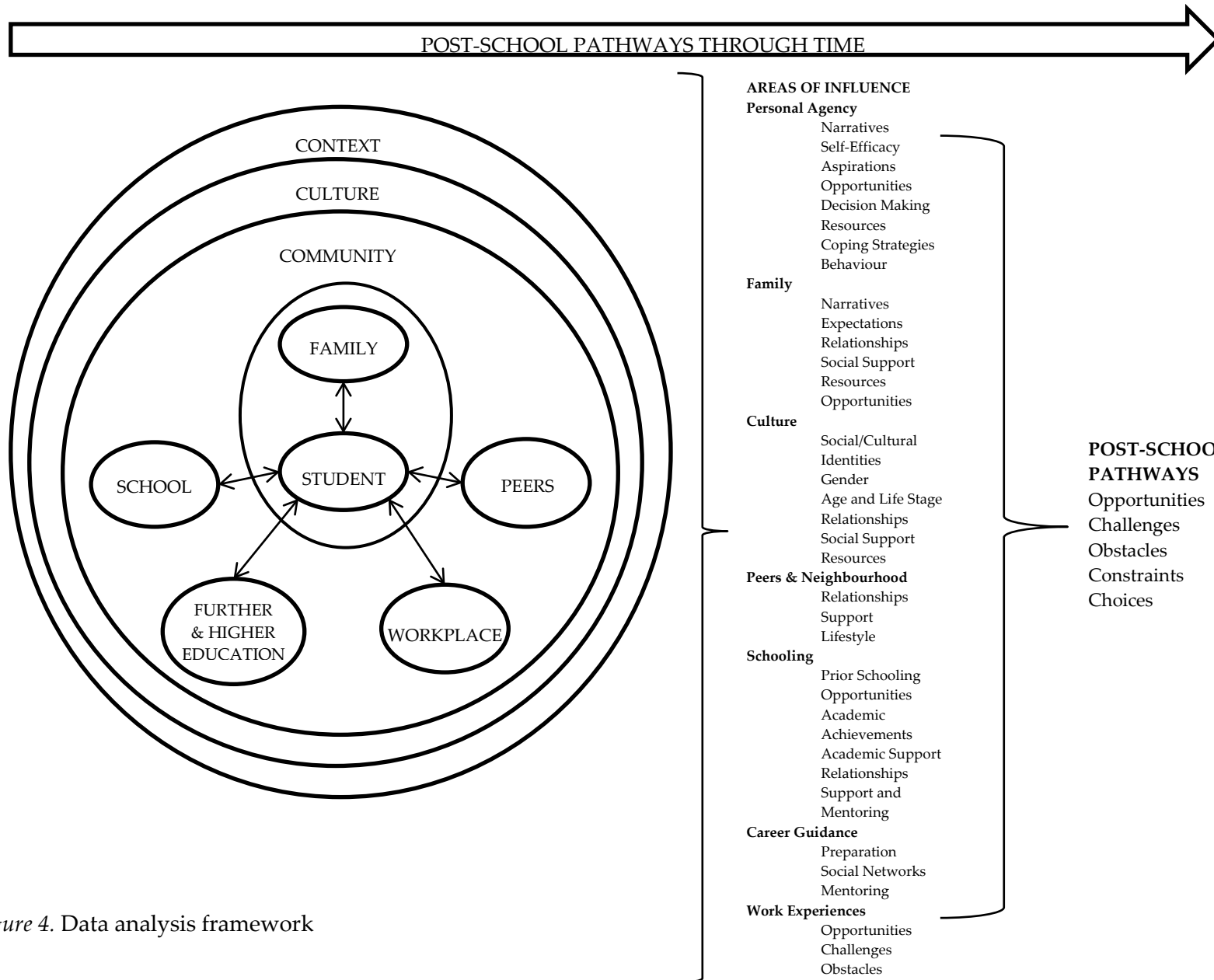


Figure 4. Data analysis framework

## **Phase 5: Development of Recommendations**

Phase 5 involved the development of a series of recommendations in collaboration with the study's participants, Reference Group and African Community Mentors. The recommendations (discussed in Chapter 7) were developed from the data that were collected, the combined personal and professional experiences of those involved in designing the recommendations, and extant literature. The recommendations were developed with an emphasis on the school context and are intended to facilitate the post-school transitions of African students from refugee backgrounds.

## **Phase 6: Feedback and Final Analysis**

Throughout the study, research updates were provided to Reference Group members, African Community Mentors, and participants. This process involved both providing and receiving feedback and was expected to contribute to good communication and the development of trust and rapport amongst those involved both in and around the study (Sieber, 1992). In the sixth phase of the study, participants and participating schools and African communities engaged in final feedback sessions. Like the regular research updates, final feedback sessions involved sharing feedback. The opportunity to engage in dialogue was critical to the study for three reasons. Firstly, receiving participants' feedback on the findings of the study assisted in establishing the relevance of the study's findings to those involved. Secondly, given previous experiences of research in new and emerging African communities in South Australia, receiving information regarding the study's findings was critical to maintaining rapport and trust with participants. Lastly, final feedback sessions assisted in ending the researcher/participant relationship, and the study.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics refers to the protection of individual and community interests (Arksey & Knight, 1999). With any research that is conducted with human participants, researchers must ensure that they adhere to a series of ethical principles (Smith, 2000). These principles include: beneficence (i.e., the researcher will strive to do no

harm) (Israel & Hay, 2006); fidelity and responsibility (i.e., the researcher will establish relationships built upon trust); integrity (i.e., the researcher will promote honest, accurate and truthful research); justice (i.e., the researcher will remain fair and be just to all involved in the research); and respect (i.e., the researcher will respect the rights, and maintain the dignity of those involved in the research) (American Psychological Association, 2002). While principles are useful in guiding researchers to conduct ethical research, these codes are general and can be ambiguous (Arksey & Knight, 1999), leaving researchers to make their own decisions (Blee & Currier, 2011; Smith, 2000). Considering the research context is, therefore, critical to best addressing ethical principles (Haverkamp, 2005).

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

Confidentiality implies that participants' identities and confidences will remain private (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bok, 1984; Garrett, Baillie, & Garrett, 2001; Kvale, 1996). In qualitative research, disguising participants' identities can be difficult (Haverkamp, 2005) due to the extensive amount of personal information to which researchers are privy (Adelman et al., 1976), coupled with the use of extensive participant quotations (Patton, 1990; Stake, 2000b). Despite these inherent difficulties, confidentiality must be maintained. This can be achieved by anonymising people through the assignment of codes (Fisher et al., 2002) or, as is the case in this study, pseudonyms (Arksey & Knight, 1999).

The intention of this study was to conduct research with participants, rather than to participants (Hynes, 2003). One way of establishing a more collaborative relationship with participants was to invite student participants to select their own pseudonyms. This decision was made in order to provide students with a greater sense of ownership over their data and narratives, and to involve them in the process of the research. All students offered a pseudonym for use in the presentation of their stories and are those that are used in this study.

## The Researcher/Participant Relationship

The relationship between the researcher and the participant is multi-faceted and is influenced by a number of factors. Discussed below are some of the critical elements that influenced the researcher/participant relationship and, ultimately, shaped the narratives told.

### **Trust.**

Trust is a critical aspect of the researcher/participant relationship (Israel & Hay, 2006), particularly when conducting research with refugee populations (Powles, 2004) or where there are differences in status or ethnicity between the researcher and the participants (Sieber, 1992). In this study, developing trust was paramount, given such differences. Furthermore, establishing trusting relationships with participants was even more critical because of the longitudinal nature of this research as it aided in the retention of participants (Gifford, 2013).

Engaging with participants over time (Mackenzie, McDowell, & Pittaway, 2007), through multiple interviews is a means of developing trust and rapport (Eyde, 2000). Developing trust over time may have resulted in engagement in conversations which more accurately reflected participants' realities (Mackenzie et al., 2007; Smith, 2000).

Issues of trust can emerge when final reports are written. Here, the participant is forced to trust that the researcher will maintain ethical standards to ensure that their identities remain anonymous (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Inviting participant feedback on the research can, therefore, aid in the development of trust in the researcher/participant relationship (Hynes, 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2007). It is a way of showing respect to participants (Liamputtong, 2007) by engaging them as partners in the research (Eyde, 2000), thereby facilitating the empowerment of participants (Powles, 2004).



### **Different cultural worlds.**

It has been argued that, wherever possible, it is important to match interviewers and interviewees by race (Denton & Smith, 2001). In this study, however, vastly different racial and cultural backgrounds and life experiences likely influenced the researcher/participant relationship (Seidman, 1991). Gender differences may have also influenced the relationship (Liamputtong, 2007; May, 2001; Seidman, 1991). For example, all African community leaders who were interviewed were male. This may have influenced the data collected in the sense that a female researcher may have been a challenge to African gender roles and norms. Despite these critical differences, the literature depicts a scarcity of research examining the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. And, as Tilbury (2006, p. 82) stated, "... it may be better that someone undertake the research, even an 'outsider', than that no-one does."

The respective cultural knowledge of the researcher and participants may have affected participants' engagement in conversations due to a limited understanding of the Australian education and employment systems. As a researcher with a very different cultural background, it was important to learn as much as possible about the general systems of interaction, hierarchy and appropriate behaviour and conduct within the various African cultures. For example, shaking hands is an important greeting in African cultures. It was, therefore, important to engage in this element of social interaction. In contrast, engaging with African participants over a period of time may have, as Gifford (2013) argued, acted as a bridge to the wider community.

Despite these contrasts, important cultural understandings were made explicit during interviews, thereby illuminating important aspects of culture. Had the racial backgrounds of the researcher and participants been similar, much of this cultural knowledge may have remained implicit. In addition, one similarity that was shared with the student participants was the researcher's own relatively recent transition from secondary school (i.e., within the last 10 years). This common experience enabled 'partial identification' (Gemignani, 2011) with these participants.

**Behaving in a culturally appropriate manner.**

Conducting ethical research with individuals from refugee backgrounds requires that researchers are aware of, and acknowledge, the diversity of their participants (E. Cooper, 2005). In this study, it was, therefore, critical to develop an awareness and understanding of the tribal, ethnic and linguistic diversity of the various African cultures. This cultural awareness was developed through conversations with African Community Mentors and Reference Group members, in addition to consulting cultural awareness resources.

**Power relations.**

Power refers to a social construction in which certain relationships, ideas and meanings are privileged over others which, in turn, serves to create a disempowerment/empowerment divide (Hawkins, 2004). Power relations continually changed during the study. Initially, participants were in a position of power by deciding whether or not to participate in the research (Haverkamp, 2005). For participants with a refugee background, being able to make this decision may have empowered them because of layers of mistrust (Hynes, 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2007) and sites of disempowerment (E. Cooper, 2005) that often characterise the refugee journey. For example, political violence in the home country can cause individuals to be fearful of the consequences of speaking out (Hackett & Rolston, 2009). Similarly, there may be a mistrust of individuals who are in perceived positions of power and authority (Hynes, 2003; Mackenzie et al., 2007).

During the interviews, participants remained in a more powerful position by choosing to answer particular questions, and the depth and breadth of information they provided, which is characteristic of conversational interviews (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Despite this empowerment, however, the interview is ultimately a controlled conversation, based on the researcher's interests and, therefore, is inadvertently disempowering (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). At the second interview, the researcher held a position of greater power because interpretations of participants' information were shared (Burgess-Limerick & Burgess-Limerick, 1998). Here, however, participants were also able to

exercise power in providing clarification, elaborating on aspects of the interview summary, or correcting information that had been recorded.

After writing the results and analysing the data, participants were invited to provide feedback and comment upon the findings. Taking the time to speak with participants at the conclusion of data collection and analysis was designed to fulfil three purposes. Firstly, providing participants with an overview of the results was expected to show respect to participants by enabling them to comment upon the results. Secondly, this dialogue provided an opportunity to ensure that interpretations and analyses were appropriate and relevant. And finally, engaging in this knowledge sharing was designed to reduce the power imbalances that inevitably arise during research with human participants.

### **Reducing formality.**

When conducting research with refugees, it is important to reduce the formality of interviews and ensure that participants are comfortable (Powles, 2004). In this study, dressing in a neat casual manner was intended to reduce formality (Denton & Smith, 2001). Secondly, the layout of the interview room was constructed in order to reduce the tone of formality, and to establish a non-threatening environment (Hynes, 2003).

### **Informed Consent**

Informed consent is a key ethical principle (Burns, 2000) and is designed to safeguard the privacy and welfare of participants, and provide them with the choice to participate in the research (Arksey & Knight, 1999). Informed consent is based on the principle of autonomy and respect for individuals (Fischman, 2000).

Informed consent requires that participants are aware of a number of elements concerning their involvement in the research, namely: the purpose of the research; their right to withdraw at any time, and the foreseeable consequences of this withdrawal; the potential risks and benefits of participation; the limits of confidentiality; and the contact details of the researcher (American Psychological

Association, 2002). By providing this information, individuals are in a position to make a rational, informed, and voluntary decision about participation (Fischman, 2000; Fisher et al., 2002; Israel & Hay, 2006).

Obtaining consent can be a complex process when conducting research with refugee populations, given that standard consent procedures may be inappropriate or inadequate in refugee settings (Mackenzie et al., 2007). A flexible approach to obtaining informed consent was, therefore, necessary and constituted an ongoing process of communication (Fischman, 2000; Saldana, 2003; Sieber, 1992).

#### **Parental consent.**

Many parents of potential student participants lacked literacy skills in English and in some cases, also their native (or other spoken) language. Because of this, time was taken to provide verbal as well as written information to participants in order to ensure that consent provided was well informed.

At the time of student recruitment, eight of the 11 students who agreed to participate were 18 years of age or over. These students, therefore, did not require parental consent to participate in the study. Despite this, participant information was addressed to students and their parents/guardians (where appropriate). This decision was made because of the collective nature of African cultures. It was also designed to promote a relational understanding of autonomy, where individuals are seen as fundamentally social and relational (Mackenzie et al., 2007). While signed consent was only required from the student, it was considered important to also involve the students' parents/guardians in the decision making process, and all students were encouraged to discuss participation with a parent, guardian, family member or friend. For the three students under the age of 18 at the time of recruitment, parents and guardians were contacted and provided with verbal and written information about the research.

*Translation of participant information.*

An important aspect of obtaining informed consent is to ensure that the information is presented in language that is easily understood (Denton & Smith, 2001; Khawaja, 2011). In the current study, this involved the translation of participant information into two languages – Somali and Kiswahili<sup>21</sup> – by an individual who is competent in Somali, Kiswahili and English, both verbally and in writing<sup>22</sup>. After initial translation, both the Somali and Kiswahili translations were examined by two independent people who are fluent in English, and Somali and Kiswahili, respectively, to ensure accuracy.

*Learning some of the language.*

Two international postgraduate students from Africa provided information regarding African culture and norms in the form of informal discussions. In addition, these individuals taught me to speak a few words of the Kiswahili language. With their help, and the application of some techniques that I used to learn the Serbian language, I was also able to read Kiswahili.

Learning some of the Kiswahili language proved invaluable in one particular instance. One of the mothers of a student participant regularly attended the Mothers' Group at Fairview High School. Her ability to communicate in English was very limited, making interaction difficult. The few phrases that I learned enabled me to communicate and engage with this woman (albeit on a very basic level).

Upon presenting the woman with the written participant information (in Kiswahili), she simply stated, "No school," meaning that she was unable to read the information. Through the interactions that I had with the two African postgraduate students, I was able to read the information aloud to her. This was effective in that

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<sup>21</sup> These languages were identified after being provided with a list of Fairview High School students who met the selection criteria for participation. This list contained information about the countries of origin and the languages spoken at home.

<sup>22</sup> This individual was suggested by a Reference Group member.

she was able to understand and stated, “This is about refugees.” As a result, this mother was in a better position to understand her adult daughter’s participation in the research.

In addition to developing rapport with this mother, I also used some of the Kiswahili phrases that I had learned with the Kiswahili-speaking student participants as a means to assist in reducing formality. I believe that this demonstrated my willingness to learn about aspects of African culture which is important when conducting research with refugee groups (Powles, 2004), and assisted in developing rapport.

### **Research with Individuals from Refugee Backgrounds**

In the Australian community, refugees are not always received positively, and may not receive the sympathy of the public (Sieber, 1992). Some hold misperceptions about refugees (e.g., refugees take away the jobs of those who were born in Australia). Others confuse refugee status with the status of asylum seeker, and consider them to be ‘queue jumpers’. Furthermore, African youth are highly visible and have attracted negative media attention which has sometimes portrayed them as violent. Because of the negative portrayals, stereotypes and misperceptions, African youth can be considered a vulnerable population.

Vulnerable populations are often marginalised and, because of this marginalisation, may lack opportunities to voice their concerns, thereby rendering them invisible (Liamputtong, 2007). Despite obvious ethical considerations that must be made when working with vulnerable populations, there is a paucity of literature providing guidance for researchers to conduct such research (Bilger & van Liempt, 2009).

Conducting research with minority groups may provide the only opportunity for them to have a voice (Tilbury, 2006). The current study gave a voice to a number of new and emerging African communities, including its leaders and young people, in South Australia. This occurred through engaging African Community Mentors in ongoing collaborative relationships. While these individuals could be considered

‘vulnerable’, this research sought to focus on their capacities and capabilities in shaping the educational and employment futures of their African young people.

### **Life histories involving trauma.**

In this study, the focus was on looking towards the future (i.e., the post-school transition). This examination, however, did not occur in a vacuum where previous development and experiences were ignored. Rather, in this study, a life course approach was adopted which acknowledges the important role of past experiences in shaping present and future behaviours and actions (Elder Jr. & Johnson, 2003). Because of this, student participants were invited to share information about their lives before migrating to Australia. While trauma was not a focus of this research, students’ narratives often involved brief descriptions of life in the refugee camp and the associated challenges.

All participants received a list of counselling services at the initial interview, should participation have raised any personal issues that warranted discussion with a professional. The opportunity to access counselling services is consistent with ethical research conduct (Tilbury, 2006). For participants from refugee backgrounds, this list was accompanied by a list of other, more general services in order to provide participants with the details of additional services that are available to them (see Appendix H for the lists of support services).

### **Formal Ethics Approvals**

In addition to adhering to the ethical principles described above, it was necessary to obtain approvals from relevant institutional review boards. Three such formal approvals were required to conduct this research (see Table 7).

*Table 7.* Details of institutional review board approvals to conduct the research

<b>Institutional Review Board where approval was sought</b>	<b>Date of Application Lodgement</b>	<b>Date of Approval</b>
Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee	August, 2010	December, 2010
Research Unit, DECD	September, 2010	October, 2010
Catholic Education SA	August, 2011	September, 2011

## **Parameters of the Study**

In order to ensure that this research could be completed in a timely manner, this study was subject to a series of parameters (discussed below).

### **School Sites**

This study was delimited in the sense that the majority of the student participants were recruited through Fairview High School. While this was a parameter of the research, it did not preclude the recruitment of other school sites to be involved in the study. In addition to Fairview High School, staff from another secondary school and a senior college were involved in the research. Limiting the number of school sites facilitated a greater understanding of the contextual factors associated with each school site, and contributed to an examination of the similarities and differences between each school.

### **Retrospective Post-School Transitions**

This study followed a group of Fairview High School students who were completing Year 11 and 12 in 2011 and, therefore, examined experiences of making the transition from secondary school. That is, it did not examine a specific transition (e.g., the transition to university). This decision was made for a number of reasons. Firstly, a general view of the 'post-school transition' was considered to more accurately reflect reality. It enabled different post-school pathways to be examined. Secondly, examining different post-school pathways enabled comparisons to be made in terms of the resources that students required in order to embark upon their chosen pathway.

While the majority of student participants were engaged in the process of making the transition from secondary school, this did not preclude the involvement of students who had already made the transition (i.e., 'retrospective' student participants). This took the form of three African youth who had recently completed their South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE) at the time of data collection.



## **Number of Participants**

This study was limited to 38 participants (i.e., 14 student participants and 24 stakeholders). The decision to involve a limited number of individuals was made in order to ensure that interviews could be conducted in sufficient depth. It also enabled deeper engagement with participants' experiences and perceptions of the post-school transition. This parameter is also a limitation where time constraints prevented the involvement of additional participants.

## **Limitations of the Study**

As with all research, this study possessed a number of limitations which warrant discussion. The limitations of the current study are now discussed.

### **Cultural Differences**

As previously discussed, there were stark variations between the researcher and the majority of participants in terms of cultural background and life experience. This created the potential to complicate data collection, particularly where concepts possess different meanings across cultures. For example, Western notions of self-efficacy are understood differently in the context of a collectivist culture.

### **Language Proficiency**

English language proficiency impacted upon the data collected from some of the African participants in this study. Limited English language proficiency may have prevented some participants from being able to accurately convey their feelings, thoughts and experiences. Similarly, those with limited English language proficiency who require an interpreter were not involved in the study. The involvement of these individuals would have illuminated the inherent challenges of limited English language proficiency in terms of engaging in education and employment.

### **Absence of Parents**

Another limitation of the study was the absence of the parents of the student participants. There are a number of reasons for this limitation. While students'

parents were not interviewed in this study, this did not preclude the gathering of data from the students themselves regarding the expectations that their parents had for them in terms of post-school pathways. It has been argued that perceived support can also play a critical role in shaping an individual's behaviour and approach to stressful events (Kovacev & Shute, 2004; MacGeorge, Samter, & Gillian, 2005; Pilgrim et al., 2009). The student participants with parents who were known to be living in either Australia or Africa were asked: What does your family expect you to do when you leave school? In addition, other questions were asked about parents' occupations in the country of origin, country of asylum and, where appropriate, their occupational status in Australia.

Despite the absence of parents' voices, parental perspectives were gained from some of the African community leaders who were interviewed in this study. The comments they made about parenting and being a parent in Australia in the context of the post-school transition were based on both their own experiences as parents, and also their encounters with parents in their communities.

A future study of this kind could incorporate the voices of parents whose children are embarking on post-school pathways. This would aid in determining the types of support that parents offer, and their influence in terms of the post-school pathways of their children.

### **Male and Female Participants**

This study is limited in the sense that there was an absence of female African community leaders and elders. Incorporating the voices of respected women in the African communities would have contributed valuable insights into the complexities associated with gender in shaping post-school options and pathways. Similarly, this study is limited in the sense that only three student participants were male. While this reflected the number of male African students at Fairview High School, a larger number of male student participants would have enriched the examination of commonalities and differences.

## **Recruitment and Retention Challenges**

Locating and recruiting schools with significant numbers of African students from refugee backgrounds, in addition to other participants, proved difficult. Personal contacts, Reference Group members and African Community Mentors were relied upon for assistance with recruitment<sup>23</sup>.

Retention also posed a challenge amongst some of the African student participants. As Gifford (2013) explained, follow-up sessions with participants from refugee backgrounds can prove difficult because of the mobile nature of their lives (i.e., moving house or moving interstate). In this study, student participants were presented with a small gift, including a journal containing inspirational quotes and with the name of the participant embroidered on the cover. As Gifford (2013) stated, maintaining contact with participants is facilitated when they feel that they are part of something special. This gift was intended to do this, in addition to thanking students for their time and commitment to the study.

## **Diversity of Post-School Pathways**

This study is limited in the sense that the post-school pathways taken by student participants reflected an over-representation of education pathways. While African youth that were engaged in employment were recruited, school-to-work pathways could only be examined retrospectively.

## **Chapter Summary and Directions**

This chapter provided an overview of the study's six-phase design. It then examined the ethical considerations of conducting this research before concluding with a discussion of the parameters and limitations of the study.

The following chapter presents the education and career pathways of 14 African youth from refugee backgrounds. Throughout the chapter, the reader will walk with the participants, experiencing that which they experienced, and gaining insights into their thoughts and feelings as they made the post-school transition...

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<sup>23</sup> Recruitment difficulties were discussed earlier in this chapter.

## SECTION IV: CHRONICLES OF THE JOURNEY

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*Their story, yours and mine – it's what we all carry with us on this trip  
we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn  
from them.*

*-- William Carlos Williams*

Chapters in Section IV:

5: Tales of Transition: Results Part I

6: Perspectives on the Journey: The Voices of Educators, Service Providers  
and African Community Leaders: Results Part II

7: Unfolding Pathways: Analysis and Discussion

# Chapter 5: Tales of Transition: Results

## Part I

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*While ... today's statistics are replaced by those of tomorrow, these stories, as pieces of literature and memories of witnesses, will never lose their importance.*

*-- Mertus, Tesanovic, Metikos, and Boric (1997, p. 6)*

This chapter is entitled 'Tales of Transition' because all African youth who participated in this study are in a state of transition. Physically, they have made a transition from Africa to Australia. In navigating different social and cultural worlds on a daily basis, they remain in a transitory state. And, in the context of this study, these African youth are making the transition from secondary school and embarking upon their post-school education and career pathways.

This chapter begins by providing an overview of the geographical context of the participants. This is followed by a brief discussion of how the stories were constructed. The 14 narratives are then presented.

The tales of transition that are presented in this chapter provide critically important research data. The narratives outline the key events in the life courses of the participants, and detail their education and career aspirations, goals and decisions. In this way, these 14 stories are central to the analysis and discussion of the findings, and the development of the study's conclusions.

### **Geographical Context**

Before presenting the stories of the African youth, it is useful to have an understanding of the geographical context of each of the participants. Figure 5 indicates the countries of origin of the participants and refers to the countries of asylum in which these young people lived prior to their migration to Australia.

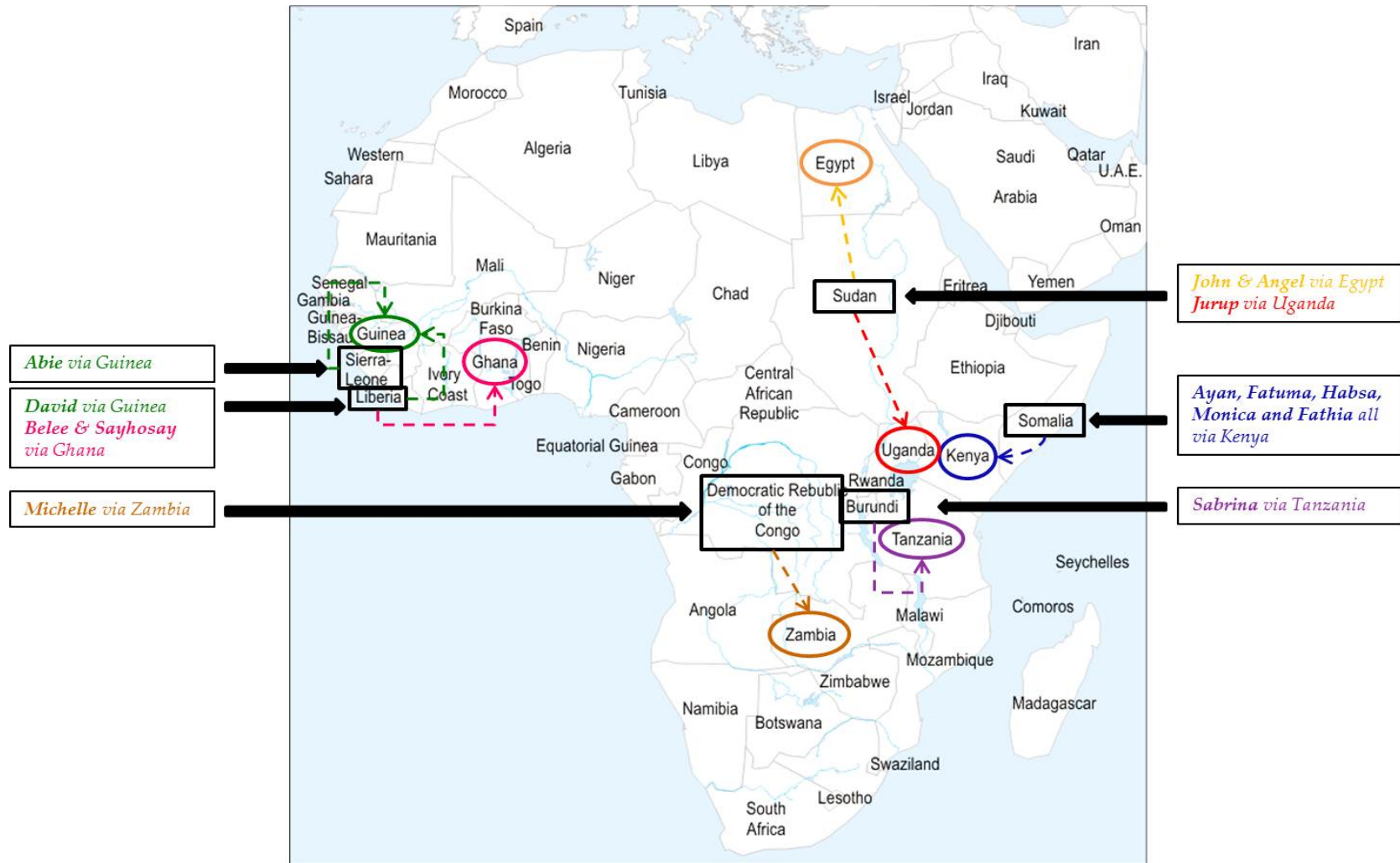


Figure 5. Map of Africa (Free World Maps, n.d.) depicting the countries with which student participants identify and the countries of asylum

From the map, it can be seen that five participants identified with Somalia, and had migrated to Australia via Kenya. Three participants identified with Liberia; Belee<sup>24</sup> and Sayhosay spent time in Ghana while David lived in Guinea before coming to Australia. Abie, the only participant from Sierra Leone, lived in a refugee camp in Guinea, like David. Three participants identified with South Sudan. John and Angel are siblings and their family fled to Egypt to seek asylum. Jurup and his family fled South Sudan, travelling to Uganda. Sabrina was born in Burundi and, soon after her birth, moved to Tanzania with her family until they migrated to Australia. Michelle was the only participant who originated from the Democratic Republic of Congo. She and her family sought asylum in Zambia.

## **Tales of Transition**

The 14 tales of transition were constructed from the perspectives of the African youth who participated in this study. Recall that data were collected primarily from multiple semi-structured interviews with participants over a 12 month period. During interviews, participants shared what they considered to be important aspects of their life histories, including moments of joy, terror, and sadness. They also contemplated the future by exploring their education and career aspirations and goals.

In analysing the 14 narratives, it was evident that each story could fill an entire book. The narratives, however, have been constructed for a purpose – to outline key events that have occurred in participants' lives in and around their education and career pathways, and the transition from secondary school. Given this purpose coupled with practical constraints (e.g., word limit), the narratives presented in this chapter provide only a small window into the lives of these young people.

The construction of these stories revealed that the participants were not always aware of, or underestimated, the multiple influences that have shaped – and will shape – their decisions, experiences, and overall life course. These narratives are,

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<sup>24</sup> Note that the names used are pseudonyms which were decided upon by the young people themselves (see Chapter 4 for a discussion of the rationale behind this decision).

therefore, limited in the sense that only the influences that the participants considered important at the time of data collection are explored.

The stories begin with an introduction in the voice of the young person. These quotations were taken directly from the initial interview with each participant and are the words that participants used to introduce themselves. This decision was made in an effort to reduce the distance between the reader and the 'main character' in each story. Furthermore, introducing the participant using his/her own words was seen to aid in maintaining the participant at the centre of the story's construction.

The stories of the participants are structured around four types of transition: Intended Transitions; the Transition to University; the Transition to TAFE; and Continuing Transitions. Each story is unique at different levels in terms of, for example, country of origin, refugee experiences, and educational background. Despite the uniqueness, there are common threads that run through each story. These common threads form the basis of discussion in Chapters 7 and 8.

### **Intended Transitions**

Seven participants (i.e., Jurup, Monica, Abie, Michelle, Sayhosay, Ayan and Habsa) were attending mainstream secondary school during the data collection period. They all completed Year 11 in 2011 and were completing Year 12 in 2012. These participants were, therefore, involved in the research as 'prospective' cases and their stories explore intended transitions from secondary school.

#### **Abie.**

*My name is Abie ... I'm African, from Sierra Leone, opposite Ghana. I came here [to Australia] with my dad ... [and] my step-mum. Me and my step-mum [were] having a bit of confusion, so I decided to leave and live [on] my own, sharing with friends ... Me and my step-mum [did] not agree ... maybe because ... I'm not her real daughter. Maybe that's why ... So, I just decided ... to leave ...*



Abie was born in 1993 in Sierra Leone, where she attended primary and secondary school. She stated that school was difficult because students undertook 12 subjects and there were no computers. In addition, teachers “beat” students for bad behaviour.

One day, in 2008, when Abie was in Year 10, her normal school day was interrupted. The Sierra Leonean conflict had worsened and she was forced to flee with her family to the neighbouring country of Guinea. Abie was 15 years old at the time.

Abie and her family lived in a Guinean refugee camp for nine months. Although education was provided in the camp, Abie did not attend school because of the trauma she had experienced in fleeing her homeland. She stated that at the time, she felt “scared, thinking about home.” In addition to the trauma of leaving Sierra Leone, Abie’s parents were experiencing marital problems which were brought about by her father’s marriage to another woman. Abie became implicated in the situation when, during her family’s interview to apply for refugee status, her father instructed Abie to say that her mother was dead, should they ask about her whereabouts. When the question was posed, however, Abie stated, “I don’t know where my mum is.”

The family’s application was accepted and Abie arrived in Adelaide in June, 2009 with her father and step-mother, under the Special Humanitarian Program (visa 202). Abie’s mother remained behind in Africa, where she continues to live.

One month after arriving in Australia, Abie and her step-mother experienced what Abie described as “confusion.” Abie stated that whenever she assisted with domestic duties, her step-mother “never appreciated [it], or she [would] complain.” Abie explained the situation to her father, but “he just ignored what [she was] saying.” Consequently, Abie made the decision to move out of the family home and moved in with one of her mother’s friends, whom Abie knew in Africa and refers to her as ‘aunt’. These family and housing difficulties compounded other resettlement

challenges, such as needing to adapt to the Australian lifestyle and “catch up with English.”

After her arrival, Abie attended the Adelaide Secondary School of English (ASSOE) for nine months. Although she could have spent a longer period of time at the school, Abie was focussed on the future. She stated that it was “time to go forward, not backwards.” Abie assumed that attending ASSOE for an extended period of time would significantly prolong her education.

In 2010, Abie enrolled in Year 10 at Fairview High School<sup>25</sup>. Initially, she found mainstream schooling “difficult” because of the nature of the schoolwork. Despite this, she was “trying [her] best to get a good grade.” During the year, Abie completed work experience at a nursing home, which she found rewarding because it assisted her to develop an understanding of the aged care industry. This work experience prompted Abie to undertake a Vocational Education and Training (VET) course in aged care, which she completed in 2011. Following the completion of this qualification, Abie was able to find part-time employment in an aged care facility. She was still engaged in this work at the time of the interviews.

As a result of completing this VET course, Abie had nearly fulfilled the requirements to gain her South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE). She was only required to complete one subject, the Research Project, in order to obtain her certificate. Despite this, Abie undertook two additional subjects in her final year of secondary school: Numeracy for Work and Community Life, and Workplace Practices. It is likely that Abie made this decision in light of the advice she received from her aunt, that completing Year 12 is highly advantageous because of the numerous post-school options that become available.

Two Fairview High School teachers reported that Abie “struggles” (Rob) in the mainstream. Kerri stated that Abie was in need of additional support but “unfortunately, with special ed[ucation] now, they’ve moved the ... bar in order to get recognition for a student with a disability,” which means that she is unable to

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<sup>25</sup> Recall that this is a pseudonym for the school that participated in the study.

access “SSO [school services officer] support.” Abie’s difficulty with academic tasks has made it difficult for her to engage with some senior school subjects. This is likely to have shaped her subject selections.

Although Abie has found satisfactory employment in the aged care industry, her future goal is to become a registered nurse. Her desire is to attend university instead of “sitting and ... wasting time.” Abie’s alternative plan is to complete enrolled nursing at a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institute. She has discussed her post-school plans with her friends, who have suggested that TAFE is a good pathway to completing an enrolled nursing qualification, which can then lead to university entrance to complete registered nursing.

*Abie completed her SACE in 2012. In 2013, she did not receive an offer to study at TAFE or university. I was able to learn from other participants that, following the completion of Year 12, Abie continued to work in the aged care industry.*

### **Sayhosay.**

*I’m Sayhosay ... and I came to Australia in 2009 on the 10<sup>th</sup> of June, which is my birthday ... I’m a Liberian, but I grew up in Ghana in a refugee camp ... I know I’m a Liberian, but I don’t know my country ...*

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Sayhosay was born in 1993 in Liberia but moved to Ghana with her aunt, her cousin and her brother when she was very young. The family lived in a refugee camp where life was difficult. She stated that sometimes “you finish the day without eating anything.” There was also “a lot of sickness and no proper place to sleep. You’re sleeping in a tent.” During this time, Sayhosay



*Children participating in a program in a Ghana refugee camp (Right to Play, 2010).*

and her brother learned from their aunty that their parents were missing, presumed dead.

Sayhosay lived in the refugee camp until she was 16 years old. During this time, she attended school, although it was very different to school in Australia. Sayhosay stated that “it wasn’t really like a school.” Rather, children were simply gathered together to “keep [pass] the time ... They just put you there ... to keep your mind out of the outside thinking [thinking about war].” This ‘school’ was run by “some white women from Australia,” who would “come and give you biscuits, lollies ... It was just like having fun.”

In 2009, Sayhosay migrated to Australia with her family under the Special Humanitarian Program (visa 202). Soon after arriving, she began attending ASSOE, where she remained for 10 months. ASSOE was Sayhosay’s first experience of formal schooling. She stated that “it was my first time to be in the classroom. My first time to read, my first time to speak English, my first time in everything about school.”

Amidst beginning formal schooling, Sayhosay (like Abie) experienced housing difficulties in living with her uncle and his wife. Sayhosay and her aunt “used to have quarrels [and] confusion,” which were largely based on different religious practices. She explained, “Me, I’m a Christian. She is a Muslim ... I feel like she’s taking me from what I believe in ... If she is fasting ... she wants us to do the same, which is not really fair.” Consequently, Sayhosay made the decision to move out of the home and into independent living. Although she no longer lives in this environment, there are multiple challenges associated with living alone, such as having “no one to talk to.”

In April 2010, Sayhosay enrolled in Year 10 at Fairview High School. Rob acknowledged that for students who are living independently, schooling can be difficult because they “have got a lot more on their plate” than other students from stable homes. He stated that despite her difficult experiences, Sayhosay is “doing

well” at school which was reflected in Sayhosay’s first semester report where her teachers’ comments reflected a positive transition to mainstream schooling.

Since arriving in Australia, Sayhosay has experienced difficulty in deciding on a career path. She considered this “the most challenging thing ... It’s really confusing ... This is my second year in Australia ... I don’t really know how things work, I don’t know what I need to study. I don’t know what I want to do.”

Initially, Sayhosay wanted to join the Australian Defence Force, but she was unable to realise this dream because of health problems. Sayhosay was born with an enlarged heart, a condition which causes her to fatigue quickly. This condition was only diagnosed and treated upon arrival in Australia. Sayhosay’s ultimate goal, however, is to be able to return to her country, equipped with skills that she can apply in supporting her African community. Her desire is to undertake a course of study in Australia that will equip her with skills to:

*... be able to go back to my country and do the same thing ... I don’t want to do something in Australia that when I go to my country, I can’t do, you know? Because I’m planning on going to my country and helping other people. So, that’s why I’m really confused. I need more information.*

Despite the difficulties associated with choosing a suitable career pathway, Sayhosay developed an aspiration to work in the aged care industry after completing work experience in Year 10 at a nursing home. Her placement supervisor supported Sayhosay’s decision to pursue this kind of work, stating that Sayhosay was “caring and good with residents.”

Following this work placement, Sayhosay and her friend, Abie completed a VET course in aged care with a view to gaining employment in the industry. This course provided both students with enough points to nearly complete their SACE. Sayhosay had enough Stage 2 credits to gain her SACE following the completion of the research project.

In the meantime, Sayhosay completed Year 11 in 2011 with the following subjects: Biology, English as a Second Language (ESL), Integrated Studies, Music, Numeracy for Work and Community Life, Society and Culture, Design and Multimedia, and Workplace Practices. Throughout the year, Sayhosay had a total of 60 whole day absences, 38 of which were unexplained which, according to teacher Rob, was a cause for great concern amongst her teachers. Rob stated that:

*Teachers around here [are] saying, 'Bloody Sayhosay. She's never at school. She's always away. You know, she's working. You know, she's got to get her priorities right.' ... Sayhosay has her priorities right! [laughs] ... As well as looking after herself, she has a part-time job.*

Sayhosay stated that she enjoys her work in aged care, and has received recognition for her efforts from her workplace. She reported that she was awarded a certificate for being “one of the best workers,” of which she is proud, particularly as she had only been working in the facility for “eight ... nine months.”

*During 2012, Sayhosay stopped attending school. In Term 1, Sayhosay was absent for 20 days. After being unable to contact Sayhosay, I learned from her friend, Abie that Sayhosay had chosen to leave school early and is now working full-time in aged care. This was confirmed by Sayhosay's brother, whom I happened to meet in May, 2013.*

### **Michelle.**

*I'm Michelle ... from the Congo. I migrated to Australia with my family. I'm the oldest of six children – five girls and one boy ... When the war began in the Congo, we fled to Zambia where we waited for protection for nine years ...*

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Michelle was four years old when she left the Democratic Republic of Congo for a Zambian refugee camp with her parents, siblings and grandmother. Consequently, much of her childhood was spent outside her country of birth.

During the family's nine-year stay, Michelle's parents had "to go out and look for [work]" and consequently, did not live with Michelle and her siblings:

*My parents were in town, and we were in the camp ... My mum was doing nursing, midwifery, and my dad was a businessman ... In Congo, my dad ... was a teacher. And then when he went in Zambia ... he didn't want to be a teacher again. He wanted to be ... a businessman.*

Despite living with her grandmother during this time, Michelle found it was difficult being away from her parents. She stated that she and her siblings felt "lonely ... like orphans."



*Zambian camp for refugees from the Democratic Republic of Congo (Guyson, 2010).*

In Michelle's family, education "is important." Her parents' views of education are likely to have been

shaped by their own educational experiences. Because education is important, Michelle was encouraged by her parents to attend primary school in the refugee camp. She explained: "We learnt [in] French and just [a] small [amount of] English. Just how to say, 'Hi ... Where are you going?' Stuff like that." Michelle stated that attending school was a positive aspect of her life at the time because she had "good teachers."

In August 2008, Michelle and her family left Zambia and migrated to Australia as refugees (visa 200). She was 16 years old at the time and had completed seven years of primary school in the refugee camp.

One month after their arrival, Michelle began attending ASSOE, where she remained until October 2010. In 2011, she enrolled in Year 11 at Fairview High School. During the year, Michelle completed Biology, Furniture Construction, ESL, Music, Numeracy for Work and Community Life, and Workplace Practices.

As part of her workplace practices subject, Michelle completed work experience in an aged care facility. Despite having a positive work experience, Michelle reported that she “[doesn’t] really want to do aged care.” Instead, her goal is to become a midwife. Michelle was inspired to follow this career path by her mother who worked as a midwife in Africa. She has discussed her plans with her family who are supportive of her decision. She stated that “they already accept it ... I’ve been talking to my parents, my family, about what I’m going to do ... and they say it’s alright.”

When asked to comment upon Michelle’s academic abilities, her ESL teacher, Rob, stated that she is a “delightful young woman.” Initially, she “was *very* quiet and withdrawn” but she is now “quietly confident.” Rob stated that while her written work is “adequate ... she will struggle with Stage 2 [Year 12] subjects, with the language demands.” Consequently, Rob concluded that he does not think that “she’s a university candidate.”

In reflecting on her educational history and looking towards the future, Michelle stated that coming from a refugee background has impacted upon her post-school options:

*Sometimes, I was ... thinking, if I came earlier ... [when] I was like four years old, I could have finished my study. But because ... I came when I was like 15 or 16 years old ... I’m a little bit late, you know? Behind [in] everything ...*

*Michelle completed high school in 2012. In 2013, her name did not appear amongst the first or second round university or TAFE offers. Contact with Michelle was lost and no knowledge of her post-school plans has been gained.*

### **Jurup.**

*I was born in Sudan ... but I grew [up] in the country called Uganda ... [We moved] because of war ... At that time, I was little, like three months [old]. I don’t remember [anything about Sudan], just my mum tells me about it ... That’s where I*



*[have] grown [up] [in Uganda]. And I start my nursery school up to the high school, [and] then I came to Australia.*

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Jurup was born in South Sudan in 1994. Soon after his birth, Jurup's father died "because he was police" and, therefore, a target. Jurup, however, does not know the details of his father's death. At the time, Jurup's mother, who was working as a businesswoman, decided to take Jurup and his three older brothers to Uganda to escape the conflict in South Sudan and to prevent any further loss of life in the family.

Soon after arriving in Uganda, Jurup's oldest brother returned to Sudan as part of the UNHCR's repatriation program, where he continues to live and work as a mechanic. In addition, another one of Jurup's brothers<sup>26</sup> moved to Kenya to live with an aunt until 2005, when they migrated to Australia as refugees. Jurup remained in Uganda with his mother and brother<sup>27</sup>.

In the meantime, Jurup began attending school, completing nursery and primary school. Instruction was provided in English and the "local language." Following this, Jurup began high school.

In Uganda, classes were large with "a hundred [and] something [students] in one class." In addition, there were only a "few" textbooks that were owned by teachers and there was no homework; rather, all exercises were completed in class. Punishment for misbehaviour involved "strokes, [the] cane ..."



*A refugee camp in Kampala, Uganda (Behrmann, 2007).*

<sup>26</sup> Since migrating to Australia, Jurup's older brother has completed a science degree and is now preparing to undertake a degree in medicine.

<sup>27</sup> Jurup's brother began a degree in psychology before transferring to a combined degree in social work and social planning. He is due to complete this course at the end of 2013.

In 2010, 16 years after fleeing South Sudan, Jurup along with his mother and brother migrated to Australia under the Special Humanitarian Program (visa 202). Upon arrival, Jurup did not attend ASSOE. This decision was made on his brother's advice and in light of his prior schooling:

*When I was in Africa, I was in high school ... I almost finished ... [By] the time I reached here [Australia], my brother [was] saying ... it's useless for me to go to ... that school [ASSOE], so let me straight away continue from Year 11 ... I think it was a good decision.*

In 2011, Jurup enrolled in Year 11 at Fairview High School. Both Rob and Kerri believe that Jurup would have made an easier transition to high school had he first attended ASSOE. Kerri stated that Jurup's family "demanded, requested, argued very strongly" that he commence mainstream high school without attending the New Arrivals Program (NAP). Consequently, she believes that Jurup "did himself an injustice by being thrown in the deep end." Similarly, Rob stated that by not attending ASSOE, Jurup "was going to have great difficulty ... Anything with written and oral assessment components, he will struggle with, although, his English has improved significantly during the year."

Jurup stated that English language communication was the greatest challenge he faced in beginning school in Australia. According to Jurup, "most of the teachers [say] ... it's difficult to understand me sometimes." This was reiterated by Kerri who stated that "staff are divided, whether they can understand his English or not." Such communication difficulties became critical when Jurup had a disagreement with his teacher regarding his mathematics grade, which resulted in his suspension from school. He stated that "the way [the teacher] responded to me, she made me angry, so I walked out from the class ... That's why they suspended me." Although Jurup's family were "not happy with [him]," his brother was able to give him "advice" on "how to approach teachers in the class," which helped him to improve his relationships with his teachers. Jurup stated that he prefers to seek help from his brothers regarding school matters as opposed to his mother. He explained that his mother "[doesn't] understand English."

In addition to teachers citing difficulties in understanding him, Jurup explained that understanding people in Australia has proven difficult because of “the way people speak English here [in Australia].” He stated that the accent in addition to the speed at which people speak makes it difficult to understand. Jurup explained that “if the ... person is speaking quick[ly], then I can’t understand. If they’re speaking slowly, I can get it.”

In 2011, Jurup’s aspiration was to become a nurse. He developed this aspiration while he was studying Biology in Uganda. Jurup’s brothers were supportive of his decision. In considering his mother’s role in assisting him to make post-school plans, Jurup referred to the difficulties in engaging his mother in his education and career decision-making:

*I can talk to my mum, too, but ... most of the things ... about school or whatever, I think my brothers, they will help me better ... If I tell her [my mother], even though she came here, she [doesn’t] understand English ... The first thing, I have to tell my brothers ... Telling my mum, I will tell her and let her know about it ... but doing some action ... she can’t do it.*

Because Jurup only enrolled at Fairview High School at the beginning of Year 11, the school found it difficult to arrange suitable work experience for him. That is, work experience that was tailored to his career goals. Consequently, he completed work experience at Fairview High School in which he shadowed teaching staff.

In the meantime, Jurup began studying Biology; a subject he had enjoyed in Uganda. It soon became evident, however, that he was struggling with the subject matter, which was reflected in his first semester results. Jurup attributed this to the teaching at Fairview High School which “is quite different” to that which he experienced in Uganda. He explained that at Fairview High School, “they don’t write things [down] ... Mostly, they will print that stuff and give it to you and ... [then you] read from it, then explaining it to us, but it gets difficult.” Despite this, Jurup persisted with Biology in Semester 2 in addition to ESL, Integrated Studies, Numeracy for Work and Community Life, and Physical Education.

In considering Year 12 subject selections, Jurup stated that the school took the majority of the responsibility for making these decisions. From the subjects that teachers “gave” him, he came to the realisation that “there’s no combination” associated with a career in nursing. This prompted Jurup to reconsider his post-school options. While completing Year 12, Jurup stated that he wanted to study accounting, explaining that he had two options – retail and administration. Jurup stated, “I think they are related, doing the same work ... That’s what they [the teachers] told me.”

In Year 12, Jurup completed the following subjects: Workplace Practices; ESL; the Research Project; Mathematical Applications; and Society and Culture. His first term results indicated that he was struggling with Mathematics and Society and Culture.

*Jurup completed Year 12 in 2012. In 2013, he was offered a place at TAFE to complete a Certificate IV in Dental Assisting but did not accept this offer because it was outside of his area of interest. Jurup was then offered a place in a nursing course at Gilles Plains TAFE, but this offer was revoked because the course is designed for students with nursing experience, which precluded Jurup from participating. He was then taken to complete a test and was granted a place in a laboratory technician course at TAFE, beginning in Semester 2, 2013. Before beginning this course, Jurup began working at Hungry Jack’s on the advice of his older brother, who was unhappy with Jurup staying at home, idle.*

**Monica.**

*My name’s Monica ... I’m the oldest of six kids and ... I live with my mum and my step-father, who works somewhere far away in Bordertown ... He cuts meat there ... I’m Somali. My mum is ... raised in Somalia, her mum is Somali ... but she’s Eritrean ... so that’s where her dad is from, but she’s like a Somali Eritrean ... I have a different father to all my brothers and sisters ... I’ve never met him [my father] before.*

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In 1994, in order to escape the conflict in Somalia, Monica's mother fled to the neighbouring country of Kenya, where she went to live in a refugee camp. At the time, Monica's mother was pregnant. Early the following year, in 1995, Monica was born and three years later, Monica and her mother migrated to Australia under the Woman at Risk scheme (visa 204).

After their arrival, Monica's mother met and married a Somali man and the couple had two children together – a son and a daughter. Monica's mother then separated from this man before marrying her current husband. The couple have a son and two daughters. Monica has three sisters and two brothers, all of whom were born in Australia, and the family of eight live together.

Because Monica was a small child when she left Africa, she has very few memories of her life in Kenya. In addition to her own memories, Monica has engaged her mother in conversation about their shared past. Monica's mother "said it [the war in Somalia] was really bad. She had a hard life." Because she and her siblings grew up in Australia, Monica stated that her family is "more Australian than Somali." She stated that her siblings "don't really understand the Somali culture and stuff, and neither do I." Despite this limited cultural understanding, Monica feels as though she is "halfway" between the Somali and Australian cultures." She stated that:

*We are ... a lot like Australian families and we are a lot like Somali families ... We don't go in both places. We speak English at home and stuff, but we wear long clothes ... I feel like we're Somali in terms of what we eat and how we [act] ...*

Monica credits her developing knowledge of Somali culture to the friends that she has made at school. She stated that "it was only since [she] got Somali friends" at Fairview High School that she started to learn about the culture. Monica stated, "I'm speaking Somali now because all my friends are Somali, so all the people I hang out with now are Somali. So, I speak Somali. I try to."

Having Somali friends has, however, created some tension between Monica and one of her sisters. Monica's sister has labelled her "'FOB' ... fresh off the boat" and has stated that she is "going to be FOB for [her] whole life."

Because Monica was not of school age at the time of migration, her education in Australia began in a mainstream primary school. When she was in primary school, Monica was diagnosed with dyslexia. She stated, “I have spelling difficulties. So, that’s what I find challenging ... spelling words out and stuff ... If I was good at spelling, I’d be able to have all my work done, because I understand the work.”

After completing primary school, Monica began secondary school at an Islamic high school. After one term at the faith-based school, Monica decided that she “didn’t really like it” and moved to Fairview High School, where she completed her secondary education.

Although she was provided with strategies to overcome this learning difficulty when she was first diagnosed with dyslexia, Monica prefers to rely heavily on her memory. She stated that she has “a good memory. So, if you tell me what this word is, I will remember it.” Despite having significant difficulties with spelling, Monica did not believe that she was able to seek support from her teachers to overcome her obstacles. In addition, she does not believe that there is support available to her, given her unique position as a student from a refugee background:

*I feel like all the help there is, I don’t get because people don’t consider me as ... being like a new arrival and a refugee, because I’ve been here over 13 years ... Any program there is, it’s really strict on how long you’ve been here. I don’t feel that’s right.*

Rob commented on Monica’s school performance. He stated that she has difficulty with written expression and also has poor attendance and punctuality. Rob stated that Monica is “away an awful lot. She’s frequently late. She doesn’t complete her work, and her written work is very poor.” Despite these issues, he stated that Monica is “a nice kid.”

In 2011, Monica completed Year 11 with the following subjects: ESL, Food and Hospitality, Numeracy for Work and Community Life, Art, Integrated Studies, and Design and Multimedia. Because of her dyslexia, Monica is proud of herself for having completed Year 11. She explained: “I didn’t think I would get this far with

my spelling difficulties. I didn't think I'd ever be in Year 11. I don't think my mum even thought I'd be in Year 11, [and] getting a job at Hungry Jack's."

In 2012, Monica completed: ESL; the Research Project; Food and Hospitality; Society and Culture; and Visual Arts (Design). When discussing her Year 12 subject choices, Monica stated that she "just picked" the subjects on her own. Her mother was not involved in the decision making process. She stated that "we don't talk about school ... we don't have time. I'm always at work. My mum's always like running after some child." Consequently, Monica made her own subject selections. She stated that ESL and the research project were compulsory; hence, she had no choice in completing these subjects. For the remaining three subjects, Monica stated she "just chose them" because she had completed the subjects in Year 11, "so it will be easier just to probably do them [in Year 12]."

Monica's aspiration is to pursue a career in event management. According to Kerri, she was inspired to become an event manager in order to "follow in [her mother's] footsteps" who, despite not having a qualification, organises parties and functions in the Somali community. Monica became further interested in this type of work from watching a television show called, 'Whose Wedding is it Anyway?'

Upon completing Year 12, Monica's goal was to attend university and complete a three-year course in event management. Despite TAFE options in the same field, Monica wanted to move to university, stating that "when you go to work in the future, they like people that come from unis more than people that are from TAFE." In addition, she stated that her mother "expects" her "to go to university." Following the completion of event management, Monica's goal is to become a wedding planner:

*I want to have my own wedding planner business ... and I want to be an entrepreneur ... and make money ... I want to be very successful. I want you to see me ... in the newspaper and say, 'I used to know her ...'*

Ultimately, Monica's ultimate aim is "to succeed [to achieve] more than my parents have." She stated that this aspiration is "making [her] strive for more."

*In 2012, Monica completed Year 12 and her SACE. At the end of the academic year, she was offered a university place in a Bachelor of Tourism and Event Management degree at the University of South Australia. During the first semester, Monica was assessed and again, was diagnosed with dyslexia. She reported that she struggles with the academic work, and is seeking a private tutor to edit her assignments and support her learning of the content. Apart from these challenges, Monica is enjoying the university student lifestyle of being able to 'come and go' as she pleases.*

### **Habsa.**

*I was born in Kenya, but I'm Somali background, and I came here [to Australia] with my parents and my sisters. I've got five sisters. Right now, I live with my sisters and my mum ... [I came to Australia] three years ago, in 2008.*

\*\*\*

Habsa was born in 1993 in Utanga refugee camp, in Mombasa, southern Kenya. Like Monica, Habsa has a limited understanding of the circumstances that led to her parents' journey from Somalia to Kenya. Habsa stated:

*My parents didn't tell me much because the story is too sad ... All I know is that, like, fights happened and then my mum got lost ... without her family, and then she came to Kenya. And then she met my dad there ... She was like my age, she was 17.*



*View of the coastal city of Mombasa, Kenya (War is Boring, 2008).*

Habsa is the oldest of eight children. While six of the children in the family are still alive, one of Habsa's sisters and her only brother died in Kenya as a result of inadequate medical treatment in the refugee camp.

When Habsa was a small child, she and her family moved from Mombasa to Nairobi where she and her sisters attended school. Habsa stated that school was challenging because there were typically 45 students in any given class and "you



have to ... fight to get a position in the school, otherwise you won't have an opportunity to study." Habsa studied Social Studies, Science, Mathematics, English, and Swahili. She also studied Music, Physical Education, and Christian and Islamic Religious Education.

In Nairobi, the Kenyan government paid half of a student's school fees, and parents paid the remainder. This was particularly difficult for Habsa's family, given that her mother did not work and her father only had occasional work with the UNHCR. This difficult financial situation resulted in the family's decision to return to the Utanga refugee camp in 2005. It was at this stage that Habsa's family applied for resettlement.

During the three-year wait, Habsa and her siblings attended school in the refugee camp, and they were amongst the best performing students in their respective classes. Although she was performing well, Habsa preferred the school in Nairobi, stating that she felt safer there:

*The Sudanese kids [in the refugee camp school], they normally fight ... and they're big, like big men ... So, you get scared ... During the exams, if they ask you, 'Help me with Swahili,' and you don't, outside, you are dead. Like, normally, they fight outside. But nobody ever beat me because I was just, 'Okay, yes boss.'*

In addition to school-related fears, Habsa and her family felt unsafe living in the refugee camp. They faced the constant threat of being pillaged during the night.

In September, 2008, Habsa and her family migrated to Australia as refugees (visa 200). One month later, she enrolled at ASSOE where she studied for 14 months. She enjoyed her time at the school, "meeting a lot of people from different cultures", making friends, and interacting with her teachers. Habsa stated that she "didn't find anything difficult" at the school, largely because of her previous knowledge of English. She acknowledged that "it's very hard to teach somebody English ... any language, when they never heard of it before. For me, it wasn't that bad ... because I knew English."

In 2010, Habsa enrolled in Year 10 at Fairview High School. During the year, she completed work experience at the Salvation Army, a department store, and at a makeup retailer. None of these work placements were related to Habsa's career aspirations at the time. Habsa stated that she was considering a career in "something to do with medicine." In considering the origins of these aspirations, Habsa agreed that her interest in medicine had come from witnessing the deaths of two of her siblings in Kenya. Habsa's mother was also encouraging her to pursue a career in medicine. Later, however, Habsa came to the realisation that medicine "is too challenging ... it's over-challenging," prompting her to consider an alternative career pathway. One of Habsa's teachers suggested "communication art" because she is "good at writing."

In 2012, during Habsa's final year of high school, she reported that her post-school plans and career aspirations had changed. At that time, Habsa was considering a course in tourism and business, and stated that this change had been prompted by her performance in science. She arrived at the conclusion that "the English in science is very difficult" and made the decision to "improve [her] basic English" skills. Despite these difficulties with language, Habsa does not regret having completed science subjects at school because it enabled her to "understand that [she] can change [her] mind" with regards to her career aspirations.

Following this decision, Habsa felt "more confident" with her post-school plans. At this time, her family were also supportive of her career plans. She stated that previous support from her family was "kind of different ... Now, they're giving me more options ... Maybe I've grown, or maybe they think it's right to give me more space."

In reflecting upon her educational opportunities, Habsa stated that coming from a refugee background has shaped her post-school options. She believes that "people give you more chances ... Some people, not all people. And that helps you to reach higher [goals] ..."

*After completing Year 12 in 2012, Habsa applied for university. In 2013, she was offered and accepted a place in a Bachelor of Business degree at Flinders University.*

**Ayan.**

*I was born in Kenya ... My father died when I ... wasn't even born ... I grew up with my mum and with my sister. I live here [in Australia] with my cousins and my mother and my aunt. And we came to Australia in ... April 2009.*

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Ayan was born in 1993 in Kenya. A few months prior to her birth, Ayan's mother witnessed the death of her husband, Ayan's father, in Somalia. This experience prompted Ayan's mother to flee to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. Consequently, Ayan was born and raised in a Kenyan refugee camp.

When she reached school age, Ayan attended primary school in the refugee camp. Towards the end of her primary schooling, she received a scholarship which enabled her to attend primary school in Nairobi. Soon after, however, in November, 2008, Ayan's family made the decision to apply for resettlement. A condition of this application process was that the family remain in the refugee camp pending a final decision. Consequently, Ayan was unable to complete her primary schooling in the city. Fortunately, the resettlement application was processed within a few months and in April 2009, Ayan migrated to Australia with her family under the Woman at Risk scheme (visa 204). She was 16 years old at the time.

One month after her arrival, Ayan began attending ASSOE, something that contradicted her intended educational plans. Ayan believed that she would be able to enter mainstream high school as soon as she arrived in Australia. Despite this, Ayan attended ASSOE and stated that the "multicultural" nature of the school, coupled with her "English level" at the time of migration, made it easy to settle. She attended the school for eight months.

In 2010, Ayan enrolled in Year 10 at Fairview High School. During the year, Ayan completed work experience at a makeup shop. While she found the work

interesting, Ayan stated that it was not a career that she would like to pursue in the future. She would have preferred to have completed work experience in a hospital, but stated that all positions had been filled and “some hospitals, they don’t accept students.”

In 2011, Ayan completed Year 11 at Fairview High School. During the year, she completed the following subjects: Biology; Communication Products; ESL; Food and Hospitality; Mathematics Applications; Workplace Practices; and Integrated Studies.

Initially, Ayan felt pressured from her mother about her post-school plans because her mother “always used to tell [her], ‘Be a doctor, be a doctor.’” Fortunately, Ayan was able to explain to her mother that it is important “to do what I am interested in ...” which enabled Ayan to exercise more independence in making post-school plans while receiving support from her family.

When asked what she would like to become if she had no obstacles, Ayan stated that she would like to have a career in law. This, however, was not seen as a viable option because “a lawyer sometimes lies” in order “to defend his client ... In our religion [Islam], no one is allowed to lie.”

Towards the end of 2011, Ayan stated that after completing Year 12, she intends to complete a degree in physiotherapy. She developed this aspiration when she was in Year 10 and stated that she would enjoy “helping patients.” Ayan stated that undertaking this course would take less time than completing other health-related courses such as medicine. She stated that physiotherapy “is hard ... but it won’t take you a long time ... to study.” Ayan sought advice from individuals at university open days to aid her in determining what Year 12 subjects to choose in order to prepare for a degree in physiotherapy.

In 2012, Ayan completed Year 12 with the following subjects: Biology, ESL, Food and Hospitality, the Research Project, and Society and Culture. She had taken the advice of one physiotherapist that she met at a careers expo and elected not to complete Physics in Year 12, believing that poor academic performance in the

subject would compromise her overall Year 12 results and ultimately, her ability to gain a university place.

Ayan's ultimate goal, however, is to become a cardiologist. She stated that this would be a goal "for the future, after I graduate from uni." Ayan developed an aspiration to become a cardiologist when she was attending primary school in Kenya. During Science lessons, she became interested in learning about the human circulatory system and the structure and function of the heart. This future goal is also likely to have been shaped by her mother's suggestion that Ayan should consider a career in medicine. Describing this as a *future* goal may act as a compromise in appeasing her mother and her expectations for Ayan.

Over the course of the year, Ayan began reconsidering her post-school options in light of her academic performance. She stated that "you need ... a lot of points" to study physiotherapy. Furthermore, she arrived at the conclusion that she does not enjoy physics. Ayan then began considering an alternative option – registered nursing – as a potential post-school pathway. It is likely that Ayan considered nursing as an alternative option because she may have perceived this as a more achievable goal.

*After completing Year 12 in 2012, Ayan chose to complete Year 13 with a view to improving her overall academic score. In 2013, she began Year 13 in a part-time capacity, studying workplace practices and food and hospitality. Ayan stated that this decision was strongly influenced by her step-father. During the year, I worked with Ayan at Homework Club. She mentioned that she had made the decision to pursue midwifery as a potential career pathway, with nursing as a fall-back option. Ayan arrived at this decision after spending time with her baby nephew and realising that she might enjoy working with babies.*

## **The Transition to University**

In this section, four tales of transition are told. The stories of Fatuma, David, Fathia and Angel are centred around the transition from secondary school to university.

**Fatuma.**

*My name is Fatuma. I came from Somalia. I came to Australia in 2009. Currently, I'm living alone. I've got no family here. I got separated from my family when I was 13. I came here with a foster family through the UNHCR process ... They were Somali. And then, a week later, when I was very new to Australia ... I was kicked out of their home and I was homeless a bit. And then I got a home. And now, at least ... I'm someone ...*

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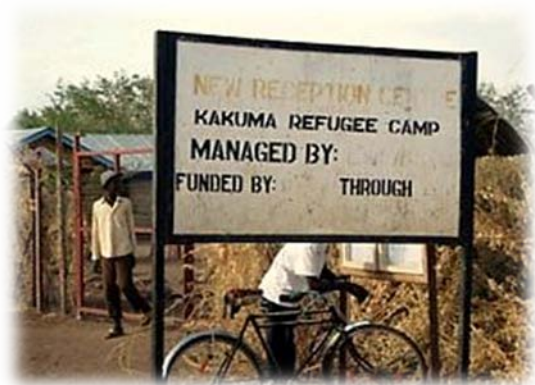
Fatuma was born in 1990 in Bu'aale, Somalia and is the only girl in a family of six. When she was two years old, due to ongoing conflict, the family moved to Mogadishu, Somalia's capital city. One day in September, 2003, Fatuma and her younger brother were returning from Madrasa (religious instruction) to find that their home had been targeted by militia:

*... we came from Madrasa, me and my brother, coming home, there [were] only the corpses of my two brothers ... There was nothing else ... We were so scared and went back to my dad's, where he used to work, and when we went there, it was all burning everywhere ... And then we were walking ... We don't know where we were heading. And then a woman, our neighbour, took us from there ...*

After failed attempts to find their parents, Fatuma and her brother travelled with their neighbour and her three daughters to Liboi, near the Kenya/Somalia border, in search of accommodation. Before long, a one bedroom apartment was found in Nairobi, which presented a problem. Islamic law and Somali tradition states that boys and girls are forbidden from sharing the same sleeping quarters. While Fatuma remained with the neighbour and her children, her brother had to find other accommodation. "And that's the time that me and my brother got separated." Fatuma was 13 years old at the time.

After travelling to Nairobi, Fatuma and her neighbour's daughters began attending school where they learned English and Swahili, amongst other subjects. Fatuma performed well at school and in 2006, she was ranked 1 out of 69 students<sup>28</sup>.

One year later, Fatuma's neighbours were granted refugee status and left Kenya for the United States, where the woman and her daughters were reunited with their husband and father. Then, Fatuma "was left alone." She travelled to Kakuma refugee camp. Because she was under the age of 18, Fatuma was required to select a foster family with whom to live. Fortunately, the first family whom she met had known her family in Bu'aale, which made it easy for Fatuma to make the decision to stay with the family. She stated that "they were the only family that I had ... at that time."



*Entrance to Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya (Turnbull, 2012).*

After settling into Kakuma with her new foster family, Fatuma began attending school in the camp. In addition, because of the language skills she had developed at school in

Nairobi, Fatuma secured part-time employment with the UNHCR as an interpreter. This enabled her to practise her English, Somali and Swahili language skills while also receiving some financial support.

In 2009, Fatuma and her foster family were granted refugee visas (category 200) to migrate to Australia, arriving in Adelaide in August of that year. One week later, Fatuma was told to leave her foster family's home. She stated that "when we came here, it was like, 'You are in Australia. Look for your own home.' I was like, 'Oh my God! What can I do?'" And so Fatuma became homeless. This created immense challenges for Fatuma. She recalled: "I didn't know the country. I didn't know [any]

<sup>28</sup> Fatuma's school, like many others in Africa, utilised a ranking system to assess student performance. A ranking of 1 is awarded to the student with the best academic performance in the class.

one. I had no one ... Not knowing anyone, not knowing the place ... Not knowing what to do ... I used to cry a lot." Fortunately, Fatuma learned how to navigate her way through the support services and secured accommodation at the beginning of 2010, when she began living independently. She was 19 years old at the time.

Amidst housing difficulties, Fatuma began attending the NAP at Thebarton Senior College, on the recommendation of a caseworker. Soon after she began studying, however, it became obvious to Fatuma that she had already learned what was being taught. She stated, "you learn A, B, C, D ... I didn't know what to do!" Fatuma persisted, however, and completed three months at the senior college. Following this, she enquired about studying aged care at TAFE, with a view to becoming a nurse. After discussing her options with a TAFE counsellor, Fatuma was told that she could enter mainstream high school and complete Year 11, which would equip her with a greater variety of options. She was "so happy" that she visited Fairview High School and enrolled that afternoon.

During Fatuma's time at Fairview High School, she completed work experience at a hospital where she shadowed nursing staff. It was this experience that made her reconsider a career in nursing. From her observations, nurses "do the bulk of the [work]" while doctors give orders. In addition to the extensive workload, Fatuma did not enjoy dealing with patients who are ill because "they become aggressive because of pain." While she decided not to pursue a nursing career, Fatuma still wants to work in the health care industry. Her ultimate goal was to become a gynaecologist and return to Africa to work, but this was considered a longer-term goal.

In 2010, following her migration to Australia, Fatuma was able to find her mother and brother, with the help of the Red Cross. They were, and still are, living in Kakuma refugee camp. Since that time, Fatuma has been sending the majority of her Centrelink allowance to her family. Given the small amount of money that she receives, Fatuma wanted to find a part-time job in order to further assist her family.



In order to gain employment, Fatuma completed an induction day at Subway, but decided that she did not want the job because she was uncomfortable with handling pork products, given her Islamic religious beliefs. She then completed an aged care course with a view to finding part-time work while studying, but has found it difficult to secure employment.

In discussing her post-school plans, Fatuma stated that her family have “zero expectations” about her post-school education. “In Somalia, you’re not supposed to be learning ... My mum expects me to have a family right now.” Despite not yet fulfilling her mother’s expectations, Fatuma stated that her mother is proud of her achievements. Fatuma’s high school teachers have also been supportive of her in continuing her education. Rob has been particularly supportive. She stated, “He’s so nice. He’s like everything to me ... He’s like a dad to me.”

In 2011, Fatuma completed Year 12 at Fairview High School. As in Nairobi, Fatuma was academically successful and she was awarded the joint dux of the school. Rob stated that “Fatuma is a bit of an exception ... because she’s *going* to do well. She was the joint dux of the school.”

After completing Year 12, Fatuma was offered a place in a laboratory medicine degree at the University of South Australia, which she began in 2012. Initially, Fatuma found university stressful, particularly in terms of learning to ask questions of lecturers. She stated that she “had a question to ask” in the first week of her first semester. She recalled:

*I was so scared! I want to ask the question ... But before I ask, my heart bumps faster ... And I’m not always confident with my accent ... I may ask a question and she’s like, ‘Huh?’ ... So, I like to sit at the front so that she can hear me, she can look at my mouth and at least understand ... When I asked her a question one time, second time ... It’s becoming part of normal ...*

In looking back, Fatuma believes that her refugee background has limited her post-school opportunities:

*I'm 21 now ... If I was not from [a] refugee [background] ... [if] I had the opportunity to ... go to kindergarten, and primary, secondary, by now I would be ... finishing uni ... Everything [would] seem very easy ... The day you were born until now, you will learn English. You are used to the environment. It looks familiar and you know a lot of options.*

*During Fatuma's first year of university, she was able to find stable part-time employment in aged care. Fatuma now works in two aged care facilities and is no longer reliant on financial support from the government.*

*In the meantime, Fatuma married her long-time Somali boyfriend and shortly after, became pregnant. Their son was due to be born in May, 2013.*

*In terms of study, Fatuma transferred from laboratory medicine into midwifery, citing boredom as the major reason for this change. She intends to study externally and part-time for the first semester in 2013 before returning to study full-time in the second semester. Her husband plans to return to Somalia to work, and may take their son to be cared for by Fatuma's mother.*

### **David.**

*My name is David ... I was born in Liberia and I grew up ... in Guinea, near my country ... I left Liberia when I was just nine years old ... I don't know a lot about Liberia ... In my family, we're seven ... four girls, three boys ... I'm the third born ... I'm from a Christian background and we go to church every Sunday ...*

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David was nine years old when he last saw his father. The war had begun and "they were taking everyone." It was at this time that David's mother, who worked for the Liberian government, decided to move her family to a safe place. David explained that "the moment you are working in the government ... you're going to be the first people that they're [militia] going to look for ..."

David and his family fled to Guinea where they entered a refugee camp. The transition to the refugee camp was made easier because David's mother was able to find employment and was, therefore, able to financially support the family. She worked as a leader with the United Nations and also worked as a



*Liberian refugees in Guinea (UNHCR, 2003).*

primary school principal. Consequently, David's family had "a better life" than most Liberian refugees in Guinea. He stated that "some people, they do find it really hard there." In working, David's mother became "well recognised" and gained respect from the community.

David's mother always instilled in her children the belief that education is critical to having a good life. He stated that, "My mum always says ... 'Education doesn't end ... Every day, you've got to learn new things and new skills.'" Because of this, David and his siblings had always attended school, both in Liberia and Guinea.

In 2004, 10 years after leaving Liberia, David and his family migrated to Australia as refugees. David was 19 years old at the time and was just about to complete Year 12. Because of his previous education, David expected to begin TAFE and gain entry to university. His intentions, however, did not become reality. He discovered that "it was a little bit harder" than he had envisaged.

In December, 2004, David spent one month at LM Training<sup>29</sup>. In 2005, he enrolled in a mainstream high school near his home in Adelaide's western suburbs. Here, he completed Years 10 to 12, gaining his SACE in 2007.

Initially, David was frustrated at having to start so far behind. The school explained to David their decision to enrol David in Year 10, stating that he needed to develop his computer skills. Soon after beginning school, David realised that developing

<sup>29</sup> LM Training Specialists provides new migrants with access to English courses with a view to equipping them with sufficient language skills to enable them to engage in employment.

computer literacy was a key challenge. In addition, he, along with other newly arrived African students at the school, found it difficult to adjust to daily school routines such as sitting in classes throughout a much longer school day than to what they were accustomed.

In 2007, David completed Year 12. He completed ESL, Chemistry, Biology, and Mathematics Applications. David also completed VET courses in Mechanics, Building Construction, and Design. Following the completion of the VET course in Design, David decided that he did not want to pursue a career in this industry. Firstly, he stated that he is “not too good at drawing” and secondly, he needed a career “that will give me money quick.”

During his time at school, David also developed an interest in pursuing a career with the South Australian Police (SAPOL). He was inspired to consider policing after attending a Blue Light Disco, organised by SAPOL. The school then arranged for David to complete a six-month course with the police. Following this course, however, David was prompted to reconsider his career plans. He stated that he “thought this job will be a lot of fun” but quickly noted that there were “some parts” that he didn’t like. One aspect of the job was the need to learn how to use firearms. Upon entering the practice ground, he found it to be “mayhem” and the thought of using a weapon “scared” him as it reminded him of gunshots during the war in Liberia. In addition, David did not want to be conflicted in his role as a police officer and as an African. He stated that Africans “don’t want to hear the word ‘police’.”

Despite his intentions to consider alternative career options, David gained a place in a criminal justice course at Flinders University. In 2007, he completed the first year of this degree. He then decided that he needed to look for work. David stated that at the time, “money wasn’t ... so important,” but he did acknowledge that the amount of financial support that he was receiving from the government “wasn’t enough.” Rather, David wanted work experience to include in his resume, to aid in finding employment in the future. After making this decision, he enrolled in an aged care course and then found work as a personal carer. From this experience, David

decided that it would be “better to work as a nurse” and made the decision to transfer into nursing at Flinders University.

In the meantime, David met and married a woman from Sierra Leone who had previously migrated to Australia as a refugee. In order to purchase their first home, David deferred his studies in order to work full time.

Unfortunately, David’s marriage broke down when his wife made allegations of domestic violence. He was required to attend court to face the charges. David stated that “that’s the first time in my life that I was in the court house and ... I don’t want to go there [again] ...”

During this time, David was unable to return to study and due to court requirements, was unable to work. He explained that the court had ordered him to complete a six-month anger management course. From attending the classes, David has “learned a lot of stuff ... I know myself now ... I’m not a violent man.” In the meantime, David began a course in personal training and is hoping to work part-time in the industry when he returns to study in 2013. He made the decision to complete this course because he enjoys exercising.

David’s ultimate goal is to return to Africa to open a music production business to support African youth to enter the music industry:

*... if I finish my nursing degree, I will follow ... music production ... playing with electrical stuff ... I will work hard to get a degree and by working in the industry ... I will invest my money ... in a music production studio. Then, I can take that ... home [to Liberia] and open a studio ... Hopefully, God will give me a long life and give me strength to focus on it ... That’s my dream.*

**Fathia.**

*I was born on the border ... between Somalia and Kenya ... Born on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, '91 ... So, that means I’ve never seen Somalia. All I know is just Kenya ... I’ve got four brothers and three sisters ... I’m the third child. I’ve got two older*

*than me ... and they both go to uni ... 'cause my parents were really educated ...  
My mum was a nutrition teacher and my dad was a banker ...*

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Fathia was born in 1991 on the Somalia/Kenya border. Her parents had previously moved to the border to escape the conflict in Somalia. Fathia stated that her mother and father, who worked as a nutrition teacher and banker, respectively “wanted ... a good future for their children ... They didn’t want them to be born in a place where [children] have been taken by wars.”

A few weeks after Fathia was born, her family moved to Mombasa, Kenya, where Fathia’s father found work. When Fathia was of school age, she attended nursery school before beginning her primary education in an Islamic school.

When Fathia was eight years old, the family moved again, this time to Nairobi. Soon after, however, they moved to the Kakuma refugee camp. This decision was made because Fathia’s parents believed that there would be “better opportunities” for their children if they were to live in the camp.

During their time in Kakuma, Fathia attended school in the refugee camp. She stated that “it was shit ... because the teachers ... weren’t really educated. They’d just finished Year 12, had a bit of training, and they’re trying to teach you.” In addition to the poor quality of education, Fathia did not feel safe at school. She found Sudanese students to be “violent,” where “they would actually hit you” if you received “a better grade than them.” Fathia found this situation unbelievable: “Imagine being told not to be smarter than someone!”

Despite the change in quality of her education and threats of physical violence, Fathia studied hard and became the top student in her class. From her academic performance, she was offered a scholarship to study in another Kenyan town. When she moved from the refugee camp to study, she found the transition challenging. Fathia stated that in the refugee camp school, she was “the best,” but at her new

school, she “wasn’t actually the best” and to “work hard” to “be at their standard. So, it was a bit challenging.”

In the meantime, Fathia’s family had made an application for refugee status, which was accepted. The family migrated to Australia in June, 2007. Fathia was 15 years old at the time. Migration to Australia brought with it “more opportunities” to engage in education, which Fathia would not have had in Kenya. For example, Fathia stated that after finishing Year 12, she “wouldn’t have had the opportunity to go to uni. My parents would have [to have] been really rich for me to go ...”

Soon after the family’s arrival, Fathia began attending ASSOE. She spent six months at the school and found that “it wasn’t for [her]” because she “would be sitting in class” with students “who had never been to school.” In addition, unlike many of her peers, Fathia had prior knowledge of English. Consequently, Fathia “didn’t want to be there” and “wanted to leave” in order to enter the mainstream.

In 2008, Fathia enrolled at Fairview High School where, in 2010, she completed Year 12. In her final year of high school, Fathia completed Biology, Social Sciences, ESL, Chemistry, and Nutrition.

Fathia’s aspiration is to work in the field of health sciences or medical sciences. She developed this aspiration as an eight year old child after encountering a neighbour with AIDS. She explained: “I would look at him and say, ‘I wish people could help ...’ They were isolating him ... and I would sit with him ... I wish I could help him.” Fortunately, while she was at school, Fathia was able to complete work experience in her field of interest. Her placement at a local hospital involved shadowing medical staff, where she learned a great deal about working in the health sciences industry.

Fathia stated that her parents were supportive of her ability to make her own decisions related to her post-school plans. She explained that the decision was ultimately hers, stating that “it’s actually my life, so I had to make my own decisions.” Fathia’s mother, however, suggested that she should “make a wise decision.”

At the conclusion of Year 12, Fathia gained a place at Adelaide University, studying health sciences. Fathia was “never worried [about] making it to uni.” Rather, she “always knew [she was] going to make it.” The difficulty was, however, in deciding between medical and health sciences. Fathia stated that it was a case of “eenie, meenie, miney, mo ... I remember making up my mind [on] the last day ... before the closing date.”

Fathia felt well prepared to study at university because of the practical support she received. For example, one of her teachers showed Fathia and her peers what university is like, and presented the students with “a lot of alternatives ... if you don’t make it to uni.” This enabled Fathia and her peers to feel “relaxed instead of being all pressured.” In addition, Fathia’s older brother and sister were already attending university and were able to show her how to apply. Consequently, Fathia “was not stressing out” because her siblings were also available to answer her questions.

Despite this preparation, Fathia initially found it difficult to settle into the university culture when she began her degree in 2011. She recalled that “everything was *so* different from school ... It was just full on.” By the fourth week of the semester, however, she “got used to it.”

During her first year of university, Fathia decided to begin a part-time TAFE course in legal services. She was inspired to undertake this study because her mother had recently completed a Certificate III in the same area. After one semester, however, Fathia realised that continuing this study would detract from her university studies and engagement in social activities. Electing to defer this study enabled Fathia to become more actively involved in university campus life. She is currently a member of the Fair Trade, World Vision, and Vision Generation clubs at university. In addition, Fathia is also working part-time at Foxtel, although with limited hours to prevent her job from encroaching upon her study.



Fathia's ultimate goal is to return to Africa to "help orphaned kids" by opening a school. She wants to "give [a] chance to those kids who actually lost hope." Fathia would also like to "improve the health system of Africa" and "adopt a child."

**Angel.**

*I'm Angel ... I like reading, used to like maths. I hate it now ... I like basketball, watching movies. That's about it.*

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Angel was born in Sudan in 1992. She is the third eldest of five children<sup>30</sup> and has two older brothers, and one younger brother and sister. In 1995, during her early childhood, Angel and her family lived in Saudi Arabia, where her father worked as an accountant. Her mother was also employed, working as a businesswoman, selling clothing<sup>31</sup>.

The family returned to Sudan in 1999, where Angel began attending school. She was seven years old at the time. Soon after their return, Angel's father sensed that civil war was looming in the country and made the decision to move his family to Egypt. In 2001, the family arrived in Egypt and lodged an application for refugee status. Angel explained that her father wanted a "better lifestyle" for the family and wanted his children to have the opportunity to engage in education of a "really high [standard]." In the meantime, Angel, then a 10 year-old child, attended school.

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<sup>30</sup> Angel's brother, John, participated in this study. His story is presented later in this chapter.

<sup>31</sup> Since migrating to Australia, Angel's parents have experienced career changes. Being a qualified accountant, her father believed that he would find work in the same field. Unfortunately, his qualifications were not recognised in Australia, prompting him to seek employment in other fields. At the time of the interviews, Angel's father was working as an interpreter and translator while completing an Australian accounting degree. Angel's mother also experienced a career change following migration to Australia. At the time of the interviews, she had secured a permanent job in the aged care industry. Angel's older brothers were working in factories at the time of the interviews.

During the family's time in Egypt, life was difficult. "There was no employment," which meant that the family had to live from the savings that Angel's father had accumulated during his time in Saudi Arabia.

The family's refugee application took two and a half years to process. In 2004, they migrated to Australia under the Special Humanitarian Program (visa 202). Angel was 11 years old at the time.

Following their arrival, Angel attended a NAP primary school before spending six months at ASSOE. She then enrolled at Fairview High School where, in 2010, she completed Year 12.

In making post-school plans, Angel had a clear goal in mind. She wanted to become a nurse. This aspiration was heavily influenced by members of her extended family, in which three of her aunts are nurses. "Seeing my aunts doing the job ... I used to go with them to the hospital, spend the holiday there ... I always wanted to be a nurse."

While awaiting her Year 12 results, Angel began to worry about her future. She was concerned about whether she would "[make] it to uni" and began to consider the alternatives. Fortunately, Angel successfully completed Year 12 and secured a place at the University of South Australia. She did not, however, gain her first preference, instead earning a place in a health science degree. After completing one semester of health sciences, Angel transferred into nursing.

Beginning university "felt weird" to Angel. She questioned herself saying, "What am I doing here?" Angel was also initially concerned about "knowing if you're in the right place." Fortunately, these fears were allayed through the presence of a supportive friend who was also making the transition to university. Fathia<sup>32</sup> attended "most" of Angel's lectures "even though she doesn't attend that uni, but she was free ... When I'm free, I go with her." In addition to providing each other

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<sup>32</sup> Fathia participated in this study. Her story was presented earlier in this chapter.

with moral support, Angel and Fathia “switch notes” and, therefore, contribute to each other’s learning.

Angel enjoys many of the benefits that her non-African and non-refugee background peers appreciate about the university student lifestyle. For example, she enjoys not having to wake up early. Angel also experiences challenges associated with her university studies that are also common to other new students. For example, she stated that she is “used to people telling me, ‘Hey, your assignment is due tomorrow,’ like reminding me.” The absence of these reminders is something that Angel is “still not used to.” Similarly, Angel referred to the difficulties associated with understanding academic writing conventions. She stated that “you don’t know exactly what they [lecturers] want.”

In terms of academic expectations, Angel recalled a confronting experience involving her lecturer. Her lecturer presented the first assignment. Upon explaining the assignment to the class, the lecturer spoke to Angel, “and a couple of Asian students, international students” and “referred me to ... the learning teaching unit ... It was my first time in the lecture.” Angel questioned his motivation in singling her out amongst other international students. This encounter left her pondering the assumptions that the lecturer had made about her academic writing, on the basis of her background. She stated that people have this “low standard [expectation]. They think all refugees are uneducated and they’re not capable of doing things.” Consequently, refugees “have to prove them wrong.”

Despite ongoing challenges, Angel is enjoying university. Her future goal is to return to Africa to open a medical clinic and work as a nurse alongside her aunts.

## **The Transition to TAFE**

In this section of the chapter, the story of one African young person who participated in this study is presented. John’s story describes his transition to TAFE.

**John.**

*I'm [John] from Sudan and I came to Australia in 2004 ... I came when I was 10 years old ... I like playing basketball and drawing and ... cars.*

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John was born in 1994 in northern Sudan, but identifies with the South Sudanese culture and the Dinka tribe, to which his mother belongs. John has two older brothers, one older sister (Angel), and one younger sister.

As discussed in Angel's story, John's family lived in Saudi Arabia for four years. In 1999, they returned to Sudan where they remained for two years. Like Angel, John attended school in the home country. John recalled that lessons were conducted in sheds and stables, with up to 80 students in the class. Assessment consisted solely of tests, and there were no computers. Physical punishment for inappropriate behaviour was also a normal part of John's schooling.

In 2001, John and his family moved to Egypt to escape the impending war in Sudan. Once in Egypt, they prepared an application for refugee status. John stated that his father made this application in order for John and his siblings "to get educated ... That's the reason we left."

During the two and a half year wait, John attended school where he had to learn to adapt to a new schooling system. For example, Sudanese instruction was provided in Arabic whereas Egyptian schools provided instruction in English. This transition, however, was made more easily because of the assistance John received from his father. He stated,

"My dad used to speak a little bit of English, so he taught us at home." Similarly, John's father used to spend time with John by "doing times tables" with him.



*South Sudanese refugee children at a UN-funded school in Egypt (Jeffrey, 2008).*

In 2004, the family migrated to Australia. John was 10 years old at the time. He stated that in Australia, “everything is different.” Despite attending school in Egypt where he learned English, John initially experienced difficulty communicating in the language. He stated that when he first arrived, “all I could say was, ‘I don’t know English.’ That’s all! [laughs]” This was also made increasingly difficult because Arabic is the language that his family speaks at home. His mother also occasionally speaks Dinka. In addition to the complexities of verbal communication, John also experienced initial challenges with written communication. He stated that “back in Sudan, we used to write from the right to the left. And here, we write from left to right.”

After arriving in Australia, John attended a NAP primary school where he remained for two years. It was during this time that John was diagnosed with Sydenham’s chorea<sup>33</sup>. In considering its impact on John’s education, a psychologist’s report revealed that John’s father believed that the medical condition had negatively impacted upon John’s learning at school. In discussing this with John, he stated that his illness had minimal impact on his schooling.

Following the completion of his time in the NAP school, John moved to a mainstream primary school where he completed 12 months. During this time, John was assessed by a psychologist and found to have “overall delayed levels of cognitive functioning.” In 2006, he was identified as a student with a language and communication disability. The following year, John enrolled at Fairview High School where a Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) was designed for him. As a consequence of this learning disability, Kerri stated that John is “a little bit lower functioning. So [he’s] missing out on the main messages.” Similarly, Rob stated that John “struggles” with “written work.” Integral to John’s NEP was the provision of one hour of support each week from a School Services Officer (SSO). While this support aided John academically, it created social problems. He cited issues of

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<sup>33</sup> Sydenham’s chorea is a condition that is a sign of rheumatic fever. It results in involuntary, jerky muscular movements. Treatment involves penicillin administered monthly by intramuscular injection.

bullying, where he was called names. Fortunately, “the teacher helped to sort it out.” Despite these challenges, John stated that he enjoyed school.

While he was in high school, John experienced difficulty in deciding on a post-school pathway because of the extensive number of available options, stating that “there were too many choices.” John did, however, develop an interest in becoming a car mechanic and was inspired by one of his older brothers who, despite lacking a formal qualification, “always used to fix cars.” John was further inspired by the range of car makes and models that exist in Australia that “you never see” in Africa.

While John had the desire to become a car mechanic, his father expressed a desire for John to become an artist because of his ability to draw. John, however, could not envisage such a career for himself. He stated that art is a hobby; one that he enjoys “in [his] own time.” Despite this difference of opinion, John’s father was supportive of his decision to consider a career in car mechanics.

John’s teachers were also supportive of his decision. He stated that, “they were helping me to get into what I wanted to do. They were helping a lot ... They were supportive ... They got me to go to information nights that talk about automotive and cars.” In 2009, the school arranged for John to complete work experience with an auto electrician and in 2011, as part of his workplace practices subject, John completed a further two placements. In addition to arranging work placements, Kerri assisted John to prepare for the TAFE entry test, providing him with the necessary details and also encouraging him to complete a practice test. Before formally sitting the entrance test, John felt “very confident” that he would be admitted into TAFE.

In Year 12, John completed Mathematics, ESL, Design, Workplace Practices, and Art. He chose these subjects based on his “strengths ... what you’re good at.” His father played an important role in assisting him to identify his strengths.

When John received his final Year 12 results, he was disappointed with his grades. He stated that he “could have done *better*,” suggesting that he hadn’t “tried [his] hardest.” Despite his perceived poor academic achievement, John had previously

completed the TAFE entrance test and was offered a place in a six-month auto motor mechanics course. He, therefore, felt “good” knowing that he would be studying at TAFE.

When John first began attending TAFE, he “felt like [he] didn’t belong.” At the time, he had “no friends,” causing him to “feel weird [and] awkward.” In addition, there is no comparison between school and TAFE; “it’s just all different.” Despite these initial challenges, John stated the TAFE environment has become “normal”. He has made friends, making it easier to settle into the new learning environment.

After completing his auto motor mechanics course, John’s goal is to become an apprentice mechanic. He stated that he “just want[s] to get into working with [his] hands ... [I want] to be a mechanic. I’m here now.”

*Following the completion of data collection, I happened to see John at a local community centre. He had completed his six month TAFE course and was in the process of applying for work as an apprentice mechanic. In the meantime, John had begun a university preparation course. At this time, he was unsure of what education and employment choices he would make following the completion of this course.*

## Continuing Transitions

In this, the final section of this chapter, two stories are presented. Sabrina and Belee both made the transition from secondary school but unlike the other 12 youth who participated in this study, neither made a direct transition to an education course or paid employment. This section explores their respective experiences and describes the events that led to their current situations.

### **Belee.**

*I’m from Liberia, West Africa, and my name is Belee. I came to Australia in 2006 ... After two weeks, I started going to ... Adelaide Secondary School of English ... And in 2008, I started going to Fairview High School ... In 2009, I was having some problems with my sister, so I stopped ... going to school because I had to look after myself ... So, I wasn’t really concentrating on school, so I decided to stop, to find a*

*place to stay and settle myself ... In 2010, I went back to school ... I started Year 11 over. I did well, I made good grades. I passed ... And this year [2011], I'm having lots and lots of struggles and that's why I'm not really at school.*

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Belee was born in 1990 in Liberia, but grew up in the nearby country of Ghana. Like David, Belee has very little memory of her homeland.



*Liberian refugees in Buduburam refugee camp, Ghana (Butty, 2011).*

Belee lived in a refugee camp with her sister, her only known relative. Her childhood was

dissimilar to those of other children living in the camp. Belee stated that her sister “never treated me right.” While they were living in Africa, her sister “*had* the money” to send Belee to school, “but she didn’t.” Instead, Belee “had to go to other people’s houses and help them clean and look after the kids.” In some instances, she was paid for her work.

In 2006, when she was 15 years old, Belee and her sister migrated to Australia as refugees (visa 200). It was at this point that Belee was told the truth about her family. Belee’s sister said, “You are not my sister. I just found you during the war ... You’re not my relative.”

After Belee was accused by her sister of stealing and lying, she made the decision to leave her sister’s house, stating that she “had to leave and make a life for [herself].” Living independently was, however, “one of the most challenging things” that Belee has done. These events caused Belee to question the whereabouts of her family, leaving her feeling “alone in this world.”

At the time, Belee did not seek support from anyone, stating that she does not like “to be a burden.” Instead, she sought strength from her belief in God in order to



cope with the situation. She stated: "I was being strong because I had hope. I always prayed to God ... I gave my life to Christ ... and He's always there for me."

In 2006, amidst these familial and housing difficulties, Belee attended ASSOE for 18 months. She then enrolled in Year 10 at Fairview High School in 2009. Belee stated that her placement in a year level beyond her capabilities impacted upon her ability to study. She explained:

*I didn't really go to school in Africa ... My problem [was that] I went straight to Year 10 and I was like, 'Oh my God! Can I do it? ... I'm still so, so tired ... and feel like I can't do it.*

In addition, Belee struggled to make friends with her peers, given that she was much older. Instead, she preferred to interact with her teachers. Belee cited different "way[s] of understanding" as a barrier to forming friendships with her fellow classmates.

During her struggles with her schooling, Belee sought support from the Liberian community, which she calls her "family". Associating with the community has also assisted Belee to find her passion, which is working with young people which she described as "a duty" which she "should perform." Since becoming involved in the Liberian community, Belee has joined the African Communities Council of South Australia, Youth Parliament, and is also a youth leader in her church community. In 2011, she received an award from the South Australian African community for her services to the community.

Since beginning Year 11 in 2010, Belee struggled to attend school regularly, which was a concern amongst her subject teachers. For example, in Semester 1, she was absent for a total of 42 days. In Semester 2, Belee's attendance improved, despite still recording 31.5 day absences. Her improved attendance enabled her to improve her academic performance.

In 2011, Belee began Year 12 at Fairview High School. During the first semester, Belee was absent for a total of 40 days. These absences contributed to her poor

academic performance in the subjects that she studied: the Research Project, Community Studies, Workplace Practices, and ESL. In Semester 2, Belee dropped a number of subjects as reflected in her Term 3 report which revealed that she was undertaking ESL and Community Studies. Unfortunately, neither of these subjects were graded given Belee's 48.5 day absence during the 10-week term. Over the course of the 2011 school year, Belee was absent from school for 140 days<sup>34</sup>. The majority of these absences were attributed to family reasons (n = 59) and illness (n = 60).

Belee has questioned why she is "so weak on [her] education." She feels as though "a spirit of weakness" has prevented her from engaging in her education. This 'spirit of weakness' is very likely depression. For example, Kerri described a recent conversation where she suspected that Belee might be depressed, and urged her to speak to her counsellor. Rob attributed this as the reason why Belee "virtually dropped out [of school] halfway through."

Although Belee did not describe a particular career path, her ultimate goal is to support the youth in her community. She believes that she will achieve this goal by voluntary work with the South Australian African community. Kerri stated that Belee is "linked with the Migrant Resource Centre ... She sounds like she's on a good pathway." In the future, Belee would like to complete a TAFE course and obtain a university degree in the area of community services or social science.

*As discussed, Belee was not engaged in either employment or a course of study at the conclusion of data collection. She does, however, continue to volunteer her time in the African community and, more specifically, the Liberian community in South Australia.*

*In 2013, Belee became pregnant and has, therefore, begun a transition to motherhood.*

*Unfortunately, the child's father, an ex-boyfriend of Belee's, is currently living with another woman who happens to be Belee's best friend. The couple have a child together.*

*Consequently, Belee is likely to raise her child as a single parent.*

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<sup>34</sup> These data were obtained from Fairview High School attendance records.

**Sabrina.**

*My name is Sabrina and I left Burundi with my mother when I was very young ... Then we went to Tanzania ... We walked for I think six months ... and we lived there [in Tanzania] for 13 years, inside a refugee camp ...*

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Sabrina was born in Burundi in 1991. As a young child, Sabrina fled with her mother to Tanzania. Consequently, Sabrina “[doesn’t] know much” about the conflict in Burundi. She stated that “it’s quite hard” for her mother “to talk about how she survived.” Similarly, Sabrina does not know the whereabouts of her father, and relies on her mother for information, but she “doesn’t feel comfortable talking about [Sabrina’s] father.”

Life in the Tanzanian refugee camp “was alright” for Sabrina and her family. She stated that they “received food and ... fresh water ... It was tough, but [it] was okay.” In particular, the “opportunity to go to school” was a positive aspect of Sabrina’s life in the refugee camp.



*Lugufu refugee camp in Tanzania (Cochrane, 2006).*

Sabrina attended school for four years and found it “really challenging.” At school, she learned French and Kirundi. Seeking help from the teacher was challenging because “there’s about 400 students asking for help ... and one teacher.” In addition, the school was under-resourced. She stated that the classroom was “not that big ... There [are] no computers, but we have a blackboard ... and chalk ... and a few books ... and pens and pencils, exercise books.”

In 2003, Sabrina’s mother lodged an application for refugee status. Two years later, in October, 2005, Sabrina migrated to Australia with her mother and younger sister. Sabrina and her sister were 14 and 10 years old, respectively.

When the family arrived, Sabrina had “zero English”. This caused her to worry about living in Australia. She explained: “I thought I wasn’t going to be able to speak English at all when I came to Australia.”

Two months after their arrival, Sabrina enrolled at ASSOE, where she spent two years. In 2008, Sabrina enrolled in Year 9 at Fairview High School. She stated that attending school in Australia was a positive change in her life since migrating and thoroughly enjoyed her time at school.

It was during her time at ASSOE that Sabrina began developing career plans. Initially, she had dreams of becoming a doctor, but found it difficult to start high school and surmised that the pathway to a career in medicine would be even more difficult. Sabrina then turned her attention towards nursing as a potential career.

In Year 10, Sabrina completed work experience at a florist shop where her duties involved making flower arrangements, washing vases, and cutting fresh flowers. Sabrina’s work placement report revealed that she was polite, displayed a happy attitude towards learning new tasks, and worked well in team jobs. In the same year, Sabrina also began volunteering at a local hospital with a view to gaining an understanding of the role of a nurse. Following this experience, however, Sabrina changed her mind. She stated that after “seeing what nurses do,” she “didn’t feel that [she] can really get into [that career]”:

*I’m not a confident person ... I need to have the heart to do it, not my mind ... I don’t think that’s the right career for me, so I have to think ... I changed my mind ... but I’m still thinking about nursing ... in the future.*

In August, 2009, when she was in Year 10, Sabrina was assessed by a Guidance Officer<sup>35</sup>. This assessment revealed that Sabrina has an intellectual disability, which entitled her to access the Disability Support Program and an NEP. The following

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<sup>35</sup> Guidance Officers are educational psychologists who support school communities to cater for the academic, social and emotional needs of their ESL students, particularly those who are newly arrived (Department of Education and Children’s Services, 2009). Services include psychological assessments of students with complex learning and/or emotional needs (DECS, 2009).

year, Sabrina was linked with the Statewide Transition Centre, a program is designed to support students aged 15 years or older who are enrolled in a government school, are part of the Disability Support Program.

In 2010, Sabrina completed a semester-long Stage 1 course in Integrated Learning – Transition to Work. During this course, Sabrina engaged in workplace-related learning (e.g., job interviews, preparation of a career pathway plan, and participation in work experience). Sabrina gained a basic first aid certificate and participated in work experience at a supermarket. At the conclusion of the course, Sabrina’s employability skills were assessed, and she was found to be “at work place level”. In addition, Sabrina completed a Certificate II in Health Support Services, also run by the Statewide Transitions Program. She completed 105 hours associated with the following tasks: participation in OHS processes; preparation and maintenance of beds; following basic food safety practices and safe manual handling practices; and transporting food.

Sabrina completed Year 12 in 2011. During the year, she studied ESL, community studies and completed the research project. She also completed a Certificate II in aged care and a Certificate II in child care, providing Sabrina with additional career options. She did, however, state that neither area appeals to her as a long-term career. Instead, Sabrina had other plans in mind, namely working in the health and fitness industry. She did, however, admit that she “[doesn’t] know much about it.” Despite her limited knowledge of the field, Sabrina wants to be a personal trainer and believes that she would “love it.”

In the future, Sabrina would like to return to Africa for a visit. She would like to perform tasks which are common in Africa, such as “carrying buckets on [her] head, full of water ... I miss that ... And also being able to play games that in Australia, they don’t [play].” Sabrina’s ultimate plan for the future is “to get a job and build my life. I want to be happy in myself ... and then think about getting married.”

*Following the completion of data collection, I happened to see Sabrina's younger sister at Fairview High School. She mentioned that since completing school, Sabrina had undertaken a course to become a personal trainer.*

## **Chapter Summary and Directions**

This chapter presented the tales of transition of the 14 African youth from refugee backgrounds who participated in this study. It began by providing a geographical context for the participants, illustrating their countries of origin and asylum before migrating to Australia. These narratives constituted critically important research data by exploring key events in students' life courses in addition to their education and career aspirations, goals and decisions. These stories were central to the analysis and discussion of the findings, and the development of the study's conclusions.

The following chapter considers the post-school transition more broadly, by reporting on participants' 'perspectives on the journey'. Chapter 7 then provides an analysis of the entire data set (i.e., 78 interviews with 38 participants).

# Chapter 6: Perspectives on the Journey: The Voices of Educators, Service Providers and African Community Leaders: Results Part II

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*Visibility ... allows travelers both to see far and to be seen; seclusion, on the other hand, prevents travelers from having to confront physical danger; accessibility and proximity help travelers to obtain needed resources or to arrive to their destinations with relative ease.*

*-- Zedeno et al. (2009, pp. 3-4)*

This chapter presents the perspectives of 24 individuals who educate, support and mentor 'travellers' (i.e., African youth from refugee backgrounds) through their roles as educators, service providers and African community leaders. These individuals – and many others like them – support African youth as they navigate the unknown terrain of their education and career pathways, assisting them to overcome difficulties, and facilitating access to the resources required to embark upon their respective journeys.

In this chapter, the perspectives of these individuals are presented in the form of nine domains: Previous Schooling; English Language Proficiency and Literacy Skills; Mainstream Schooling; Family, Kin and Community; Relationships; Education and Career Aspirations; Education and Career Counselling; Post-School; and Motivation and Self-Belief. Within each domain, a series of issues and challenges are presented. These constitute participants' perspectives on the factors that shape the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds and, therefore, aids in addressing the first and second research questions<sup>36</sup>:

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<sup>36</sup> The third and final research question is addressed in the following chapter.

1. What are the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?
2. What are the key influences that shape the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?

## **The 24 Educators, Service Providers and African Community Leaders**

Before the nine domains are presented, it is useful to have an understanding of the participants' experiences that inform their perspectives. This information is now summarised.

### **School-Based Educators**

Seven school-based educators (ST) were recruited from three school settings: Fairview High School, Seraphim College and Eastbank Senior College<sup>37</sup>. A brief description of each educator is provided below.

Rob and Kerri were recruited from Fairview High School. Rob has been a teacher for nearly 40 years and has worked at Fairview High School for the last 25 years during which time has held the following roles: Coordinator of Year 12, South Australian Certificate of Education (SACE), and Vocational Education and Training (VET); and Year 12 English and English as a Second Language (ESL) subject teacher. In addition to teaching Workplace Practices and ESL at Fairview High School, Kerri previously worked in Germany as an ESL teacher and in Morocco in special education.

Four participants were recruited from Seraphim College. Barbara has over 30 years' ESL teaching experience and has worked at Seraphim College for nearly eight years. Linda also has over 30 years' teaching experience and prior to becoming an ESL support teacher, working one-on-one with ESL students in various schools, she taught business English to migrants at TAFE. Jacqui is a qualified teacher and counsellor and has worked as a special education coordinator and student

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<sup>37</sup> The names of participating schools have been changed to protect the identities of both the schools and the personnel.



counsellor. Lillian has nearly 25 years' experience as a teacher and has worked for the last 10 years as a qualified career counsellor.

Trevor was recruited from Eastbank Senior College where he works as the Coordinator of SACE, and Student Retention and Support. Prior to this, he spent 13 years at a single-sex school, holding various roles including subject teacher, and Coordinator of Middle School, Society and Environment, ESL, and Cultural Diversity across the Curriculum.

### **University and TAFE Educators**

All four TAFE educators (TE) were teaching in a TAFE-based program at the time of the interviews. Denise has 10 years' experience as a tutor both in the university and TAFE systems. Laura has over 35 years' experience as an ESL teacher in the TAFE system. Similarly, Daphne has over 35 years' experience with a focus on student literacy skill development. In contrast, Maria is new to teaching in the TAFE system.

All five university educators (UE) were recruited from the same South Australian university. Mark and Sean have over 10 and 20 years' experience, respectively, and are involved in research, academic advice, lecturing, and program coordination. Tracey has over 20 years' experience and her current roles are in coordination in the law school. Rebecca has 16 years' experience and her current roles involve providing academic and learning advice and lecturing. Amanda is a psychologist and has worked for over 10 years in the student health and counselling service.

### **Service Providers**

Three service providers (SPs) were recruited for participation in this study. Rachel has five years' experience as a caseworker, program coordinator and manager of youth services with a focus on supporting newly arrived refugee young people with education and employment options. Darren is a youth worker at Eastbank Senior College, providing support to students who are at risk of educational disengagement. He also has experience as a caseworker for migrant and refugee young people. Dean has four years' experience in facilitating education and

employment amongst youth from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds through training and employment brokering.

## **African Perspectives**

Five individuals were recruited from the new and emerging African communities in South Australia. In addition to migrating to Australia as refugees themselves, each of these individuals is in a paid service provision role. A brief summary of each African service provider (ASP) is provided below.

Deng migrated to Australia in 2005 from South Sudan. He is currently working part-time in an organisation as a community career consultant in which he assists young refugees and migrants into employment and education. Deng is also studying social work at university. He is actively engaged in the South Sudanese community and with African youth more generally.

Emmanuel migrated to Australia in 2007 from Burundi. Like Deng, Emmanuel works part-time as a community career consultant and is currently studying social work and social planning at university. Emmanuel is a committee member in the Burundian community in South Australia.

Kennedy migrated to Australia in December, 2004 from Liberia. He currently works part-time in an organisation that assists those who are newly arrived in the first five years of resettlement while he completes a social work degree. Kennedy is heavily involved in the Liberian community, particularly with youth, and is a respected member and elder.

Will migrated to Australia with his siblings in 2007 from the Democratic Republic of Congo. In late 2009, he began working as a Bilingual School Services Officer (BSSO) in a New Arrivals Program (NAP) during which he was inspired to become a teacher – a goal towards which he is currently working.

Luol migrated to Australia in 1998 from Sudan. He currently holds a government position in the Department of Human Services and is heavily involved in the South Australian Sudanese community, where he is a respected elder.

## The Domains

Data analysis was a recurring process that occurred during and after data collection. Data were analysed by identifying issues that participants considered critical in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. These were then arranged into a series of nine domains: Previous Schooling; English Language Proficiency and Literacy Skills; Mainstream Schooling; Family, Kin and Community; Relationships; Education and Career Aspirations; Education and Career Counselling; Post-School; and Motivation and Self-Belief (see Figure 6).

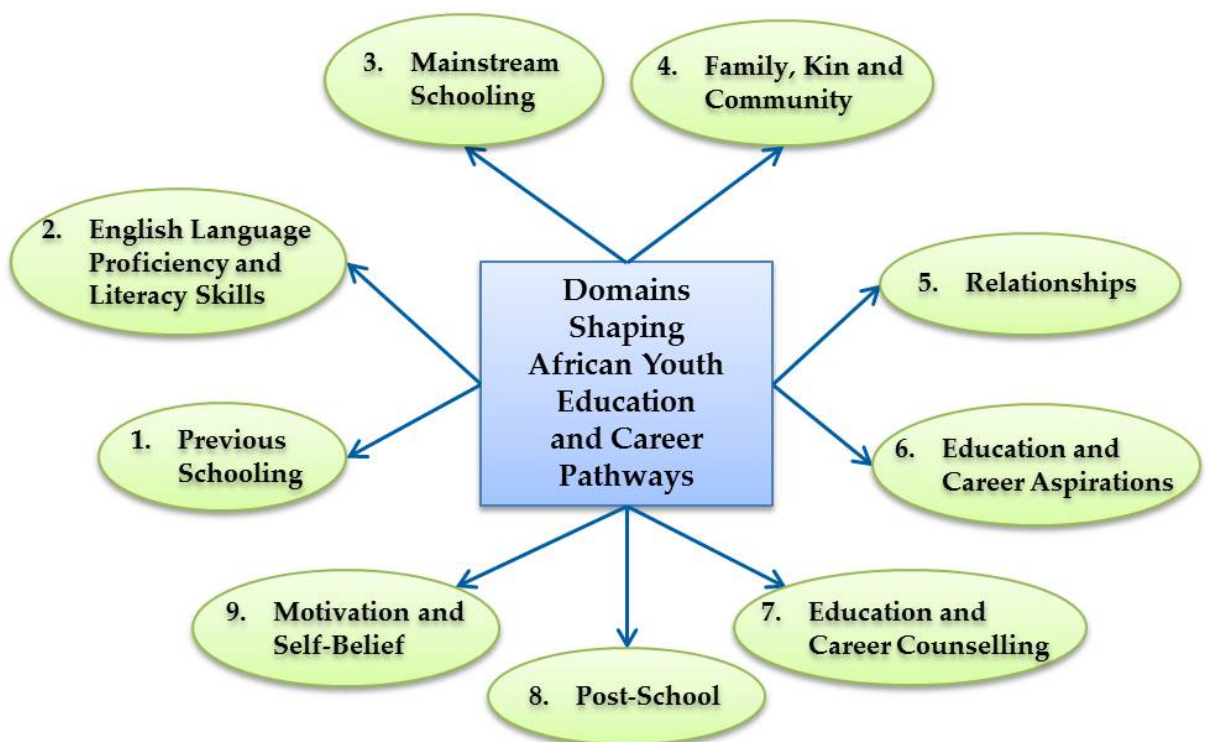


Figure 6. Overview of the nine key domains shaping the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds

### Overview of the Domains

This section provides an overview of the nine domains. Each domain is described in terms of its influence on the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds as explored by participants.

Prior schooling was found to critically influence the education and career pathways of African youth. African youth who have had limited access to formal education

and/or limited resources to support learning prior to migration, were found to face significant social and academic challenges during their schooling in Australia. Consequently, limited prior schooling experience can, in turn, limit available post-school education and employment options.

English proficiency, including literacy skills, was considered a major barrier in navigating education and career pathways, and resettlement, more broadly. Participants identified multiple difficulties associated with language and literacy development such as: engaging in conversational English; accessing school curricula; and developing English language and literacy skills in the context of knowledge of a number of languages other than English. Language and literacy demands were considered to critically shape the education and career pathways of African youth.

The education and career pathways of African youth were also influenced by mainstream schooling experiences in Australia. Participants described the need for African youth to be provided with ongoing academic support, including curriculum differentiation. Social support in the form of mentoring and seeking support from outside agencies was also considered important in shaping African students' mainstream schooling experiences. Academic and social support was seen to facilitate positive post-school transitions.

Family, kin and community were considered significant influences on the education and career pathways of African youth. Within this domain, cultural and religious identities were seen to shape students' education and career pathways by influencing their aspirations and goals. Family structure and support were also considered critical in shaping the school and post-school experiences of African youth. Fractured families and limited support were seen to directly impact upon students' education and career pathways. Participants also explored the responsibilities of African youth to their families, kin and communities and explored their direct impact upon post-school options. In particular, the obligation to financially support family overseas critically shapes African students' post-school options.

Developing positive relationships was seen to influence the school and post-school experiences of African youth. Establishing quality relationships with peers and teachers was found to facilitate the social and emotional wellbeing of African students at school. Participants also explored the influence of gender in shaping interactions and help-seeking behaviours. Within this domain, issues of racism and discrimination in the context of the education and career pathways of African youth were discussed.

A number of key factors were identified as impacting upon the development of African young people's education and career aspirations. These factors include: the importance of education, status and respect; the desire to contribute to the development of community; the critical influence of family; and the influence of gender.

Education and career counselling was identified as an important, yet often difficult and complex process in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. Supporting students to make appropriate subject selections was a major task of education and career counselling. Within this domain, participants perceived that many African youth possess education and career aspirations which are 'unrealistic' in the context of a short timeframe and without giving due consideration to their limited formal schooling experience and language proficiency and literacy skills. This was compounded by the notion that many African youth have only partial knowledge of the available career options in Australia. In addition, education and career counselling were considered challenging because of the sense of urgency amongst African youth in wanting to progress along their education and career pathways.

Within the post-school domain, participants referred to issues associated with further and higher education, and employment. In terms of education, participants described issues with university preparedness, notions of success and failure, and engagement and participation. Participants also explored issues related to employment, emphasising limited resources and cultural and religious differences as barriers to accessing work.

Finally, participants explored intrapersonal factors that shape the education and career pathways of African youth. Participants discussed the beliefs that African youth have in their capabilities, in addition to the role of effort, chance and luck in shaping education and career pathways. The perceived strengths of African youth were also explored in terms of their role in facilitating post-school pathways.

The remainder of this chapter discusses each key domain in turn. Where appropriate, participant quotes are used to illustrate key points. These quotes have been taken from the entire dataset and, therefore, include students' voices in addition to 'stakeholder' participants.

## **1. Previous Schooling Domain**

Prior to migration to Australia, African youth typically have limited access to formal schooling – a perceived consequence of living in a refugee camp. Although some refugee camps offer free, basic education, this may only consist of “learning the alphabet” (Kennedy, ASP). Further education may only be accessible beyond the camp and is restricted to those with finances to be able to pay for education. As Jurup (student) explained, opportunities to develop literacy skills are only available to those who attend “expensive schools.”

Multiple consequences of limited or no prior formal schooling experience were cited by participants. An overarching consequence is that upon entering mainstream education, African youth can encounter significant social and academic difficulties that can persist throughout their schooling. This can ultimately impact upon their post-school options.

A key challenge for African youth with limited or no formal schooling is “to make up for that loss of education” (Kerri, ST). As Darren (SP) suggested, this can be particularly difficult for African students who need “to pick up either eight or nine years' worth of schooling in 12 to 18 months” in the NAP. These difficulties can persist through secondary school as is evident in Emmanuel's (ASP) experience in working with an African client:

*... He was in Year 5, primary school, but when he came here, he started in Year 9 at the Adelaide Secondary School of English ... Think how many classes he jumped ... How can he perform very well at high school? Impossible. He missed a lot of things. It's very hard for such students to pass the SACE ... They're forced to learn hard in order to pass. Otherwise, your school forces you to go to [pursue] a vocation. In that case, you are not choosing the career. The career chooses you ... You have a limited choice.*

This example supports the view that limited formal schooling can create issues in mainstream education that persist and consequently, limit African students' post-school options.

In addition to exploring the 'big picture' issues, participants referred to specific challenges that can arise as a consequence of limited formal schooling. For example, limited formal schooling was associated with poor literacy and numeracy skills upon migration to Australia<sup>38</sup>. As Rob (ST) explained, many students arrive in Australia "with *no* English" and "just get a little bit" through the NAP. Upon entering mainstream schooling, "it's hard work" for student and teacher alike. Participants also referred to educational disengagement and the subsequent development of anti-social behaviours brought about by difficulties associated with limited formal schooling in the context of adapting to mainstream education in Australia<sup>39</sup>.

Participants made distinctions between African youth with formal schooling and those with little or no prior schooling. Those with previous educational experience are considered to be "*massively* advantaged" (Amanda, UE) when compared to students with limited formal schooling. Consequently, African students who have "been exposed to education previously" appear to move through the NAP "with ease" (Will, ASP). They are also more "willing to take ... risks" in terms of classroom activities (Will, ASP) and are "more open to education itself" (Daphne, TE).

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<sup>38</sup> Literacy and numeracy skill development is discussed later.

<sup>39</sup> The issue of educational disengagement is discussed later.

Most student participants thoroughly enjoyed their time in the NAP, citing friendly, helpful teachers and establishing new friendships as contributing to their positive experiences. Although feedback was largely positive, some students with formal schooling experience reported that they felt adequately prepared for mainstream education without completing the NAP. For example, Habsa found that the schoolwork was “too simple,” having covered the content during her previous education in Kenya. Similarly, Fathia saw the NAP as “a waste of time” for her because she was already in Year 8 when she left Africa. Jurup did not attend the NAP for similar reasons. He and his family believed that his previous schooling in Africa was sufficient preparation for mainstream education. In contrast, Jurup’s teachers perceived that this decision was “a mistake” (Rob, ST), believing that he was ill-prepared for senior secondary school.

### **Resources to support learning.**

Limited resources to support learning were found to significantly shape African students’ prior schooling experiences. Upon questioning some of her African students, Linda (ST) reported that students “... sat in a big group under a tin roof and there were no pens or papers.” Similarly, students referred to limited educational resources during their prior schooling experiences. For John, his schooling took place in “sheds, stables.” Students also cited large class sizes as a constraint on their support to learn. For example, in Sabrina’s experience, there were “about 400 students” seeking assistance from one teacher. Student participants also reported that quality teaching was limited in refugee camp schools. As Fathia explained, teachers in refugee camps often have very little training.

Limited resources shape the schooling experiences that African youth receive in refugee camps. In turn, this significantly shapes their educational experiences in Australia. For example, participants stated that African youth in refugee camps often do not have access to information and computer technologies to support their learning. Consequently, many African youth in Australia possess “limited computer knowledge” (Kennedy, ASP). This has the potential to disadvantage students, particularly given the growing use of technology to support learning in schools and



further and higher education institutions. This was found to be a particularly important issue amongst African youth at university.

### **Different cultures of education.**

Participants described stark contrasts between the cultures of education in Australia compared to Africa. In particular, participants referred to differences in: approaches to behaviour management; culture and approaches to learning; class allocation systems; and the role of parents in their children's education. These differences are now discussed in terms of their impact on the education and career pathways of African youth.

Differences in behaviour management were frequently cited amongst student participants. For example, Jurup reported receiving "strokes" from a "cane" to punish inappropriate behaviour. Similarly, Sabrina stated that teachers "beat you ... very hard" for transgressions such as "talking in class while the teacher is speaking." It was during her time in the NAP that Abie learned that teachers in Australia "never use [the] cane or whip, to whip students." Differences in the management of behaviour in schools can create academic difficulties for African youth who perceive the Australian education system as too lenient. In Habsa's experience of schooling in Australia, lackadaisical punishments, including flexible assessment deadlines, have caused her to become "lazier" in her approach to study.

The perceived leniency of the Australian education system was described in contrast to the competitive nature of schooling in Africa. The view of learning as competitive was considered to be perpetuated by the announcement of students' marks at final assemblies. For students with the lowest marks, Habsa (student) stated that "the teachers tell you off ... They ask you, 'What are you thinking? The only thing you need to think about is pen and paper.'" In addition, Angel (student) stated that in her experience of schooling in Africa, there was no acknowledgement of learning difficulties or preferences. Rather, teachers assume that students "have the same brain" and, therefore, learn content in the same way. The identification of learning needs amongst students with learning difficulties may promote educational

engagement and participation in Australia, thereby facilitating positive school experiences and ultimately, post-school outcomes.

Adjusting to a different learning culture was considered to be compounded by broader resettlement challenges, such as understanding Australian cultural norms. In Barbara's (ST) experience, many African students "struggled" to learn about Australian culture and society which, in turn, made it difficult "to keep the focus on their study." Transitioning between different educational cultures in the broader context of resettlement, therefore, possesses the potential to create difficulties for African youth as they settle into the Australian education system which, in turn, can impact upon their post-school options and experiences.

Learning approaches in Africa and Australia were also described as starkly contrasting. Many participants characterised education in Africa as rote learning. For example, Jurup (student) stated that "if the teacher is writing it down ... you copy it down." Similarly, Kennedy (ASP) reported that in Africa, "the teacher is the only source of information" and learning is focused on "memorising" rather than "actually *knowing* it." Participants reported that African youth can encounter difficulties in making the transition to the Australian education system, which emphasises more independence in learning, and engagement in research.

Different class allocation systems were also described by participants as a factor that influences the ability of African youth to adapt to the Australian education system. In Africa, classes are ability-based, while Australian students are placed in classes according to age. This transition was considered a critical and demanding task for some African youth with limited or no prior formal schooling experience. For example, Kennedy (ASP) stated that some Liberian youth were "placed in classes where they couldn't cope." Similarly, Emmanuel (ASP) reported the Burundian youth have also been placed into classes which were "not suitable." According to Luol (ASP), social and academic difficulties in adapting to this different class allocation system have caused some African youth to become disengaged from education, resulting in the decision to leave school early. This illustrates that older

African students with limited prior schooling can encounter significant academic challenges that can ultimately shape their education and career pathways.

Participants reported differences in Australia and Africa in terms of the role of parents in their child's education. In Africa, the teacher is given "total responsibility" (Rachel, SP) for children's education where the role of parents is to enable teachers to exercise this responsibility. In Australia, parents adopt a more active role in supporting their child's learning. A limited understanding of the role of parents in schooling in Australia was considered to shape the schooling experiences of African youth. This is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The differences in the cultures of education in Africa and Australia indicate some of the sources of difficulty encountered by African youth in adapting to the Australian education system. This discussion illustrates that even African youth who have previously engaged in education can encounter difficulties in making the transition to the Australian education system. The ability to adapt to these differences can, therefore, shape the school and post-school experiences of African youth.

## **2. English Language Skills Domain**

English language skills were considered crucial in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth in the broader context of resettlement. As Denise (TE) stated, English "seems to be the root of everything." Similarly, Emmanuel (ASP) explained that the development of English language skills occurs amidst adaptation to Australian cultural norms: "We are learning English in order to do *everything*, to go shopping, church, looking for work ..."

Limited English language skills were seen to simultaneously limit African students' education and career options. For example, entering "competitive occupations" (Denise, TE) such as law and medicine can be challenging where African youth lack appropriate language skills. Fathia (student) believes that her English language skills have impacted upon her post-school options. According to Lillian (ST), there is a denial amongst some African students about the importance of English literacy in shaping post-school pathways. She stated that some students don't "want to admit

that so much is caught up in the language of a subject and the knowledge of English, which holds them back at so many different levels.”

Within the English language proficiency and literacy skills domain, participants discussed issues associated with conversational English, accessing curriculum, and developing literacy skills. In addition, the influence of being multilingual was explored.

### **Conversational English.**

Developing conversational English skills is a key challenge for many newly arrived immigrants. As Dean (SP) stated, it can be difficult to develop English language skills “to the point where they can understand the nuances of conversation, the fact that a tone or inflection changes the meaning of a sentence.”

In terms of education and career pathways, communication difficulties were considered to influence interactions with educators, peers, colleagues and employers. For example, Fatuma (student) reported difficulties in engaging in conversation with her teachers and peers because of her limited English vocabulary. In addition, Fatuma initially found it challenging to converse with her Australian-born peers because of terms with which she was unfamiliar, such as “awesome” and “I reckon.”

Participants considered limited English language proficiency to be the primary barrier to accessing employment. Communication difficulties can cause employers to become “reluctant” (Darren, SP) to hire African youth. As Dean (SP) stated, he explains to his clients that “when you get better English, you get a better job. Poor English, poor job. Good English, good job. *Best* English, university.”

Speaking with a heavy accent was also considered to potentially create communication difficulties. Recall from Chapter 5 that Kerri (ST) cited difficulties amongst school staff in comprehending Jurup (student) while Jurup had difficulty in understanding his teachers and peers. Similarly, Emmanuel (ASP) stated that African students may be unable to “tell the teacher what they want and ... how they feel.” This can result in misunderstandings between student and teacher.

### **Accessing curriculum.**

English proficiency and the development of literacy skills were seen to critically shape the ability to “access the curriculum” (Jacqui, ST). Access to the curriculum was considered a strong predictor of educational participation, engagement, and success. Conversely, the inability to access school curricula can limit students’ subject choices and ultimately, their post-school options. Consequently, limited English language proficiency and literacy skills were considered to have a lasting impact on the education and career pathways of African youth, as evident through discussion of this issue in both school and post-school contexts.

The ability to access school curricula was linked with academic performance. English language and literacy skills were considered to represent a key predictor of success in the Australian education system. That is, limited English language proficiency was described as a “huge barrier” (Laura, TE) to academic success. For example, Maria (TE) reported that she marked an essay that was written by an African student, but she “couldn’t even understand it enough to correct it.”

Accessing curriculum was also described in terms of being able to engage with discipline-specific language and literacy. A number of school teachers referred to the complexities of developing subject-specific language and literacy skills amidst the broader task of developing general English language proficiency and literacy. African students are “learning two things at the same time ... They’re learning English and they’re learning the subject content ... Not only is it the everyday language, but ... the subject-specific language and the detail ...” (Rob, ST). This issue was also discussed by student participants. For example, Michelle encountered difficulties in studying biology, citing the need to develop English as a second language vis-à-vis specialised terminology as a key challenge. As this example illustrates, the inability to overcome subject-specific language and literacy problems can limit students’ subject choices and subsequent post-school options.

### **Literacy skill development.**

Literacy skills were considered crucial in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. Participants referred to both the importance and

difficulty of developing literacy skills. Daphne (TE), who is multilingual, stated that English is “one of the more complex languages to learn,” stating that the “standard conventions and rules” that apply in other languages are not applicable in English. For example, the convention amongst many phonetic languages is that “if you can speak, you can write.” This does not apply with English, making it difficult to learn as a second or other language.

Developing literacy skills was described as a key challenge for African youth in terms of their education and career pathways because of the time required to develop proficiency. It can “take years to work on” (Laura, TE) developing literacy skills and requires “many, many years of disciplined practice” (Daphne, TE). The difficulty of developing literacy skills over time is evident through Laura’s experience of teaching a female Sudanese student:

*She couldn't really write her address and I worked with her ... for several years, and we got nowhere ... She was fluent, she was charming, she was bright, and I was of no use at all ... We spent, like, two years just trying to do basic phonic stuff ... like cat, bat ... but it didn't stick ... And I've had a number of students like that since.*

Linda (ST) cited an example of working with a Year 10 student who “didn’t know all the alphabet sounds.” He had “been in the school a few years” but had “slid under the radar because they’re often absent during tests, or they’ll do oral explanations to be assessed.” In this case, the student aspired to become an engineer, wanting to attend university after completing Year 12. This example indicates that significant literacy issues can severely limit a student’s ability to achieve their post-school goals.

Literacy skill development was found to be compounded by academic writing conventions. For example, Sean (UE) suggested that some African students “don’t know *what* to write,” suggesting that this is derived from a lack of understanding of academic writing expectations. Daphne (TE) has concluded that some African students “don’t like the structures and rigours of writing an academic essay and they become agitated about what they see as petty, that I’m trying to explain is required ...” Associated with academic *writing* are difficulties related to *reading*

academic texts. For example, Tracey (UE) has observed that African students who are studying law can struggle with “critical reading ... and reading *lots* of difficult texts” when English is their “third or fourth language.”

In contrast to the identified issues surrounding literacy skill development, some participants emphasised the strong oral communication skills of many African students. These two skill sets, however, were discussed simultaneously. For example, Rebecca (UE) stated that she “find[s] most of the Africans easy to understand, but some of their writing is not.” Similarly, Daphne (TE) reported some of her African students are “quite good communicators ... but they struggle with the writing.” In contrast, Denise (TE) has encountered difficulties in understanding African students’ verbal communication. Despite “mak[ing] an effort to verbalise what they think,” she often struggles to “pick[ing] up on the points” they have made.

### **Influence of being multilingual.**

The majority of newly arrived African youth speak at least one language or dialect other than English, indicating that “they are incredibly capable at language” (Tracey, UE). Participants explored the impact of being multilingual on education and career pathways in Australia. For example, Fatuma’s (student) Somali friend was not literate in Somali. Fatuma was able to utilise her own knowledge of Somali to assist her friend to develop literacy skills. Consequently, Fatuma’s friend has improved her English language skills. Fatuma explained that “sometimes, you don’t know how to pronounce a word in English. And if you can write that in your own language, how to pronounce it ... It helps you a lot.” Similarly, Michelle (student) has been able to utilise her knowledge of French to support her English literacy skill development.

While many participants reported benefits of being multilingual, some participants referred to the disadvantages. For example, Habsa (student) explained that being multilingual requires her to translate assessment tasks in order to understand the question:

*I just understand things in English and then try and put it in my language so it makes better sense. And then I come back to English ... You're reading the question, you don't understand. So, each word you're reading in your mind with your language and then you understand in your language and then you bring it back to English! [laughs] ... It's really hard.*

The act of translating assessment tasks to aid in comprehension amongst African students was also observed by Rob (ST). He suggested that “it must take them twice as long as it would take anybody else to do a task ...” because of the time required to engage in this translation. Translating can, therefore, increase the time required to complete tasks which can impact on African students’ school experiences.

Being multilingual possesses both advantages and disadvantages. While it can aid in developing English language skills, it can also prove time-consuming during tests and exams. Being multilingual can, therefore, simultaneously aid and hinder African youth in terms of their education and career pathways.

### **3. Mainstream Schooling Domain**

The education and career pathways of African youth are critically informed by their Australian school experiences. In order to facilitate access to the curriculum and, therefore, educational engagement, participation and success, African youth require academic and social support. Such provisions are particularly crucial for those with limited formal schooling and/or English language and literacy proficiency. Within this domain, issues are discussed in relation to academic and social support and educational disengagement.

#### **Academic support.**

The provision of academic support was a particularly salient issue amongst school-based educators. Academic support was considered key to assisting African students to develop positive study habits, general knowledge, and literacy and numeracy skills. Appropriate academic support in secondary school can, therefore, aid in counteracting some of the lasting impacts that limited skills can have on the education and career pathways of African youth.



Academic difficulties were found to be exhibited in a variety of ways, such as disruptive behaviour during class, tardiness, and absences from school. Barbara (ST) referred to an African student who was consistently late to school. His teacher said, “If you’re late again, you will get a detention.” In an attempt to evade punishment, the student chose to remain home. Barbara surmised that the student’s tardiness was derived from academic difficulties. She suggested that when students are “really weak with their English skills and really slow to pick it up, that’s where I think they just say, ‘It’s already 9 o’clock. Well, I’ll just stay home.’”

Discussions of academic support largely centred on curriculum modifications (e.g., modifying assessment tasks). Despite its importance, curriculum differentiation was considered to be largely dependent on the views and actions of the individual teacher. That is, some educators aren’t “prepared to adopt different strategies or methodologies” while others do “modify the curriculum and ... their methodology to support students’ learning” (Trevor, ST). This divide was not limited to secondary school contexts. In the university sector, Sean (UE) stated that there are “two groups” of educators – those that “will go out of their way” to support African students and those that “handball it to someone else” and are “unwilling to offer help.”

In addition, curriculum differentiation was considered to be constrained by practical issues. For example, making appropriate curriculum modifications requires time. Time, however, is not always afforded to teachers who typically have multiple roles and responsibilities.

When African students do not have teachers who differentiate the curriculum to meet their learning needs, students are “expected to meet” the “standard that is set” (Kerri, ST). This can limit a student’s access to the curriculum which can prove particularly challenging for students with limited formal schooling experience and/or English language and literacy skills. As discussed, limited access to the curriculum strongly shapes African students’ experiences of school which, in turn, influences their senior school subject choices and post-school options.

Eliciting feedback from students was considered integral in providing appropriate academic support to African youth. For example, teachers need to ask suitable questions in order to establish students' level of understanding. Asking closed questions that require a 'yes' or 'no' response, for example, is typically unproductive. The teacher may be "led to believe" that the student has "understood something" and "further down the track," the teacher discovers that the student "actually had no idea" but "did not want to let you know" (Jacqui, ST). Jacqui stated that the "habit of saying *yes* to everything" has implications for African students' education and career pathways by making it difficult for students "to choose [appropriate] subjects in the senior years." This can then critically shape students' senior secondary school experiences and impact upon their post-school options.

While academic support was considered important in shaping African students' school experiences, such provisions can lead to negative consequences. For example, when curriculum modifications are made, students' senior school subject choices can be constrained. As Linda (ST) explained:

*Because teachers are modifying the work ... and not expecting the same level ... when the students get the report and take it home ... it looks like they're coping okay because it has been modified ... And some families insist that they will do physics ... and that puts huge pressure on the school and the teachers to justify why they can't ...*

Challenges can also arise when African students are graded on the basis of their performance within a differentiated curriculum. This practice can create a "false expectation" (Trevor, ST) in students about their capabilities, knowledge and skills. In this way, curriculum differentiation can act to restrict senior school subject choices and consequently, post-school options. Providing academic support in the form of curriculum modifications can, therefore, facilitate educational engagement, participation and success, while simultaneously constraining post-school pathways amongst African youth.

### **Social support.**

In addition to academic provisions, social support was deemed necessary in order to facilitate engagement, participation and success in the Australian school system. At a rudimentary level, social support provision involves establishing a welcoming environment that promotes the development of a sense of belonging. Mentoring, however, was considered a critical means by which to provide social support.

Mentoring has been described as having “somebody who can encourage” (Luol, ASP) and support African youth at secondary school. A mentor/mentee partnership was considered key to facilitating the development of cultural capital amongst African students. In describing this relationship, participants emphasised the importance of having a mentor from a similar cultural background. As Darren (SP) explained, “it’s important for them to have really good, solid examples of people from their own culture that have been a success ...” Such cultural role models were seen to act as a ‘bridge’ between the student’s home, school and community. Where African youth are “missing an adult figure at home,” (Linda, ST) mentoring is particularly important. Linda suggested that in these situations, the mentor can act as an “older [sibling].”

Social support provisions were considered to be constrained by a number of factors. For example, heavy teaching loads can reduce the time that can teachers could spent supporting African students. Similarly, the role of the BSSO was considered to be time-restricted which, in turn, can reduce the consistency of social support that is provided. Furthermore, BSSOs were perceived to only enter schools “when something happens” (Luol, ASP). That is, when there is a problem. In this way, the BSSO role constrains social support for students by being confined to ‘fixing problems’ rather than taking a more proactive approach to social support provisions. In addition to school-based constraints, Jacqui (ST) cited limited resources among outside agencies as a barrier to accessing social support services for African students. Specifically, she stated that lack of access to interpreters and associated lengthy waiting times can significantly impact upon communication between students’ families and the school. Limited finances to provide appropriate social support provisions was also considered a barrier.

The provision of social support was considered a necessary element in facilitating positive school experiences amongst African students. Appropriate social support was seen to enhance engagement and participation in education, which provides a strong foundation upon which African students can build as they make post-school education and career choices.

### **Educational disengagement.**

Approximately five to six years ago, educational disengagement was a particularly prevalent issue amongst African youth from refugee backgrounds. The primary cause of this disengagement was considered an inability to cope with the academic demands of the Australian school system as a consequence of limited formal schooling and English language and literacy skills. These academic challenges were described vis-à-vis social issues such as racism and bullying. School-based difficulties were also described as being compounded by other issues such as teenage pregnancy, family conflict and mental health issues. As Darren (SP) explained, educational disengagement was found to trigger feelings of boredom and subsequently, engagement in anti-social behaviours:

*The easiest [option] for kids in a school setting when they feel embarrassed or they stand out ... is to just not go to school. And when you don't go to school, you invariably get bored after staying at home. And the easiest thing is to find yourself in trouble.*

During this time, participants reported that intra-tribal conflict was common. As Luol (ASP) stated, African youth “used to fight each other” despite “com[ing] from the same tribe.” The cause of this conflict was rooted in dissimilar cultural and linguistic histories associated with the countries of asylum. As Jacqui (ST) explained, South Sudanese Dinka students who lived in Egypt learned Arabic while those who spent time in Kenya learned Swahili. She stated that language differences would be enough to “start a fight” because one group assumed the other was “talking about them.”

During 2008 and 2009, some African youth began engaging in criminal activity. For example, Jacqui (ST) reported that one of the gang leaders was attending the school and was expelled following “a violent home invasion of another student.” This incident and other criminal behaviours significantly impacted upon the functioning of the school community, such that police were often called to school. As a consequence of this criminal behaviour, “there used to be *heaps* of [African youth] in Magill<sup>40</sup>” (Luol, ASP) who would often have “up to 30 different charges pending” (Darren, SP) and were “in and out of the youth courts.”

More recently, however, incidents of criminal activity amongst African youth are rare. As Darren (SP) stated, youth workers do not seem to “*see* justice issues at all.” He attributed this to better settlement amongst African youth generally, coupled with a “stronger school base [previous schooling experience]” and better engagement with the community.

Educational disengagement can critically shape African students’ education and career pathways. For example, school experiences can shape aspects of students’ post-school pathways which include subject choices.

#### **4. Family, Kin and Community Domain**

Family, kin and community were found to play a critical role in the education and career pathways of African youth. Within this domain, cultural and religious identity was found to influence African students’ education and career aspirations. Family structure and support were considered integral to African students’ school experiences and were also significant in shaping post-school decisions. In addition, students’ roles, responsibilities and expectations within their families and communities were seen to strongly shape their education and career pathways.

##### **Identity.**

This study found that the identities of African youth are complex and ever-changing, and are influenced by geography. For example, Somali student

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<sup>40</sup> The Magill Youth Training Centre was a juvenile detention facility that has now closed and merged with the Cavan Training Centre to become the Adelaide Youth Training Centre.

participants who were born outside the country of origin maintain strong identification with Somali culture. Growing up in a neighbouring country such as Kenya was also found to shape the development of students' cultural identities. For example, Fathia reported that she understands and identifies with the Kenyan culture to a greater extent than her Somali culture. Following migration, the cultural identities of African youth then become increasingly complex, where students are exposed to new cultural norms and values. Despite the complexities of a cosmopolitan identity, the cultural identities of African youth were seen to critically inform their education and career aspirations.

The cultures to which newly arrived African youth belong are communal in nature. As Kennedy (ASP) stated, "in a village, every elderly man is a father to all the children in that village. We live like a family." Migrating to an individualist society can, therefore, disrupt traditional patterns of interaction, as Luol (ASP) explained:

*We are communal ... People talk to each other, people learn from each other ... Back home, the elders are like counsellors ... They talk to the kids ... Even if he's not related to me ... I can actually discipline that kid and say, 'No. What you are doing is wrong.' ... That opportunity, we don't have it here ... They have lost that respect for their elders ... simply because ... where we come from, we use the word 'we' a lot. But here, they use the word 'I' a lot.*

Participants reported a general fear amongst some newly arrived African parents that their children will lose their cultural identity. The African community in the diaspora is divided along cultural and tribal lines and is considered a critical context for the maintenance and development of a sense of kinship and identity. Members of the community are seen to actively support one another through collaborative problem-solving and the provision of practical and social support. This desire to support others is coupled with a general desire for newly arrived Africans to become "good citizens" (Amanda, UE).

Maintaining a sense of community in the diaspora, and supporting others to succeed were seen to play a key role in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. For example, Belee (student) receives much satisfaction from

“participating and contributing” to the Liberian community and aspires to work to support young people. Her desire for community involvement is strong; she “feel[s] like it’s a duty.” In contrast, some student participants avoided contact with the community for a number of reasons, including political division, and a fear of becoming ‘left behind’ in relation to other young people. Despite this, all African youth reported a strong desire to better their respective communities through participation in education.

In addition to culture, religious identities were found to influence African youth experiences of resettlement, migration and engagement in education and employment. Some student participants explicitly referred to their faith in assisting them to cope with difficulties and change. For example, David reported attending church “every Sunday” and referred to the strong influence of religion on his identity. Similarly, Belee reported a strong belief in God, stating that it was her faith that kept her “well protected” throughout her life. Belee’s religious beliefs have also assisted her to cope with major changes and upheavals in her life such as dealing with family conflict.

#### **Family structure and support.**

Both family structure and support were considered strong influences on the education and career pathways of African youth. Structural changes to families were seen to occur in and around migration and were found to trigger additional challenges. The support that family can provide to their children in terms of schooling and post-school education and career pathways was found to be constrained by a number of factors.

Structural changes to families that are brought about by refugee experiences can create difficulties following migration. In particular, the absence of a father figure can create difficulties within the family. As Kennedy and Deng (ASPs) explained, in many newly arrived African families, the father is traditionally responsible for managing children’s behaviour. The absence of a father figure can, therefore, create difficulties for the matriarch, particularly where children are experimenting with a new sense of freedom in Australia. In addition, a lack of parental ‘control’ over

African students' behaviour can critically impact upon African students' education and career pathways. For example, Fatuma (student) stated that some students tell their parents that they are "doing an assignment" when in reality, they "[are] on Facebook." Failure to complete homework can impact upon students' educational participation and engagement and academic success. In turn, this can affect subject choices and, ultimately, post-school options. This was consistent with Jacqui's (ST) experiences of working with African students who were involved in gangs and criminal activity (discussed previously). In these situations, the mothers were not respected by their children. Jacqui stated that these mothers were in "powerless positions" because they have been "displaced from their culture," they "don't have the language" and they have "lost the male head of the household."

Recall from Chapter 5 that Abie, Fatuma, Sayhosay and Belee (students) experienced conflict with family members following migration and subsequently moved from the family home to live independently. School teachers reported similar situations amongst their African students. For example, Jacqui (ST) worked with two siblings who migrated to Australia with their biological father and step-mother. The school intervened to secure accommodation for the students after learning that the step-mother "was quite violent towards them." Similarly, Linda (ST) worked with an African student who had "been kicked out of home because his step-mother didn't want to put up with him." She stated that the boy "came to school smelling of alcohol some mornings."

The absence of an adult figure at home was seen to create and compound social and academic challenges for African students, who become independent "at a very vulnerable age" (Jacqui, ST). Jacqui suggested that when these students face social, emotional or academic issues, they lack guidance from "stable and supportive adults" and consequently, are "very much on their own." In these instances, school staff may take on a greater 'loco parentis' role and become more "involved in the wider things" (Barbara, ST) such as assisting students to find suitable housing and part-time employment, and ensuring that they maintain a healthy diet.



Family support was found to be critical in shaping students' education and career pathways. The level of family support, however, was found to be dependent upon a number of factors. As illustrated above, family structure can shape the availability of support. For example, Fatuma (student) stated, "I wish my mum was here. I'd like a family to [go] to whenever things go wrong, or whenever you need someone ...". Similarly, Belee (student) reported that one of the difficulties of independent living is that there is "no one to talk to."

Participants reported that parents play a more passive role in their children's schooling in Africa when compared to Australia. Consequently, knowledge of the level of parental involvement in schooling in Australia can limit the type of support that parents can provide to their children in terms of their education. In addition, family members may have a limited understanding of school expectations (e.g., homework, assignments, SACE requirements, and the need for a computer and Internet access in the home). This can also limit the type of support that parents can provide to their children.

Parents with limited or no literacy skills in English or any other language can experience difficulty in supporting their children's education (e.g., assisting with homework). Similarly, language difficulties can create communication challenges between the home and school. For example, written notes that are sent home are not likely to be useful for parents with limited literacy skills. In addition, the education and employment histories of parents were found to shape the level and type of support that they can provide to their children in the context of education and career pathways (discussed later).

### **Roles and responsibilities.**

Family roles and responsibilities of African youth were explored in terms of their influence on education and career pathways, including the direct impacts on students' schooling. These roles and responsibilities included: caring for younger siblings; engaging in domestic duties; and assisting family members with English language issues in the form of interpreting and translating. In addition, limited

financial resources were found to directly impact upon the education and career pathways of African youth.

Caring for younger siblings and engaging in housework are often responsibilities that are entrusted to female African youth. In Trevor's (ST) experience, African girls are often assigned these tasks because their single mothers often work "long hours" in aged care or cleaning. For example, Habsa (student) reported having after-school responsibilities such as feeding and showering her siblings, and putting them to bed. Similarly, Will (ASP) has observed that within the same family, "the boy's excelling at his schoolwork, whereas the girl, she's just regressing." He cited housework and other family responsibilities that are placed on female youth as a cause for such academic differences. Fulfilling household duties and caring for siblings can, therefore, make it "difficult to study" (Trevor, ST) because of the limited time for homework. In addition, Laura (TE) has also observed that female African students' "roles at home" can critically impede their success in the TAFE system.

Familial roles and responsibilities of African youth can also shape employment opportunities. For example, Laura (TE) observed that employment is particularly important for men given their prescribed role as the traditional financial providers for the family. Conversely, employment opportunities for female African youth may be "limited" (Trevor, ST) because of their domestic roles and responsibilities. It is, therefore, evident that family roles and responsibilities, particularly for female African youth can significantly shape their education and employment pathways.

Participants cited an onus on young people to interpret and translate for family members with limited English language skills. For example, David (student) stated that, "If she [my mother] wants to say something, I have to be there ... I've got to interpret when she speaks." Darren (SP) suggested that this responsibility was often incumbent upon young people because of their ability to learn English more quickly than older family members. Attending appointments to interpret can, therefore, shape African students' school attendance and academic achievement, which can ultimately affect their post-school pathway options.

Limited financial resources were considered to critically impact upon African students' school experiences. For example, African youth often have little money to purchase school uniforms, textbooks, stationery, and meet the costs of excursions. In addition to impacting upon students' school experiences, Kerri (ST) suggested that "money would be an issue" for African youth who intend to undertake further study, stating that limited financial resources would likely result in the need to engage in "part-time work *and* part-time study."

The finances required to undertake education are often coupled with, and compounded by, financial obligations to family and kin in Africa and the diaspora. Financially supporting family overseas was considered a task "for nearly every family member you find here [in Australia]" (Kennedy, ASP). This obligation is often coupled with the assumption by those living in Africa that Australia is the "land of milk and honey" (Amanda, UE), where people are free from financial difficulties.

The provision of financial aid to family and kin is not a choice but rather, "an obligation" (Emmanuel, ASP), as Will (ASP) explained:

*... you have a lot of people who rely on you ... That's the thing that they put in our minds ... They'll tell you, I'm not just my mother's kid. I'm not just only my father's kid ... My aunty has a right on me, my uncle has a right on me. So, if me studying will make them starve, then I'm not doing the right thing. I should stop studying and then work in order to support them ...*

Similarly, Abie explained that she feels "responsible" for financially supporting her family in Africa. Through her work as a psychologist, Amanda (UE) has also observed the importance of making regular remittances to Africa. One of her students stated that the family will "... put a hex on me if I don't continue to contribute." Amanda reported that similar sentiments have been expressed by other students.

All student participants reported sending money to family in refugee camps and other situations of poverty. Students' assessment of the degree of difficulty in saving

and sending money to family was related to the employment status and job stability of themselves and their family. For example, Fatuma stated that the majority of her Centrelink allowance is sent to her family, leaving little money for food and bills.

Similarly, Habsa cited difficulties in sending money to family:

*... we are facing our own problems. We can't help them right now ... When you can, it's not difficult, but when you can't and they need you, it's difficult ... My uncle ... is sick and my mum was sick. Everyone was ... in bad condition. But at the same time, there was no money.*

In contrast, Angel stated that “it’s not difficult” to send money to relatives in Africa “because my mum’s got a permanent job and my dad works.”

Remittances to family overseas were seen to directly impact upon the education and career pathways of African youth. As discussed above, students may not have “money set aside for a school uniform or for books” (Rachel, SP). In these situations, “the money [that is] going overseas impacts directly on ... learning” (Trevor, ST). Financial constraints can also constrain post-school options, where a tension exists between the need to financially support family and create education and career plans. For example, Darren (SP) stated that:

*If you're the eldest sibling and your mum is a single parent and you've got five or six younger brothers and sisters ... education's not seen as something that's going to be a pathway to making money in the short term. A pathway to making money is to find a job doing whatever to contribute, to try and support.*

In some instances, the ultimatum is to “work and eat, or study and starve” (Dean, SP). Consequently, some African youth are under “enormous pressure to work hard, earn a lot [and] send some to family” (Daphne, TE).

Financial constraints can also have long-term implications for African students’ education and career pathways. For example, Will (ASP) cited situations where, upon completing high school, African youth begin low-skilled employment because of financial obligations. They begin “with the intention” of working for two years

before returning to study. The notion of living in relative poverty whilst studying then acts as an impetus to remain in employment. Years later, African youth may arrive at the conclusion that “it’s too late” (Will) to return to study. Similarly, long-term employment prospects can be limited when African youth lack “any sort of qualifications” (Darren, SP) because of financial responsibilities to family.

## 5. Relationships Domain

Relationships were considered integral in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. Participants described the importance of interactions with peers and teachers in shaping the experiences of African youth. Issues of racism and discrimination were also explored in terms of the impact on the education and career pathways of African youth.

### Peer relationships.

Peer relationships were a key factor in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. Positive peer interactions were seen to provide African youth with a source of practical, emotional and social support and aid in overcoming difficulties. Schooling provides opportunities to develop cross-cultural relationships because of, for example, proximity, shared experiences, engagement in similar activities, collaborative group work, and teacher support.

Amidst ‘same-culture’ relationship preferences, participants reflected upon their observations of interactions amongst African students. Student participants described the quality of their relationships with both African and non-African students. Many reported that their friendships are predominantly with other Africans and some described their relationships with Australian-born peers as superficial. For example, Habsa reported that she rarely interacts with Australian-born students and her interaction is limited to infrequently “saying hi.” Others, however, described a strong division between African and Australian-born students. For example, Sayhosay reported that classroom activities are a site for division where “you will see the African students [in] one place and the Australians, one place ... In my group, everyone is African.”

Educators also reported segregation between African and non-African students, stating that there is often a tendency amongst African students to “keep to themselves” (Rob, ST). Some participants viewed this segregation as a sign that African youth are “not integrating” (Maria, TE) into the broader Australian community. A number of participants, however, cited the ease of ‘speaking the same language’ to explain this preference and acknowledged that the desire to “stick together” (Jacqui, ST) is common amongst many “minority groups in a dominant culture” (Daphne, TE). In ‘sticking together’, participants referred to a desire to “support each other” (Daphne, TE) which appears consistent with the importance of community (described earlier).

Issues associated with developing cross-cultural relationships were explored. For example, Sayhosay (student) explained that it is challenging to make “Australian friends” because she cannot “speak proper English.” Emmanuel (ASP) suggested that some African parents may fear that cross-cultural friendships will compromise the development of their children’s cultural identities. Dissimilar social worlds and different levels of freedom were also considered a potential barrier to developing cross-cultural friendships. Similarly, different topics of conversation and underlying assumptions about relationships were considered challenges associated with cross-cultural interaction.

### **Student/teacher relationships.**

The student/teacher relationship was found to be integral in shaping African students’ experiences in secondary and further and higher education. Positive relationships were critical in fostering the development of help-seeking skills. The skills developed in interacting with school teachers were considered useful in assisting African students to develop relationships with educators beyond school.

African youth and their families were seen to hold educators in “high regard” (Rachel, SP). This was reiterated by student participants who described their teachers in terms of ‘respect’. They reported positive interactions when teachers demonstrated empathy and acknowledged the difficulties faced by African students. For example, Angel respected Rob (ST) because he “understood where

we're from, our background." Establishing positive relationships with African students involves "showing that you care enough to give them time and ... talk to them respectfully" (Linda, ST).

Interestingly, students who live independently described the relationships with their teachers in 'family' terms. For example, Fatuma stated that Rob (ST) is "like a dad" because "he is very supportive [and] understanding." Barbara (ST) also referred to the familial nature of her relationships with African students, stating that she sometimes feels like "a surrogate mum." This is consistent with the idea of school staff taking on a greater role when working with students who live independently (discussed earlier).

Amongst student participants, different help-seeking strategies and behaviours were used. For example, Belee was reluctant to seek help because of a fear of being seen as a "burden," and felt "embarrassed" to ask for assistance. Mark (UE) reiterated this idea when describing African students' help-seeking strategies. Similarly, Sayhosay worried that her teachers would not understand her, but gradually developed confidence to seek help. In contrast, David saw the need to seek assistance: "If you don't ask [any] questions, you're going to get no answers." Despite identified fears associated with help-seeking, participants reported that African students are generally "quite comfortable" (Laura, TE) in approaching school teachers for assistance. Similarly, university educators suggested that African students do not appear to be "intimidated" (Mark, UE) by lecturers when students are seeking help from them.

Help-seeking behaviours amongst African youth were found to be influenced by a number of factors. For example, cultural modes of interaction were seen to critically shape help-seeking where there is a preference towards a relational approach. That is, African students "respond to contacts. If they know somebody is there that *might* be able to help them," (Rebecca, UE) they are more likely to seek help. In Amanda's (UE) experience, "it is really important that they can relate to you as a person." The relational nature of students' cultures, therefore, shapes their approaches to help-seeking.

The culture of help-seeking in the Australian university context was also a critical factor in shaping African university students' help-seeking behaviours. Broadly, help-seeking is often viewed by the university student population as "an indication" of failure in the system (Amanda, UE). Sean (UE) suggested that this is a critical point amongst African students, whose lives have been "punctuated by failures." Seeking help is, therefore, an acknowledgement that the "cycle of failure" is maintained. Perceptions of failure were associated with a desire to 'save face.' 'Face-saving' was considered both a barrier to, and strategy of, help-seeking. Saving face was found to possess a physical dimension. That is, African students do not want to be "seen by others" (Sean, UE) to be seeking help. Face-saving serves to maintain the illusion that African youth are "coping and they're successful" (Lillian, ST) which is particularly maladaptive for those with multiple academic and social challenges.

Gender was considered a factor in shaping help-seeking behaviours, particularly for male students who are working with female educators. As Sean (UE) explained, African students have come "from a male-dominated, patriarchal society ... to Australia, where women and men are more or less equal." The impact of gender in shaping interactions was, therefore, representative of a cultural shift associated with migration. Consequently, young African men may feel embarrassed to seek help from a female teacher, particularly if they only have respect for "male authority" (Linda, ST). This has been Barbara's (ST) experience where she often has to "work harder" to earn the respect of her male African students. Gender can, therefore, critically shape help-seeking behaviours and student/teacher interactions.

Some African youth were perceived as 'loud' and 'demanding' when seeking help. Darren (SP) suggested that these help-seeking behaviours can be "misinterpreted as being anti-social and non-conformist." Three suggestions were made about the origin of this behaviour. Firstly, Jacqui (ST) interpreted this as "frustration" in being unable to express "what is actually bothering them" because of limited language skills. Secondly, Darren (SP) suggested that "loving life and being loud" is part of African culture. Finally, Rachel (SP) suggested that this behaviour may be a consequence of the refugee experience in which there is a need to "push to survive."



The notion of information avoidance was also considered a factor associated with help-seeking. That is, African youth may avoid new information because they are overwhelmed with numerous struggles and competing demands. Supporting African students to become independent learners and active help-seekers was considered particularly important for African youth who intend on undertaking further and/or higher education.

### **Racism and discrimination.**

Newly arrived Africans belong to a visible, “distinguishable” (Sean, UE) minority in Australia. In addition to having “black faces” (Sean, UE), Africans “stand out ... because they’re so tall and they just look different” (Tracey, UE). Because of these differences and ubiquitous racist rhetoric, African youth must learn to “put up with and live with” discrimination despite having adopted “the culture, the language, the slang” and “the Australian accent” (Luol, ASP). Consequently, racism and discrimination were considered to shape African students’ education and career pathways and their sense of belonging in the broader community.

Will (ASP) described the difficulties in challenging and overcoming visible differences, stemming from a colonial history:

*When you’re talking with people ... some of the Africans ... they still hold back and say, ‘She is white,’ or, ‘He is white,’ ... It’s like, ‘I’m inferior to them.’ It puts that barrier ... ‘How is she going to react to that?’ Or, ‘How is he going to take that, because I’m black?’ ... It’s in our mind and it’s in our brain because we’ve been colonised ... I never saw any Belgians ... but they came, they beat us ... they told us that they were superior, so it takes courage to say, ‘I oppose that.’*

Visible differences, coupled with historical notions of superiority/inferiority can, therefore, shape cross-cultural interactions. Fears of racism, discrimination and intolerance can, thus, influence the education and career pathways of African youth.

School-based racial bullying experiences were reported by participants. Racism was considered to threaten students’ sense of safety and wellbeing which can impact on their engagement and participation in education. For example, Sayhosay reported

racial abuse from one of her Australian-born peers after accidentally walking into him. He responded to Sayhosay by saying, ““Oh, you have a dirty colour! Your skin colour is too dark and dirty. Don’t touch me!”” Other students who witnessed the incident laughed, leaving Sayhosay feeling “really hurt” and “really ashamed.” Similarly, a client of Emmanuel’s (ASP) reported that ““The students said they don’t want me in the class. Every day, they say I’m black.”” This prompted the client to change schools. Trevor (ST) has also observed “a lot” of racism in schools involving African students’ peers. Racial taunts, however, were ‘hidden,’ making issues difficult to address:

*Some girls, they’re very good at subtle stuff with a flick of the hair, the look and so on ... That was enough to let them know they didn’t like them ... And it’s all undercover, it’s nothing you can put your finger on ... You can’t accuse someone of flicking their hair at someone.*

In addition to racial bullying from peers, student participants reported racial abuse from teachers. Fatuma reported that her chemistry teacher taunted another African student in the class, saying: ““Lucky I’m not the mother who ... gave birth to you. I feel sorry for the mother who looks at that face ... and gives birth to that face.”” In addition, some student participants stated that educators can stereotype African students because of their refugee status. As Angel stated, some people “think all refugees are uneducated and they’re not capable of doing things,” prompting refugees “to prove them wrong.”

Educators also reported issues of racism in which African students made accusations that teachers were racist. Linda (ST) stated that some African students will “pull the racist card” in circumstances that are not in the students’ favour. For example, Daphne and Laura (TEs) have both been labelled racist by African students. In both instances, students were awarded grades that were perceived by the students as low and not indicative of their abilities.

The workplace was also a site for racial abuse. Luol (ASP) referred to his own experiences in working in customer service. He reported that an older Australian woman demanded to “speak to an Australian.” He explained to the woman that he

was Australian before saying, "I see. You want to speak to a *white* Australian." Luol also recalled an encounter with an Aboriginal man who referred to him as a "black bastard." While witnesses were concerned, Luol simply laughed at the comments, considering the irony of the situation. Such experiences can cause African youth to develop and maintain a defensive stance in the workplace. As in education contexts, racism can threaten a sense of safety and wellbeing which can, ultimately, impact upon employment experiences and job satisfaction. Racism and discrimination can, therefore, critically impact upon the education and career pathways of African youth.

More broadly, negative media portrayals of newly arrived Africans were considered to perpetuate racist ideologies in the broader community. Such representations serve to maintain "non-acceptance" and racist attitudes "against anyone who's got dark skin" (Rob, ST). A particularly illustrative example relates to a stabbing incident which occurred in South Australia within the African community a number of years ago. Luol (ASP) believes that the media engaged in biased reporting because of the involvement of African youth, stating that the media "capitalised" on the events. Similarly, Darren (SP) described the coverage as inappropriate because of the discussion about "*gangs*" when in reality, "it's a group of friends hanging around, often with very limited prospects and simply finding trouble." The difficulty in addressing these negative portrayals stems from ignorance. As Luol (ASP) stated, people "have not been educated to know *why* these people are here." This is coupled with a lack of African voice to address these issues. Luol suggested that "if there is no one that can talk on your behalf, the voice just dies ... No one *cares* [that] these people are people."

Like racial taunts, negative media portrayals of newly arrived Africans in Australia can threaten a sense of safety. Portrayals of Africans as "violent people" (Sean, UE) can also impact upon the education and employment prospects of young people. For example, employers may be reluctant to hire an African in light of negative media representations.

## 6. Education and Career Aspirations Domain

The development of education and career aspirations amongst African youth constituted a key focus of this study. Aspirations to become doctors, lawyers, engineers and dentists were commonly cited by participants. This section explores four key influences which were considered critical in shaping the education and career aspirations of African youth. These include: the importance of education, status and respect; the desire to contribute to the development of community; familial influences; and gender.

### **Importance of education, status and respect.**

African youth and their families were seen to place a great deal of “value” (Jacqui, ST) and “importance” (Amanda, UE) on education. Access to “a better education” (Luol, ASP) was considered a critical migration-related opportunity, acting as both a motivating factor for resettlement, and key to creating a “new” (Linda, ST) and “better” (Jacqui, ST) life for the future. The desire to improve “family circumstances” (Amanda, UE) was coupled with the expectation that “everyone should be successful” (Rachel, SP) because of the opportunities available in Australia. Many African youth are, therefore, expected to succeed; “they must *be* something” (Rachel, SP).

Status and respect were considered key measures of success amongst African youth and their families. Education and career pathways were considered the means by which to attain status and respect and, by extension, become successful. In Lillian’s (ST) experience, the aspirations of African students with whom she has worked are “always status driven.” Careers in medicine, law and engineering are those associated with status and respect. Participants also purported that refugee experiences may have resulted in the assumption of African youth that professional careers are the means by which to attain status and respect. For example, Rob (ST) suggested that the role models to whom African youth are exposed in refugee camps are professionals (i.e., doctors and lawyers).

Aligned with the status and respect of professional careers is the view that the university is similarly esteemed. Obtaining a university qualification is, therefore,

the means by which to gain status, respect, and a high “social standing” (Jacqui, ST). Because of this, the university is considered a “glamorous” (Laura, TE) post-school option. The status of the university is made ‘visible’ amongst African students on campus when they wear “formal jackets” (Mark, UE) and other ‘business’ attire.

Like the development of professional career aspirations, participants proposed that the status of the university may be derived from refugee experiences and the associated lack of educational opportunity. That is, completing a tertiary qualification is an “impossible dream” (Daphne, TE) for many refugees who are living in camps. Following migration, university attendance becomes a possibility.

The status of the university was seen in direct contrast to TAFE. Where the university has “huge status,” TAFE has “none” (Laura, TE). Anecdotal data collected prior to this study’s data collection suggests that TAFE lacks the status and respect of the university because TAFE is ‘where you go to learn English.’ Such negative perceptions were considered detrimental, particularly for African youth for whom TAFE is the most appropriate option immediately following completion of secondary school.

### **Sense of urgency.**

Associated with the aspiration of many African youth to attend university immediately following the completion of secondary school, was a strong sense of urgency, particularly around university admittance. For example, Daphne (TE) has noticed that many African students want to ‘rush’ into university study, which is concerning when students have not yet developed the skills necessary to experience academic success. This strong desire to make haste was described by participants as not wanting to ‘waste time’. For example, Sayhosay (student) stated: “I don’t want to waste my time. I just want to move on quick.”

A number of suggestions were offered regarding the underlying impetus for this sense of urgency. Daphne (TE) suggested that “where they’ve come from,” their futures are seemingly uncertain and “you don’t know what tomorrow will bring.” The result is a desire to make haste. Some suggested that the desire to ‘make up for

lost time' is a contributing factor. A sense of urgency may also be derived from students' family roles and responsibilities. For example, long-term study commitments may prevent African youth from financially "assisting the family" (Darren, SP).

A strong sense of urgency was also associated with a perceived need to 'catch up'. Student participants judged their progress against their Australian-born counterparts and many resolved to 'catch up' to their peers. For example, Michelle stated that she is "a little bit late [behind]," attributing her delay to the age at which she migrated to Australia. For Sayhosay, being 'behind' is a cause for concern, stating that if she had been born in Australia, she would not "worry that much." Fatuma made a similar comparison, stating that it is 'easy' for Australian-born students because they are 'on time'.

### **Community development.**

Associated with a desire to attain status and respect through education and career pathways was the aspiration to contribute to community development both in Africa and the diaspora. In Lillian's (ST) experience, African students will often convey a desire to return to Africa and "put [their] jobs into action to help people ... When they're talking about what job they want ... it's *always* got a purpose."

Recall from Chapter 5 that many student participants reported an intention to 'give back' to their community after completing appropriate qualifications in Australia. For example, Fathia intends to "open a school for [orphaned children] ... and improve the health system of Africa." Angel's vision is to work in Australia before returning to Africa to open a family clinic and "work with [her aunties]" as a nurse. Sayhosay's aspirations were also strongly influenced by the desire to return to Africa to support the Liberian community. Like other student participants, Sayhosay explained that this return is temporary:

*My aim is to go back to my country. Not forever. To establish some things, and come back ... I have to help people in my country. But it's not like I'm going [to] my*

*country to live there ... Australia is my country now ... I just want to ... give back a little bit ...*

This transient return to Africa to aid in community development was echoed by other participants. As Emmanuel (ASP) explained, some African youth dream of returning with knowledge gained in Australia, but “no one dreams to live there permanently.” Similarly, Kennedy (ASP) reported that Liberian youth who have decided to return to their homeland are intending only “to visit.” According to Barbara (ST), the intention to return is seemingly novel when compared to other students from refugee backgrounds where “there is no going back, often.”

Participants also reported working with African youth who “*never* want to go back” (Dean, SP). For example, Jurup (student) stated that he will never return to his homeland, stating that this is written on his migration documentation. Dean suggested that previous trauma acts as an impetus in making the decision not to turn to Africa. This may be the case in Jurup’s situation, given that his father, a policeman, was killed during the conflict.

The impetus for this desire to contribute to the development of community was explored. Some participants suggested that supporting the developing community was another means by which to attain status and respect. Others suggested that this may be derived from familial and community expectations. That is, African youth may “feel like they ... *owe* it to their parents or their family or their cultural traditions ... to go back and offer something” (Darren, SP). This sense of ‘obligation’ was described by Will (ASP) in terms of culture:

*The African saying says, ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ So, if it’s taken a whole village to raise you, then you owe them something ... Background, where we come from, kind of dictates what we do ...*

In summary, access to education is a key migration-related opportunity and is, therefore, considered a critically important aspect of resettlement for African youth. The education and career aspirations of African youth are profoundly shaped by a desire for status and respect – key measures of success. Completing a university

qualification and embarking upon a professional career were seen as key milestones in fulfilling this desire and expectation. Similarly, contributing to the development of community in Africa and the diaspora is seen as a means by which to attain status and respect.

### **Influence of family.**

Family was considered to have a profound influence on the development of African students' education and career aspirations, including the underlying origins of these aspirations. Despite the critical role played by family, participants cited a number of considerations that shape the education and career aspirations and expectations that families have for their children.

As previously discussed, the need for status and respect acts as an impetus for African youth to enter professional careers by means of a university education. While these desires are expressed by African youth, participants suggested that the aspiration to attain status and respect is strongly shaped by family. For example, the mother of one of Dean's (SP) African clients wanted her son to become a doctor because it is a "respected position." In this instance, the desire for respect was derived from parental aspirations. Similarly, Angel (student) has observed that some parents expect their children to 'fill the gaps' in "the new country" by completing qualifications and gaining skills that are required to support rebuilding efforts in Africa. The desire to contribute to community development may, therefore, stem directly from family expectations.

In discussing the impact of family in shaping education and career pathways, both Fathia and Angel (students) stated that their parents believe that "education comes first." Fathia cited this as an important motivator to continue her education. Again, the influence of these students' parents aids in shaping their post-school pathways towards education.

While family expectations can positively shape African students' education and career pathways, it can also be perceived as placing pressure on African youth. For example, one of Darren's (SP) clients "got the marks to study psychology" after



completing secondary school, but was unable to pursue this because her mother refused. Instead, the mother insisted that her daughter become a nurse, despite having “no interest” in working in this field. In this case, the young person experienced familial pressure to fulfil her mother’s expectations.

Participants stated that family expectations can shape the *type* of post-school pathway taken at the conclusion of secondary school (i.e., higher education compared with further education or employment). For example, Ayan (student) was pressured from family to return to school after completing Year 12 to complete Year 13. Similarly, participants reported that some African youth are pressured to attend university immediately following the completion of the SACE. This can be particularly stressful for African youth with limited formal schooling experience and English language and literacy skills. In these instances, young people can feel pressure from family “to excel before they’re ready” (Rachel, SP). Familial expectations can, therefore, shape the timing of certain post-school pathways. This clearly impacts upon the education and career pathways of African youth in terms of aspirations and goal-setting.

Conversely, Will (ASP) suggested that the strength of parental influences is lessened following migration, enabling African youth to exercise “more freedom” to achieve their education and career goals. He suggested that African youth in Australia are better able to “persuade” their parents to support their education and career decisions because parents may not always “know what’s going on, especially if they can’t speak the language.” In this way, migration can increase African students’ autonomous decision-making because of changes to family dynamics and the associated skill levels of each member.

While familial influences are critical in shaping the education and career aspirations of African youth, multiple, interrelated factors shape family expectations, which require acknowledgement. Firstly, parental education and employment histories can shape expectations for their children. Amongst student participants, the education and employment histories of family members varied significantly. For example, Angel, Fathia and John reported strong education and employment histories of their

parents. In contrast, Fatuma and Jurup stated that their parents are unable to read or write, and were engaged in low-skilled employment in Africa. Limited parental literacy is a common issue in the African community. Consequently, parents “don’t even know what their kids are *doing* to start with ... So, they don’t have a contribution. Totally zero” (Luol, ASP). This can constrain the education and career aspirations that parents have for their children.

Secondly, parents’ aspirations for their children are often limited to their own frames of reference. That is, parents transfer their knowledge of careers in Africa to the Australian context. This can be problematic because some parents are only aware of careers in teaching and medicine. They “don’t know other jobs, like social work. In Africa, there is no social work” (Emmanuel, ASP). Consequently, limited knowledge of careers can constrain the aspirations that parents have for their children.

Thirdly, family members’ knowledge of the Australian education system may be limited. As Darren (SP) suggested, many parents “don’t understand the *work* that’s required” in order to complete a university degree. Similarly, they may not understand the impact that years of limited formal schooling can have on their children’s education and career pathways. This can be compounded by limited parental education and employment histories. That is, parents may not understand the skills, knowledge and capabilities that are needed to embark on certain careers because this may extend beyond their frame of reference. A rudimentary understanding of both the Australian education system and the skills and capabilities required to embark upon certain post-school pathways can critically shape parental expectations. In turn, the type and quality of family support provided to children can be constrained.

Conversely, when students’ family members have participated in education, they are more able to provide their children with appropriate support because they have an understanding of the expectations of certain post-school pathways. As Trevor (ST) explained, African youth are “more likely ... [to] be successful” when their family members have engaged in tertiary education. For example, Lillian (ST) has

worked with African youth with family members who have engaged in tertiary education in Australia. In these cases, family members “want it [post-school plans] mapped out and they come to appointments.” Consequently, these students’ post-school preparation is “*very* supported.”

In summary, family were seen to possess a great deal of influence in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. Multiple factors were, however, found to shape the type and level of influence that family can have on their children’s aspirations and goals.

### **Gender.**

Gender roles in Australian society are very different to those in Africa. Emmanuel (ASP) stated that in Africa, “there are jobs for boys and girls ... The household is for girls and the jobs ... where you can get money ... belong to the men.” Migration can, however, influence traditional gender roles where women have access to opportunities that were traditionally only made available to men. As Luol (ASP) explained, “there used to be a lot of differences between boys and girls. But here, because of the environment,” there is less gender-based disparity. Similarly, Fathia (student) stated that “in the developing world,” her gender “would have affected” her education, “but not here [in Australia].” Making post-school plans in Australia that challenge traditional gender roles can, however, potentially cause family conflict, particularly if the young person’s family is unable to “understand why a female wants to become an engineer,” believing that the job “belongs to the boys” (Emmanuel, ASP). In these situations, female African youth can be disadvantaged “because of their cultural background” (Will, ASP) and the ascribed roles and responsibilities.

Interview data revealed inconsistencies in the way in which gender shapes the education and career aspirations of African youth. Amongst the student participants, some viewed certain careers (e.g., engineering) as jobs for men, while others stated that “girls can do anything” (Michelle). Other participants were equally inconsistent in their views of the impact of gender in shaping aspirations. While some suggested that all African students are “equally ambitious” (Rob, ST)

irrespective of gender, others observed that female students “haven’t aspired as high” (Barbara, ST) as their male counterparts. The notion that female students are not ‘aiming as high’ as their male counterparts was not always perceived negatively. For example, Lillian (ST) stated that girls’ aspirations are not “as far out of reality [as] the boys’.” Female students can also be more receptive and willing to “listen a bit more to advice” (Barbara, ST).

In discussing the role of gender in shaping education and career aspirations, participants suggested that male and female youth ascribe different priorities to their lives when considering post-school options. For example, Abie (student) stated that girls “have feelings for family” that shape their education and career aspirations, whereas boys “don’t think” about family. Similarly, Kennedy (ASP) suggested that some male Liberian youth “feel [that] having a car, the best car to drive, is their priority. And just having fun! [laughs]”

## **7. Education and Career Counselling Domain**

Education and career counselling is an important, yet often difficult and complex aspect of supporting African youth in the post-school transition. In the school context, making appropriate senior secondary school subject selections was considered integral to education and career counselling provisions. Supporting African students to make choices in light of their knowledge, skills and capabilities was seen as key to facilitating academic success in the school system. In turn, academic performance shapes available post-school education pathways. Selecting subjects that align with students’ post-school goals was, therefore, considered fundamental in facilitating their education and career pathways.

A key identified tension occurs in supporting African students to make subject selections. Issues can arise when African students make subject selections based on intended post-school goals that are perceived by teachers as ‘unrealistic’. These evaluations are made in consideration of students’ current knowledge, skills and capabilities in addition to the expected timeframe of achieving these goals. For example, participants cited instances where African youth intend to study medicine at university, but have failed Stage 1 biology and have a history of limited formal

schooling experience and limited English language and literacy skills. Supporting African students to make self-appraisals of their abilities with a view to developing what educators perceive as ‘realistic’ plans was, therefore, considered a key challenge.

Consistent with the idea of needing to set ‘realistic’ goals was the notion of a disparity between African students’ ‘actual’ and perceived knowledge, skills and abilities. That is, the notion of ‘reality’ and the ‘ideal’ can be “skewed” (Lillian, ST). For some students, “there’s a long way between ... where they think they’re going ... and their actual academic ability” (Jacqui, ST). Consequently, these students have “a particular goal in mind” but they “haven’t really assessed whether they’re capable of achieving that goal” (Lillian, ST). Laura (TE) has encountered a similar issue with African students at TAFE, where students’ perceived language skills do not match ‘reality’:

*There’s this ... gap between what they think they can do because they can talk English fine, they think their English is fantastic. But in fact, they’re not ready and for some, they just can’t seem to see that or understand that.*

Engaging in discussions with African students about making ‘realistic’ self-appraisals was described as a key issue and, in some cases, considered a ‘battle’. Educators reported that the advice provided to African students during these conversations can be met with resistance. As Laura (TE) stated:

*We identify very quickly, within the first few weeks, that there’s probably 25 to 30 per cent that have significant learning, literacy issues. Can’t read academic texts, can’t write ... can’t do the critical thinking ... Just can’t do it. And we try and counsel them into considering other vocational training perhaps, instead of university, or language classes, but it doesn’t go down well ...*

In Rob’s (ST) experience, these conversations are common because “most of them are *overly* optimistic about their goals.” Overall, teachers found it “very hard” (Kerri, ST) to support African students to “accept ... their limitations” (Barbara, ST), but believed that it was paramount in preventing future failure and disappointment.

Teachers want to promote subjects in which students are “most likely to be successful” to ensure that they are not “set up for failure right from the start” (Jacqui, ST).

Rob (ST) explained that although teachers’ intentions are honourable, students “don’t always listen” to the advice of teachers. Similarly, Lillian (ST) stated that even when African students attend career counselling appointments, they are typically “fairly independent” and arrive with “their own agenda and their own aspirations.” In these instances, Lillian wonders whether the students heed advice and questions whether “they’re open to [counselling].” Jacqui (ST) suggested that “for a successful post-school outcome, you need to be working strongly with them during their time with you, especially in the last couple of years, from a realistic perspective.”

It is important to note that African youth are not dissuaded from pursuing a university education. Rather, participants expressed concern that some African students are simply ‘not yet ready’ to begin university study at the completion of secondary school. For example, Rob (ST) stated that “there’s nothing wrong with having ambition, but they aren’t aware of the fact that they are missing so much education and their language skills are insufficient for them to achieve what they want to do.” Promoting ‘alternative’ (i.e., non-university) post-school options was, therefore, considered critical in facilitating successful post-school transitions for African youth with limited formal schooling and English language and literacy skills. Promoting a TAFE pathway, for example, enables African students to complete “three or four more years of English in a subject-specific area” thereby providing “a better chance” (Rob, ST) for success in the university system.

Non-educator participants also reported issues associated with counselling African students in terms of education and career pathways. For example, different cultural approaches to counselling can create challenges for African youth. As Luol (ASP) explained, “African counselling is different [to] counselling here ... [In] African counselling, you advise someone to do something, whereas here, you only give options.” That is, there is a distinction between giving advice and providing

information, where most newly arrived African youth “need advice.” Similarly, Habsa (student) stated that “sometimes, we need direction!” Jacqui (ST) also referred to the role of culture in shaping approaches to counselling, stating that Australians “don’t always give really clear, direct, strong messages,” which can hinder African students. It is, therefore, vital for the career counsellor to “sit down and make plans with the student” and “talk about their options” (Rachel, SP).

Some African youth were seen to be ‘misadvised’ by their career counsellors. For example, some Liberian youth have reported that their school counsellors have urged them to consider aged care, a career in which they have no interest. This has left young people feeling “offended” (Kennedy, ASP) and despondent. Some career counsellors were also seen to provide incorrect or insufficient information to African youth about their post-school options. For example, some career counsellors “don’t help students apply for TAFE or uni” (Rachel, SP). This can be particularly problematic for African students who are unaware of system requirements.

In some instances, where career counsellors do assist students with applications for study, practical considerations may be overlooked. For example, one participant cited an example of a career counsellor who applied for university on behalf of a student. The student lived in the suburb of Elizabeth and was enrolling in a Flinders University course – a distance of nearly 40 kilometres. This was impractical given the student’s reliance on public transport coupled with the fact that a similar course was offered much closer to the student’s home.

Inadequate career counselling can critically shape African students’ post-school pathways. For example, career counsellors who provide information rather than advice can cause African students who need direction to develop feelings of frustration and confusion about their post-school options. Similarly, limited knowledge of available post-school options can constrain African students’ choices and potentially affect the timing of their education and career pathways.

Engagement and participation in work and/or study can be constrained when students are counselled into careers in which they have no interest, or where practical issues are not considered.

Participants acknowledged that those who are involved in career counselling do not always have a professional background in this area. They suggested that those who are engaged in career counselling roles require support in the form of resources and funding to support the completion of necessary qualifications. Similarly, ongoing training (and appropriate financial support) was considered crucial to enable an individual to function in the role of a career counsellor.

### **Knowledge of education and career options in Australia.**

Associated with education and career counselling was the view that African students' post-school decisions are constrained by limited knowledge of the available education and career options in Australia. This was considered an issue for both African youth and their families. As a consequence of limited knowledge of the available options, participants reported difficulty in promoting 'alternative' post-school options (i.e., non-university pathways).

Many African youth were considered to have "no real understanding of the processes" (Darren, SP) associated with the post-school transition. For example, "What does it *mean* to go to TAFE; to get an apprenticeship?" In addition, African students "might want to do a course because they think it leads to a certain job" but may lack "everyday knowledge about what that job is" (Lillian, ST). This lack of understanding was considered to be derived from the notion that a great deal of education and career information is assumed, which can potentially disadvantage African youth. Consequently, limited knowledge of education and career options in Australia can result in African students making post-school decisions that are "based on very little information" (Trevor, ST). In these cases, the ability to offer and promote VET courses to students was considered important and useful. Such courses were viewed as a means by which to provide students with practical experience and "a *taste* of what everything's like out there ..." (Barbara, ST). In this way, VET courses were seen as a means by which to address the limited knowledge of education and career options in Australia.

Promoting such alternative post-school options was considered to be fraught with difficulty. For example, Trevor (ST) encountered difficulties in counselling students



towards “any sort of alternative program” because “parents would *insist* that their child was going to go through and do Year 12 when they have a reading age of a Grade 2, in one case.” He suggested that this was partly a consequence of limited parental understanding of the multitude of post-school options.

In addition to the difficulties associated with the *absence* of knowledge of post-school options was a *dearth* of information that can leave African youth feeling overwhelmed and “very confused” (Barbara, ST). For example, Barbara (ST) recalled one African student who appeared to be “going through the alphabet and the job guide” in order to develop post-school pathway plans. Jacqui (ST) also cited an African student who has “wanted to be everything from a pilot to a drain cleaner! [laughs] ... He’s seeing all these choices and just thinks he can have everything at once ... He’s too excited about the choices that are there.” Similarly, one of Rachel’s (SP) clients stated that the sheer number of post-school options left him feeling “like every door was open and he wasn’t sure which door to go through ... There were just so many opportunities and he just didn’t know which one to take.”

In summary, education and career counselling was considered an important but challenging aspect of supporting African youth in and around the post-school transition. The need to support students to make realistic self-appraisals of their knowledge, skills and capabilities in considering education and career options was a key identified issue. This can shape students’ subject selections and post-school choices. Limited knowledge of career options in Australia and conversely, a dearth of career information were both seen to contribute to career indecision amongst African youth. These constraints were considered to limit the ability of African students to make informed decisions about their education and career pathways.

## **8. Post-School Domain**

Integral to interview discussions were issues associated with the post-school domain. Within this domain, participants provided insights into further and higher education, and employment. This section provides information about these aspects of the education and career pathways of African youth.

### **Further and higher education.**

The tertiary education experiences of African youth were found to be shaped by a number of factors. Issues discussed concerned preparation for studying at university, notions of success and failure, and engagement and participation.

#### *Preparedness for university.*

Perceived inadequate preparation for university was considered a major barrier to academic success in higher education. This was described in terms of: the problems associated with formalised university preparation courses; long-term implications of admittance to the university without adequate preparation; and perceived moral obligations associated with success and failure.

Formal university preparation courses were considered inadequate for African youth with limited language proficiency, literacy skills, and formal schooling experience. Such courses prove problematic because of the assumptions that are made such as the conventions of writing. This can significantly disadvantage African students and exacerbate the effects of conceptual gaps in their understanding. In addition, participants suggested that university preparation course structures do not allow scope for assessing suitability for university. That is, “it’s very hard to fail people ... if they attend and hand something in” (Laura, TE). Luol (ASP) also stated that such bridging courses require re-evaluation, suggesting that university entry criteria become more stringent. He stated that “there has to be something that will make it ... a little bit hard to [enter university] ... rather than just getting in because you’ve just got [Certificate] I, II and III.”

Admitting African youth to university without adequate preparation can create challenges, many of which have long-term “personal, social and financial” (Daphne, TE) implications. For example, African students can incur financial debts that they may never be able to repay. Academically, students may struggle if they do not have “a *really* good understanding of what an academic essay is” (Daphne, TE). This can ultimately shape students’ academic success throughout their university education. Multiple failed academic attempts can also preclude students from returning to study in the future.

Admitting African youth to university without adequate knowledge to experience academic success was also described as a moral issue. Participants suggested that it is ethically wrong to admit students to university if they “*don’t* have the ability” (Daphne, TE). For Daphne, she is sensitive towards “not setting up students for failure.” Similarly, Rebecca (UE) believes that it is “really cruel” to raise students’ hopes and “put them through that anguish and to dash their hopes.” While Mark (UE) acknowledged the social, emotional and financial costs of admitting African students to university with limited preparation, he believes that students need to be given an opportunity to try. He stated that upon admission to university, students need to be able to “see whether they *can* do it, rather than us deciding [that] ... you shouldn’t be here.” This example illustrates that the moral responsibility is shifted from the university while the ability to exercise personal agency is given to the student.

#### *Success and failure.*

Notions of success and failure were a cause for concern amongst further and higher education staff. Similarly to the perceived inadequate preparation for university, the success/failure divide possessed an ethical dimension. Participants reported feeling “caught in a dilemma” (Daphne, TE) between wanting to support African students and being unable to “ethically” (Rebecca, UE) pass them.

In addition to this ‘internal’ dilemma, issues associated with assessment involved discussions between students and educators in the form of students questioning their marks. Amanda (UE) cited a case where a tutor awarded a student 47 per cent for an assignment where, in reality, the work produced was worth 30 per cent. Amanda explained that the tutor had added an additional 17 per cent as an “encouragement mark.” The student then questioned the tutor asking, “What do I do for my three marks?” Similarly, Daphne (TE) awarded a student a mark of 55 per cent, which she believed was “really generous” relative to the student’s demonstrated knowledge. In response, the student requested that the mark be altered to a high distinction (i.e., 85 per cent). In these situations, African students are often perceived as “very assertive” (Laura, TE) in raising issues associated with their marks.

Amidst this moral issue, participants emphasised the need for educators to maintain academic standards. As Tracey (UE) explained, “I mark them as per any other student and if that means a fail, that means a fail.” Maintaining academic standards requires that educators ensure that African students are aware of the expectations. Failure to make standards and expectations transparent has the potential to disadvantage students. Similarly, upholding academic standards requires accountability. When educators do not adhere to academic standards, this can create issues for other educators. For example, Laura (TE) cited examples of working with African students who had been awarded Certificate IV in English but whose skills were not even at a Certificate II level. Such cases can place pressure on educators who *are* adhering to academic standards to justify their position.

Associated with assessment issues was an identified trend of high failing rates amongst African university students. In some instances, African students are repeating topics numerous times due to a failure to achieve competency. Multiple failures can have long-term implications where students who repeatedly fail “*narrow* their choice” and can “stop the opportunity” (Daphne, TE) to engage in study in the future. In addition to academic implications, failure can result in “alienat[ion] from the social group” (Sean UE) and an inability to ‘save face’ (discussed previously). As discussed earlier, there are also financial implications associated with failing the same topic a number of times.

Success and failure in further and higher education was seen to be shaped by the lack of understanding of the “emphasis on *referencing* and not plagiarising” (Mark, UE). Participants suggested that the concept of plagiarism is “either not understood or it’s not seen as an important issue” (Daphne, TE). This issue may be associated with cultural differences in terms of knowledge sharing where, in certain cultures, “if you agree with something, you can use the source because it’s your idea, too” (Denise, TE). In order to overcome this issue, participants suggested that African students need “ongoing support” (Mark, UE) to understand notions of academic referencing in the Australian context. This was particularly important where African students have limited English language skills such that they “can’t *not* copy and paste” because “they don’t know how to paraphrase” (Denise, TE).

*Engagement and participation.*

In terms of engagement and participation amongst African university and TAFE students, a number of educators cited multiple benefits associated with having African students in the class. African students seem to create “a different energy level” in the class by bringing their “positive hopes and dreams” that “inspires everyone” (Daphne, TE). Laura (TE) reported that African students can bring a “lightness and a sort of bubbiness” to the class. This illustrates that African students “do want to be involved and they do contribute and they do want to learn” (Mark, UE). In contrast, participants reported that some African students “don’t contribute to tutorials” and as a result, “can get lost in the crowd” (Denise, TE). Denise has noticed, however, that engagement appears to differ on the basis of gender. While male students are generally “quite happy to put their opinion forward,” female students typically require more prompting to become involved in class discussions. Denise suggested that the differences in engagement may stem from traditional cultural and gender roles.

A number of factors were considered to impact upon the ability of African students to engage and participate in class discussions in further and higher education contexts. These include: difficulties understanding the culture of the university coupled with a lack of cultural capital; limited access to resources to support learning; and the impact of trauma. These factors are discussed below.

Difficulties understanding the university culture were thought to impede engagement in higher education. This was considered to be compounded by additional resettlement issues. That is, African students may be “struggling with some of the *Australian* norms” in addition to developing an understanding of the university’s “academic rigour” (Daphne, TE). Students may also encounter difficulties in “understanding the expectations” (Denise, TE) of further and higher education institutions. This dual, simultaneous learning was considered a key challenge for many African university and TAFE students. This was coupled with a perceived lack of cultural capital. For example, Tracey (UE) explained that within a law degree, a great deal of knowledge about Australian laws and government is

assumed. She suggested that limited knowledge of societal structures in addition to language difficulties, can limit classroom participation.

Limited access to key resources to support learning was considered a major barrier to participation and engagement in post-school education. For example, African students may lack access to a personal computer with Internet access. Limited access to such learning resources can impact upon the ability to complete assignments. Limited access to technology can also constrain the development of peer relationships. As Tracey (UE) explained, no Internet access at home can mean that “you’re probably *not* going to be accessing your emails every day. You’re not going to be Facebooking with other students.”

Engagement in post-school education was also considered to be constrained by lasting impacts of trauma. For example, Tracey (UE) suggested that studying murder as part of a law degree “can’t be easy” when African students have a history of trauma. Participants also observed that trauma can directly impact upon classroom engagement. Laura (TE) cited an example of an African student who received a phone call during class with news that one of his relatives had been killed overseas. Similarly, Mark (UE) stated that “when you’re thinking about your brother, who’s been shot, it must seem really insignificant to write a 500 word assignment.” Lasting impacts of trauma can also affect the “ability to concentrate for long periods” (Tracey, UE).

### **Employment.**

Participants explored factors that can shape African youth employment pathways. Identified barriers to employment include limited resources (i.e., financial resources, cultural capital, and social networks) and cultural and religious differences. In discussing the difficulties in securing employment, participants acknowledged inherent difficulties for all job seekers, regardless of their cultural background. Participants cited the current economic climate as a reason for these difficulties. For example, Jurup (student) stated that “it’s not easy to get a job in these times.” Similarly, Luol (ASP) stated that while South Sudanese youth with university degrees are unable to find work, it is also an issue facing Australian-born people.

*Resources.*

Stakeholder participants cited limited finances in shaping the employment prospects of African youth. For young people whose families are experiencing financial hardship, they may lack the finances to assist job seeking (e.g., lacking money to purchase a newspaper, or make phone calls to potential employers). Similarly, African youth may lack money to purchase appropriate clothing to wear to job interviews. They may also encounter transport issues associated with financial difficulties.

Limited social and cultural capital was considered to have a strong influence upon the employment pathways of African youth. African youth can experience difficulty in “knowing how to apply for a job” (Kerri, ST). For example, African youth may lack the skills to appropriately address job selection criteria which can reduce the likelihood that they will be “short-listed” (Luol, ASP) for a job.

Limited or lack of work experience was also cited as a potential barrier to accessing employment. Similarly, a lack of Australian-based references and/or referees can act as a barrier to finding work. Participants also suggested that limited social networks can impede job seeking. This was considered significant given the importance of a “word of mouth network” (Kerri, ST) in learning about job opportunities.

Securing and maintaining work was found to be shaped by an understanding of acceptable procedures for dealing with issues. As Deng (ASP) explained, it is important “to know your rights” because if “you make a mistake ... you will know how to deal with that.” He cited a number of cases where African youth lost their jobs because of a limited understanding of procedures and protocols. Denise (TE) reported that some African youth are unaware of their employee rights when she discovered that some students were working more hours than their visa allowed. They also accepted jobs with menial pay “because they [didn’t] know their rights and responsibilities” and because the alternative may have been not having a job at all. Denise suggested that such situations arise from a lack of understanding of “the system” of employment in Australia.

Student participants also cited the inability to meet requirements as a barrier to accessing employment. For example, Fatuma wanted to apply for a government cleaning job but was precluded because she did not have “citizenship [and] ... [a] passport or birth certificate.” Similarly, Fathia stated that the absence of Australian citizenship has prevented her from accessing certain jobs. Not holding a driver’s licence was also a potential barrier to employment. Fatuma reported that she was questioned about this at numerous job interviews, prompting her to learn to drive.

*Cultural and religious differences.*

Cultural and religious differences, including visible differences, were considered to shape the employment pathways of African youth. Generally, participants considered a lack of cultural awareness in and around the labour market as a potential barrier to employment for African youth where limited cultural understanding can inspire fear about those who are “markedly different” (Darren, SP). Consequently, there may be a preference towards working with those who are seen as “similar” (Laura, TE). This is critically important given that there are various cultural, religious and visible differences between newly arrived African youth and their Australian-born counterparts. Having a “Muslim-sounding name” (Rob, ST) was considered to potentially shape the employment opportunities of African youth. Similarly, skin colour was identified as a potential barrier to employment. For example, African youth who are “really black” (Laura, TE) may encounter racism in the workplace.<sup>41</sup> This, in turn, can critically shape their employment experiences.

Religious difference was identified as a barrier to accessing employment, particularly for African Muslims. Laura (TE) has observed that religious beliefs strongly influence job-seeking *strategies* where African students will refer to Allah or God “in their resumes and their job applications and at their job interviews.” Removing references to a higher being was, however, perceived by African students as “total arrogance” because “credit” is not given “where it belongs.” Religious beliefs were also found to shape the *type* of employment accessed. For example,

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<sup>41</sup> See ‘Racism and Discrimination’ (discussed earlier) for a discussion of this issue.



Fatuma (student) had an interview with Subway before realising that this work would be unsuitable. She made the decision not to pursue this work because of the need to “serve pork,” which is against her Islamic beliefs. Dress codes associated with religious beliefs were considered a barrier to employment. For example, potential customers who are intolerant of difference may choose to take their business elsewhere “rather than be served by a Muslim woman wearing all that headgear.” Similarly, Monica (student) encountered difficulties in securing a part-time job while she was at school and questioned whether this may have been a result of wearing the hijab. Monica then made the decision not to wear the hijab to a job interview to “see if [she] would get the job without [her] headscarf” and was hired. Upon reflection, however, Monica believes that her hijab did not influence her employer because “another girl that’s got a job ... wears the headscarf, so my [employer] is not ... racist.”

Participants emphasised the importance of informing employers about cultural and religious traditions that may affect the ability of an African young person to perform his/her job. For example, “there are some holidays like Ramadan, where [employers have to] watch people at 3 o’clock in the afternoon because they haven’t eaten anything since before sunrise” (Dean, SP). Failing to inform employers about these issues can “set [employers] up to do the wrong thing.” For example, Dean cited an instance where an employer fired an employee because the employee did not attend work for a number of days due to a religious festival. This information was not provided to the employer. Such situations can “set [African youth] up to fail.”

In summary, numerous factors can affect the employment opportunities and pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. For example, limited financial and cultural resources can constrain access to employment. Similarly, cultural and religious differences can shape various aspects of employment for African youth. It is also important to support employers to develop cultural awareness and understanding. This can aid in facilitating positive work experiences for African youth and employers alike.

## 9. Motivation and Self-Belief Domain

Participants explored the perceived personal attributes and beliefs of African youth as they relate to their education and career pathways. It was evident that African youth derive motivation from an inherent determination to thrive in Australia, and to be seen as successful within their communities. Within this domain, participants explored: the beliefs that African youth have in their own capabilities; the importance of effort, chance and luck in becoming successful; and the perceived strengths of African youth that facilitate their post-school pathways.

### Self-belief and self-efficacy.

African youth were seen to adopt one of two positions when discussing their beliefs in their capabilities. The first position is that of *self-doubt*. That is, African youth who adopt this position doubt their abilities and have an overall low sense of self-efficacy. In these circumstances, African youth require support in developing positive beliefs about their capabilities. As Rachel (SP) stated, when African students have teachers who praise them for good work, “that encourages them to keep going forward and keep believing in themselves.” Supporting young people to believe in themselves was considered integral to the learning process and the development of positive self-beliefs and self-efficacy was considered critical in shaping the overall post-school transition.

The second position that was seen to be adopted by African youth in discussing their capabilities is that of *optimism*. Recall that a key difficulty associated with providing education and career counselling is supporting African students to conduct self-appraisals of their knowledge, skills and capabilities relative to their education and career aspirations and goals. The inability to conduct a realistic self-appraisal was described by some participants as “a sense of *over-optimism*” (Tracey, UE). As alluded to earlier, this sense of “over-estim[ation]” (Amanda, UE) can critically shape African students’ help-seeking behaviour which can ultimately influence their education and career pathways. For example, a sense of ‘over-optimism’ can cause African youth to believe “that they’re good enough” (Amanda, UE) and consequently, do not require help. Daphne (TE) suggested that this optimism may be derived from the inherent belief that students are “successful and

[are] going to be *more* successful.” This notion of success and its importance were described earlier.

### **Effort, chance and luck.**

African youth were often characterised by participants as persistent in working towards realising their education and career goals. That is, many African students “genuinely believe they can achieve anything with effort” (Lillian, ST). While this approach to learning was considered positive, it can create challenges. For example, Lillian (ST) suggested that students “can write-off whole subjects quite easily,” citing an example of a student who failed Year 10 mathematics but intended to study the subject in Year 12. Similarly, Rob (ST) has encountered African students who vow to ‘work harder’ to pass subjects and stated that such promises are made after failing multiple assessments. For example, these students will say, “I’ll do really well in the exams, because I’ll work real hard.” Lillian (ST) also reported that students will say, “I’ll just work harder. I’ll get there.” Rob stated that such comments are difficult to hear when students have limited formal schooling experience and English language and literacy skills. In these instances, it is possible that African students may dismiss or underestimate the impact of their past experiences on their present and future.

The emphasis on effort rather than ability may be derived from culture. That is, African students’ “values” may dictate that they will “achieve their rightful place” (Daphne, TE) in society through effort alone. Sean (UE) suggested that the notion of persistence originates from African cultural expectations. This is associated with the notion of ‘saving face’ (discussed previously).

Chance and luck were also considered to shape African students’ education and career pathways. Recall that participants described ‘two types’ of educators – those who provide extensive support to African students, and those who “are not always supportive” (Kerri, ST). The ‘type’ of educator that an African student encounters is largely dependent on chance. Similarly, being in the ‘right time and place’ plays a role in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. For example, Emmanuel (ASP) stated that “in Australia, if you meet a good person to help you,

you achieve your aspiration. But if you meet the wrong person, you can't do anything." Serendipity and "a whole lot of luck" (Kerri, ST) can, therefore, play a fairly significant role in shaping African students' work and study experiences which can impact upon their education and career trajectories.

### **Strengths.**

African youth from refugee backgrounds were considered to possess various strengths that facilitate their education and career pathways. Participants cited an inherent resilience amongst African youth in light of their experiences as refugees. As Dean (SP) explained, African youth have had "more than the average Joe has had to deal with, so they're pretty strong. They're pretty resilient." African youth have, therefore, "demonstrated that they can survive" (Tracey, UE) and ultimately, thrive in a new environment.

African youth were also characterised by determination and perseverance. For example, Sean (UE) stated that "they are very determined; determined to succeed." Amanda (UE) stated that African students "continue to try" where "other students may give up." This persistence and determination may be a consequence of the emphasis that African youth place on effort (as opposed to ability) which, as discussed, may be derived from cultural expectations. That is, "they persist because they are expected to persist" (Sean, UE).

Finally, African youth were seen to convey an overall positive outlook on their lives. For example, Amanda (UE) has observed that African students are "quite forward looking [and] can be quite idealistic." Similarly, Laura (TE) noted that many African youth have "optimism about a bright, shiny future" and "don't seem to be dragged down very much by the past." Optimism was considered an important asset in facilitating the education and career pathways of African youth.

In summary, participants reported that African students' self-appraisals tend to either over- or underestimate their capabilities. This can affect help-seeking behaviours and ultimately, influence education and career pathways. Many African youth were seen to attribute success to effort and, in the process, discount or dismiss

the impact of previous life and school experiences when considering factors that impact upon their education and career pathways. In this way, African youth were seen as persistent and determined to achieve their goals through effort. Similarly, they were characterised by participants as optimistic about the future. This forward-looking mindset was considered to contribute to the development of education and career goals and aspirations.

## **Chapter Summary and Directions**

This chapter began with a brief summary of relevant personal and professional experiences of those who participated in this study as educators, service providers, and South Australia's new and emerging African communities. The remainder of the chapter presented the identified issues in the form of nine key domains that were considered important in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. These domains were: previous schooling; English language proficiency and literacy skills; mainstream schooling; family, kin and community; relationships; education and career aspirations; education and career counselling; post-school; and motivation and self-belief. Figure 7 provides a summary of the nine domains and the major issues explored within each domain.

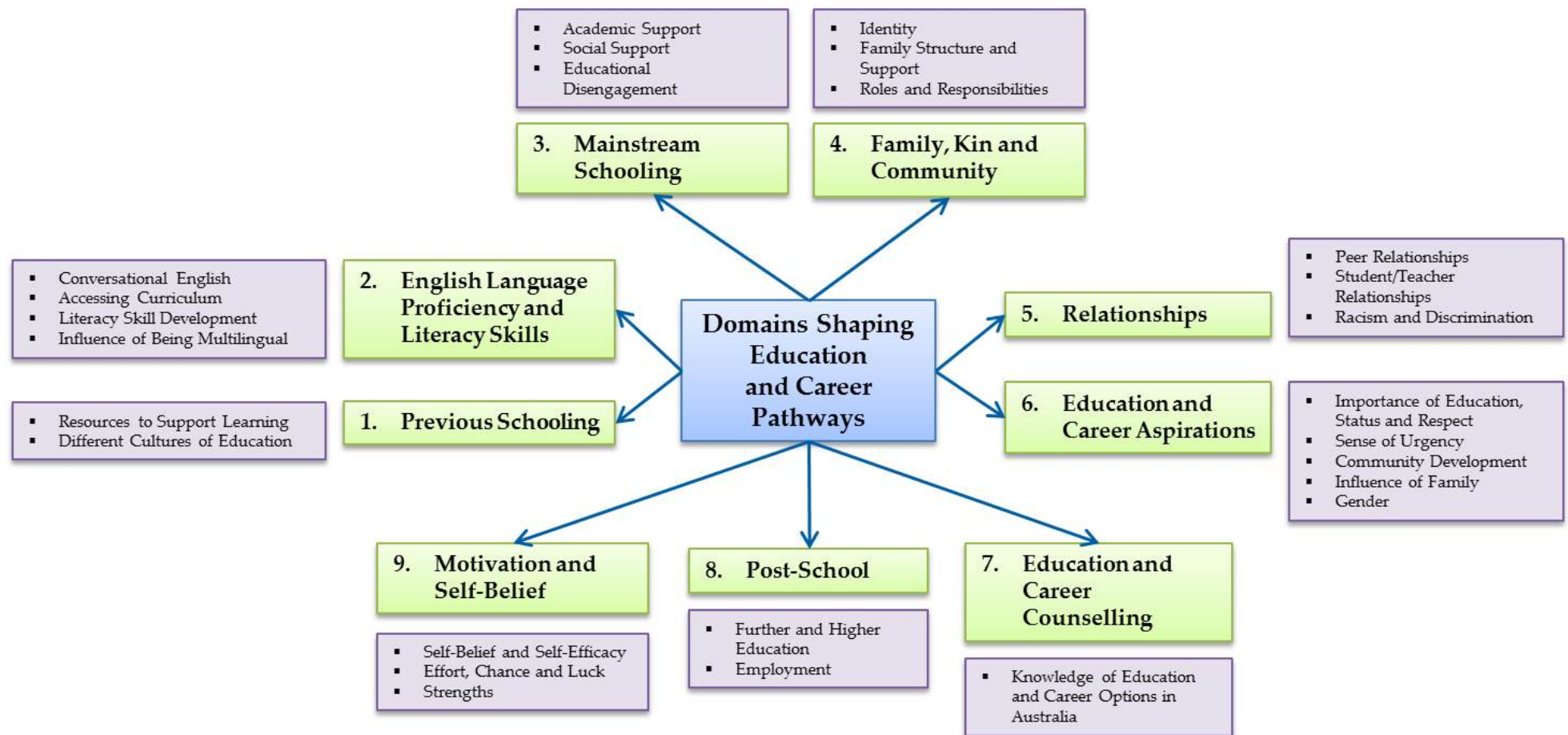


Figure 7. Overview of the nine key domains and associated issues that shape the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds

The following chapter presents a developmental post-school pathways model that illustrates critical factors that shape African students' experiences. Included in the chapter are a series of predicted trajectories in light of these factors. In addition, the study's major findings are located in the context of existing literature.

# Chapter 7: Unfolding Pathways: Analysis and Discussion

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*Travel is more than the seeing of sights; it is a change that goes on, deep and permanent, in the ideas of living.*

*-- Miriam Beard*

The quotation that begins this chapter is, in many ways, consistent with the central intentions of research. Research involves 'sight-seeing' (i.e., data collection) and an extension towards a broader, deeper engagement with the ideas that emerge. Conducting social research can also be transformative in that researchers can strive to improve an aspect of the human condition on the basis of the research journey that transpired. This chapter addresses these central research intentions by exploring the ideas that emerged through an examination of the study's three research questions:

1. What are the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?
2. What are the key influences that shape the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia?
3. From the perspectives of different stakeholders, how might African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia be better prepared for the post-school transition?

## **Applying the Theoretical Framework**

This study's theoretical framework was comprised of 16 assumptions associated with: the life course; context; personal and family narratives; work; career development; culture; gender; social and cultural identities; age and life stage; resources; relationships; social support; individual and collective agency; self- and collective efficacy; coping strategies; and collaboration. This framework guided the study's research design and methodology, and aided in identifying topics to explore



during interviews. Given the complexity of this research topic, the theoretical framework also served a critically important 'scaffolding' function in identifying, understanding and conceptualising the data during analysis. Consequently, the ideas presented in this chapter and, indeed, throughout this study, are underpinned and informed by these assumptions.

## **The Education and Career Pathways of African Youth from Refugee Backgrounds**

In order to address the study's first research question, two approaches were taken. Firstly, in order to develop an understanding of the key elements of the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds, a developmental framework was constructed during data analysis. Secondly, student participants' tales of transition (see Chapter 5) were analysed chronologically, historically and contextually, with an emphasis on education and career aspirations, expectations and post-school pathways.

### **The Developmental Education and Career Pathways Framework**

This study conceptualised the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds as being shaped by previous developmental pathways throughout the life course and embedded in the social contexts of the individual, family, school and community. Consequently, data analysis was approached in this way. This resulted in the creation of a developmental education and career pathways framework (see Figure 8) comprised of five phases: life prior to becoming a refugee; experiences as a refugee; migration and resettlement experiences; Australian education experiences; and senior secondary school experiences. In each phase, three to four factors were identified as critically shaping the development of African students' education and career pathways. Within this chronological structure, it became evident that African students' education and career aspirations and expectations are developed throughout the life course and are transformed in response to experiences, opportunities, challenges and barriers which are reflected in the framework. This framework has been utilised as an analytical tool in examining this study's data.

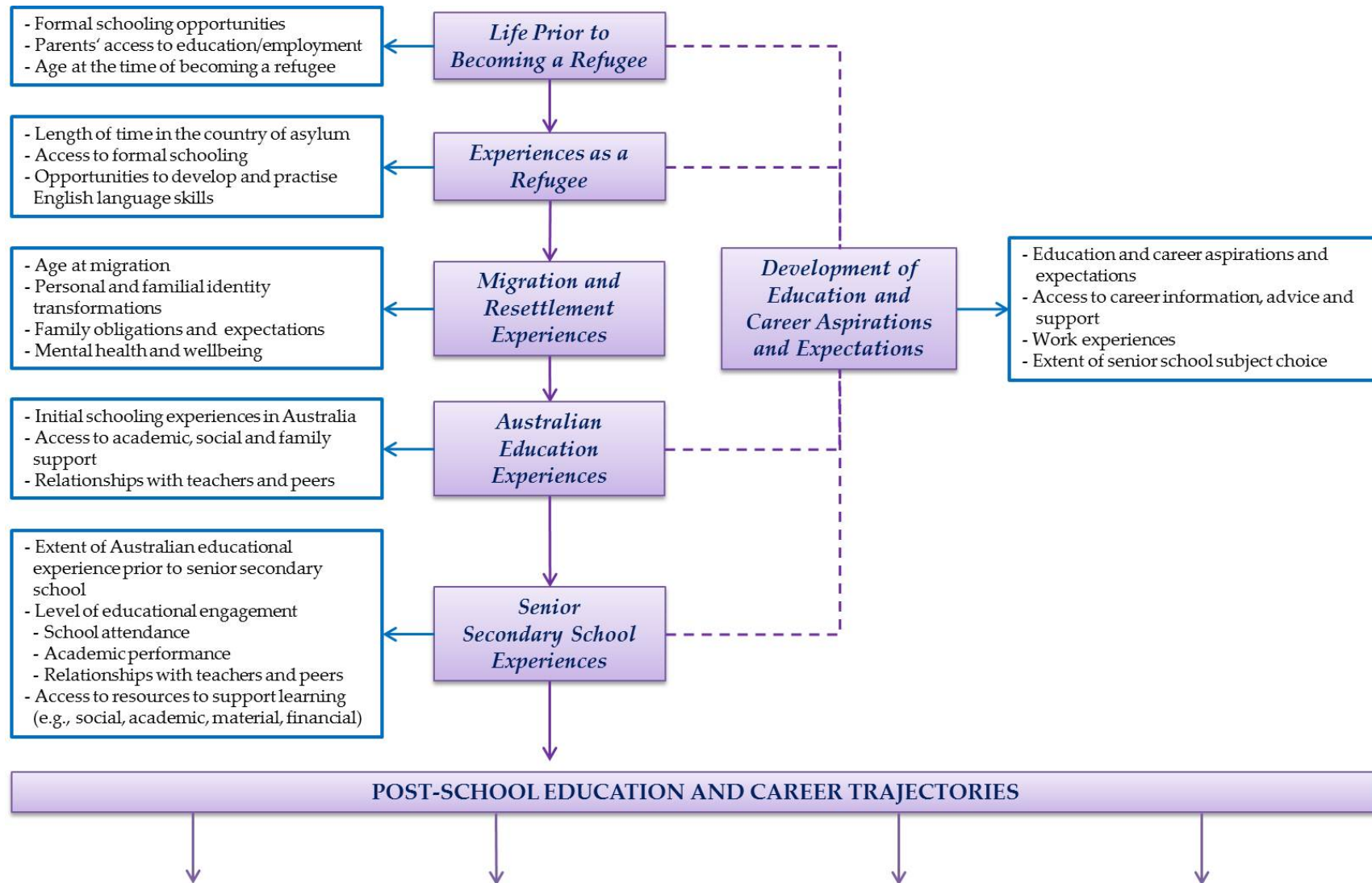


Figure 8. The developmental education and career pathways framework

### **Framework assumptions.**

In creating the developmental education and career pathways framework, a number of assumptions were made. Firstly, development is viewed as a process of evolving, interdependent, interrelated changes (Lerner & Castellino, 2002) where "... early life experiences have implications for later resources and experience" (Moen & Erickson, 1995, pp. 199-200). During development, predictors, meanings and consequences are shaped by, and shape, context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goldstein, 1994). In turn, these developmental processes are dependent on sequence and timing (Amato & Kane, 2011; Elder Jr., 1995a) where people change over time as a consequence of their accumulated experiences (Neugarten, 1976). The resulting developmental trajectories are, therefore, shaped by people's roles, experiences and events that occur throughout the life course (Lerner & Castellino, 2002).

Consequently, the challenges and opportunities encountered during life's transitions constitute 'turning points' (James & Beedell, 2010) that result in diverse developmental pathways amongst individuals (Howard et al., 2010). This framework, therefore, recognises the complexity and fluidity (te Riele, 2004) of African students' education and career pathways.

Underlying this framework is the recognition that "it is never possible to map the route that a person's life will take" (Thomson, 2011, pp. 1-2) because individuals are key actors in their own lives (Ecclestone et al., 2010). They exercise agency and autonomy in the context of opportunities and constraints, and the actions of systems, structures and key people (te Riele, 2004). Thus, as with other life course research (e.g., Chamberlain & Johnson, 2013), the factors identified in this framework are not definitive. Rather, the framework highlights individual, social, cultural and structural factors that were considered influential in shaping African students' education and career pathways.

### **The Education and Career Pathways of Student Participants**

To understand student participants' education and career pathways, data were analysed chronologically and developmentally, and in terms of education and career aspirations and subsequent post-school pathways. For some students, refugee experiences provided a context for the initial development of education and career

aspirations. For example, Ayan developed an aspiration to become a cardiologist during her primary schooling in Kenya where she learned about the human circulatory system and the heart's structure and function. Throughout the life course, these aspirations were seen to undergo transformation in response to new experiences, information, challenges, opportunities and barriers. For example, Habsa encountered difficulties with Year 11 science subjects which effectively altered the direction of her post-school pathway.

Analysis of student interviews revealed a distinction between education and career *aspirations* (i.e., future goals) and *expectations* (i.e., post-school plans and intentions), which is consistent with the literature (e.g., C. R. Cooper, Chavira, et al., 2005; Glick & White, 2004; Whiston & Keller, 2004). Consequently, data analysis resulted in the understanding of education and career pathways as a transformative process whereby aspirations evolve to become expectations and eventual post-school pathways. This connects with other Australian research findings that career aspirations amongst youth from refugee backgrounds are 'adjusted' over time (Gifford et al., 2009). Table 8 summarises the student participants' education and career aspirations and expectations, and post-school pathways.

Table 8. The education and career aspirations, expectations and subsequent post-school pathways of student participants

Student Participant	Aspirations	Expectations	Post-School Pathway
Abie	Nursing or midwifery	Study nursing at TAFE or university	Working in aged care
Angel	Nursing	Study nursing at university	Studied health science at university before transferring to nursing
Ayan	Cardiology	Study physiotherapy or nursing at university	Completing Year 13
Belee	African community work	Study community services or social science at TAFE or university	Not engaged in education or employment, but engaged in voluntary work in the African community
David	Design, building construction or policing	Study criminal justice at university	Studied criminal justice at university before transferring to nursing
Fathia	Health science or medical science	Study health or medical science at university	Studying health science at university
Fatuma	Gynaecology	Study in health sciences at university	Studying laboratory medicine at university, but considering a transfer to midwifery Working part-time in aged care
Habsa	Medicine or communication art	Study tourism and business	Studying business at university
John	Car mechanics	Study auto motor mechanics at TAFE	Completed a six-month TAFE course in auto motor mechanics and applying for an apprenticeship; also completing a university preparation course
Jurup	Nursing, accounting	Study accounting at university	Studying at TAFE to become a laboratory technician Working part-time in a fast food restaurant
Michelle	Midwifery	Study nursing at TAFE or university	Not known (did not receive a university or TAFE offer)
Monica	Wedding planning	Study event management at university	Studying event management and tourism at university
Sabrina	Medicine or nursing	Study child care, aged care or health and fitness	Studying to become a personal trainer
Sayhosay	Australian Defence Force or engage in community development	Study aged care at TAFE	Working in aged care

As can be seen from Table 8, the education and career pathways of Angel, John and Monica follow a more logical progression when compared with most other students. What these three students have in common is a relatively long resettlement history; in Monica's case, 13 years, and in John and Angel's case, a seven year resettlement period. Under Australia's humanitarian program, the first five years following migration constitute the critical resettlement period which is reflected in the timing,

delivery and availability of many services. It is likely, then, that a resettlement history spanning five or more years provides opportunities and time to engage in career exploration and the development of knowledge of Australian education and career pathways. This is consistent with research that found that young people from refugee backgrounds develop an increasing awareness of different education and career pathways over time and consequently, expand their options (Gifford et al., 2009).

Table 8 indicates that most students in this study aspired to professional careers through university attendance. This is consistent with stakeholder interview data which revealed that many African youth aspire to become doctors, lawyers and engineers. Other research with African youth from refugee backgrounds has reported similar findings, labelling these young people as having ‘high aspirations’ (Anjum et al., 2012; Cassity & Gow, 2005a; Oliver et al., 2009). This judgement was also made by the study’s participants.

Although student participants cited specific careers in discussing their aspirations, it appears that greater emphasis was placed on the type of post-school *pathway* (i.e., university) than a particular *career* (e.g., doctor or lawyer). Career specificity may, therefore, be secondary to the type of post-school pathway. Consequently, it may be more appropriate to conceptualise the education and career aspirations of African youth in terms of the types of post-school pathways than to discuss these aspirations in terms of specific careers. Furthermore, interview data suggests that there may be a ‘hierarchy’ in terms of post-school pathway aspirations. This was described specifically by a number of students when discussing their post-school options. For example, Abie’s preferred option was to study nursing at university. Her second option was to complete an equivalent qualification at TAFE. Her final option was to transition directly to employment in aged care.

### **The origins of education and career aspirations.**

In exploring the origins of African students’ education and career aspirations, two influences – education as a migration-related opportunity, and the desire for status and respect – were most salient. What also became apparent was that these two

influences are strongly shaped by family expectations<sup>42</sup> which is consistent with other research (C. R. Cooper, Chavira, et al., 2005).

Immigrant parents typically place a great deal of importance on their children's education (C. R. Cooper et al., 1995; Pittaway & Muli, 2011). In this study, access to education was often a motivating factor for family resettlement. For example, John reported that education was "the reason [he and his family] left" Africa. Other participants also described the "value" (Jacqui, ST) and "importance" (Amanda, UE) that African youth and their families place on education, explaining that participation in education is the key to a "better" (Jacqui, ST) life, findings which are consistent with other research (e.g., Murray, 2010; Stevenson & Willott, 2007). Furthermore, some students reported that "education comes first" (Angel) in the family. Fathia explained that her parents' emphasis on education motivated her to pursue post-school education, providing evidence that parental attitudes play an important role in shaping those of their children (Dooley, 2009; Williams, 2011).

African youth from refugee backgrounds and their families often have a strong desire to attain status and respect (Walker et al., 2005). In this study, this was found to be achieved in two ways. Firstly, attending university and subsequently embarking upon a professional career was a means by which to achieve "social standing" (Jacqui, ST) in the community. For example, recall Dean's (SP) interaction with his client's mother who wanted her son to become a doctor, explaining that it is a "respected position". These types of aspirations are consistent with those reported in literature examining the role of immigrant parents in their children's education (H. J. Krahn & Taylor, 2005; C McMichael et al., 2011).

Data analysis revealed that African youth and their families appear to associate the university with "huge status" in comparison with other educational institutions such as TAFE. Status differences between further and higher education amongst people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds have been noted in the literature (Fozdar & Gallegos, 2009; Walker et al., 2005). These status

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<sup>42</sup> The role of family is explored in the second section of this chapter.

differences are consistent with the notion of a 'hierarchy' of post-school pathways that was discussed earlier.

Contributing to community development and rebuilding efforts in Africa and the diaspora was found to aid in attaining status and respect. According to other research (Gifford et al., 2009), it is also a means by which to maintain ties to the country of origin. Udo-Ekpo (1999, pp. 102, 104) described this as a "longing" for Africa both in terms of the "physical place" and an "imaginary state of being" which is connected to cultural identity, forming part of the "collective consciousness". Similarly, the desire to engage in practical service to humanity may stem from the core elements of African culture (i.e., kinship, spirituality and collective practices and beliefs) (Theron et al., 2013). Most student participants reported a desire to return to Africa to contribute to the community. For example, Sayhosay stated that her "*aim* is to go back to my country ... to help people ... I just want to ... give back a little bit ...". This is consistent with Swedish research with resettled refugees from West Africa (Anjum et al., 2012). In this study, students explained that their return to Africa would be on the proviso of completing an Australian qualification. The impetus to contribute to community development was described by participants as culturally driven. As Will (ASP) explained, "... 'It takes a village to raise a child.' So, if it's taken a whole village to raise you, then you *owe* them something ...". This emphasises the importance of culture and cultural identity in shaping African students' future aspirations.

### **Education and Career Pathways: The Key Influences**

From this study, there is ample evidence to suggest that the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds are influenced by multiple, complex, interrelated factors that are developmental and contextual in nature. Despite this myriad of factors, six influences were found to play a particularly pivotal role. These include: previous schooling experiences; English language skills; Australian schooling challenges and support; family support; academic achievement; and post-school preparation. These influences and their interactions are presented visually in Figure 9.



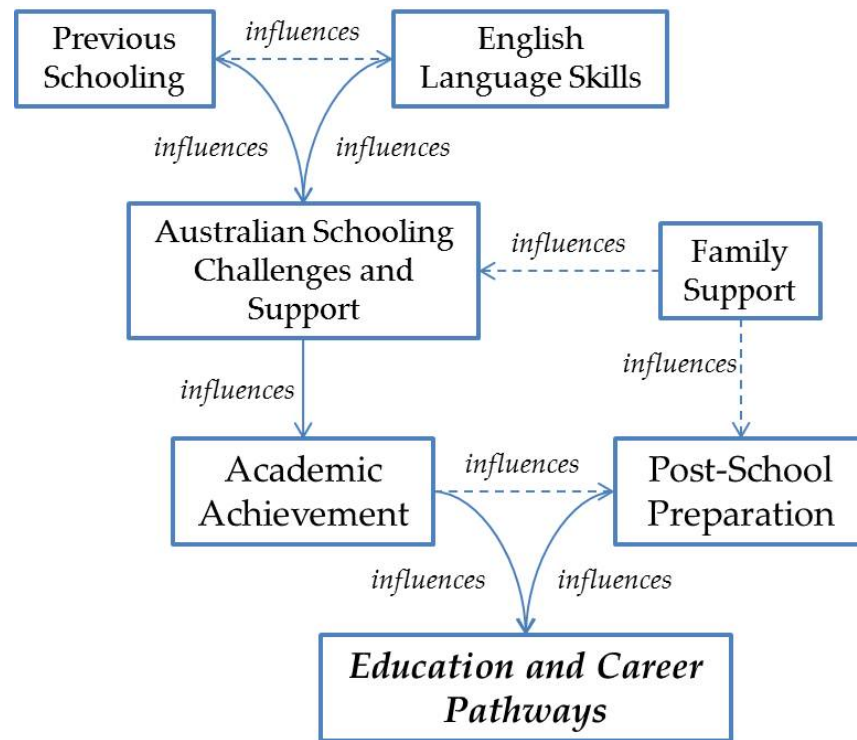


Figure 9. Key influences shaping the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds

These influences will now be explored under five headings: previous schooling; English language skills; Australian schooling challenges and support; family support; and post-school preparation. Within this structure, the impact of these factors on academic achievement and overall education and career pathways are discussed.

### Previous Schooling Experiences

Students from refugee backgrounds have unique circumstances that are unlike many other Australian-born school students. For example, students from refugee backgrounds have often experienced significant disruptions to their formal schooling, typically lasting many years (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). A history of disrupted education can pose significant schooling challenges (J. Brown et al., 2006; Department of Education and Children's Services, 2007a) and, therefore, have a negative impact on their overall educational attainment (Peek & Richardson, 2010). Access to formal schooling in the homeland and country of asylum was, therefore, considered a critical resource in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth by providing a foundation upon which to build when students enter the Australian education system.

Three student participants migrated to Australia with no formal schooling experience. Monica was only three years old at the time of migration and, therefore, began her schooling in Australia. Sayhosay and Belee both grew up in a Ghanaian refugee camp after fleeing Liberia at young ages. During the 15 years in which they lived in Ghana, they did not access formal schooling. Sayhosay explained that while she attended school, she did not consider this to equate to learning or education. Rather, schooling consisted of games and activities that were intended to “[pass] the time” and keep children occupied. It is likely that Sayhosay’s education constituted ‘structured recreational activity’, one of the nine forms of education available in emergencies (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). In contrast, Belee’s sister did not allow Belee to attend school, instead forcing her to work as a babysitter and cleaner in the refugee camp. In examining these students’ education and career pathways, it is evident that lack of access to quality formal schooling during the formative years created significant social and academic challenges upon entry into the Australian school system.

The majority of student participants attended school in the country of asylum. Refugee camps typically have limited access to education and associated learning resources (Grant & Francis, 2011; Pittaway & Muli, 2011) which was verified by participants who characterised schooling in refugee camps as lacking quality. As Fathia explained, this was, in part, due to a lack of teacher training, which is a key issue amongst educators in emergency situations (Bethke & Braunschweig, 2004). Issues of high student/teacher ratios were discussed, with Sabrina reporting a student/teacher ratio of 400:1. Participants also cited poor infrastructure such as Linda’s (ST) African students who explained that classes were conducted “in a big group under a tin roof, and there were no pens or papers.” Furthermore, there was a lack of information and computer technologies and only limited access to textbooks. As will be discussed later, lack of access to more than basic education during pre-migration schooling was found to result in educational challenges in Australia. This study’s findings suggest that even when African youth *are* able to access formal schooling in the country of asylum, it is often limited in terms of the *quality* of education. This indicates that disrupted schooling is multidimensional, being shaped by both the duration and quality of pre-migration schooling experiences.

Pre-migration schooling can play a pivotal role in shaping African students' experiences in Australian mainstream education. Previous schooling was seen to provide students with an educational foundation upon which to build. In this study, the students with prior schooling experiences appeared to encounter fewer challenges in the Australian education system when compared with those with a history of disrupted schooling. While students with educational foundations still encountered challenges, their previous schooling experiences provided a context through which to cope with, and overcome, these challenges. For example, for the student participants, prior schooling provided a context for the development of literacy skills that served as a foundation for the development of English language and literacy skills (discussed later).

### **English Language Skills**

English language development constitutes a key challenge for immigrants from non-English speaking backgrounds in English-speaking countries (Atwell et al., 2009; Matthews, 2008; Wille, 2011). This study confirmed the importance of language development, where English was considered "the root of everything" (Denise, TE) where language skills are required "in order to do *everything*, to go shopping, church, looking for work ..." (Emmanuel, ASP). In terms of education and career pathways, participants cited the need for African youth to develop English language skills for multiple purposes; specifically, conversational English skills, literacy skill development, and English for academic purposes.

In this study, the 11 students who attended school prior to migration cited different languages of instruction. Most had opportunities to develop English language skills through their schooling given that English was the language of instruction.

Conversely, Michelle attended school in a Zambian refugee camp where lessons were given in French. In Tanzania, Sabrina attended school where classes were conducted in French and Kirundi. For these students especially, the transition to the Australian school system was made more complex and challenging because of their limited English language skills prior to migration.

### **Conversational English.**

In Australia, functional conversational English skills are integral to establishing and developing relationships (McFarlane et al., 2011) and critical to social inclusion (Milner & Khawaja, 2010). In this study, the ability to communicate in English was considered central to the development of relationships with teachers and peers. For young people, social networks with adults and peers provide frameworks that facilitate learning, understanding, and coping with challenges (Hebert et al., 2004) and enable access to social support (Ertel et al., 2009; Rook & Underwood, 2000). English language skills can, therefore, facilitate the use of adaptive help-seeking behaviours and contribute to a developing sense of connection and belonging in the school environment. Employing positive help-seeking strategies can aid students in making education and career decisions (Turner & Fozdar, 2010).

Some students cited communication difficulties as a barrier to forming relationships. For example, Fatuma explained that her limited vocabulary and understanding of Australian vernacular (e.g., phrases such as “I reckon”) initially made it difficult to follow conversations. Participants also reported difficulties associated with accents. Recall that both Kerry (ST) and Jurup encountered communication difficulties associated with heavy accents. These communication difficulties were also found to influence students’ post-school pathways. In terms of employment, Darren (SP) suggested that employers may be “reluctant” to hire an African youth if there are significant communication difficulties. This is consistent with literature that has identified the importance of English language skills in shaping access to meaningful employment opportunities (e.g., Codell et al., 2011).

### **Literacy skill development.**

Participants noted that generally, African youth possess greater oral English proficiency than written skills. For some, this is a consequence of the lack of quality of previous schooling prior to migration where language difficulties are compounded by interrupted schooling (J. Brown et al., 2006; Ndhlovu, 2011; Pittaway & Muli, 2011). Limited literacy skills are also a consequence of the lack of written forms of some African languages (Kramer, 2006; Tshabangu-Soko & Caron,

2011), constituting a key difference between African youth from refugee backgrounds and most other English as a Second Language (ESL) learners.

In this study, prior literacy skills were found to facilitate the development of English language proficiency and promote understanding. For example, Fatuma was able to utilise her Somali literacy skills to assist her friend to develop written Somali skills. From this, Fatuma's friend was able to develop English literacy skills and overcome pronunciation difficulties. Similarly, Habsa utilised her Swahili literacy skills to translate school assessment tasks in order to aid in comprehension. Rob (ST) acknowledged that this process of translation must take "twice as long" to complete tasks. This is consistent with research that has noted that simple homework tasks that are unproblematic for Australian-born students can require hours of work for African students from refugee backgrounds (J. Brown et al., 2006).

When African youth lack literacy skills in any language, the challenge of developing English language skills can be compounded. For example, Linda (ST) cited an example of a Year 10 student who was unfamiliar with alphabet sounds. When students encounter difficulties in processing the alphabet and phonics, this can affect fluency and comprehension (Wrigley, 2008). Limited English language and literacy skills, therefore, constitute a key structural barrier for African youth from refugee backgrounds in terms of their schooling in Australia and, consequently, their education and career pathways.

#### **English for academic purposes.**

English language and literacy skills were considered central in facilitating access to the school curriculum. Limited English language proficiency, therefore, constitutes a "huge barrier" (Laura, TE) to academic achievement. The notion that English critically affects academic success has been reported in the literature (e.g., McBrien, 2005; Olliff, 2004; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Sarroub, 2007; L. Wilkinson, 2002).

As Rob (ST) explained, African students are engaged in a process of 'dual learning' where they are not only learning "everyday language, but ... the subject-specific language and the detail ..." Developing subject-specific language and literacy

amidst general English language skills constitutes a significant challenge for students from refugee backgrounds (J. Brown et al., 2006; Grant & Francis, 2011; Naidoo, 2009) and can influence academic achievement (Chegwiddden & Thompson, 2008). For example, recall that Habsa explained that “the English in science is very difficult” and it was because of this that she changed her Year 12 subjects and the direction of her post-school pathway. Language difficulties can, therefore, severely limit students’ post-school options. Returning to the notion of a ‘hierarchy’ of post-school pathways, language difficulties can eliminate higher education as a viable post-school option.

### **Australian Schooling Challenges and Support**

Data analysis revealed that educational engagement and academic achievement are shaped by African students’ opportunities, challenges, barriers, and support in the Australian school system. While appropriate support provisions are important for all students, irrespective of their background, supporting African students from refugee backgrounds plays a vital role, given the multiple, complex challenges they face.

#### **Mainstream schooling preparation.**

New Arrivals Programs (NAP) and Intensive English Language Centres (IELC) provide new arrivals with specialist support (DECS, 2007a) to develop English language skills and an understanding of cultural practices to facilitate participation in new cultural contexts (DECS, 2007b). The majority of the student participants attended a NAP/IELC, considering it an overall positive experience. For some, with previous schooling experiences and knowledge of English, however, attendance was perceived as “a waste of time” (Fathia) due to the perception of being academically more advanced when compared with other students. This created the perception that NAP/IELC attendance served to delay students’ education and career pathways. In making this judgement, students compared themselves to their Australian-born peers explaining the need to ‘catch up’; a common theme emerging from the literature (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Grant & Francis, 2011). This can be explained by Neugarten’s (1969) notion that people make self-assessments as either ‘on’ or ‘off’ time in relation to others. Academic disparity between students from

refugee backgrounds and their Australian-born peers can contribute to a sense of isolation and feelings of inadequacy (J. Brown et al., 2006). Students in these situations can experience poor self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) which can act as a powerful contributor to academic achievement (Bandura, 1995b).

Data analysis indicated that attendance at a NAP/IELC is important for all African students from refugee backgrounds, regardless of their previous schooling history because of the opportunities to not only develop academic and language skills, but also knowledge of the Australian education system. Preparation for mainstream schooling in the form of a NAP/IELC can aid in overcoming the limited knowledge of assumed cultural understandings and expectations of schooling that are often characteristic of newly arrived young people (J. Brown et al., 2006; DECS, 2007a). Awareness of these cultural norms and expectations can, therefore, aid in reducing the effect that this can have in academically disadvantaging students. Consequently, this study's findings indicate that initial schooling experiences in Australia are an important precursor to future schooling experiences and, therefore, academic achievement.

### **The challenges of educational transitions.**

Research indicates that disparate teaching and learning cultures and educational expectations and standards complicate the already challenging transition to the Australian education system (J. Brown et al., 2006; Grant & Francis, 2011).

Furthermore, inadequate access to good, basic education in refugee camps pose challenges for young people as they transition into host country education systems (Bates et al., 2005). These findings were supported in this study which revealed that all student participants encountered challenges in making the transition to the Australian school system, regardless of their educational histories. This further illustrates the notion that disrupted schooling is multidimensional. These challenges, consistent with those identified in the literature (see Bates et al., 2005; Dooley, 2009; Earnest & de Mori, 2008; Harris & Marlowe, 2011), are summarised in Table 9.

Table 9. Educational differences between Africa and Australia as identified by participants

<i>Aspect of Education</i>	<i>Africa</i>	<i>Australia</i>
<i>Class size and allocation system</i>	Large class sizes (up to 400 students); students in ability-based classes	Smaller class sizes (20-30 students); students in age-graded classes
<i>Student/Teacher Relationships</i>	Teachers are the authority and are not to be questioned	Student/teacher relationships are characterised by mutual respect and negotiation
<i>Role of parents/guardians</i>	Passive role; total responsibility assigned to teachers	Active role of parents
<i>Behaviour management</i>	Corporal punishment (e.g., cane)	Non-violent punishments (e.g., detention, suspension)
<i>Pedagogy</i>	Didactic teaching; rote learning and memorisation	Learners more active; engage with knowledge and manipulate ideas
<i>Learning approach</i>	Competitive; equal treatment of students regardless of their abilities, skills and interests	Acknowledgement of learning preferences; support provisions for students with learning difficulties
<i>Resources to support learning</i>	Access to basic stationery; limited access to textbooks and technology	Access to textbooks and other reading materials; technologies used to support learning
<i>Homework</i>	No homework; all tasks completed during class time	Allocation of homework tasks

Data analysis suggests that the ways in which African students cope with these educational transition challenges influences their academic achievement. In particular, the transition from an ability-based to an age-graded system can result in academic and social challenges, particularly for those with limited or no formal schooling experience (Pittaway & Muli, 2011; Ramsden & Taket, 2011; L. Wilkinson, 2002). As participants noted, when students are placed in classes in which they lack many of the assumed knowledge and skills, it is unlikely that they will be able to experience much academic success. This, in turn, can significantly constrain their senior school subject choices and consequently, their post-school options. For example, Emmanuel (ASP) referred to an African client who, prior to migration, was completing Year 5. Upon arrival in Australia, he was placed in a Year 9 class. Consequently, “he missed a lot of things” making it “very hard for such students to pass the SACE [South Australian Certificate of Education].”

### **Academic experiences, challenges and support.**

Curriculum differentiation was considered the primary form of academic support provision for African students from refugee backgrounds with significant academic



challenges. Such provisions were seen as a means by which to offset some of the long-term impacts of interrupted schooling and limited language skills. Implementing curriculum modifications was, however, considered contentious. Firstly, curriculum differentiation was perceived by participants to be heavily dependent on the actions and beliefs of individual teachers. Secondly, participants suggested that educators may feel unprepared to work with and support African students with severely disrupted schooling histories and limited language and literacy skills. Thirdly, curriculum modifications have implications for senior school subject choice and post-school options. As Linda (ST) explained, when teachers modify academic tasks, they are “not expecting the same level.” The students’ grades, however, can give the impression that students are coping but can create a “false expectation” (Trevor, ST) which directly influences senior school subject decision-making. This indicates that curriculum differentiation can simultaneously enable students to experience academic success in the school system while constraining their education and career decision-making by limiting options. Thirdly, curriculum differentiation was considered to be particularly constrained in senior secondary school, given the set curriculum that provides little flexibility for task modification (Pugh, Every, & Hattam, 2012).

### **Social experiences, challenges and support.**

As participants noted, schools fundamentally need to establish a welcoming environment which is central to the work of schools (Cotterell, 2007). A welcoming environment can foster a sense of belonging and social connection (Ager & Strang, 2008) which is particularly important for students from refugee backgrounds (S. Taylor & Sidhu, 2011).

### ***Relationships.***

This study revealed that school-based relationships are critical in shaping African students’ social, emotional and academic experiences given that these students typically have limited social networks both within and beyond the African diaspora community. Positive school relationships have been found to enhance academic performance (McBrien, 2005; Murray-Harvey, 2010) and school retention (Williams,

2011). When students have access to social support, they can develop greater self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995a) which contributes to their academic development (Bandura, 1995b). Supportive relationships with teachers can assist immigrant students to 'bridge' the cultures of home and school, enhance feelings of safety, and provide opportunities for students to experience success (Suarez-Orozco et al., 2009). In this study, school-based student/teacher relationships were identified as an important precursor to forming relationships in other educational contexts such as university and TAFE. Schools, therefore, constitute important sites for learning about the development of relationships.

Student participants described positive student/teacher interactions that were characterised by respect and empathy. For example, Angel noted that Rob (ST) was well respected by students because he "understood where we're from, our background." For African students who live independently, student/teacher relationships were particularly important. In these instances, some teachers were seen to adopt a greater 'loco parentis' role which was reflected in the language participants used to describe their relationships. For example, Barbara (ST) considered herself a "surrogate mum" while Fatuma explained that Rob (ST) was "like a dad" to her. These findings are consistent with other research that suggested that students from refugee backgrounds with no family support often "... cling to the stability provided by school" (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008, p. 27).

In this study, some students reported a reluctance to seek help from teachers. For example, Belee did not want to be seen as a "burden" by her teachers. This has been described as 'forbearance' and is common amongst international university students who seek to minimise or conceal problems to avoid being perceived as a burden by teaching staff (Harris & Marlowe, 2011).

This study found that generally, African students "keep to themselves" (Trevor, ST), with friendships predominantly forming with other African students. Furthermore, interactions with non-African students were often described as superficial. Sayhosay reported a strong division between African and Australian-born students which is consistent with other South Australian research that examined the

interactions between NAP and non-NAP students in a primary school (Riggs & Due, 2010). Limited cross-cultural interactions can restrict African students' capacity to develop bridging social capital (Holland, 2009; Putnam, 2011; Weller, 2010) that could otherwise facilitate engagement in education and employment.

Practical reasons were cited for the division between African and Australian-born students. Specifically, language difficulties were seen to act as a barrier to cross-cultural peer interactions (McFarlane et al., 2011). In this study, participants referred to the ease of 'speaking the same language'. For example, Sayhosay explained that it was difficult to make "Australian friends" because of her perceived inability to "speak proper English".

Disparate social and cultural worlds were also identified as a barrier to developing cross-cultural peer relationships. For example, Belee reported difficulties in establishing friendships because she perceived that she shared little in common with her peers. Limited social connections likely contributed to Belee's feelings of isolation, loneliness and marginalisation (Pittaway & Muli, 2011) which impeded her educational engagement (Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009).

When students feel disconnected from school, they often cope by truanting or dropping out (Cotterell, 2007) which has implications for their academic achievement derived from absences (Barry & Reschly, 2012). In Belee's case, she recorded 140 absences during 2011, equating to nearly three quarters of the school year. Belee's educational disengagement was compounded by issues beyond the school (Sarroub, 2007) such as mental health issues (Banks & MacDonald, 2003) and limited family support (Cutrona, 2011). For Belee, educational disengagement contributed to her poor academic achievement and eventual early school leaving. This significantly limited her post-school options which reflects other research findings (e.g., Alloway et al., 2004; Lenton, 2005; L. Wilkinson, 2002). Belee's case supports the notion that early events are critical in the process of school dropout (Barry & Reschly, 2012).

*Racism and discrimination.*

African people from refugee backgrounds are considered a 'visible minority' in Australian society (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012). Associated with this marginalisation is social exclusion through racism and discrimination, an issue described by participants. For example, Luol (ASP) explained that racism is something that African youth must tolerate. This notion of coping with racism and discrimination was described by Fozdar and Torezani (2008) in their Western Australian research with individuals from refugee backgrounds. Racism can compound already complex resettlement difficulties (Danso, 2002) and has been found to shape the education and employment experiences of immigrants in the United States (Bates et al., 2005) and Australia (Brough et al., 2003; Fozdar & Torezani, 2008; Wakholi, 2007).

This study's findings support the notion that racism is detrimental to establishing and maintaining positive school-based relationships (Miller, Mitchell, & Brown, 2005). Recall that a number of student participants cited examples of racism involving both peers and teachers. For example, Sayhosay reported racial abuse from one of her peers on the basis of her skin colour which left her feeling "ashamed." Similarly, Fatuma cited an instance where her chemistry teacher taunted another African student in the class, saying "... 'I feel sorry for the mother who looks at that face ...'" Such encounters were explored by educators. For example, Trevor (ST) explained that racism is often covert, where some female students are "very good at subtle stuff, with a flick of the hair, the look, and so on ... it's all undercover ..." In addition, educators cited examples where African students accused them of being racist. Linda (ST) explained that some students will "pull the racist card" in circumstances that are not in their favour. TAFE educators also observed this when students perceive that their grades are not reflective of their abilities. This notion of attributing difficulties to discrimination is consistent with the literature (Fozdar & Torezani, 2008).

*Mentoring.*

In adapting to a new country and culture, migrant children can “become entangled in a crossroads of expectations” (Amigo, 2010, p. 35) involving their families, teachers and peers. These youth are engaged in crossing social, cultural, linguistic, structural, and gendered borders, often with limited support (Phelan et al., 1998). The ability to cross these borders has implications for “... the quality of [students’] lives and their chances of using the educational system as a stepping-stone to further education, productive work experiences, and a meaningful adult life” (Phelan et al., 1998, pp. 3-4). This study identified the need for cultural mentoring. Like student/teacher relationships, mentoring was considered particularly important for students who are “missing an adult figure at home” (Linda, ST).

Integral to mentoring for African students is the need to have “good, solid examples of people from their own culture that have been a success” (Darren, SP).

Researchers, however, have identified a critical absence of such mentors (Refugee Council of Australia, 2009; Wilson et al., 2006). In this way, mentors can act as ‘cultural brokers’ (C. R. Cooper, 2011; C. R. Cooper et al., 1999; Yohani, 2011) and play a key role in ‘bridging’ the home, school and community. This is particularly important for African youth from refugee backgrounds given that they often lack knowledge of cultural expectations and understandings (J. Brown et al., 2006; DECS, 2007a; Grant & Francis, 2011). Mentoring can, therefore, facilitate African students’ understanding of mainstream social expectations and institutional practices that facilitate engagement with learning (Ferfolja & Vickers, 2010). More broadly, mentoring can support the development of cultural capital that promotes engagement and participation in education and employment.

**Summary**

African students with severely disrupted schooling are likely to encounter significant academic and social challenges in the Australian education system. For example, they can experience conceptual gaps in their understanding (Brodie-Tyrrell, 2009) and can experience difficulties in developing literacy skills. Together, these challenges can impede students’ ability to access the Australian school

curriculum which is reflected in their academic performance. This, in turn, can constrain post-school options.

African students can encounter challenges in terms of understanding the culture of Australian schooling, including the expectations of being a student. A lack of knowledge of these implicit understandings can affect educational engagement and academic achievement. This, in turn, can constrain senior school subject choices and ultimately, post-school pathways. Access to appropriate support can positively contribute to the social and academic lives of African students in the Australian school system and beyond.

## **Family Support**

Family plays a key role in the development of all children (Osher, 1996), irrespective of their background. Support from family facilitates access to social resources such as support networks, good relationships, and a sense of connectedness (Moen & Erickson, 1995). This study provided evidence that family support is constrained by significant family resettlement challenges such as communication and financial difficulties, living arrangements, and changes to family roles and responsibilities (C McMichael et al., 2011). Specifically, four key factors were found to shape the nature and quality of family support: familial structural changes; responsibilities and obligations; family members' education and employment histories; and knowledge of the Australian education system and post-school pathways.

### **Familial structural changes.**

In this study, most student participants reported structural changes to their families. These occurred in the homeland, the country of asylum, and Australia, and were found to shape access to family support. Family disintegration is a common experience amongst newly arrived refugee families in Australia (Gifford et al., 2009; Westoby, 2009). Structural changes within families can strain relationships (Mondain & Lardoux, 2012), creating additional resettlement challenges (C McMichael et al., 2011).

Three students in mixed families<sup>43</sup> at the time of arrival in Australia explained that family conflict resulted in their transition to independent living. African students who transition to independent living “at a very vulnerable age” (Jacqui, ST) have limited access to support from “stable and supportive adults.” This was confirmed by students who explained that limited social support is a key challenge associated with living independently. For Belee, the lack of family support following her transition to independent living left her feeling “alone in this world” and contributed to her depression. Belee acknowledged that her family’s breakdown contributed to her disengagement from education which, ultimately, constrained her post-school options. These students also cited practical challenges such as cooking for themselves and ensuring that they had financial resources for food and utilities, and money to send to family overseas. These challenges contributed to difficulties in maintaining the focus on their schooling, which shaped their academic achievement.

African youth from single parent homes can encounter challenges that affect school engagement. While the same could be said for Australian-born students, this structural change proved particularly significant amongst African students because of the influence of culturally prescribed gender roles within the family. For example, Kennedy and Deng (ASP) explained that the family’s patriarch is typically responsible for managing children’s behaviour. Absent fathers can leave mothers in “powerless positions” (Jacqui, ST). Recall that Jacqui was supporting a male student who was engaged in gang and criminal activity. This student migrated to Australia with only his mother, who experienced difficulty in exercising parental control because of culturally prescribed roles associated with her female gender. This illustrates the critical role that family structure and prescribed roles can have in shaping African students’ schooling.

### **Responsibilities and obligations.**

Study participants noted that role transformations are common in newly arrived African families, with children adopting adult roles and responsibilities; a process

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<sup>43</sup> This term refers to families which include step-parents, foster parents, or guardians other than biological parents (e.g., a relative from the extended family, or friend).

known as 'adultification' (Burton, 2007). Roles cited include caring for siblings, preparing meals, and engaging in interpreting and translating. These "roles at home" (Laura, TE) can influence academic achievement (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Dooley, 2009; Earnest & de Mori, 2008). For example, acting as a 'language broker' (C. R. Cooper, 2011; Titzmann, 2012) or 'cultural mediator' (Coventry et al., 2002) by engaging in interpreting and translating can affect school attendance because of the need to attend appointments. Family roles and responsibilities can also constrain academic achievement by reducing the time that students have to complete homework (J. Brown et al., 2006; Dooley, 2009). This study's findings support other research (Chegwidden & Thompson, 2008) that found that opportunities to complete homework differ according to gender. That is, African family roles and responsibilities are typically greater for female youth than for males. For example, Will (ASP) observed that within one family, there was evidence of "the boy excelling" while the girl was "regressing". These gender differences may be a result of the different roles played by men and women in African cultures, where women's roles typically revolve around the household and caretaking responsibilities (Mugabushaka, 2011).

Transnational remittances are commonly practised amongst resettled African refugees (Akuei, 2005; Johnson & Stoll, 2008; Lim, 2009) and are considered the "glue" that maintains family ties (Hammond, 2010, p. 126). Study participants explained that "nearly every family member" (Kennedy, ASP) who migrated to Australia from Africa has an "obligation" (Emmanuel, ASP) to financially support family, kin and community overseas. Student participants reflected on the degree of difficulty in meeting these obligations in terms of the employment status and job stability of family members. In Angel's family, remittances are "not difficult" because both of her parents have stable employment. Conversely, Fatuma, who was living alone, studying full-time and was not engaged in part-time paid employment, reported difficulties with remittances. She explained that the majority of her Centrelink allowance is sent to her family, leaving little money for her own expenses.



Limited financial resources can heavily burden immigrant African families, creating a sense of shame when they are unable to meet financial obligations (Hammond, 2010). Participants reported that transnational remittances can exacerbate financial difficulties amongst African families which can shape both the 'micro' and 'macro' aspects of African students' education and career pathways. Situations of poverty can directly impact upon students' academic achievement (Williams, 2011) by reducing access to resources to support learning (O'Sullivan, 2006b) such as "a school uniform or ... books" (Rachel, SP). Limited access to financial resources can also shape African students' post-school options by either deferring or preventing engagement in post-school education in order to transition directly into paid employment (Banerjee & Verma, 2012; Fuligni & Pedersen, 2002; Lim, 2009; RCOA, 2010). As Darren (SP) explained, when finances are limited, post-school education may not be a realistic option because of the inability to be "making money in the short term" in order to support the family. In these instances, paid employment may constitute the only real option.

#### **Family members' education and employment histories.**

Interview data revealed that students' parents have diverse education and employment histories. For example, in Somalia, Fathia's mother was a teacher and her father worked as a banker. In contrast, Sabrina's mother was only able to access basic education and was unable to develop literacy skills in any language. Consequently, Sabrina's mother had limited employment opportunities, working in Burundi as a low-skilled farm labourer.

Refugees often have limited access to resources such as food, medical services and education (Pittaway & Muli, 2011). In this study, parents with a history of skilled employment were able to compensate for this by utilising their work-related resources in the country of asylum which shaped their family's refugee experiences. For example, David's mother secured employment as a primary school principal and a leader with the United Nations. The financial resources she accrued from this employment aided in improving the family's living conditions. Students whose parents were engaged in skilled employment, particularly those who worked as teachers, reported that their parents encouraged them to attend school in the

country of asylum, which contributed to the development of an educational foundation prior to migration.

Limited English language skills were found to constrain the practical support that family provide to African students such as homework assistance. Limited literacy skills can also constrain home/school communication (Rah et al., 2009). For example, after Jurup was suspended from school, he approached his brothers for advice instead of his mother. This preference may have been due to the fact that Jurup's mother "[doesn't] understand English." This demonstrates that language-based communication difficulties can constrain parents' contributions to their children's schooling. Conversely, parents with greater knowledge, skills and cultural capital are better able to support their children's schooling (Alitolppa-Niitamo, 2004; Suarez-Orozco, Bang, & Onaga, 2010; Suarez-Orozco, Gaytan, et al., 2010).

#### **Knowledge of the Australian education system and post-school pathways.**

Immigrant parents typically lack knowledge of educational systems in countries of resettlement (C. R. Cooper et al., 1999; Roxas & Roy, 2012). Participants reported that many newly arrived African parents "don't understand the *work* that's required" (Darren, SP) in order to embark upon certain post-school pathways such as university. This is compounded when parents are unaware of the academic challenges that their children face in the Australian school system (C McMichael et al., 2011; Ramsden & Taket, 2011) such as the impacts of language difficulties and interrupted schooling. This can result in family expectations that are deemed 'unrealistic' relative to their children's knowledge, skills and capabilities. This can create a source of stress for African youth who may feel pressured to "*be something*" (Rachel, SP).

This study found that African families typically possess a limited knowledge of expectations associated with the roles of parents and guardians in the Australian school context. Recall that dissimilar parental roles were considered a key challenge in making educational transitions. For example, parents may see teachers as the authority (Rah et al., 2009) and associate school contact with fear and stigma (Ramsden & Taket, 2011). Parental support may, therefore, be limited to parents'

frames of reference. Furthermore, this study's findings revealed that parental aspirations for their children can also be limited by their own frames of reference. As Emmanuel (ASP) explained, parents are typically only aware of careers in teaching and medicine. They "don't know other jobs like social work. In Africa, there is no social work." This may contribute to our understanding of why newly arrived African families promote post-school pathways that lead to these careers. This is reflected in other research which has found that immigrant and ethnic minority parents are often unaware of the types of pathways that they might consider (C. R. Cooper, Chavira, et al., 2005) because of their limited knowledge of available post-school pathways (Stevenson & Willott, 2007).

Recall that one of Darren's (SP) clients "got the marks to study psychology" but was unable to pursue this course because her mother expected her to become a nurse. Similarly, recall that some students explained that if they faced a situation in which their aspirations and expectations were inconsistent with those of their parents, they would follow their family's wishes over and above their own plans. These findings indicate the strength of family influence in shaping education and career decisions, which is reflected in the literature (Fulgini & Pedersen, 2002; O'Sullivan, 2006b). As Coventry et al. (2002, p. 54) explained:

... young people may in principle have the right to make informed decisions  
... however, the risk of excommunication from the family and ethnic  
community is part of the information that must be taken into account before  
a decision is reached.

What lies at the heart of these issues is that family members may lack the cultural capital needed to support their children to access and derive meaning from the educational information that is provided to them (Suarez-Orozco, Bang, et al., 2010). This can constrain family support in terms of their children's schooling and in preparing for the post-school transition. Limited cultural capital can, therefore, undermine the collective efficacy of African youth and their families in and around education and career decision-making.

**Summary.**

Family, both present and absent, plays a pivotal role in the lives of African youth. Generally, families are supportive of their children's education and play a highly influential role in shaping their children's schooling experiences. Family also significantly shapes African students' education and career decision-making. Family support was found to be influenced by family structure, roles and responsibilities, the education and employment histories of family members, and knowledge of the Australian school system and post-school options. This study's findings support other research that has identified family as simultaneously acting as a source of strength and potential conflict (Coventry et al., 2002; Gifford et al., 2009; Udo-Ekpo, 1999).

**Post-School Preparation**

In Australia, career development is typically initiated at a very early age, where young people are given many years to formulate, (re)develop and (re)evaluate their aspirations. Resettlement in Australia can dramatically impact upon a student's education and career opportunities and ways in which to access them. Thus, when African students from refugee backgrounds migrate to Australia, they are likely to reconsider their aspirations. This process takes time and is facilitated by the acquisition of new knowledge. The post-school preparation that students receive is, therefore, critical in shaping their education and career decisions and post-school pathways. In this study, three key processes were identified as critical to this process: senior school subject selection; the promotion of non-university pathways for those with limited English language skills and/or a severely disrupted schooling history; and opportunities to engage in work experience.

**Subject selection.**

Teachers play an important role in assisting students to achieve their career goals by supporting them to make subject choices that can influence their post-school plans (National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2011). In this study, subject selection was considered an important post-school preparation process. The subject choices that students made affected their academic achievement, both in specific

subjects and their overall academic performance. For African students from refugee backgrounds, limited time in Australian mainstream schooling means that the time in which to explore subject areas of interest can also be limited. In some cases, this exploration only occurred during senior secondary school (i.e., Years 11 and 12).

Subject choices can be further constrained for African students given that the content and pedagogical foundation for many subjects is introduced in the middle years. This creates obvious disadvantages for African students who enter mainstream schooling in the latter stages of secondary school. Recall that Jurup entered mainstream school in Year 11. During the year, he reported a desire to study nursing after enjoying his study of biology in Uganda. In Australia, however, Jurup struggled to adapt to different teaching and learning styles which was reflected in his low grades for Year 11 biology. Consequently, Jurup's teachers counselled him into other subjects which altered the direction of his post-school pathway away from nursing.

Academic achievement that is derived from senior school subject selections can affect post-school pathways. For those who intended to transition to university, academic performance in the final year of secondary school, culminated in the form of an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank (ATAR). Students' ATAR scores then affected the university courses that were offered to students. For example, Angel did not achieve an ATAR score that facilitated entry into a nursing degree and was instead offered a place in a health sciences degree.

### **Promoting non-university post-school pathways.**

This study found that academic achievement influences the education and career counselling that students receive. For example, participants noted that for students who were perceived to be struggling academically, further education and employment pathways were seen as preferable post-school options when compared to university pathways. These 'alternative' options to higher education were considered to create opportunities for students to develop academically and participants explained that these pathways were a means by which to prevent students from being "set up for failure" (Jacqui, ST). This was considered a common

concern amongst educators both in this study and in the literature (Harris & Marlowe, 2011).

Educators reported difficulties in counselling students to consider pursuing alternative post-school pathways, particularly when students have aspirations to attend university. Stakeholder participants in this study perceived that some students with limited knowledge and skills can possess 'unrealistic' education and career expectations. This notion of 'unrealistic' expectations has been noted in the literature (Fozdar & Gallegos, 2009) and is compounded when university is perceived as the only valid post-school pathway (Olliff & Couch, 2005). These difficulties may be derived from the limited knowledge that migrant and refugee youth have about alternative pathways (e.g., apprenticeships) and how to access them (Fozdar & Gallegos, 2009).

### **Work experience.**

Work experience is an important aspect of post-school preparation for all students, irrespective of their background because it provides an opportunity to develop an understanding of a particular job while exposing students to the broader 'world of work'. For African students, engaging in appropriate work experience was considered an important factor in shaping their post-school pathways, given their often limited knowledge of the available education and career options. Work experience can, therefore, introduce these students to jobs and aid them in making post-school plans (Alloway et al., 2004). For example, John explained that his work experience in the automotive industry assisted him to understand the daily tasks of a mechanic and aided him in identifying a specialisation.

### **Summarising the Key Ideas**

In order to summarise the key ideas that emerged from data analysis, an education and career decision-making model was developed (see Figure 10).

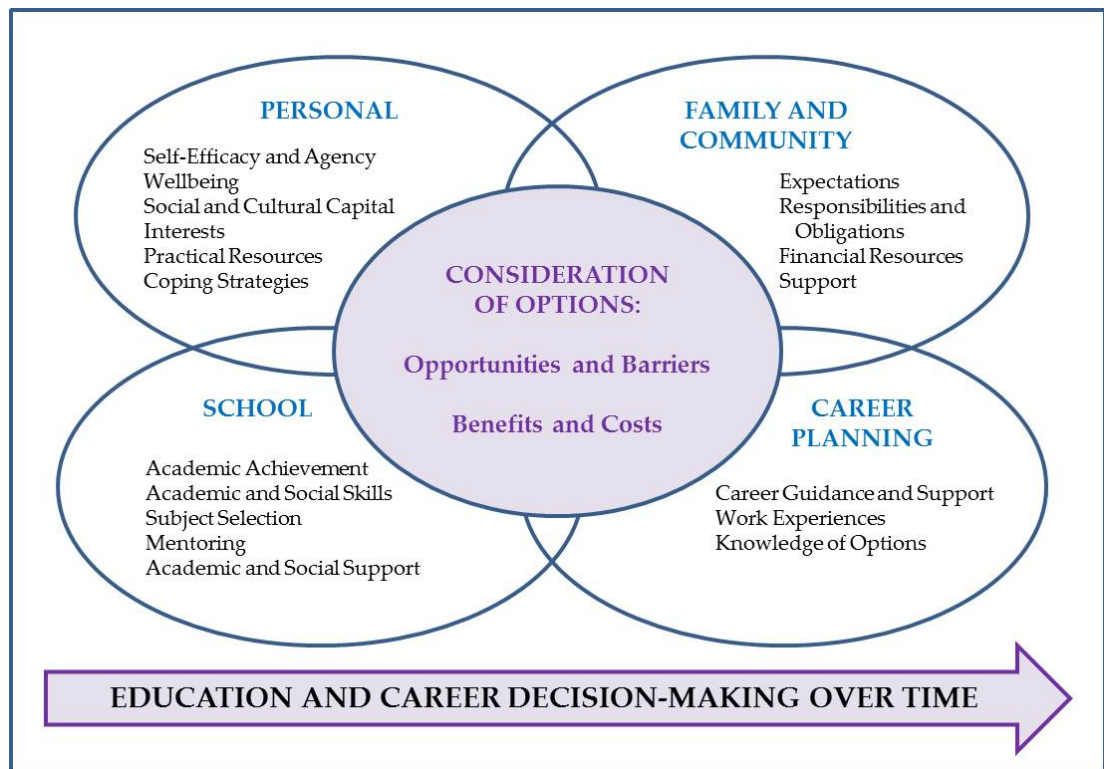


Figure 10. Developmental model of education and career decision-making

This model identifies four elements – personal, family and community, school, and career planning – as shaping the education and career decision-making of African youth from refugee backgrounds. Central to the process is a consideration of perceived available options in light of opportunities, barriers, benefits and costs.

#### **Framework assumptions.**

A number of assumptions underpin the decision-making model. This model assumes that decision-making is a goal-directed process that involves an examination and assessment of perceived available choices (Cassel, 1973) and a consideration of the costs and benefits (Kalyuzhnova & Kambhampati, 2007). Individuals, therefore, make decisions within a structure of opportunity and constraint in the context of "... personal life history, current life circumstances and individual dispositions ..." (Adamuti-Trache, 2011, pp. 64-65). This model acknowledges that choices are the product of individual deliberation, but can also be conveniently made when they are imposed by others whose expectations and feelings are so strong, they cannot be divorced from the individual's own expectations (Cassel, 1973). This is particularly important given the strength of family influence in shaping African students' education and career decisions.

This model assumes that decisions are made on the basis of information, experiences, personal and social identities, preferences, and perceived opportunities. There is a tendency amongst individuals "... to seek information that confirms their attitudes, beliefs, and decisions" (Sweeny et al., 2010, p. 343), but people also avoid considering information that conflicts with their world view, self-image and beliefs. The decision-making process is, therefore, underpinned by decision-making practices and coping strategies including active problem-solving, avoidance coping, and collective coping (Friedman & Mann, 1993; Sweeny et al., 2010).

Like the education and career pathways framework, this model is developmental in nature. Consequently, the developmental assumptions described earlier are consistent with the decision-making model. Consistent with a developmental approach is the notion that education and career decision-making has a strong temporal component, where plans and goals are developed on the basis of a timeline that is shaped by expectations about the sequences of major life events (Neugarten, 1969). That is, decisions are made, revised and re-evaluated over time, in response to opportunities, experiences, challenges, obstacles, and barriers. This is consistent with a life course approach (Elder Jr. & Johnson, 2003). This model also assumes that the four decision-making elements are interconnected (as illustrated by the use of concentric circles in Figure 10). This is consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 1975) theory of human development which conceptualises individual lives as complex systems of relationships that are shaped by multiple levels of context.

## **Post-School Preparation: Recommendations for Effective Practice**

This section of the chapter relates to the study's final research question: From the perspectives of different stakeholders, how might African youth from refugee backgrounds be better prepared for the post-school transition? The key recommendations presented herein constitute a synthesis of the suggestions made by participants during interviews and from meetings with the Reference Group and African Community Mentors. These recommendations, therefore, represent the



perspectives of those who were involved in and around this study. Given that schools play a critical role in contributing to early intervention because of their capacity to identify and access at-risk students (Coventry et al., 2002), these recommendations are located in the secondary school context; specifically, in the South Australian context.

Schools are complex environments in which educators strive to educate and support all students, irrespective of their background. This raises the question: why focus on African students from refugee backgrounds? As has been illustrated throughout this chapter and thesis, this group of young people face a specific set of complex challenges that are unlike many other South Australian school students. Amidst the process of rebuilding their lives in a foreign country, African youth from refugee backgrounds encounter school-based challenges as a consequence of missed years of schooling, limited English language proficiency and literacy skills, limited social networks, and a lack of social and cultural capital that strongly impacts on their engagement in the Australian school system and society more broadly. These recommendations are presented with a view towards achieving equity for this group of students to facilitate greater engagement and participation in Australian society through education and employment.

Although these recommendations highlight perceived needs, they have not been designed solely to emphasise deficits. In acknowledging the needs and relative disadvantage of African youth from refugee backgrounds, it is important to recognise and appreciate the capacities and resilience they bring to overcome challenges and barriers (Coventry et al., 2002; Gifford et al., 2009). This was emphasised by participants who characterised African youth from refugee backgrounds as resilient, determined and persistent, with a strong sense of optimism for the future. These personality traits were seen to have an enabling function in assisting these youth to cope with multiple, complex challenges. In addition, these recommendations seek to reinforce the effective and positive contributions that schools and teachers make in shaping African students' school experiences and post-school preparation. The recommendations are, therefore, not intended to criticise the good work of schools and teachers but rather, to highlight

effective strategies and approaches to working with African youth from refugee backgrounds.

## **Professional Development**

Australia's official policy on multiculturalism (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) emphasises the centrality of cultural and linguistic diversity in shaping the nation's character. The very notion that Australia *has* such a policy indicates the importance of acknowledging and celebrating diversity.

Cultural awareness and sensitivity are important prerequisites for effective cross-cultural communication (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005). Cultural awareness and sensitivity, therefore, shape cross-cultural relationships. When teachers are culturally aware, they are better placed to develop appropriate expectations about students' knowledge, skills and capabilities. This is not to say that teachers should have low expectations, but rather, develop realistic expectations about students' knowledge and skills. Equipped with this knowledge and understanding, teachers are better equipped to utilise effective ways to support African students.

When teachers display cultural awareness and sensitivity, this promotes the development of positive student/teacher communication and relationships. Recall that Angel appreciated Rob (ST) as a teacher because he "understood where we're from, our background." Teachers who acknowledge and understand the experiences and challenges encountered by African students are better positioned to develop strong, respectful relationships. In addition, positive student/teacher relationships can foster adaptive help-seeking behaviours that contribute to effective academic and social support provision.

Conversely, some teachers who work with and support African students from refugee backgrounds may be perceived as (unintentionally) lacking cultural sensitivity (Coventry et al., 2002). This can stem from what Quappe and Cantatore (2005) refer to as a 'parochial' level of cultural awareness, where individuals are unaware of the impact of cultural difference. Providing opportunities for school staff to engage in cross-cultural awareness training can aid in overcoming this challenge and foster positive student/teacher relationships. Promoting cultural

awareness and sensitivity can also aid in reducing racist attitudes and practices that are inherent in the broader community (Coventry et al., 2002). Some participants suggested that educators in particular be provided with cultural awareness training and access to cultural mentors and relevant support personnel.

Given that cultural diversity is a characteristic of the Australian community, it was suggested that cultural awareness training should become a requirement for all teachers. While this professional development could be delivered at school sites, one participant recommended that cultural awareness be incorporated into pre-service teacher education courses. Cultural awareness training could become part of the accreditation process within Australian teacher education courses and for teacher registration.

In addition to cultural awareness, participants perceived that some African students from refugee backgrounds do not receive the support and counselling they need from teachers in relation to their learning and education and career counselling. In order for teachers to effectively perform their roles, they need support to: attain appropriate qualifications; have opportunities to engage in ongoing professional development; and gain access to resources. Supporting teachers in this way can aid in better meeting the needs of African students.

## **Academic Support**

African students' experiences of school are shaped and framed by school structure and organisation. For some students, the rigidity of the school system can exacerbate their already complex social and academic challenges. A recurring issue is the difficulty associated with adapting to an age-graded school system. When African students with severely disrupted schooling and limited English language skills are placed into classes solely on the basis of chronological age, they can encounter social and academic challenges that persist throughout and beyond secondary school. Establishing greater flexibility within school systems and structures can enable African students to cope with, and overcome, these long-lasting challenges. This involves a consideration of African students' abilities in addition to their chronological age (Refugee Council of Australia, 2010) and may

require an evaluation of student assessments that seek to establish students' entry points into mainstream schooling.

### **Timetabling.**

Structural difficulties associated with school timetabling were considered to shape African students' school experiences. For example, Trevor (ST) explained that at one school, the classes for two subjects were scheduled concurrently. Both subjects appealed to the needs and interests of African students. Timetabling issues, therefore, prevented these students from completing both subjects. Individuals also noted that a limited *variety* of courses can create structural disadvantage. Overcoming these structural challenges by establishing greater flexibility can facilitate school engagement and academic achievement. Furthermore, flexible approaches to learning can provide space and opportunities for students to exercise greater agency over their education and career pathways.

### **Curriculum differentiation.**

Recall that curriculum differentiation was a cause of contention amongst educators, African students and their families. A key issue was that some students and their families are unaware of the implications of a differentiated curriculum, such as limiting senior school subject options. Effective curriculum differentiation involves dialogue between teachers, students and their families to ensure that all parties are aware of rationale and the implications of a modified curriculum.

### **Homework and assignment support.**

From my own experience as a volunteer homework club tutor with the Australian Refugee Association, it is evident that many African students from refugee backgrounds struggle with homework and assignment tasks. Difficulties arise from limited academic skills, limited English language, literacy, numeracy and technology skills, and lack of appropriate support from family. Providing greater academic support by, for example, establishing a support centre that is accessible during school hours, and/or an after-school homework club could aid in overcoming some of these challenges (RCOA, 2010). Academic support provisions

such as these have the potential to benefit all students, irrespective of their educational or cultural background.

### **English Language and Literacy Support**

This study's findings emphasise the centrality of English language proficiency in shaping all aspects of African students' lives in Australia. It is also evident that African youth from refugee backgrounds can face complex challenges in learning and developing English language skills, particularly where students lack literacy skills in any language. As is consistent with the literature (RCOA, 2010), contributors to the recommendations noted the need to recognise that literacy development takes time and requires support. Furthermore, Reference Group members noted the lifelong impact of limited literacy skills. In terms of schooling, limited language skills can constrain classroom participation, the development of relationships with teachers and peers, and access to the curriculum. In terms of post-school pathways, limited English language proficiency can constrain education and employment opportunities.

Individuals explained that educators need to become aware of the impact of students' limited literacy skills and modify their expectations accordingly. They also suggested that teachers need support in the form of professional development in order to develop effective teaching strategies to support African students to develop English language and literacy skills. This is the responsibility of *all* teachers, not only those who teach English or ESL because of the challenges associated with developing general English vis-à-vis subject-specific vocabulary. A number of individuals recommended that African students with limited literacy skills need to work more closely with specialist teachers who are experienced in teaching language skills to this group of students.

### **Social Support**

This study confirmed that African youth who arrive in Australia as refugees often lack the social and cultural capital needed to facilitate engagement in education and employment. African youth are disadvantaged when they lack implied, assumed knowledge about Australian culture, and the nature of education and employment.

Not all newly arrived students have opportunities to develop this social and cultural capital because of a lack of social networks that include individuals from different cultural backgrounds (Walker et al., 2005).

Many of this study's participants considered cultural mentoring to be pivotal in promoting successful integration, academic functioning, social and emotional wellbeing, and facilitating post-school transitions. For many African students from refugee backgrounds, the cultural mentoring that they receive is perceived to be generally inadequate, inconsistent and haphazard, and is largely dependent on individual teachers who see the need for this mentoring.

Participants recommended that a formal, organised cultural mentoring program be established that begins at enrolment and continues until the student leaves the school. Schools would be well-placed to bear this responsibility and could utilise support from individuals who are external to the school in the form of ongoing partnerships and collaboration. This program would act as an early intervention for students who require support to develop social and cultural capital and could, therefore, aid in reducing the impacts of disadvantage.

Elements of cultural mentoring that were considered important include: personal support and encouragement; education and career counselling including the dissemination of information about schooling in Australia; monitoring of social and emotional wellbeing; assistance in clarifying educational needs; and enlisting the support of others when needed (e.g., facilitating access to role models from students' ethnic communities). Cultural mentors would, therefore, need to know about support structures that are available from outside agencies, departmental staff, and community groups, and be in a position to form relationships and partnerships with these agencies.

The key differences between such a program and current provisions are that cultural mentors would: be selected on the basis of their knowledge and skills in cultural sensitivity and awareness; view cultural mentoring as their primary role in working with these students; have support and recognition from leadership within the school; and have opportunities to meet regularly with the students involved.

Such cultural mentoring need not be seen as an alternative to existing school support provisions but, rather, as an additional source of support and mentoring for students.

## **Career Guidance**

Access to quality career guidance and advice shapes young people's post-school transitions and pathways (Hargreaves, 2011; National Centre for Vocational Education Research, 2011), irrespective of their cultural background. Individuals noted that effective career counselling utilises an individualised, problem-solving approach in working with students to explore multiple options and pathways. As research has noted, when career counsellors adopt an advice-based as opposed to an information-based approach, they can become key resources for students (Alloway et al., 2004).

This study supported other research which has found that African youth and their families often possess limited knowledge of post-school pathways and career options that are available in Australia (Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues, 2003; O'Sullivan, 2006b). This can result in a limited number of choices that are perceived to be available and consequently, results in less effective career decision-making (C. Brown et al., 1999). This differs from Australian-born students who can generally be expected to have an awareness of the multiple pathways that are possible, and knowledge of how to obtain further information. Providing accessible education and career information to both African students and their families can support the development of cultural knowledge about education and career pathways in Australia and, therefore, better informed decision-making. Providing opportunities for African students to engage in multiple work experiences can also aid in overcoming this challenge. When students have access to diverse work experiences, they can engage in more comprehensive career exploration, develop 'career capital', learn about particular jobs, and develop an understanding of the 'world of work' (Walker et al., 2005).

Effective education and career decision-making involves collaboration between school staff, the student and his/her family. This approach recognises the

importance of African students' collective identities and acknowledges the critical role of family in shaping their children's education and career pathways. Effective collaboration is characterised by ongoing dialogue *throughout* African students' schooling in Australia in order to ensure that students and their families make effective education and career decisions with opportunities to exercise agency (te Riele, 2004). Ongoing interaction can support the development of both short- and long-term goals, thereby reframing career development as a longitudinal process involving a series of goals as opposed to a single, linear pathway. African youth who aspire to attend university but do not possess the necessary skills following the completion of secondary school can, therefore, maintain higher education as a future goal while reducing the likelihood that they will be 'set up' for failure. Goal development involves supporting African students to engage in ongoing self-assessment in terms of their knowledge, skills and capabilities with respect to their subject choices and post-school plans.

### **Summary of Recommendations**

Ten recommendations were developed from this study. These recommendations are summarised in Table 10.



*Table 10.* Summary of the study's recommendations for working with African students from refugee backgrounds

Area of Improvement	Recommendations
Ongoing Professional Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Provide teachers of African students with cultural awareness training and opportunities to discuss their needs and facilitate access to identified areas of professional development.</li> <li>2. Incorporate cultural awareness training into Australian pre-service teacher education courses.</li> </ol>
Education and Cultural Mentoring	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Provide ongoing education and cultural mentoring to African students throughout their schooling, as needed.</li> </ol>
Academic and English Language Support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Identify school-based supports that facilitate the educational engagement of African students.</li> <li>5. Identify academic support provisions that aid in addressing the learning needs of African students.</li> <li>6. Identify support provisions that facilitate English language and literacy skill development amongst African students.</li> </ol>
Social Support and Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Promote a welcoming, culturally inclusive school culture.</li> <li>8. Identify strategies that facilitate home/school communication for African students and their families.</li> </ol>
Education and Career Counselling	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>9. Identify approaches to education and career counselling that facilitate the education and career development of African students.</li> <li>10. Provide African students with opportunities to engage in multiple, diverse work experiences.</li> </ol>

## Summary of Effective Practice

A number of overarching elements were identified as contributing to effective practice when working with, and supporting African students from refugee backgrounds in South Australian schools. Effective practice for supporting African students from refugee backgrounds was characterised by a longitudinal, developmental approach involving short- and long-term plans, goals and interventions. In addition, a flexible, adaptable, strengths-based approach (Osher, 1996) that involves collaboration between educators, students and their families (RCOA, 2010) is critical. Effective practice also involves the provision of information in a timely and appropriate manner (Coventry et al., 2002). The specific characteristics of effective practice and their potential implications are summarised in Table 11.

Table 11. Summary of effective practice and potential implications

	<b>Characteristics of Effective Practice</b>	<b>Potential Benefits</b>
<b>Ongoing Professional Development</b>	Ongoing cultural awareness training for pre-service teachers and school staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Educators will develop a greater understanding of the needs and challenges facing African students from refugee backgrounds</li> </ul>
	Access and support for educators to engage in ongoing professional development related to inclusive pedagogies	
<b>Education and Cultural Mentoring</b>	Curriculum differentiation involving ongoing dialogue between teachers, students and families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students and families will be better able to understand the rationale for a differentiated curriculum and its implications in terms of future education and career plans</li> </ul>
	Ongoing evaluation and monitoring of student progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students will have opportunities to reflect on their learning and teachers can make adjustments as appropriate</li> </ul>
	Flexibility within school systems and structures in terms of student placement, subject choice and timetabling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students will be better able to cope with social and academic challenges</li> <li>▪ Students will have greater opportunities to engage in subjects which meet their needs and interests</li> </ul>
	Additional academic provisions such as learning support centres and after-school homework clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students will be able to access greater academic support from school-based educators</li> <li>▪ Students can be supported to overcome issues associated with limited access to personal, social and academic resources to facilitate learning</li> </ul>
<b>Academic and English Language Support</b>	Recognition of the long-term impacts of limited literacy and numeracy skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers will be well-placed to identify, understand and address language-based challenges</li> </ul>
	Ongoing support for students with limited English language and literacy skills that is provided by all teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students can be supported to develop general English language skills vis-à-vis subject specific vocabulary</li> </ul>
<b>Social Support and Communication</b>	Ongoing education and cultural mentoring that occurs over the course of African students' schooling in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students will have access to ongoing support and mentoring to facilitate the development of social and cultural capital</li> </ul>
<b>Education and Career Counselling</b>	Individualised career counselling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students will have opportunities to be supported to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Expand their career knowledge and 'career capital'</li> <li>○ Engage in self-assessments of their knowledge, skills and capabilities</li> <li>○ Develop short- and long-term goals</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Facilitate involvement in work experiences that will assist students in their career decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students will be able to develop their knowledge and understanding of the work culture in Australia including knowledge of particular jobs</li> </ul>

In attempting to address some of these key issues, a professional development resource was developed in collaboration with the Reference Group and African Community Mentors. This resource (contained in Appendix J) includes a case study and commentary which is intended to facilitate discussion amongst school staff in terms of the support they provide to African students from refugee backgrounds. The resource also contains a cultural understanding quiz and associated commentary, to aid educators in identifying their current level of cultural understanding, and a case study and commentary. Finally, the professional development resource includes a series of educational resources that can be utilised by educators, students and for class-based activities.

## **Chapter Summary and Directions**

This chapter offered an analysis of the study's findings and sought to establish connections with existing literature. The chapter was organised into the three sections, based on the research questions. In the first section, a developmental education and career pathways framework was presented and student participants' education and career aspirations were explored. The second section involved an examination of the six key influences that were identified during data analysis as contributing to the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds. These influences were: previous schooling; English language skills; Australian schooling challenges and support; academic achievement; and post-school preparation. To summarise this section and convey the connections between the key influences, an education and career decision-making model was presented. The chapter's final section involved a discussion of the key recommendations that were made by the study's Reference Group, African Community Mentors, and participants in the form of a series of elements of effective practice.

## SECTION V: REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

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*Let every word be the fruit of action and reflection.*

*Reflection alone without action or tending towards it is mere theory,  
adding its weight when we are overloaded with it already.*

*Action alone without reflection is being busy pointlessly ...*

*-- Helder Camara*

Chapters in Section V:

8: Discoveries and Future Directions: Conclusions

# Chapter 8: Discoveries and Future Directions: Conclusions

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*One's destination is never a place, but a new way of seeing things.*

*-- Henry Miller*

The end of every journey invokes a period of reflection: on what has transpired, what was seen, and what was learned. As the quotation above suggests, the journey's end often signals the arrival at a novel perspective; a new vision. It also prompts a contemplation of conceivable possibilities and directions for future travel.

This chapter marks the end of this journey and provides an opportunity to reflect on the study's key findings, recommendations, and limitations. In addition, the study's contribution to the research literature is discussed and suggestions for further research are offered. Personal reflections from this study are shared before a concluding statement is provided.

## **Key Findings**

This study has contributed to a growing understanding of the unique challenges and complex circumstances that face African youth from refugee backgrounds and their teachers in South Australian secondary schools and in preparing for the post-school transition. Incorporating the voices of multiple stakeholders contributed to a working knowledge of these challenges in different contexts, in addition to exploring ways to address the needs of these students.

This study found that the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds do not occur in a vacuum. Rather, they are shaped by previous experiences, challenges, opportunities and barriers that occur throughout the life course. These pathways are, therefore, embedded in individual and social contexts including the school, family and community.

African students' mainstream schooling experiences in South Australia were found to critically impact upon their education and career pathways. Students' academic and social needs in the Australian education system were strongly shaped by their schooling experiences prior to migration, and their English language and literacy skills. Students with a history of severely disrupted schooling lasting many years, coupled with limited English language skills can find it difficult to access the curriculum and cope with the demands of subject-specific language. This, in turn, can affect their academic achievement and ultimately limit their senior school subject choices and subsequent post-school options.

The school environment and ethos play a critical role in shaping the experiences of African students from refugee backgrounds. A sense of connection and belonging to the school community was considered fundamental in fostering school engagement. Conversely, experiences of racism and discrimination were found to impede students' sense of connection to the school community. Such encounters were seen to threaten African students' sense of safety, wellbeing and belonging.

Central to educational engagement is the importance of relationships. Supportive student/teacher relationships were considered an important precursor in forming relationships in other educational contexts and a means by which to foster adaptive help-seeking behaviours. Peer relationships were also found to foster school connection. The development of social networks was seen to facilitate access to social support and provide an avenue for the development of cultural knowledge and capital which can promote integration into the school community and Australian society more broadly. Social and cultural capital was seen to facilitate the post-school transition for African youth from refugee backgrounds. Social experiences at school, both positive and negative, were found to affect school attendance and academic achievement, consequently influencing African students' education and career pathways.

Family was seen to play a key role in shaping the lives of African youth from refugee backgrounds. This study found that African youth are often charged with adult responsibilities within the family such as caring for younger siblings, completing

household chores, and interpreting and translating for family members with limited English language skills. Fulfilling these roles was found to shape academic achievement by affecting school attendance and the ability to complete homework. Responsibilities also extended beyond this support to include the provision of financial support for family and kin overseas. While this was unproblematic for some students and their families, others reported difficulties in finding a balance between meeting their own needs and fulfilling this obligation to family. Difficulties included managing finances to purchase items such as stationery and school uniforms. In addition, participants reported that financial difficulties were also a factor in shaping the education and career decisions of some African youth, where financial obligations either defer or prevent engagement in post-school education.

The education and career aspirations of African youth were found to be transformed throughout the life course in response to experiences, challenges, opportunities and barriers. This involved a process of transformation from *aspirations* (i.e., future goals) to *expectations* (i.e., post-school plans and intentions). In this study, the education and career aspirations of African youth from refugee backgrounds were found to be shaped by the importance of education as a migration-related opportunity, and the desire for status and respect – two influences that were found to be strongly mediated by family expectations. Attaining status and respect in the community was found to be achieved by attendance at university and beginning a professional career, and the status attributed to higher education was reflected in the student participants' aspirations. Returning to Africa, equipped with skills and knowledge gained in Australia, to contribute to community development efforts was also a means by which to achieve status and respect. Education and career aspirations were also shaped by the knowledge of post-school education and employment options of African youth and their families where generally, this knowledge is limited. This lack of 'career capital' can disadvantage African students and their families by reducing their ability to make informed education and career decisions.

In this study, it became clear that students' aspirations were framed in terms of post-school *pathways* as opposed to specific careers. Furthermore, data analysis

revealed a 'hierarchy' of post-school pathways where students considered university the 'default' option followed by TAFE as the alternative. In the event that post-school education was not a viable option, employment was considered the 'fall-back' position. This hierarchy was found to have implications for education and career counselling, where teachers reported difficulties in promoting non-university pathways to students who were intent on embarking on a university pathways but were not deemed to have the necessary skills at the time of leaving secondary school.

## **Challenges Facing African Students and Their Teachers**

The findings of this study indicate that African students from refugee backgrounds and their teachers encounter a number of significant challenges in the school context. This section provides an overview of the key issues facing both students and their teachers in the Australian school system.

Communication difficulties constitute a key challenge for African students, their families and their teachers. African students can experience difficulties understanding their teachers and peers if they speak quickly or use Australian colloquialisms. This can affect their ability to communicate their thoughts, feelings and needs. Similarly, teachers can experience difficulties understanding their African students if they have a heavy accent or have a limited English vocabulary. This can make it difficult for teachers to identify and address the needs of their African students. Language barriers can also inhibit effective communication with African students' parents and families. This can be compounded when there is limited access to, and availability of, interpreters and bilingual workers. Language and communication difficulties, therefore, act as a barrier to the development of student/teacher, teacher/parent, and peer relationships.

African students face the challenge of developing literacy skills to the extent where they are able to access the school curriculum. This is compounded by the difficulties in developing subject-specific language skills which can be particularly problematic for students with limited formal schooling experience and who are enrolled in senior secondary school. Furthermore, African students with disrupted schooling



experience can have conceptual gaps in their understanding which are often assumed in the latter years of secondary school. These issues can be exacerbated when their teachers make incorrect assumptions about their knowledge, skills and capabilities.

Culturally, African students can encounter difficulties in bridging the multiple contexts of their lives. In their families and ethnic communities, they share a collective cultural identity and a common language. At school and in public spaces, they are a 'visible minority' (Abdelkerim & Grace, 2012) where patterns of interaction are foreign and cultural assumptions are implicit. Developing cultural capital and knowledge of how Australian society operates constitutes a key challenge for African youth from refugee backgrounds. Consequently, African students must learn to adapt to, and operate within, different cultural worlds.

Not all teachers have had access to professional development opportunities that aid them to meet the needs of African students from refugee backgrounds. Teachers may, therefore, be challenged in that they may not be aware of the unique and complex challenges facing this group of students, or how to best support them in the classroom.

School-based structures can create disadvantage amongst African students from refugee backgrounds. For example, limited availability of subject choices as a consequence of the size or the academic orientation of the school can limit students' senior school subject choices. This can mean that African students complete subjects in senior secondary school that may not meet their needs or interests and can hinder them from realising their post-school education and career aspirations and plans.

Teachers encounter many practical issues that limit their ability to support African students from refugee backgrounds. These include factors such as limited time, heavy workloads, and accountability in meeting curriculum requirements.

In preparing for the post-school transition to education and employment, African students can struggle to develop sufficient career knowledge to make informed decisions. This is compounded when their families lack knowledge of the education

and career options that are available in Australia. In addition, African students can feel pressured when their families expect them to embark upon professional career pathways without understanding the extent of the educational challenges their children face.

## **Recommendations for Educational Practice**

From the study's findings, a series of recommendations were developed in collaboration with the study's Reference Group and African Community Mentors with a view to improving educational support for African students from refugee backgrounds. These recommendations have been developed with secondary schools and staff in mind. The recommendations are not presented with a deficit view but, rather, seek to reinforce the positive contributions of schools and teachers while creating an opportunity for dialogue towards more effective ways of working with this group of students.

African students from refugee backgrounds face a common, complex set of challenges that are unlike those of their Australian-born peers. Despite these commonalities, it is important to recognise that African youth are not a homogenous group. Rather, like other Australians, African youth have diverse cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds. Similarly, all school contexts and teachers are different. Consequently, there are multiple ways in which to address the needs of these students. Adopting these recommendations, therefore, requires an examination of school, student and teacher contexts and engagement in collaborative problem-solving within schools and amongst teachers. This recognises and values the role of teachers as experts in identifying their professional needs and the needs of their students.

The study's findings indicate that not all teachers have had sufficient professional development and access to support to meet the unique challenges of African students from refugee backgrounds. In order to improve this situation, it is recommended that teachers of African students be provided with access to professional development opportunities to better support them in their roles. The identification of teachers' specific professional development needs and the

challenges they face requires the involvement of teaching staff. Areas of professional development needs may include support to assess students' language and literacy skills, subject-specific support, and cultural awareness to better address the needs of African students from refugee backgrounds. Identifying these needs and challenges can enable teachers and schools to explore ways in which to address them. As mentioned, the needs and challenges will vary from school to school, and individual teachers and schools will need to develop their own plans and strategies relative to their own particular circumstances.

In addition to school-based professional development, a key recommendation arising from this study is the need for cultural awareness training for pre-service teachers. This could take the form of a component of Australian pre-service teacher education courses and become a requirement for teacher accreditation.

Effective cultural mentoring was found to be vital in supporting African students at school and in preparing them for the post-school transition. This process was considered essential in equipping all students with cultural capital that facilitates integration into Australian society and, more specifically, engagement in post-school education and employment. In this study, the provision of cultural mentoring was haphazard and overly dependent on the awareness and actions of individual teachers rather than a result of school planning and organisation. A formalised model of cultural mentoring could aid in overcoming this.

Many African students face significant and complex academic needs in the Australian school system as a consequence of severely disrupted schooling and limited English language and literacy skills. A key recommendation arising from this study is the need for schools to consider the academic and English language and literacy support they provide to these students with a view to identifying areas for improvement.

The cultures from which the student participants came emphasise collectivism in which group associations are fostered and connectedness is critical (Triandis, 1995). To the student participants, family plays a pivotal role in their lives. Because of this, schools need to consider the opportunities they provide for African families to

become engaged in their children's schooling and post-school education and career decision-making. In addition, schools need to consider the practices they use in communicating with African students' families, particularly given the limited literacy skills amongst newly arrived families. Effective communication can contribute to the engagement of African families in their children's schooling in addition to creating and maintaining an inclusive, welcoming school community.

To complement education and career counselling, those who contributed to the development of the recommendations described the need to provide opportunities for African students to access numerous, diverse work experiences. This was seen as a means by which to support students to develop 'career capital' (i.e., greater knowledge of the 'world of work') in addition to an understanding of specific jobs and associated tasks.

Table 12 provides a summary of the recommendations that arose from this study including considerations that can aid in adopting these recommendations. As mentioned, these recommendations are presented with the understanding that there are multiple ways in which to address the identified challenges.

As a way of considering these recommendations, a professional development resource was developed from the study's findings. This resource includes a case study and commentary, a cultural understanding quiz and commentary, and a series of educational resources (see Appendix J). This resource has been designed to facilitate discussion in schools about the issues identified in this study, with a view to identifying plans and strategies to meet the needs of specific students and groups of teachers. It can be used as a tool amongst pre-service teachers. The professional development resource provides a practical starting point to better address the needs of these students and their teachers.

Table 12. Summary of recommendations arising from the study for working with African students from refugee backgrounds

	Points for Consideration
<b>Professional Development</b>	
1. Provide teachers of African students with cultural awareness training and opportunities to discuss their needs and facilitate access to identified areas of professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engage school staff in collaborative problem-solving to identify teachers' professional development needs in order to better address the needs of African students from refugee backgrounds.</li> <li>▪ Following an appraisal of these needs, facilitate access to professional development opportunities that provide teachers with, for example:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Practical assistance and support to assess students' language and learning needs.</li> <li>○ Assistance in addressing students' needs in subject areas.</li> <li>○ Cultural awareness to better address students' learning needs.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2. Incorporate cultural awareness training into Australian pre-service teacher education courses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This recommendation is targeted towards university educators involved in pre-service teacher education courses.</li> <li>▪ Cultural awareness training in education courses could be developed in collaboration with school sites, members of the wider community, and an examination of existing research.</li> <li>▪ The effectiveness of this training could take the form of research involving trials and evaluations.</li> </ul>
<b>Educational and Cultural Mentoring</b>	
3. Provide ongoing educational and cultural mentoring to African students throughout their schooling, as needed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What educational and cultural mentoring is available and how is it provided to African students?</li> <li>○ What opportunities are available for enhancing African students' access to educational and cultural mentoring (e.g., enlisting the support of people in the community, service providers)?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Academic and English Language Support</b>	
4. Identify school-based supports that facilitate the educational engagement of African students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What strategies are used to provide African students with support (e.g., flexible timetabling, curriculum differentiation)?</li> <li>○ How are African students' knowledge and skills assessed when they enter mainstream school?</li> <li>○ How are African students allocated to year levels and classes?</li> <li>○ How might the process of assessment and placement of students into classes be improved?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
5. Identify academic support provisions that aid in addressing the learning needs of African students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What academic support structures are available for African students?</li> <li>○ What additional academic support could be provided to students (e.g., an after-school homework centre, a learning support centre accessible throughout the day)?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
6. Identify support provisions that facilitate English language and literacy skill development amongst African students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are students' literacy skills assessed by the school and individual subject teachers?</li> <li>○ What specialist English language and literacy support is available?</li> <li>○ How are students with limited English language proficiency supported to develop literacy skills?</li> <li>○ How are African students from refugee backgrounds supported to develop subject-specific language?</li> <li>○ What additional supports are needed?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<b>Social Support and Communication</b>	
7. Promote a welcoming, culturally inclusive school culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How are African students and their families made to feel welcome at the school?</li> <li>○ How can a welcoming and culturally inclusive school community be established and/or maintained?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
8. Identify strategies that facilitate home/school communication for African students and their families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How does the school communicate with African students' families?</li> <li>○ What strategies have been useful in supporting home/school communication?</li> <li>○ How might home/school communication be improved?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Education and Career Counselling</b>	
9. Identify approaches to education and career counselling that facilitate the education and career development of African students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What education and career counselling provisions are available for African students?</li> <li>○ What opportunities are available for students' families to be involved in education and career counselling?</li> <li>○ How are the career interests of African students assessed?</li> <li>○ How do African students learn about the range of career options that are available in Australia?</li> <li>○ How might education and career counselling be improved for African students?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
10. Provide African students with opportunities to engage in multiple, diverse work experiences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Questions to consider:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What opportunities are available for African students to engage in work experience?</li> <li>○ How are students' career interests related to work experience placements?</li> <li>○ How can work experience be used to increase African students' knowledge of Australian career options?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited to 38 participants (i.e., 14 student participants and 24 stakeholders). The decision to limit this study to a small number of participants was made in an effort to ensure that interviews could be conducted in sufficient depth. Time constraints also prevented the involvement of a greater number of participants. Although limited to 38 participants, a strength of this study was the use of multiple, semi-structured interviews over a 12 month period in which 78 interviews were conducted.

All student participants were recruited from one high school with the exception of one student who attended a different school in the same area of Adelaide. Educator participants were recruited from three schools, including Fairview High School. Limiting the number of school sites facilitated a greater, deeper understanding of the contextual factors that shape African students' school experiences and preparation for the post-school transition.

The young people who participated in this study attended schools with an ethos embodying acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity. In addition, these schools had relatively substantial groups of African students. Accessing schools with relatively few African students from refugee backgrounds, and involving youth who were one of very few African students at the school could have contributed to a greater understanding of the influence of the school context in shaping these students' education and career pathways.

This study examined African students' experiences of making the transition from secondary school. That is, it did not examine a specific transition (e.g., the transition to university or employment). This decision was made because it was considered to establish a more accurate reflection of reality and provide scope to examine different types of post-school pathways and the associated resources required. Most student participants, however, made the transition from secondary school to university and relatively few transitioned to TAFE or employment. Given that both TAFE and

employment are common pathways for African youth from refugee backgrounds, this constitutes a limitation of this study.

Although the majority of student participants were engaged in the process of making the post-school transition at the time of the study, opportunities were also available for the recruitment of African youth who had already made the transition. In this study, three of the 14 student participants had made the post-school transition at the time of data collection. This contributed to both a prospective and retrospective examination of the post-school transition.

In this study, there were stark differences in the life experiences and cultural backgrounds of the researcher and the majority of participants. This had the potential to complicate data collection, particularly where concepts possess different meanings across cultures. These differences were, however, addressed in the study with support from the African Community Mentors who provided important cultural knowledge.

African participant involvement in this study was limited to those who were able to communicate in English without the use of an interpreter. This was both a limitation and delimitation of this study. Practical and financial constraints contributed to the decision not to involve individuals with limited English language proficiency. Involvement of individuals with limited English language skills could have provided greater insights into the language-based challenges and barriers associated with engagement and participation in education and employment. In addition, this may have resulted in an examination of more diverse post-school pathways amongst student participants.

Associated with a lack of involvement of those with limited English language skills, was that parents were not involved in this study. This, however, did not preclude gaining the perspectives of the student participants about their parents' expectations for them in terms of their education and career pathways. In addition, parental perspectives were gained from interviews with African community leaders. They drew upon their own experiences and those of the parents in their communities to provide insights into the challenges of parenting in the Australian context.



Another limitation is that employers were not involved in this study. The involvement of employers in this research would have provided greater insights into the experiences and challenges facing employers and African youth from refugee backgrounds in workplace situations. Despite this limitation, work-related issues were discussed with participants who drew from personal and indirect experiences. For example, in his role as an employment broker, Dean was able to discuss a range of employment challenges facing African youth and their employers.

Female African community leaders' voices were not included in this study with the exception of a female community leader who was involved as an African Community Mentor. Incorporating these perspectives could have contributed valuable insights into the complexities associated with gender in shaping the education and career pathways of African youth. Similarly, this study is limited in that only three male student participants were involved. While this reflected the number of male African students at Fairview High School, a larger number of male participants would have enriched the examination of gender differences. A more even gender balance amongst the student participants may have also diversified the types of post-school pathways that were explored in this study.

## **Contribution to the Literature**

Engagement and participation in education and employment are key markers of integration amongst individuals from refugee backgrounds who have resettled in host countries (Ager & Strang, 2008). Although labour market integration and employment of adult migrants has received research attention, there is limited literature examining the education and career pathways of young people from refugee backgrounds in and around the post-school transition. This study sought to address this gap in the literature.

Many of the challenges identified in this study are consistent with those reported in the literature concerning African secondary school students from refugee backgrounds. Despite this, the current study makes a number of contributions to the literature by, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, establishing a 'new way

of seeing things'. For example, this study's findings provided supportive evidence of the importance of disrupted and missed years of schooling in shaping later schooling experiences in the Australian school system (J. Brown et al., 2006). In this research, disrupted schooling was recognised as playing a key role in shaping subsequent educational pathways. That is, in this study, all student participants experienced some level of disruption to their schooling as a consequence of, for example, the length of time of the disruption, lack of access to schooling, or the quality of the education received prior to migration.

The importance of English language proficiency has also been noted in the refugee research literature concerning school engagement (McBrien, 2005; Poppitt & Frey, 2007; Sarroub, 2007) and participation in post-school education and employment (Olliff, 2004; L. Wilkinson, 2002). In this study, English language proficiency was considered to have multiple functions, both academic and social. English language skills were described in terms of: the importance of oral communication skills for relationship development; and English for academic purposes including the need to develop subject-specific language. Together, these forms of English were found to contribute to African students' education and career pathways.

This study interrogated ideas surrounding the notion of naïve and 'unrealistic' aspirations and expectations (Fozdar & Gallegos, 2009; Olliff & Couch, 2005) of African youth from refugee backgrounds and their families. While authors have explained that there is a 'mismatch' between 'high' aspirations and the complex academic challenges facing African students from refugee backgrounds (e.g., J. Brown et al., 2006), this study framed students' aspirations in terms of 'career capital'. In this study, 'high' aspirations were attributed to a lack of knowledge of career options in Australia, and the notion that family members' education and career expectations may be a consequence of a limited frame of reference.

In this study, education and cultural mentoring was identified as an important, yet often missing, element of African students' schooling experiences in Australia. Access to mentoring was considered critical in facilitating integration into Australian society through participation in education and employment. This study

contributes to the research literature by identifying the importance of providing educational and cultural mentoring to all African students to aid in bridging the gap between the family, school, and adult contexts such as the workplace and further and higher education institutions.

In examining the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds, it became clear that developmental, life course and cultural perspectives are critical. This was conveyed through the creation of an education and career pathways framework which was structured chronologically and developmentally (see Figure 8, Chapter 7) and a developmental education and career decision-making model (see Figure 10, Chapter 7). Understanding the context in which experiences, opportunities and challenges occur throughout the post-school transition requires longitudinal research which adopts a life course perspective. While statistical data are useful to examine specific points in time, qualitative research can contribute to a deeper understanding of how these experiences, opportunities and challenges evolve over time.

In Australia, it has been argued that the majority of published guides for supporting teachers and schools with students from refugee backgrounds have been developed by community organisations (S. Taylor & Sidhu, 2011). This study contributes to this by the creation of a professional development resource for use in schools and pre-service teacher education courses (see Appendix J).

## **Suggestions for Further Research**

In this study, the perspectives of family members and employers were not included, but this is not because they were not considered important. Future research could address this limitation by adopting a similar methodology to that used in this study. The involvement of family members could aid in developing a better understanding of the role that families play in shaping the education and career pathways of their children. Incorporating the perspectives of employers could also facilitate a greater understanding of workplace experiences and the challenges that African youth from refugee backgrounds and their employers encounter.

As mentioned, cultural mentoring was considered pivotal in shaping the school and post-school experiences of African youth from refugee backgrounds. Cultural mentoring constitutes a key area for further research with students from refugee backgrounds in the Australian context. Further research could explore different models of cultural mentoring and trial and evaluate their effectiveness in practice.

This study was defined as a qualitative longitudinal study. The 'longitudinal' nature of this research was, however, limited by time constraints. Future research could involve a longer period of engagement with students from refugee backgrounds, beginning with their enrolment in a New Arrivals Program or Intensive English Language Centre. Participants could then be tracked over a number of years as they transition into and out of mainstream schooling. This type of study could aid in understanding how experiences and challenges unfold over time, and how the educational needs of young people from refugee backgrounds evolve over the course of resettlement. It could also facilitate the identification of appropriate and effective times throughout students' schooling to provide particular aspects of cultural mentoring.

African youth from refugee backgrounds constituted the focus of the current study. Future research could adopt a similar research design and involve young people from different cultural backgrounds who arrive in Australia in need of humanitarian assistance (i.e., refugees and asylum seekers). This research could aid in identifying common challenges facing young people from humanitarian backgrounds in addition to exploring culturally specific factors that shape their experiences.

A key recommendation arising from this study was the need for cultural awareness training as part of pre-service teacher education courses. Following the design and implementation of this training, evaluation research could be conducted to determine its impact in promoting the values development of pre-service teachers.

This study found that educational support, and education and career counselling provisions often require novel approaches when working with African students from refugee backgrounds. Further research could involve trials and evaluations of

different approaches with a variety of students in diverse school contexts to consider their effectiveness.

This study emphasised the need for educators to access various forms of professional development in order to enhance their ability to work with and support African students from refugee backgrounds. Further research could focus on designing specific professional development packages and include trials and evaluations to assess their effectiveness.

## Personal Reflections

In conducting this study, I was privileged to bear witness to the unfolding lives of 14 African youth from refugee backgrounds. Each tale of transition was unique both in content and delivery. What was common amongst these young people was resilience in the context of multiple, complex challenges, and a determination to integrate into Australian society through participation in education and employment in all its forms.

Researchers have noted that the participation of young people from refugee backgrounds in research gives them "... a sense that they [matter] and that someone was interested in their lives in a non-judgemental way ..." (Gifford et al., 2009, p. 25). Overall, the young people who were involved in this study indicated that they found the experience of participation inherently positive and empowering. This can be seen in the following reflection by Sayhosay, which is similar to the sentiments expressed by other student participants:

*I'm feeling good because I can let everything out ... For me, I'm coming to school, I'm healthy, I'm eating, I'm working at the same time ... At least I can explain my story to people and [they will] listen to my story, read my story ... 'Oh if she can do that, I can do the same.' ...*

I was also fortunate to have been able to learn from educators, service providers and African community leaders and elders who are passionate and committed in supporting African youth from refugee backgrounds. The involvement of these individuals and their approaches in working with these young people contributed

to the identification of the principles of effective practice that were presented in Chapter 7. Like the student participants, the stakeholders who engaged in this study reported positive experiences of participation. As Luol (ASP) explained:

*... it is a privilege for me to be part of ... something [that is] going to change [the] lives of people ... For you to sit down and think and say, 'I want to do this,' it is already a contribution. Not only to the mainstream community, but to us as well, that you have that heart of thinking ...*

My experience as a researcher at Fairview High School was extremely positive. I was fortunate to have been warmly welcomed into the school community. The school has a positive ethos and a strong culture of inclusivity. Fairview High School has a culturally diverse student cohort, in which nearly one third of the students are from non-English speaking backgrounds (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2010). The school's strong commitment to supporting African students from refugee backgrounds was evident in their willingness to be involved in the study. The school was extremely supportive of the research. Both the teaching and administrative staff were approachable and keen to support the research in a variety of ways such as facilitating participant recruitment, providing spaces in the school to conduct meetings and interviews, and being involved on the Reference Group. The staff were responsive to calls for participation and were prepared to share their experiences and insights in working with African students. Fairview High School is evidence of the powerful and positive influence of schools in shaping the educational experiences of African students from refugee backgrounds.

This formal study was complemented by my involvement in the Australian Refugee Association's Homework Clubs. This extra-curricular involvement aided in strengthening my relationships with student participants and also increased my understanding of the school-based challenges facing students from refugee backgrounds. In this way, I was able to develop a deeper understanding of, and engagement with, the issues that shape the education and career pathways of African youth from refugee backgrounds.

I thoroughly enjoyed conducting this research, which was facilitated by the involvement of the Community of Collaboration (i.e., the Reference Group and the African Community Mentors). This community network was essential in conducting this study as it aided in validating this research – both the idea and its implementation. Collaborating with individuals with diverse experiences helped to ensure that the research was conducted in a culturally and ethically appropriate manner. Engaging with the African Community Mentors significantly increased my knowledge of African cultures. The Community of Collaboration also reduced the sense of isolation that often accompanies PhD candidature and fostered my energy and enthusiasm for the study through ongoing support and mentoring.

### **Concluding Statement**

Navigating post-school education and career options is inherently complex for all young people in Australia, but is particularly challenging for African youth from refugee backgrounds, given the complex and diverse set of challenges they face. This study has given voice to a small group of African youth from refugee backgrounds in South Australia who have made the transition from secondary school to further education and employment. It provided these young people with an opportunity to share their experiences, and discuss their post-school options and plans. In addition, this research provided opportunities for educators, service providers, and African community leaders and elders who support these young people to share their experiences, knowledge, and insights. Together, the participants aided in developing a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing African youth from refugee backgrounds as they transition through secondary school and into education and employment.

This study has created an increased understanding of challenges and experiences of the post-school plans and pathways of this particular group of new arrivals in South Australia. This research constituted a longitudinal prospective study. Further research can assist in identifying, trialling and evaluating practical ways in which to address the needs of this group of students, their educators, and those who support them.

*... just as real bridges must fit their local landscapes and flex with the heat and cold of the seasons, so too must enduring programs find ways to engage with the real and shifting contours of students' lives in their particular families, schools, peers, and communities over time. We have much to learn about the physics and the engineering of bridges along students' pathways ...*

*-- C. R. Cooper (2002, p. 622)*



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## Appendix A: Preliminary Contact Details

Contact	Time(s) Approached	Purpose(s) of Meeting	Outcomes
Educational Psychologist, ESL Programs, DECD	December 2009 August 2010 December 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To seek advice and feedback on research intentions</li> <li>▪ To establish rapport and develop a working relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Advice given on how to proceed</li> <li>▪ Invitation accepted to become a Reference Group member</li> </ul>
Educational Psychologist, DECD	May 2010 December 2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To seek advice and feedback on research intentions</li> <li>▪ To establish rapport and develop a working relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Advice given on how to proceed</li> <li>▪ Invitation accepted to become a Reference Group member</li> </ul>
Elders and Leaders of various new and emerging South Australian African Communities (i.e., Liberian, South Sudanese, Burundian)	September 2010 to December 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To seek advice and feedback on research intentions</li> <li>▪ To establish rapport and develop working relationships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Advice given on how to proceed</li> <li>▪ Invitations accepted to become African Community Mentors</li> </ul>
Service Provider	January 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To seek advice and feedback on rudimentary research intentions</li> <li>▪ To establish rapport and develop a working relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Advice given on how to proceed</li> <li>▪ Invitation accepted to become a Reference Group member</li> </ul>

DECD Regional Director	February 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To provide information about the research being conducted in the region</li> <li>▪ To discuss possible outcomes of the research</li> <li>▪ To explore appropriate methods of approaching schools for recruitment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Methods to approach schools provided</li> <li>▪ Suggested contact: Regional ESL Consultant</li> </ul>
DECD Regional ESL Consultant	March 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To discuss the research and receive feedback and advice on ways to proceed</li> <li>▪ To establish rapport and develop a working relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Advice and feedback provided</li> <li>▪ Invitation accepted to become a Reference Group member</li> </ul>
High School Assistant Principal	March 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To provide information about the research</li> <li>▪ To recruit the school for participation</li> <li>▪ To establish rapport and develop a working relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Consent provided to conduct the research at the school</li> <li>▪ Invitation accepted to become a Reference Group member</li> </ul>
High School Assistant Principal	November 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To provide information about the research</li> <li>▪ To recruit the school for participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Support received to conduct the research</li> <li>▪ Consent provided to conduct the research at the school</li> </ul>

# Appendix B: Reference Group Agenda

## AGENDA

**Reference Group Meeting:** *Friday, May 6 at 10am at Fairview High School*  
**African Community Mentor Meeting:** *[Day, Time and Location to be advised]*

### 1 **Introductions**

Reference group members will be invited to introduce themselves and to talk briefly about their current role or position

### 2 **Research Overview**

Svetlana will provide an overview of the research (see 'Research Summary')  
*The original Research Proposal document will also be available for those who would like a copy*

### 3 **Reference Group Goals and Aims**

Discussion of the anticipated goals and aims of the reference group (see 'Reference Group: Overview and Current Thoughts')

### 4 **Discussion of Current and Potential Challenges**

Reference group members will be invited to discuss current and potential challenges and possible ways to address these challenges.

Points for discussion include:

- Translation of Documents (and Funding Allocation)

*What are some possible ways to involve African community mentors in this process?*

- Student Participant Recruitment

*What challenges do you think Svetlana will have in recruiting students to participate in the research, and how might these challenges be overcome?*

- Arranging Interview Times

*What challenges do you envisage in arranging interview times, and how might these challenges be addressed?*

Reference group members will also be invited to raise issues that they think may arise and, possible ways to address these issues

*- What issues and challenges do you think Svetlana will have in conducting the research as she has described it, and how might these issues and challenges be addressed?*

### 5 **Interview Questions**

Reference group members will be invited to discuss possible questions to ask the stakeholders who are involved in the research (i.e., students, school, TAFE and university educators, employers, family members, community leaders, friends)

### 6 **Any further business**

### 7 **Next meeting**

Decide on a date, time and location for the next meeting

Discuss items for the agenda of the next meeting

### 8 **Meeting Close and Refreshments**

# Appendix C: Overview and Purpose of the Community of Collaboration



## Reference Group

### Overview and Current Thoughts

*Transitions from School to Work, Further Education and Training:*

*Perspectives and Experiences of African Students  
who Migrated to Australia as Refugees*

Svetlana King

School of Education, Flinders University of South Australia

Supervisors:

Prof Larry Owens, Dr Neil Welch and Dr Julie Robinson

Thank you for expressing an interest in becoming a member of the reference group. We will face some exciting challenges over the next two years and I look forward to our discussions of ways to tackle these challenges.

Firstly, I would like to tell you a little about myself and what I bring to this study:

- I am a registered teacher (I trained as a secondary school English and biology teacher)
- I am a volunteer tutor with the Australian Refugee Association's Homework Clubs for secondary school students
- I am a Girl Guide Leader of Youth, and have been for many years
- My maternal grandparents migrated to Australia after the Second World War from Serbia and the Ukraine
  - I am actively involved in the Serbian community in Adelaide as the conductor of an adult choir, a children's choir, and a children's string ensemble
- I have recently completed research which examined experiences of Serbian refugees who migrated to South Australia as a result of the dissolution of former Yugoslavia during the 1990s
  - From this research, I published:
    - A book: 'From Fighting to Freedom: Stories from Serbian Balkan War Refugees'
    - A journal article: 'Serbian Stories of Translocation: Factors Influencing the Refugee Journey Arising from the Balkan Conflicts of the 1990s'
  - This research assisted me to win a Flinders University Research Scholarship which is funding this present study
- Since 2009, I have been studying the research literature on the experiences and challenges of transition, migration and resettlement for refugees
- I have also gained valuable insights into refugee experiences of migration and resettlement from my mother, Branka King, who is a member of the South Australian Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission (SAMEAC)

## The Study

This study aims to investigate South Australian perspectives and experiences of the post-school transitions of African students who migrated to Australia as refugees. Specifically, this study will examine the following research questions:

1. What are the educational and career aspirations of African students from refugee backgrounds who are currently attending secondary school in South Australia, and what factors shape these aspirations?

2. What factors and processes influence the realisation of the work and educational aspirations and preferences of African students from refugee backgrounds, and how do these aspirations and preferences change over time?
3. From the perspectives of different stakeholders, how effective are schools in preparing African students from refugee backgrounds for transition from secondary school, what are the challenges, and how might these best be met?

## Significance of the Study

This study differs from many other studies in the refugee area in that:

- This study values the importance of **community collaboration**, active involvement, and consultation. This means:
  - This study seeks the assistance of community mentors and a reference group
  - With the assistance of community mentors, community information sessions will be organised. These sessions will:
    - Enable me to introduce myself
    - Involve the dissemination of information about the study
    - Provide people with an opportunity to ask questions
    - Facilitate the recruitment of participants
  - Those who are involved will be invited to actively engage in the process of this research. This means, for example:
    - Participants will be involved in analysing the information they provide and, in this way, will be involved in analysing *their* data
    - Findings and recommendations will be shared with the schools and communities who participate in this study, and school staff and community members will be invited to comment, and provide feedback, on the findings and recommendations
- This study is **highly situational and contextual**. This means:
  - The study is situated in and around the lives of the student participants and explores the complexities of the various contexts that students occupy
  - The following contexts are among those that are considered crucial:
    - *History* (e.g., migration, education)
    - *Family* (e.g., living arrangements, siblings)
    - *Culture*
    - *Community*
    - *School*
    - *Other learning institutions* (e.g., TAFE, university)
    - *Workplace* (including apprenticeships)
    - *Gender*
    - *Peer groups*



- The processes involved in this research illustrate the critical importance of contextual and situational factors
- The resulting data analysis and recommendations will be informed by, and embedded in, contextual and situational factors
- The study recognises the **importance of relationships** – both in and around the research. This means:
  - This study acknowledges the *complex web of relationships* in people’s lives and the important role of these relationships in shaping their experiences
  - This study will consider the key relationships in students’ lives; it acknowledges that significant people in students’ lives will have an important influence on their post-school transition experiences
  - Developing *trusting* relationships with all those who are involved in this study is considered crucial to the success of this research
  - Relationships will be facilitated by *ongoing contact* with those who are involved in this research
  - Those involved in this research will have opportunities to comment on the findings and recommendations of this study and will, therefore, be informed of the findings throughout the study
- This is a **prospective and ‘longitudinal’** study. This means:
  - Multiple interviews will be conducted with participants over an 8-12 month period *as they make* the transition from school
  - This study seeks to understand the dynamic nature of the challenges and opportunities facing students from refugee backgrounds as they make the transition from secondary school
  - This area is under-researched in the Australian context and, therefore, has the potential to increase our understanding of the post-school educational and employment aspirations, experiences, pathways and outcomes of African students from refugee backgrounds
- This study aims to involve a **diverse range of stakeholders**. This means:
  - Students, teachers, employers, training staff, mentors, caregivers, community members, and career counsellors, for example, will be involved in this study
  - The research questions will be explored and analysed from a broad range of perspectives
  - The recommendations are expected to be developed with a range of stakeholders in mind
- This study aims to develop **collaborative recommendations that *make a real difference*** to the post-school transitions of African students from refugee backgrounds. This means:
  - This study recognises the importance of developing recommendations that are directly relevant to the South Australian context at this point in time

- Recommendations will be developed collaboratively with community mentors and reference group members
- This study uses a **strengths perspective**. This means:
  - This study does not solely focus on students. Rather, this study explores the perspectives of a range of individuals who are involved in the process of transition from school
  - This study will explore a range of opportunities and challenges facing African students from refugee backgrounds as they begin new undertakings in adult settings – it will not solely focus on students’ problems and deficits
  - This study explores students’ capacities to participate in further education and the labour market in South Australia
    - This study explores a **wide range of resources** that students have (and need) in order to facilitate their transition from school (e.g., economic, educational, cultural, social)

In addition to the unique features outlined above, this study is also significant for the following reasons:

- This study examines an area which is under-researched
  - In South Australia and Australia, there has been limited research examining the post-school transition experiences of students from refugee backgrounds
- Because this study examines an under-researched area, it has the capacity to increase understandings of the barriers, challenges and opportunities facing students from refugee backgrounds as they make the post-school transition

## The Reference Group

The purpose of the reference group is:

- To provide feedback and advice on issues and challenges that emerge during the research
- To facilitate and support the research within the community
- To assist in the development, promotion and implementation of the study’s recommendations

The reference group will involve individuals who have knowledge and expertise in working with refugees and specifically, young refugees from Africa. In order to have a range of perspectives, the intention is to involve individuals from various sectors of the community (e.g., South Australian African community members, service providers, researchers involved in refugee matters, Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) staff, school representatives, and multicultural agency representatives).

The actual membership of the reference group is flexible. For example, membership of the reference group may change over the course of the study as different issues emerge. We may find that individuals with particular expertise could assist us at certain stages during the study.

## Meetings

Reference group meetings will be scheduled at key stages during the course of this research. Table 1 provides an overview of a suggested meeting schedule for the next two years. Please note that this is only a suggested schedule and is likely to change. For example, we may need to schedule additional meetings when new issues and challenges arise.

Table 1. *Suggested Reference Group Meeting Schedule*

Meeting	Topics for Discussion	Approximate Time of the Year
1	Introductions and Overview Past and present challenges	May, 2011
2	Discussion of current findings and issues	November, 2011
3	Update and discussion of findings and issues	March, 2012
4	Update and discussion of findings and issues Discussion of analysis and feedback sessions Additional suggestions	June, 2012
5	Discussion of findings Discussion of recommendations	September, 2012

Please note that I will also send regular research updates via email in between meetings. In addition, a computer program called 'Doodle' will be used to assist in arranging meeting times. Upon sending an 'invitation' to attend the meeting, you are asked to consider the times and dates listed and nominate the times that you are available. Given that everyone's schedules are very busy, I think this may be the easiest way to organise meetings.

Reference group meetings will proceed in a similar way to other committee meetings, with agendas and minutes being kept for each meeting. Please note that items for discussion during reference group meetings are suggestions. Reference group members will be asked to assist in formulating agendas for meetings. All reference group members will be able to access these documents as they become available.

At this stage, meetings will be held at Flinders in the City (182 Victoria Square (corner of Victoria Square and Flinders Street)). Another possibility is the DECS Regional Office.

We will, however, discuss this to ensure that meeting places are convenient for all involved.

It is expected that each reference group meeting will be approximately two hours in duration.

## **Contact Details**

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspect of this research or the reference group, please feel free to contact either myself or Dr Neil Welch. Our contact details are below:

Svetlana King:	8201 5672 or 0433 838 199	svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au
Dr Neil Welch :	Reference Group Chair	neil.welch@flinders.edu.au

Finally, I would like to thank you once again for your interest in participating in the reference group. I am looking forward to working with you over the next two years!

## Appendix D: Research Summary



### *The Post-School Transitions of African Students from Refugee Backgrounds* Research Outline

*Svetlana King*  
School of Education, Flinders University of South Australia  
Email: [svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au) Mobile: 0433 838 199

#### **Introduction**

Before providing an outline of the research, I would like to tell you a little about myself:

- I am a registered secondary school English and science/biology teacher
- I have a Serbian background (my maternal grandparents migrated to Australia from Serbia and Ukraine after the Second World War)
- I previously conducted research examining the experiences of Serbian people who became refugees as a consequence of the dissolution of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, and subsequently migrated to Australia. From this research, I was awarded First Class Honours from this research and won a University Medal for academic excellence in 2009. As a result of this research, I have published a book and a journal article:
  - King, S. M., Owens, L., & Welch, N. (2009). *From Fighting to Freedom: Stories from Serbian Balkan War Refugees*. Adelaide: Shannon Research Press
  - King, S. M., Welch, N., & Owens, L. (2010). Serbian Stories of Translocation: Factors Influencing the Refugee Journey Arising from the Balkan Conflicts of the 1990s. *Journal of Pacific Rim Psychology*, 4(1), 61-71
- I am a full-time PhD student in the School of Education at Flinders University, and I have won a scholarship to undertake this research



#### **Research Particulars**

- This research is being supervised by: *Professor Larry Owens*, School of Education (8201 3356; [larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)), *Dr Neil Welch*, School of Education, and *Dr Julie Robinson*, School of Psychology
- This research has received approval from the Flinders University ethics committee (Project Number 4977) and the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS)
- This study is expected to be completed by the end of 2013
- This study seeks the active engagement of a reference group, comprised of individuals from various community sectors (e.g., African community mentors, DECS staff, and service providers). The reference group will meet at key stages of the research to provide guidance and practical assistance as required, and will collaborate to develop recommendations arising from this study

#### **The Study**

This is a qualitative, prospective, longitudinal study that examines the post-school transitions of 16 African students who migrated to Australia as refugees. Using multiple interviews,

conducted over an 18 month period, this study explores students' experiences as they leave school and transition to (un-)employment and further education. At this stage, it is expected that the student participants will be recruited from two or three African communities, and be enrolled in one of two secondary schools in Adelaide's metropolitan region.

In addition to interviewing students, I would like to conduct interviews with a wide range of stakeholders including family and community members, school and employment staff, tertiary educators, career counsellors, and policy makers, and others who are involved in mentoring and supporting these students.

Community information sessions will be used to facilitate the recruitment of participants. These sessions will be conducted in collaboration with community mentors.

### *Research Questions*

This study aims to address the following questions in the current South Australian context:

1. What are the educational and career aspirations of African students from refugee backgrounds, and what shapes these aspirations?
2. What influences the realisation of these aspirations, and how do these aspirations change over time?
3. How effective are schools in preparing African students from refugee backgrounds for the post-school transition, what are the challenges, and how might these best be met?

### *The Study's Framework*

This research uses a case study methodology and draws upon a range of theories. This study recognises the importance of multiple contexts in shaping students' aspirations and their post-school transitions. The contexts considered important in this study include:

- Family
- Culture (and the influence of gender)
- Community (including collective efficacy beliefs, expectations)
- Life course (including prior learning experiences)
- School (including curriculum, pedagogy, teacher-student relationships, and social structures)
- Relationships (including those that provide social support and mentoring, and peer groups)
- Resources (including economic, material, educational, cultural and social)
- Intrapersonal factors (including self-efficacy beliefs, coping patterns, adaptation and attachment, and sense of wellbeing)

Participants will take on an active role in analysing the information they provide and in providing feedback regarding the recommendations and the draft report.

### *Intended Outcomes*

After completing this research, I hope to have achieved the following:

- Answers to the three research questions
- A number of reports and discussion papers (for participating schools and African communities, DECS, journal publications)
- A list of recommendations that will assist a range of stakeholders involved in the post-school transition of African students from refugee backgrounds

# Appendix E.1: Student and Family Letter of Introduction



## Letter of Introduction

**Professor Larry Owens**  
Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)

**School of Education**

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Adelaide SA 5001  
Tel: 08 8201 3356  
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[larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)  
[www.flinders.edu.au](http://www.flinders.edu.au)

Dear .....

This letter is to introduce Svetlana King who is a research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. Svetlana's research will explore experiences and challenges of African students from refugee backgrounds as they move from school to work and further education. The title of her research is *School to Work and Further Education of African Students who Migrated to Australia as Refugees*.

The information that Svetlana collects will be used to write a report. In the report, no names will be mentioned, and information will be kept confidential.

This study is expected to provide African students from refugee backgrounds, their families and communities, and other relevant people, with a voice. It will also recommend ways that schools can better prepare students to find a job and go on to further study.

Svetlana would be most grateful if you could assist by agreeing for ..... to participate in a series of interviews over one year as he/she moves from school to work or further education. Interviews will be less than one hour, and some may be less than half an hour.

If you and ..... agree, Svetlana would like to audio record the interviews. These recordings will help Svetlana to write a story that will be used in her report. .... can, at any time, choose not to answer questions or to stop the interview. At the end of the interviews, Svetlana will go through a summary with ..... to make sure that she has accurately noted what has been said.

Participation in this study is voluntary. .... is able to freely withdraw from the study at any time. In appreciation of ..... involvement, Svetlana would like to offer a small gift.

Finally, if you or ..... has any questions or concerns about this study, please feel free to contact me (8201 3356 or by email [larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)). Svetlana can also be contacted on 8201 5672 or by email ([svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au)).

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Larry Owens  
Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)  
School of Education

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 4977). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).*

## Appendix E.1.1: Student Letter of Introduction (Swahili)



**Professor Larry Owens**  
Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)

**School of Education**

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[www.flinders.edu.au](http://www.flinders.edu.au)

### Barua ya Utangulizi

Mpendwa .....

Barua hii ni kwa kukutambulisha Svetlana King ambaye ni mwanafunzi katika shule ya utafiti wa elimu katika Chuo Kikuu cha Flinders. Utafiti wa Svetlana utachungaza maoni na changamoto ya wanafunzi wa Afrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi. Kichwa cha utafiti wake ni "Shuleni kuelekea Kazini na Elimu zaidi ya Wanafunzi wa Afrika ambao wamehamia Australia kama Wakimbizi".

Svetlana atakusanya taarifa ambazo zitatumika kwa kuandika ripoti. Katika ripoti hii, majina hazitajwi na taarifa ambazo zitakusanywa zitakuwa siri.

Utafiti huu unatarajia kutoa sauti kwa wanafunzi wa Kiafrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi, familia zao na jamii, na kwa watu wengine muhimu. Pia utapendekeza njia bora shule zinaweza kuandaa wanafunzi kupata kazi na kwenda kwenye elimu ya juu.

Svetlana atakushukuru zaidi kama unaweza kumsaidia kwa kukubaliana kwa ..... kushiriki katika mfululizo wa mahojiano zaidi ya mwaka mmoja kama yeye anatoka shuleni na kuelekea kazini au elimu zaidi. Mahojiano itakuwa chini ya saa moja, na baadhi inaweza kuwa chini ya nusu saa.

Kama wewe na ..... mtakubaliana, Svetlana angependa kurekodi mahojiano. Recodi hizi zitasaidia Svetlana kwa kuandika hadithi ambazo zitatumika katika ripoti yake. .... inaweza, wakati wowote, kuchagua jibu, maswali au kusimamisha mahojiano. Kwenye mwisho wa mahojiano, Svetlana pamoja na ....., watapitia kwenye muhtasari kuhakikisha kwamba ameanzika kile ambacho kilikuwa kinasemwa.

Kushiriki katika utafiti huu ni wa hiari. .... anaweza kujiondoa katika utafiti huu wakati wowote. Katika kuthamini kuhusika ..... Svetlana angependa kutoa zawadi ndogo.

Mwishowe, kama wewe au ..... ana maswali yoyote au wasiwasi juu ya utafiti huu, tafadhali jisikie huru kuwasiliana na mimi (08,201 3356 au kwa barua pepe [larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)). Svetlana pia anaweza kupatikana kwa njia ya simu 8201 5672 au kwa barua pepe ([svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au)).

Asante kwa kuzingatia ombi hili.

Wako mwaminifu,

Prof Larry Owens  
Mshiriki Mkuu (Kufundisha na Kujifunza)  
Shule ya Elimu

Mradi wa utafiti huu umepitishwa na Chuo Kikuu cha Flinders Jamii na Kamati ya Maadili ya Utafiti wa kitabia (mradi namba 4977). Kwa habari zaidi kuhusu kibali maadili ya mradi Afisa Mtendaji wa Kamati inaweza kupatikana kwa simu juu ya 8201 3116, na faksi kwa 8201 2035 au barua pepe kwa [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).



## Appendix E.1.2: Student Letter of Introduction (Somali)



**Professor Larry Owens**  
Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)

**School of Education**

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[www.flinders.edu.au](http://www.flinders.edu.au)

### Horudhaca Warqada

..... qaaliga ah,

Warqadan waxay hordhac utahay Svetlana King oo ah ardayd cilmi baris kana dhigato jaamacada Filindhers. Svetlana waxay baareysaa qibradaha iyo caqbadaha ay la kulmaan ardayda Afrikaanka ah ee kayimid xeryaha qoxootiga intay iskuulka dhiganayan, ardayda raba in ay shaqeeyaan oo shaqo raadin bilaabaayo iyo kuwa rabo in ay wax sii bartaan. Cinwaanka cilmi baaristeeda waa Iskuulka, Shaqo iyo Cilmi korarsi Ardayda Afrikaanka ah oo usoo guuray Ostraliya kana yimid xeryaha qoxootiga.

Warbixinta Svetlana uruurisa waxay u istomaali in ay ka qorta warbixin. Warbixintaas magac qof kama muuqan doona, waxayna ahaan sir.

Cilmi baaristaan waxaa la rajeynaa in ay cod siiso dhamaan ardayda afrikaanka ee ka yimid xeryaha qoxootiga, qoysaskooda iyo bulshadooda iyo dadka kale. Waxay kaloo katalin jid kasto oo iskuulka si fiican ugu diyaarinkaro in ay ardayda shaqo helaan ama waxbarasha dheeraad ah sii wataan.

Svetlana waxay aad uga mahadnaqi lahayd hadii aad u ogalaan lahayd ..... in uu kaqeebqaato taxana wareysi muda dhan hal sano maadaama Ardayga uu kazoo gudbaayo iskuul una gudbaayo shaqo ama waxbarasho dheeraad ah. Wareysiyadaan waxay qaadanayaan muda hal saac kayar, qaarkoodna in kayar nusu saac.

Hadii adiga iyo ..... aad ogalaataan, Svetlana waxay jeclaan lahayd in ay duubto wareysiyada. Tan waxay ku caawin Svetlana in ay qorto sheeko loo isticmaali karo warbixinteeda. .... waxay awood u leeyihiin in aysan kajawaabin su'aal la warsaday ama ay joogiyaan waraysiga guud ahaan mar ale iyo markay doonaan. Dhamaadka wareysiga Svetlana waxay si kooban u dulmari iyada iyo ..... wareysiga guud ahaan si ay u xaqiijiso waxay qortay in ay yihiin erayadii Ardayga.

Kaqeebqaadashada waxbarashadaan waa khiyaar. .... waxuu xor u yahay in uu iska dhaafo xiliguu doona. Mahadnaq ..... kaqeebgalkooda waxbarashadaan, sidaa darted Svetlana waxay jeclaan lahayd in ay siiso hadiyad yar.

Ugu-dambayntii, hadii adiga iyo ..... aad qabtaan wax su'aal oo kusaabsan cilmi baaristaan, fadlan igala soo xiriir nambarkaan (8201 3356 ama email [larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)). Svetlana waxaa kaloo lagala xiriiri karaa 8201 5672 ama email ([svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au)).

Waxaad ku mahadsantahay tixgilinta codsigaan

Prof Larry Owens  
Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)  
School of Education

Cilmi baaristaan waxaa laga ogalaaday Jaamacada Filindhars qeebteeda cilmi barista Bulsha dhaqameeda iyo Dabeecadooda ama nidaamkooda (nambarka mashruucaan waa 4977). Wixii warbixin dheeraad ah oo ku saabsan habka loo anshax giliyo mashruuc la xiriir madaxa guud ee gudiga telefoon nambarkan 8201 3116 ama fakis kan 8201 2035 ama email kan [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).

## Appendix E.2: Principal Letter of Introduction



### Letter of Introduction

**Professor Larry Owens**  
Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)

**School of Education**

GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001  
Tel: 08 8201 3356  
Fax: 08 8201 3184  
[larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)  
[www.flinders.edu.au](http://www.flinders.edu.au)

Dear [Principal],

This letter is to introduce Svetlana King who is a PhD student in the School of Education at Flinders University. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Svetlana's research aims to explore multiple perspectives of the experiences and challenges of transition from secondary school to work and further education of African students from refugee backgrounds. The working title of her research is *Transitions from School to Work, Further Education and Training: Perspectives and Experiences of African Students who Migrated to Australia as Refugees*.

This study is expected to provide African students from refugee backgrounds, their families and communities, and other relevant stakeholders, with a voice. It also aims to improve the post-school transition experiences and outcomes of future students from refugee backgrounds. The recommendations that this study will make are expected to be of interest to both the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) by informing policy and practice, and the wider community.

This study has been approved by the Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee at Flinders University and by the Research Unit at DECS. This research is being supervised by myself (Professor Larry Owens), Dr. Neil Welch, and Dr. Julie Robinson in the School of Education, and will lead to the production of a PhD thesis and other academic publications.

Given that your school has a significant population of students from refugee backgrounds, Svetlana would be most grateful if you would consider becoming one of the participating schools in this study. Below is a brief outline of what Svetlana intends to do.

Beginning in Term 1, 2011, Svetlana would like to make regular visits to two metropolitan schools in Adelaide. These visits, negotiated with each school, would occur over a period of 6-12 months. During these visits, Svetlana would like to learn about each school's context by having informal discussions with staff and students and making observations related to her research.

Svetlana would like to conduct up to three one-hour interviews with individual teachers who work with students from refugee backgrounds at the school. In order to minimise the disruption these interviews may cause, funding has been applied for to provide for relief teachers for the time taken for these interviews.

Svetlana would also like to interview up to eight African students from refugee backgrounds at each school who intend to leave school within six months at the time of her visits. Students will

be invited to participate in up to five interviews over 12 months while students are still at school, and then as they make the transition to work and/or further study.

In addition, Svetlana would like to interview other stakeholders who are involved in the post-school transition of students from refugee backgrounds. These individuals include employers, further education staff, family members, peers, and community leaders. Stakeholders will be invited to participate in up to three interviews to discuss issues relating to Svetlana's research.

With the consent of the participants, Svetlana would like to audio record the interviews. These recordings will be transcribed to assist in writing a series of case studies that will be used in Svetlana's thesis and other publications. At the final interviews, participants will be shown a summary of what they have said during interviews.

Please be assured that all information provided by participants will be kept strictly confidential. None of the information in Svetlana's thesis or other publications will reveal the identities of any of the participants or the schools involved.

Participation in this study is voluntary. All participants (including the schools) are free to withdraw from the study at any time and without any consequences. Participants are also free to stop the interview at any time and can choose not to answer particular questions.

Finally, if you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me (8201 3356 or email [larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)). Svetlana can also be contacted on 8201 5672 or via email ([svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au)).

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Larry Owens  
*Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)*  
*School of Education*

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 4977). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).*

## Appendix E.3: Stakeholder Letter of Introduction



**Professor Larry Owens**  
Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)

**School of Education**

GPO Box 2100  
Adelaide SA 5001  
Tel: 08 8201 3356  
Fax: 08 8201 3184  
[larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)  
[www.flinders.edu.au](http://www.flinders.edu.au)

### Letter of Introduction

Dear [Stakeholder],

This letter is to introduce Svetlana King who is a research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. She will produce her student card, which carries a photograph, as proof of identity.

Svetlana's research aims to explore multiple perspectives of the experiences and challenges of transition from secondary school to work and further education of African students from refugee backgrounds. The title of her research is *Transitions from School to Work, Further Education and Training: Perspectives and Experiences of African Students who Migrated to Australia as Refugees*.

This study is expected to provide African students from refugee backgrounds, their families and communities, and other relevant stakeholders, with a voice. It also aims to improve the post-school transition experiences and outcomes of future students from refugee backgrounds. The recommendations of this study are expected to be of interest to both the Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) by informing policy and practice, and the wider community.

This study has been approved by the Flinders University ethics committee. This research is being supervised by myself (Professor Larry Owens), Dr. Neil Welch, and Dr. Julie Robinson in the School of Education, and will lead to the production of a thesis and other academic publications.

This research involves collaboration with a number of stakeholders, including schools, teachers, employers, family members, peers, community leaders, and the students themselves. Given your relevant experience in working with students from refugee backgrounds, Svetlana would be most grateful if you would consider participating in up to three one-hour interviews.

With your consent, Svetlana would like to audio record the interviews. These recordings will be transcribed to assist in writing a series of case studies that will be used in Svetlana's thesis and other publications. At the final interview, you will have the

opportunity to view a summary of the interview data and make any changes to ensure that the information has been accurately recorded.

Please be assured that the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential, and none of the information in Svetlana's thesis or other publications will reveal your identity. In the event that secretarial assistants are required to assist with transcription, you can be assured that such persons will be advised of the requirement that names and identities not be revealed and that the confidentiality of the material is respected and maintained.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Of course, you are entirely free to withdraw from the study at any time and without any consequences. You are also free, at any time, to stop the interview and can choose not to answer particular questions.

Finally, if you have any questions or concerns about this study, please do not hesitate to contact me (8201 3356 or email [larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)). Svetlana can also be contacted on 8201 5672 or via email ([svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au)).

Thank you for considering this request.

Yours sincerely,

Prof Larry Owens  
*Associate Head (Teaching and Learning)*  
*School of Education*

*This research project has been approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 4977). For more information regarding ethical approval of the project, the Executive Officer of the Committee can be contacted by telephone on 8201 3116, by fax on 8201 2035 or by email [human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au](mailto:human.researchethics@flinders.edu.au).*

# Appendix F.1: Information Sheet

## ***From School to Work and Further Education: Students who Migrated to Australia as Refugees***

My name is Svetlana King and I am a research student in the School of Education at Flinders University. I am conducting a study that examines the move from school to work and further education of African students from refugee backgrounds who are attending school in South Australia.



This research is being supervised at Flinders University by Professor Larry Owens, Doctor Neil Welch, and Doctor Julie Robinson. The results of this study will be used to produce a report and other academic publications. This research has been approved by the Flinders University ethics committee.

This study is particularly important because there has been limited research in this area. This research provides African students from refugee backgrounds, their families and communities, and other relevant people, with a voice and the findings are expected to be of interest to secondary schools, employers, higher education staff, and the wider community.

This study will address three main questions:

1. What do African students from refugee backgrounds want to do when they finish secondary school in terms of work and/or further education, and what influences what they want to do?
2. What influences African students from refugee backgrounds in realising these goals, and how are these goals shaped over time?
3. From different people's perspectives, how effective are schools in preparing students from refugee backgrounds for the move from school to work and/or further education, what are the challenges, and how might these best be met?

There are many people involved in this research – schools, educators, employers, students from refugee backgrounds, family members, peers, community leaders, and mentors. Described below is an outline of what I plan to do.

### **School Visits**

Beginning in Term 1, 2011, I would like to make regular visits to two schools. During these visits, I would make observations about the school context and have informal conversations with staff and students. I would like to develop an understanding of:

1. The demographics of the staff and students at the school.
2. The inclusion policies that operate in the school.
3. The 'daily' challenges faced by students from refugee backgrounds and their teachers.
4. How the relationships between students from refugee backgrounds, their peers and their teachers evolve over time.

### **Teacher Interviews**

During my school visits, I would like to conduct up to three interviews with individual teachers who support students from refugee backgrounds in a variety of roles (e.g., classroom teacher, career counsellor, and Vocational Education and Training staff). These interviews will help me to understand teachers' views about the experiences and challenges for students from refugee backgrounds as they leave school and begin work and further education.

### **Student Interviews**

I would like to follow up to 16 African students from refugee backgrounds who intend to leave secondary school within six months at the time of the school visits. I would like to record their experiences and challenges of leaving school and beginning work and/or further education by interviewing each student a number of times over 12 months. Interviews will be less than one hour, and some may be less than half an hour.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

In addition to talking with teachers and students, I would like to interview other people who are involved in the move from school to work and further education of students from refugee backgrounds. These individuals include other education staff (e.g., Technical and Further Education (TAFE) staff, university tutors), employers, family members, peers, and community leaders. I would like to interview these individuals up to three times to get an understanding of different perspectives of the post-school transition of students from refugee backgrounds.

### **General Information**

All interview times and places will be negotiated with participants and schools in order to minimise disruption. If participants are willing, I would like to audio record interviews, not to share with other people, but to allow me to listen to the recordings a number of times and to note key points. If participants do not want me to record interviews, I will need to take written notes as we proceed.

At the final interviews, I will go through a summary of what each participant has said. This process will allow me to make sure that I have accurately noted the information.

All information provided will be stored in a de-identified form and only I will know the identity of the participants and the schools. All information provided by participants will remain completely confidential. No one who reads my report will be able to identify or connect the individual participants or schools with the information that is provided.

Towards the end of the study, I will provide participants and schools with an overall summary of my findings. I will invite participants to comment on the findings to ensure that my understandings are accurate.

Participation in this research is voluntary. Participants can choose not to answer particular questions, or withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Contact Details**

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me on 8201 5672 or via email ([svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au)). Professor Larry Owens can also be contacted on 8201 3356 or via email ([larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)).



## Appendix F.1.1: Information Sheet (Swahili)

### Kutoka shule ya kufanya kazi na ELIMU ZAIDI: Wanafunzi ambao walihamia Australia kama wakimbizi

Jina langu ni Svetlana King na mimi ni mwanafunzi katika shule ya utafiti wa elimu katika Chuo Kikuu cha Flinders. Mimi nafanya utafiti kuhusu wananfunzi wafrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi ambao wanahudhuria shule katika Australia Kusini.



Utafiti huu unafanywa chini ya usimamizi wa Profesa Larry Owens, Daktari Neil Welch, na Daktari Julie Robinson katika Chuo Kikuu cha Flinders. Matokeo ya utafiti huu atatumiwa kutoa ripoti na machapisho mengine ya kitaaluma.

Utafiti huu ni muhimu sana kwa sababu kumekuwa na utafiti mdogo katika eneo hili. Utafiti huu hutoa sawuti kwa wananfunzi wa Kiafrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi, familia zao na jamii, na kwa watu wengine muhimu. Pia, matokeo wanatarajiwa wa maslahi na shule za sekondari, waajiri, wafanyakazi wa elimu ya juu, na jamii kwa ujumla.

Utafiti huu utashughulikia maswali matatu kuu:

1. Nini wananfunzi wa Kiafrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi wanataka kufanya wakati ya kumaliza shule ya sekondari katika masuala ya kazi au elimu zaidi, na kile mvuto wanataka kufanya?
2. Mvuto gani wananfunzi wa Kiafrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi kutofikia lengo haya, na jinsi malengo haya huumba baada ya muda?
3. Kutoka mitazamo tofauti ya watu, jinsi gani ya ufanisi ni shule katika kuandaa wananfunzi kutoka asili ya wakimbizi ya kuondoka kutoka shule kufanya kazi au elimu zaidi, Je, nini changamoto na jinsi gani wanaweza kuzitatua bora?

Kuna watu wengi kushiriki katika utafiti huu: shule, waajiri, wananfunzi kutoka asili ya wakimbizi, familia, rika, viongozi wa jamii na washauri. Ilivyoelezwa hapo chini ni muhtasari wa kile mpango wa kufanya.

Inavyoelezwa hapo chini ni muhtasari wa mpango wangu.

#### **ZIARA YA SHULE**

Kuanzia muhula wa mwanzo wa mwaka wa 2011, napenda kufanya ziara ya mara kwa mara kwa shule mbili. Wakati wa ziara hizi, napenda kufanya uchunguzi juu ya mazingira ya shule na kuwa na mazungumzo rasmi na wafanyakazi na wananfunzi Ningependa kuendeleza uelewa wangu kuhusu:

1. idadi ya watu ya wafanyakazi na wananfunzi wa shule.
2. sera kuingizwa kazi katika shule.
3. changamoto za kila siku zinazowakabili wananfunzi kutoka asili ya wakimbizi na walimu wao.
4. jinsi uhusiano kati ya wananfunzi kutoka asili ya wakimbizi, wenzao na walimu wao kubadilika baada ya muda.

#### **Mahojiano ya Mwalimu**

Wakati wa ziara yangu ya shule, napenda kufanya mahojiano tatu na walimu ambao wanaosaidia wananfunzi kutoka wakimbizi katika aina mbalimbali ya majukumu. (Kwa mfano, mwalimu wa darasa, mshauri wa kazi, na Elimu ya Ufundi na wafanyakazi wa mafunzo). Haya mahojiano yatanisaidia kuelewa maoni ya walimu kuhusu uzoefu na changamoto kwa ajili ya wananfunzi kutoka asili ya wakimbizi kama wao kuacha shule na kuanza kazi na elimu ya juu.



### **Mahojiano ya Mwanafunzi**

Napenda kufuatilia wanafunzi 16 wa Afrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi walio na nia ya kuondoka sekondari katika kipindi cha miezi sita wakati wa ziara ya shule. Ningependa kurekodi uzoefu wao na changamoto ya kuacha shule na kuanza kazi au elimu zaidi na kuhoji kila mwanafunzi idadi ya mara kwa kipindi cha miezi 12. Mahojiano itakuwa chini ya saa moja, na baadhi inaweza kuwa chini ya nusu saa.

### **Mahojiano ya Wadau**

Mbali na kuzungumza na walimu na wanafunzi, ningependa kuwahoji watu wengine wanaojihusisha na wanafunzi kutoka asili ya wakimbizi wakitoka shuleni kuelekea kazini au kutafuta elimu zaidi. Hawa watu wengine pamoja na elimu ya wafanyakazi (kwa mfano, wafanyakazi wa (TAFE), walimu wa chuo kikuu), waajiri, familia, rika, na viongozi wa jamii. Ningependa kuwahoji watu hawa hadi mara tatu kwa kupata uelewa mitazamo tofauti ya mpito baada ya shule ya wanafunzi kutoka asili ya wakimbizi.

### **Taarifa ya Jumla**

Wakati wote wa mahojiano na mahali ita zungumzwa na washiriki na shule ili kupunguza usumbufu. Iwapo washiriki wako tayari, ninpenda kurekodi mahojiano, si kushiriki na watu wengine, lakini naomba kusikiliza rekodi idadi ya nyakati na kutambua maneno muhimu. Iwapo washiriki hawataki mimi nirekodi mahojiano, nitachukua maandishi kama sisi kuendelea.

Katika mahojiano ya mwisho, nitapitia muhtasari wa yale ya kila mshiriki alisema. Hatua hii itaruhusu mimi kuhakikisha kwamba nime usahihi na kubainisha habari.

Taarifa zote zinazotolewa kuhifadhiwa katika fomu na kutambuliwa na mimi tu kujua utambulisho wa mshiriki na shule. Taarifa zote zitakazotolewa na washiriki zitabaki siri kabisa. Hakuna uwezekano kwa mtu anayesoma ripoti yangu kutambua washiriki au kuunganisha washiriki mtu binafsi au shule na taarifa ambazo zimetolewa

Kuelekea mwisho wa utafiti, mimi nitatoa ujumla wa muhtasari wa matokeo yangu kwa washiriki na kwa shule. Mimi nitawakaribisha washiriki kutoa maoni yao juu ya matokeo ya kuhakikisha kuwa uelewa wangu ni sahihi.

Kushiriki katika utafiti huu ni wa hiari. Washiriki wanaweza kuchagua kujibu maswali fulani, au kujiondoa katika utafiti wakati wowote.

Unaweza nipata:

Kama una maswali kuhusu utafiti huu, tafadhali jisikie huru kuwasiliana nami kwa 8201 5672 au barua pepe (svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au). Profesa Owens Larry pia inaweza kuwasiliwa kwa 8201 3356 au barua pepe ([larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)).

## Appendix F.1.2: Information Sheet (Somali)

### ***Iskuul, Shaqo iyo/ama Waxbarashadoo la sii korarsada: Ardayda Katimid Xeryaha Qoxootida ee Australia Jooga***



Magacayga waa Svetlana King waxaana ahay ardayad cilmi baarta ah ee dhigato jaamacada Filindhers. Waxaan sameynayaa cilmi baaris imtixaanaysa 'kadib dhameynta Iskuulka, shaqo raadin iyo/ama aqoon korarsi ardayda Afrikaanka ee ka timid xeryaha qoxootiga ee iskuulka ka dhiga Koonfurta Australia'.

Cilmi baaristan waxaa maareynaya dad badan oo dhiga Jaamacada Filindhers sida Borofasooore Larry Owens, Doktor Neil Welch iyo Doktor Julie Robinson. Natiijada waxaa loo isticmaali doona in laga qoro warbixin iyo tacliin aqooneed daabacan. Cilmi baaristaan waxaa ogalaaday gudi nidaameedka jaamacada Filindhers.

Waxbarashadan waa muhiim, sababtoo ah way yartahay wax cilmi baaris kaqoray arimahaan. Cimli baaristaan waxay cod siinaysaa ardayda Afrikaanka ee ka yimid xeryaha qoxootiga iyaga iyo eheledooda, bulshadooda iyo guud ahaan iyo dadka kale ee quseeya ardaydaan. Waxaa kaloo la rajeynayaa in ay cilmi baaristaan ka faa'idaan ardayda dugsiyada sare, dadka wax shaqaalaysta, shaqaalaha aqoonta sare iyo gabi ahaan bulsha weynta.

Waxbarashadaan waxay ka koobantahay sedex su'aalood oo kala ah:

1. Maxay ardayda Afrikaanka ee ka yimid xeryaha qoxootiga rabaan in ay sameeyan kadib markay dhameeyaan dugsiyada sare gaar ahaan shaqo iyo/ama cilmi korarsi, iyo maxaase dhiira galin karo waxay rabaan in ay sameeyaan mustaqbalka?
2. Waa maxay dhiira galin kara ardayda Afrikaanka ee ka yimid xeryaha qoxootiga in ay garaan guulahooda iyo siday guulahaan isku badali karaan markasta?
3. Ra' yiga dadka kale duwan iyo fikradahooda , iyo sidey wax tar ugu yeelanaayaan iskuulka in uu u diyaariyo ardayda qoxootiga ka timid in ay ka gudbaan iskuul una gudbaan shaqo ama waxbarasha dheeraad ah. Waa maxay caqabadaha iyo sida ugu fiican ee caqabadahaan loo wajahi lahaa.

Dad badan ayaa ku lugleh cilmi baaristaan sida- iskuulada, aqoonyahano, dadka dadka shaqaalesta, xubna kamid ah qoysaska ardayda kayimid xeryaha qoxootiga, asxaabtooda, odayaash bulshada iyo lataliyeyaashooda. Hoos waxaa ku qoran waxa aan rabo in aan sameeyo.

#### **Booqashada iskuulada**

Belowga teeram koowaad, ee sanadka 2011, waxaan jeclaan lahaa in aan booqdo labo iskuul. Booqashada gudaheeda, waxaan indha-indhayn kusamaynayaa iskuulka qaab waxbarasheedkiisa, kadibna waxaan wada sheekaysi la yeelan doona shaqaalaha iyo ardayda iskuulkaas. Waxaan jeclaan lahaa in aan sameeyo xiriir is fahan ah:

Howlaha wax qabad ee shaqaalaha iyo ardayda iskuulka

Nidaamka siyaasadeed ee uu iskuulka ku shaqeeyo.

Caqabadaha maalin kasta ay la kulmaan ardayda katimid xeryaha qoxootiga iyo macalimiintoodaba.

Side buu wada xiriirka ardayda ka timid xeryaha qoxootiga, saaxiibdooda iyo macalimiintooda u hor-maraa.

#### **Wareysiyada Macalimiinta:**

Inta lagu guda jiro booqashadeyda iskuulka, waxaan sameyn doona sedex wareysi oo gooni gooni ah oo aan ka qaadi doono macalimiinta gaar ahaan kuwooda caawiya ardayda katimid xeryaha qoxootiga tusaale (maclinka fasalka, maclinka la talinta iyo waxbarasha korarsi iyo tababarayaasha shaqaalaha). Wareysiyadaan waxay igu caawin doonaan fahanka aragtiyeed ee macalimiinta qibradooda iyo caqabadaha ardayda ka timid xeryaha qoxootiga

la kulmaan ka dib marka ay dhameeyaan iskuulka ama bilaabaan shaqo ama markay ay sii siyaadsanayaan waxbarashadooda.

**Wareysiyada Ardayda:**

Waxaan jeclaan lahaa in aan wareysi xiriira la yeesho 16 arday oo ka timid xeryaha qoxootiga, kuwaasoo kadheem doona dugsigiga sare lix bilood laga bilaabo maalintaan iskuulka soo booqday. Waxaan kaloo jeclaan lahaa in aan duubo qibradaha iyo caqabadaha ay la kulmaan ardayda markay iskuulka katagayaan iyo markay shaqo bilaabayaan iyo/ama markay waxbarasha dheeraad ah sii wadanaayaan. Waxaan jeclaan lahaa in aan hal sano wareesto arday kasta. Wareysiyadaan waxay qaadan doonaan muda dhan hal saac iyo in ka yar.

**Wareysiyada Maal qabeenada:**

Wareysiyada aan la yeesho ardayda iyo macalimiinta waxaa sii dheeran doona wareysiye kale oo laan layeelan doona dad kale oo igana quseeya arimaha ardayda katimid xeryaha qoxootiga kadib markay dhameeyaan iskuulka oo ay shaqo raadinayan ama ay sii wadanaayaan waxbarashadooda. Dadkaan waxaa ka mid ah shaqaale aqoonyahano ah tusaale, xirfadlayaal iyo aqoon korarsi (shaqaalayaasha TAFE, macalimiinta Jaamacadaha), dad loo shaqeeyo, xubna ka mid ah qoysaska ardayda, saaxiibada ardayda iyo hogaamiyayaash bulshada. Waxaan kaloo jeclaan lahaa in aan waraysto shaqsiyaashaan ilaa iyo sedex jeer si aan u fahmo fikradahooda kala duwan ee waqtiga kal guurka oo Ardayda qoxootiga katimid iskuulka ka baxayaan.

**Warbixin Guud:**

Dhamaan waqtiyada wareysiyaasha iyo meesha lagu qaban doona waa laga heshiinaa, kaqeebgalaha iyo iskuulka si loo yareeyo carqaladaha. Hadii ka qeygalayaasha rajeynayaan, waxaan jeclaan lahaa in aan duubo wareysiyada, muhummada duubistaan ma aha in aan la wadaago dad kale balse si aan aniga wax badan udhageysto si aan u ogaado waxyaalaha muhiimka ah. Hadii ka qaygalayaasha aysan rabin in aan duubo wareysiga way ii sheegayaan, si aan qoraal u sameeyo.

Dhamaadka waraysiga ka qeebqaate kaste waxaan u dulmaraa oo u aqriinaa wareysiga oo kooban kuwaasoo ah wixii u yiri ama ay tiri. Tan waxay ii saamaxaysaa in aan hubiyo in aan qoray warbixin sugan oo la hubo.

Dhamaan warbixinada wareysiga waxaa lagu kaydin meel u goono ah, aniga kaliya ayaa ogaan karo kaqeebgalayaasha magacyadooda iyo iskuuladooda. Dhamaan warbixinta ka timid kaqeebgalayaasha waxay ahaan mid sir ah. Qofkastoo aqriya warbixintayda awood uma yeelan doona in uu o gaado shaqsiga Warbixintaas katimid ama in uu la xiriiro kaqeebgalaha ama iskuulka Warbixintaas dhiibay.

Gabagabada cilmi baaristaan, waxaan kaqeebgalayaasha iyo iskuulada siinayaa wixii aan ogaaday oo kooban. Waxaan kaloo ku casuumi kaqeebgalayaasha in ay fikradooda ka dhiibtaan guud ahaan waxaan qoray. Taas waxay igu caawin in aan fahmay ayna saxanyihiin waxaan qoray.

Kaqeebqaadashada cilmi baaristaan waa mid khiyaar ah. Kaqeebgalayaasha waxay dooran karaan in ay san ka jawaabin su'aale qaarkood, ama ay xiligay doonaan joojiyaan wareysiga ama warbixinta ay i siinayaan.

**Kala Xiriir wixii Faahfaahin dheeraad ah:**

Hadii aad qabto wax su'aal ku saabsan waxbarashadaan, fadlan igala soo xiriir telefoonka 8201 5672 ama email ka ([svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au](mailto:svetlana.king@flinders.edu.au)). Borofeesor Larry Owens waxaa lagala xiriiri karaa telefoonka nambarka 8201 3356 ama email kan ([larry.owens@flinders.edu.au](mailto:larry.owens@flinders.edu.au)).

# Appendix G.1: Student Consent Form

## STUDENT CONSENT FORM

I ..... consent to participate in the study of the experiences of moving from school to work or further education of African students from refugee backgrounds.

1. I have been told about the study and I understand what it is about and what is involved.
2. I have been able to ask questions about the study, and have been given answers that I understand.
3. I have been given a copy of the information sheet that explains the details of the study in a language that I understand.
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time, and can choose not to answer questions.
5. I understand that if I withdraw from the study, there will be no negative consequences.
6. If, at any time, I have questions about the study, I know who to contact to discuss them.
7. I understand that Svetlana will write a report of this study and that she will not use my name or family name and that all information will be kept confidential.
8. I understand that I will not receive any special advantages or benefits by taking part in this study.

**Signature..... (Student)**

**Date.....**

## Appendix G.2: Parent Consent Form

### PARENT CONSENT FORM

I ..... consent to my son/daughter ..... participating in the study of the experiences of moving from school to work or further education of African students from refugee backgrounds.

1. I have been told about the study and I understand what it is about and what is involved.
2. I have been able to ask questions about the study, and have been given answers that I understand.
3. I have been given a copy of the information sheet that explains the details of the study in a language that I understand.
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that my son/daughter can withdraw at any time, and can choose not to answer questions.
5. I understand that if my son/daughter withdraws from the study, there will be no negative consequences.
6. If, at any time, I have questions about the study, I know who to contact to discuss them.
7. Provided that my son/daughter agrees, I am happy for the interviews to be tape-recorded.
8. I give permission for Svetlana to read my son/daughter's school reports.
9. I understand that Svetlana will write a report of this study and that she will not use my son/daughter's name or family name and that all information will be kept confidential.
10. I understand that my son/daughter will not receive any special advantages or benefits by taking part in this study.

**Signature..... (Parent/Guardian)**

**Date.....**

## Appendix G.2.1: Parent Consent Form (Swahili)

### FOMU YA IDHINI YA MZAZI

Mimi ..... ridhaa ya mwana mtoto wangu ..... kushiriki katika masomo ya mpito kutoka shule kwenda kufanya kazi na/au elimu ya juu myongoni wanafunzi wa Afrika kutoka asili ya wakimbizi.

1. Nimeambiwa habari kuhusu utafiti na nimeelewa kenye kinahusu na nini ushiriki wake.
2. Nimekuwa na uwezo wa kuuliza maswali juu ya utafiti huu, na nikapewa majibu ambayo ninaelewa.
3. Nimepewa nakala ya karatasi ambayo inafafanua habari kwa lugha yenye naelewa.
4. Mimi naelewa kwamba kushiriki katika utafiti huu ni wa hiari na kuwa mtoto wangu unaweza kutoka wakati wowote, na wanaweza kuchagua kutojibu maswali.
5. Mimi naelewa kuwa mtoto wangu unaweza kutoka utafiti huu na hakutakuwa na matokeo mabaya.
6. Kama, wakati wowote, nina maswali kuhusu utafiti huo, najua nani kuwasiliana nakujadili nao.
7. Zinazotolewa kuwa mtoto wangu anakubaliana, nina furaha kwa ajili yamahojiano kurekodiwa.
8. Nimeruhusu Svetlana kusoma ripoti ya shule ya mtoto wangu.
9. Naelewa kwamba Svetlana kuandika ripoti ya utafiti huu na kwamba yeye hatatumia jina la mtoto wangu au jina la familia na kwamba taarifa yote itakuwa siri.
10. Naelewa kuwa mtoto wangu hatapokea faida yoyote maalum kwa kushiriki katika utafiti huu

Sahihi..... (Mzazi / Mlinzi) Tarehe.....

## Appendix G.2.2: Parent Consent Form (Somali)

### FOOMKA OGALAANSHAHA WAALIDKA

Aniga..... waxaan ogalaansha siinayaa gabadhayda/wiilkeyga..... kaqeebqaadashada cilmi baaris qibradeedka ardayda katimid xeryaha qoxootiga marka ay ardaydaan dhameeyaan iskuulka oo ay shaqo raadin ama ay sii siyaadsanayaan waxbarashadooda.

1. Waa la ii sheegay waana fahansanahay cilmi baaristaan iyo waxay ku saabsantahay oo dhan.
2. Waxaan awoodaa in aan weydiyo su'aal kastoo quseeysa waxbarashadaan iyo waxaa kaloo la isiiyay jawaabo aan fahmayo.
3. Waxaa la isiiyay warqad koobbi ah taasoo kahadlaysa cilmi baaristaan, iyadoo si aad ah u faahfaahineyso cilmi baaristaan oo ayna ku qorantahay luqad aan fahmayo.
4. Waxaan fahansanahay ka qaybqaadashada waxbarashadaan in ay tahay khiyaar iyo in wiilkayga/gabadhayda ay aboodaan in ay iska dhaafi karaan qeybgalkeeda xili ale iyo xiligay doonaan, waxay kaloo aboodaan in aysan kajawaabin su'aalaha qaarkood oo la weydiin doona.
5. Waxaankaloo fahansanahay hadii wiilkayga/gabadhayda iska joojiya kaqeybqaadashada warbixin cilmi baaristaan, wax dhaliil ah ma jirayso.
6. Hadii, xili kasta, aan qabo su'aal kusaabsan cilmi baaristaan, waxaan ogahay qofkaan la xiriiri lahaa si aan jawaab u helo.
7. Hadii wiilkayga/gabadhayda ogalaado, waan fasaxay in wareysiyada la duubo.
8. Waxaan fasax siinayaa Svetlana in ay aqrin karto warbixinta iskuulka ee wiilkayga/gabadhayda.
9. Waxaan fahansanahay in Svetlana ay qori doonta warbixin cilmi baaris ah iyo in aysan isticmaali doonin wiilkayga/gabadhayda magaceeda/ magaciisa ama magaca qoykeyga. Dhamaan warbixintaan waxay noqon doontaa mid sir ah.
10. Waxaan fahansanahay in wiilkayga/gabadhayda ayna heli doonin faa'idooyin gaar ah marka ay kaqaybqaadanayaan cilmi baaristaan.

Saxiixa..... (Waalidka/Ilaaliyaha) Taariikhda.....

# Appendix G.3: Stakeholder Consent Form

## CONSENT FORM

I ..... consent to participate in the study about moving from school to work and further education of African students from refugee backgrounds.

1. I have been told about the study and I understand what it is about and what is involved.
2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and have been given answers that I understand.
3. I have been given a copy of the information sheet that explains the details of the study to keep for future reference.
4. I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time, and can choose not to answer questions.
5. I understand that if I do withdraw from the study, there will be no negative consequences.
6. If, at any time, I have questions about the study, I know who to contact to discuss them.
7. I agree to have my interviews tape-recorded.
8. I understand that I will not be identified in any of Svetlana's reports, and my information will remain confidential.
9. I understand that I will not receive any special advantages or benefits by taking part in this study.

**Signature..... (Participant)      Date.....**



# Appendix H: Support Services

## Support Services

### COUNSELLING SERVICES

#### **Lifeline Australia**

Telephone: 13 11 14

Website: [www.lifeline.org.au/](http://www.lifeline.org.au/)

Lifeline Australia offers a 24-hour confidential telephone counselling service that is staffed by trained volunteer counsellors. Counsellors can offer support, assist in clarifying your options and choices, and provide information about other community services.

#### **Relationships Australia (SA)**

55 Hutt Street, Adelaide SA 5000

Telephone: 8223 4566

Website: <http://www.rasa.org.au/>

#### **PEACE Multicultural Service**

49a Orsmond Street, Hindmarsh SA 5007

Telephone: 8245 8100

Relationships Australia (SA) offers a range of services, including PEACE Multicultural Service. This service caters for the needs of people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds by offering a free, confidential service for both short- and long-term individual support, and information and support for people who are concerned about a family member or friend. The service is flexible, providing services at times and locations that are convenient.

#### **STTARS Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation**

12 Hawker Street, Bowden SA 5007

Telephone: 8346 5433

Website: [www.sttars.org.au](http://www.sttars.org.au)

Email: [sttars@sttars.org.au](mailto:sttars@sttars.org.au)

STTARS is a free, confidential service that assists people from migrant and refugee backgrounds who have experienced torture or have been traumatised as a result of persecution, violence, war or unlawful imprisonment prior to arrival in Australia. This organisation provides individual and group counselling, information, support, and advocacy. Interpreters are available where necessary.

## GENERAL SERVICES

### **Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia**

59 King William Street, Adelaide SA 5000

Telephone: 8271 9500

Website: [www.mrcsa.com.au/contact.html](http://www.mrcsa.com.au/contact.html)

Email: [admin@mrcsa.com.au](mailto:admin@mrcsa.com.au)

This Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia offers a number of specialist services which include Family Relationships Counselling and Community Education, and Supporting Refugee Families Program (mentoring and peer support for families).

### **Australian Refugee Association (ARA)**

304 Henley Beach Road, Underdale SA 5032

Telephone: 8354 2953

Website: [www.ausref.net/](http://www.ausref.net/)

Email: [reception@ausref.net](mailto:reception@ausref.net)

The Australian Refugee Association (ARA) provides assistance to refugees and migrants of similar backgrounds in order to help them settle in Australia. The services offered include migration, settlement, employment, and public education and policy.

### **African Community Centre**

262 Prospect Road, Prospect SA 5082

Contact Reagan Bledee (Manager)

Telephone: 8344 9048

Email: [reagan@accsa.com.au](mailto:reagan@accsa.com.au)

The African Community Centre provides a range of services for South Australia's diverse African community. These services include access to information, employment and education services, skills development, health and wellbeing, workshops and space for community meetings, and cultural and social activities. The centre provides access to office space, gym and exercise facilities, and computers.

### **Multicultural SA**

24 Flinders Street, Adelaide SA 5000

Telephone: 8226 1944

Website: [www.multicultural.sa.gov.au](http://www.multicultural.sa.gov.au)

Email: [multiculturalsa@saugov.sa.gov.au](mailto:multiculturalsa@saugov.sa.gov.au)

Multicultural SA is responsible for advising the Government of multicultural and ethnic affairs issues in South Australia. Multicultural SA provides a range of services for the community, including interpreting and translating, calendar and magazine providing information about multicultural events, information about grants schemes, and leadership skills courses for women and young people.

# Appendix I.1: Student Interview Questions

## STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. So that I get to know you a little bit better, could you tell me about yourself?  
(e.g., place of birth, cultural background, family, year level)

- a. **Post-Migration**

- i. Since you arrived in Australia, what have been the positive changes in your life?
- ii. How long have you been in Australia?  
When did you arrive in Australia?
- iii. What has been challenging since coming to Australia?
- iv. How well would you say that you have adapted to life in Australia?
- v. How do you define your ethnicity (cultural identity)?
  1. Do you think of yourself as Somali, etc., African, Australian, a combination of both, or...?

- b. **School**

- i. What do you think about school in Australia?
  1. What do you like about school?
  2. What don't you like about school?
  3. What do you find difficult/challenging at school?
  4. What do you find easy at school?
  5. Who is/are your favourite teacher/s?
    - a. What is it that you like about them?
  6. Who are your friends at school?
  7. What do you think are some of your biggest achievements since starting school in Australia?
- ii. Before you came to Australia, what was your experience of school?
  1. Did you go to a school like this one?
  2. What was different about schooling in Africa compared to Australia?
  3. What was similar about schooling in Africa compared to Australia?
- iii. Before coming to this school, did you attend a NAP school?
  1. If so, what was your experience of this program?
  2. How long did you stay at this school?
  3. When you first started at the NAP school, what did you find:  
- easy? What made it easy?  
- difficult? What made it difficult?
  4. When first you started mainstream school, what did you find:  
- easy? What made it easy?  
- difficult? What made it difficult?
- iv. Tell me about the subjects you are doing at school this year.
  1. What subjects are you doing?
  2. How are you finding these subjects (i.e., are they easy, difficult)?
  3. How did you come to be doing these subjects?
  4. Did you choose them? How?
  5. Did someone choose them for you? If so, who?
  6. How do you think you are going at school so far this year?

- c. **Thoughts/Feelings About Leaving School**

- i. How are you feeling about leaving school?
    1. What are you worried about?
    2. What are you excited about?
  - ii. How do you think things in your life will change after you leave school?
  - iii. What things will stay the same after you leave school?
  - iv. When you leave school, how will your experience be different/similar to other students in your year level? If so, how? Why?
    1. Australian-born students?
    2. other African students from refugee backgrounds?
- d. Post-School Aspirations**
- i. What is your plan for when you leave school?
    1. How long have you wanted to do this?
    2. How did you come to decide this?
      - a. Was there someone who influenced your decision (e.g., family member, teacher, community member)?
      - b. How much control do you think you have over this decision?
      - c. How happy are you with this decision?
  - ii. What information do you already have about this?
    1. How did you access this information (e.g., through school information sessions, family member, friend)?
    2. When did you learn about this?
  - iii. How easy or difficult do you think it will be to achieve your goal?
    1. What resources do you think you will need to achieve your goal (e.g., driver's licence, car, access to public transport, qualification, support from family)?
    2. Who do you think will be most supportive of you in achieving your goal?
    3. How confident are you that this is what you will be doing after you leave school?
    4. If you don't end up doing this, do you have another idea about what you might do?
  - iv. If you had no obstacles or challenges, what would you want to do after finishing school?
    1. Why this?
    2. What obstacles and challenges do you think you would face if you followed this pathway after leaving school?
- e. Important People**
- i. Who are the important people in your life? Who can you go to for:
    1. Help with schoolwork?
    2. Advice when you're having friendship/relationship problems?
    3. Advice about your plans for when you leave school?
    4. Information about your plans after you leave school?
- f. Living Arrangements**
- i. Could you describe your living arrangements (i.e., who you live with)?

What suburb do you live in?  
Do you live with someone? If so, who?  
How many people live in the same house as you?  
Describe the environment where you do your homework.  
Independent Living:  
How long have you lived by yourself?  
What have the challenges been for you in living by yourself?  
How easy/difficult to you find it to get to school?  
What are the benefits (if any) of living by yourself?

How satisfied are you with your current living arrangements?

g. **Part-Time Employment**

- i. At the moment, do you have a part-time job? If so, explain.  
Where do you work?  
How long have you worked there?  
How do you balance work and study?  
Had you had a job before this one? If so, what was it?  
Do you think you will continue this work after you leave school? Do you think your hours will change?

h. **Personal Interests/Hobbies**

- i. What sort of involvement do you have in the school after hours (e.g., do you play a sport for the school/a club, are you involved in the school's music program)?
  1. Tell me about your involvement.  
When do you do this activity?  
What do you find enjoyable about this activity?  
Have you had any negative experiences in doing this activity?
- ii. When you are away from school, what do you like doing in your spare time (e.g., drawing, playing sport, cooking, spending time with friends, etc.)?
- iii. Do you spend much time in the African community in South Australia? If so, how are you involved? If not, why?

i. **Other Individuals to Interview**

- i. Are there some people in your life that I could talk to about your transition (e.g., friend, teacher, family member, employer, someone in your community)?
  1. Contact Details?
- ii. Can you think some other people who might be interested in participating in this research?
  1. Contact Details?

2. **Debrief**

- a. Is there anything else that you want me to know about you/your life/aspirations?
- b. Is there something else that you would like to have talked about?
- c. How are you feeling about being involved in this research?
- d. Are there any questions that you would like to ask me?
- e. Are there any particular things that I should ask teachers about that would help other African students at school, before they leave school?
- f. Keeping in Contact: best way (email, phone (text or call) me or I contact you)

➤ Thank students for their time

# Appendix I.2: School Teacher Interview Questions

## SCHOOL TEACHER INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Tell me a little bit about your teaching history.
  - a. How long have you been a teacher?
  - b. What subjects do you teach / have you taught?
  - c. How long have you been teaching at this school?
  - d. What is your role at this school?
2. What has been your experience in working with African students from refugee backgrounds?
3. Considering the current cohort of Year 11 and 12 African students from refugee backgrounds:
  - a. Which student/s is/are the most difficult to get to know?
    - i. What strategies have you used to encourage this/these student/s to open up?
    - ii. How effective have these strategies been?
  - b. Which student/s do you have the most difficulty in engaging in class?
    - i. What strategies have you used to try to get this student/these students engaged?
  - c. What other practical issues and challenges have you encountered in the classroom in working with these students?
    - i. How have you overcome these challenges?
  - d. Which student/s do you think is/are most likely to make an easy transition from school?
    - i. What are the factors that contribute to the likelihood of this/these student's/s' success?
  - e. Which student/s do you think will have the most challenges in making the transition from school and why?
    - i. What are some of the challenges that this/these student/s will face?
  - f. In general, how do you think these students cope at school in terms of:
    - i. Learning (the curriculum alongside the English language)
    - ii. Interacting with school staff
    - iii. Interacting with peers:
      1. Other African students
      2. Other students from refugee/migrant backgrounds
      3. Australian-born students
4. What are your thoughts about the aspirations of the African students who are currently in the Year 11 and 12 cohort at your school?
  - a. How realistic are their aspirations about the future?
  - b. For students' whose aspirations are unrealistic, how do you think they will cope with the transition from school?
5. What do you think the major influences are on these students' educational and career aspirations?
  - a. What do you think the roles are of:
    - i. Students' previous educational experiences
    - ii. Students' beliefs about their capabilities
    - iii. Culture
    - iv. Gender
    - v. Family
    - vi. Students' social support networks (and peer groups)
    - vii. Students' cultural backgrounds
    - viii. The African communities of which students are a part (or apart from)
    - ix. The school
    - x. Teaching staff at the school

6. From your perspective, what constrains these students' post-school choices?
7. In your experience, what strengths do these students have that will assist them as they leave school?
8. In general, how effective do you think South Australian schools and the curriculum are in preparing these students for transition from school?
  - a. What are some of the strengths of the curriculum?
  - b. What are some of the weaknesses of the curriculum?
  - c. What recommendations would you make to improve the preparation of these students for the post-school transition?
9. How does your view of the effectiveness of the South Australian secondary school system compare with the effectiveness of this school in preparing these students for the post-school transition?
  - a. What has worked well at the school in terms of preparing these students for the transition?
  - b. What do you think could be improved at the school to facilitate the post-school transition of these students?
10. In order to assist you in working with African students from refugee backgrounds, and students from refugee backgrounds in general, is there something that you would like to know from:
  - a. The students themselves?
  - b. Further education staff?
  - c. Employers?
  - d. Family members?
  - e. The African community?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the process of participating in the research, or a comment that you would like to make?

➤ Thank teachers for their time

# Appendix I.3: TAFE/University Educator Interview

## Questions

### TAFE/UNIVERSITY EDUCATOR INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### *Preliminary Information*

- Focus of the study: post-school transitions of African students from refugee backgrounds
- My research involves interviewing students before, during and after they leave school (over about 8-12 months) as well as teachers, family members, university and TAFE staff, friends, and employers
- Go through consent form (provide copy to participant)
- Check if audio recording is okay
- *Provide participant with a copy of the support services:*
  - Here is a list of support services should you wish to explore an issue that emerges for you as a result of participating in this study
- The questions I would like to ask of you pertain largely to African students from refugee backgrounds who have just made the transition to university (TAFE) from secondary school
  - If you have other relevant experiences (e.g., African from refugee backgrounds who are mature age students), however, please feel free to share those as well
- I will be asking some very general questions – if you have specific examples that you think will shed some light, however, please feel free to share them

1. Could you tell me about your current role?
  - a. How long have you been working at the university (TAFE)?
  - b. What is your role?
  - c. What kind of duties do you perform?
2. What has been your experience in working with African students from refugee backgrounds?
3. What challenges have you faced in working with these students?
4. What strategies have you used in overcoming these challenges?
5. What factors do you think contribute to the success of African students from refugee backgrounds in settling into the university (TAFE) environment?
6. What factors impede the success of these students at university (TAFE)?
7. What role does XX play in shaping the university (TAFE) experiences of African students from refugee backgrounds?:
  - a. Students' previous educational experiences
  - b. Students' beliefs about their capabilities
  - c. Culture
  - d. Gender
  - e. Family
  - f. Students' social support networks (and peer groups)
  - g. Students' cultural backgrounds
  - h. The African communities of which students are a part (or apart from)
  - i. The school they attended (if applicable)
  - j. Teaching staff at the school they attended (if applicable)
8. In general, how do you think these students cope at university (TAFE) in terms of:
  - a. Learning and understanding content
  - b. Learning in English
  - c. Engaging in classes
  - d. Interacting with their lecturers and tutors
  - e. Interacting with other students
  - f. Asking for help when needed
  - g. Completing assignments



- i. Satisfactorily
  - ii. On time
9. In general, how prepared do you think African students from refugee backgrounds are for studying at university (TAFE)?
  - a. In your opinion, based on the students you have worked with, are these students ready to study at university (TAFE)?
10. In your experience, what strengths do these students have that will assist them as they leave school and begin further education?
11. In general, how effective do you think the South Australian school system is in preparing these students for transition from school?
  - a. What are some of the strengths of the curriculum?
  - b. What are some of the weaknesses of the curriculum?
  - c. What recommendations would you make to improve the preparation of these students for the post-school transition?
12. How effective do you think this university (TAFE) is in supporting African students from refugee backgrounds?
  - a. What have you seen that is working well?
  - b. What do you think could be improved in order to facilitate the success of these students?
  - c. What recommendations would you make to those who work with African students from refugee backgrounds here at the university (TAFE)?
13. In order to assist you in working with African students from refugee backgrounds, and students from refugee backgrounds in general, is there something that you would like to know from:
  - a. The students themselves?
  - b. Employers?
  - c. Family members?
  - d. The African community?
14. Is there anything else that you would like to share that we haven't already discussed?
15. How are you feeling about being involved in this research?

➤ Thank individual for his/her time

# Appendix I.4: Service Provider and African Community Leader Interview Questions

## SERVICE PROVIDER and AFRICAN COMMUNITY LEADER INTERVIEW GUIDE

### *Preliminary Information*

- Focus of the study: post-school transitions of African students from refugee backgrounds
  - My research involves interviewing students before, during and after they leave school (over about 8-12 months) as well as teachers, family members, university and TAFE staff, friends, and employers
  - Go through consent form (provide copy to participant)
  - Check if audio recording is okay
  - *Provide participant with a copy of the support services:*
    - Here is a list of support services should you wish to explore an issue that emerges for you as a result of participating in this study
1. Could you tell me about your current role?
    - a. What kind of work do you do?
    - b. How long have you been doing this work?
  2. What has been your experience in working with African students from refugee backgrounds?
    - a. What challenges have you faced in working with young Africans?
    - b. How have you overcome these challenges?
    - c. In your role, what general observations have you made about young Africans in terms of:
      - i. Adapting to life in Australia
      - ii. Learning what is required of them
      - iii. Interacting with superiors
      - iv. Interacting with colleagues/peers
  3. What do you think the major influences are on young Africans' educational and career aspirations?
    - a. What do you think the roles are of:
      - i. Students' previous educational experiences
      - ii. Students' beliefs about their capabilities
      - iii. Gender
      - iv. Family
      - v. Students' social support networks (and peer groups)
      - vi. Students' cultural backgrounds
      - vii. The African communities of which students are a part (or apart from)
      - viii. The school they are at / came from
      - ix. The teachers at the school they are at / came from
  4. From your perspective, what constrains the post-school choices of young Africans?
  5. In your experience, what strengths do young Africans have that assist them in their post-school endeavours?
  6. In general, how effective do you think South Australian schools are in preparing African students from refugee backgrounds for the transition from school?
    - a. What have you seen that has worked well?
    - b. What do you think could be improved on at the secondary school level to facilitate the post-school transition of these students?

Appendix I.4: Service Provider/African Community Leader Interview Questions

- c. What other recommendations would you make to those who are involved in the post-school transition of African students from refugee backgrounds, and students from refugee backgrounds in general?
7. Is there something that you would like to know from young Africans that would assist you in your work?
8. Is there something that you would like to know from school teachers that would assist you in your work?
9. Is there something else that you would like to share that we haven't already discussed?
10. How are you feeling about being involved in this research?

➤ Thank individual for his/her time

# Appendix J: Professional Development Resource

## SUPPORTING AFRICAN STUDENTS FROM REFUGEE BACKGROUNDS:

*A Professional Development Resource*

*for Secondary Schools*

Svetlana King

School of Education, Flinders University

2013

## Introduction

This professional development resource is based on the findings of a three-year study conducted by Svetlana King, which examined post-school transition experiences of African youth from refugee backgrounds. The research was guided by a team of supervisors and a Reference Group and involved:

- African youth from refugee backgrounds
- Secondary school staff including subject teachers, coordinators, counsellors and special education teachers
- Educators from Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes and universities
- Service providers
- African community leaders and elders

The research revealed that post-school transitions and education and career pathways are critically shaped by previous learning opportunities, mentoring and support, schooling practices, and subject choices.

This professional development resource presents issues that participants identified as integral to shaping their own schooling and post-school pathways. This resource is designed to facilitate discussion in schools about these issues to consider how the needs of this group of students, who have a unique set of experiences and challenges, might best be met.

This professional development resource is not intended to criticise the good work that is being done in schools. Rather, it can be used to aid in evaluating this work in order to move towards even more effective ways to support African students from refugee backgrounds.









16. **What are some common barriers that prevent African families from becoming involved in their children’s education in Australia?**

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17. **African students share similar cultural, tribal and family traditions irrespective of the African country from which they came.**

Completely Disagree ----- Completely Agree  
1 2 3 4 5

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18. **Why might African students not complete homework? Tick all that apply.**

- Homework is a foreign concept and students may not understand why it is important.
- African students may lack appropriate facilities to study at home.
- African students may not have literacy skills that enable them to complete homework.
- African students (especially females) may have domestic duties, leaving little time for homework.
- Some African students have missed a great deal of formal schooling and consequently, may not have the necessary conceptual understanding to complete homework.

19. **Teachers in mainstream Australian schools should not have to provide African students from refugee backgrounds with any special treatment or support. These students need to learn to fit in to be like all other students. This is part of learning the Australian culture.**

Completely Disagree ----- Completely Agree  
1 2 3 4 5

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## African Students from Refugee Backgrounds: What Do We Know?

A refugee is a person who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.

*-- 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*

African students from refugee backgrounds face a unique set of challenges. This list serves as a reminder of the challenges that this group of students commonly encounter:

- Years of limited or disrupted formal schooling prior to migrating to Australia (in the home country and/or in a refugee camp), resulting in limited opportunities to learn specialised concepts and vocabulary in English or another language
- Limited English language proficiency (i.e., vocabulary, literacy)
  - Being able to communicate in English is critical to all aspects of resettlement in Australia (e.g., making friends, asking for help, learning how to use public transport, understanding the health care and welfare systems, participating in education, and gaining employment)
  - Research shows that children who have limited or no literacy skills in their mother tongue experience difficulty developing English literacy because they have no previous experience to draw upon
- Limited preparation for mainstream schooling
  - Attendance in a New Arrivals Program or Intensive English Language Centre is typically only 18 months which is insufficient, particularly for those who have had very limited formal schooling experiences
    - Limited time to prepare for mainstream schooling cannot be expected to address all of the gaps in students' knowledge, skills and understandings resulting from missed or limited years of formal education
- Limited practical, material and financial support and resources for learning

- When individuals arrive in Australia as refugees, they typically have very limited financial resources and those that they have are used to meet immediate needs (e.g., food)
  - Access to private transport, a computer and the Internet are typically not affordable for newly arrived families
- For the many African students from refugee backgrounds whose parents have little or no English language proficiency, there is typically no access to an adult in the home that can help the student with homework
- Refugee experiences including:
  - Escaping violence and persecution (which can involve traumatic experiences)
    - Individuals who have been traumatised may require ongoing medical and psychological treatment
    - Following migration to Australia, multiple challenges of resettlement can add to previous trauma from the homeland
  - Refugee camp experiences (e.g., poor hygiene and diet, illness, lack of safety)
    - Poor diet in refugee camps can have lasting effects in terms of development and these can impact upon learning
    - Chronic illness in refugee camps can have lasting impacts which can affect school attendance due to medical appointments and persistent symptoms
    - Refugee camps are typically unsafe, threatening physical and psychological health and this sense of danger and hyper-vigilance can persist once refugees arrive in Australia
- Adapting to Australia in terms of, for example, lifestyle, culture, language, education, work
  - Research has shown that young refugees are able to adapt more quickly to the host country than their parents (e.g., learning the language and making friends) which can cause intergenerational conflict in some families – this can have flow-on effects for the student’s engagement at school
  - Parents may have a limited understanding of their role in their child’s education in Australia, which can impact upon the student’s experiences in the education system
  - Newly arrived families are likely to have a limited understanding of the myriad of educational options and employment prospects in Australia, which can, in turn, limit their aspirations

- Learning how to access services and understanding how various systems work can be very difficult
- African students from refugee backgrounds and their families may come from cultures that emphasise the importance of the group (i.e., family and community) over the individual and this can impact upon students' choices and responsibilities
- Understanding the laws of Australia (e.g., domestic violence laws) can impact upon the structure and functioning of the family unit
- Negative community responses to refugee and in particular, refugees from Africa
  - The resettlement of refugees in Australia remains a contentious issue – negative responses from individuals can make it difficult for new arrivals to integrate into Australian society
  - Newly arrived refugees can experience negative responses from the Australian community because they are seen as 'different' in terms of religion, culture, and belonging to a visible minority – such responses can cause new arrivals to feel unsafe
  - Some individuals may be subjected to racial abuse which can also make it difficult to settle and feel safe in Australia
- Family responsibilities
  - Young people often adapt more quickly than their parents and caregivers because of the opportunities that young people have to develop English skills and learn about Australian culture – because of this, young people may be expected to take on adult roles within the family, which can affect their engagement at school. For example:
    - Parents may expect their elder children, particularly their eldest female children, to take responsibility for their younger siblings (e.g., transporting them to and from school, helping with homework, bathing, and preparing meals)
      - This can directly impact upon the older child's ability to attend school on time, complete their homework, and maintain friendships outside of school
    - Young people, particularly females, may be expected to perform household duties (e.g., cooking, cleaning) which can be demanding, particularly if there are many people living in the home

- Some students may be required to complete paperwork for family members who are unable to read/write which can take time away from schoolwork
- Some young people may be required to attend family members' appointments to act as an interpreter, which can impact on school attendance
- In addition to supporting the immediate family in Australia, many newly arrived African families are obliged to send money to relatives overseas which can:
  - Reduce the amount of money that is spent on education-related costs
  - Place demands on children to find part-time work to contribute, reducing the student's ability to complete homework and maintain friendships outside of school

While this list presents some of the common challenges experienced, it is important to remember that African students from refugee backgrounds are not a homogenous group. Rather, each student has a unique identity and set of circumstances.

## Case Study<sup>1</sup>

This case study is intended to facilitate discussion amongst school staff in terms of how African students from refugee backgrounds can best be supported in order to meet their learning and social needs.

After reading through the case study, please consider the questions that are posed. This exercise is designed to encourage you to consider how African students' learning and social needs are addressed at the school, and consider ways in which to improve this.

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Precious was born in Africa. She spent much of her childhood in a refugee camp where conditions were poor. The camp had a school, but the education provided was only very basic, with limited resources.

A little over a year ago, Precious migrated to Australia with her mother and four younger brothers. Because Precious is the only girl in her family, her mother expects her to perform many of the household tasks including cooking and cleaning. She is also expected to look after her brothers, and is responsible for taking them to and from school each day.

Soon after arriving in Australia, Precious attended the Adelaide Secondary School of English where she spent 12 months. Several weeks ago, she joined your class.

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Precious is not the only student in the class with special learning and social needs. Because of this, there are constraints in terms of the support that can be provided.

In considering the following questions, reflect on your school and classroom context.

What is practically possible to support African students from refugee backgrounds?

What are the challenges and obstacles to assisting these students?

How could these challenges and obstacles be reduced or overcome?

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<sup>1</sup> This case study is fictitious and has been developed from the experiences of research participants. It does not reflect the story of any one particular individual. Similarly, all names used in this discussion paper are pseudonyms.

1. **What are good ways of getting to know students and developing close relationships with them?**

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2. **What is being done to help students to be accepted by their peers and promote positive classroom interactions? What improvements can be made?**

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3. **How are students' learning needs assessed, and how might this be improved?**

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4. **What cultural mentoring is provided to students at the school, and how might this be improved?**

*Cultural mentoring refers to the support provided to students to develop knowledge and understandings of Australian cultural, social and behavioural norms.*

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5. **What academic support is provided to students, and how might this be improved?**

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6. **As a school, how are students supported to make subject choices that consider their interests, capabilities, skills and aspirations? How can this be improved?**

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7. **How does the school communicate and engage with students' parents and caregivers? What could be done to ensure that this communication and engagement is effective?**

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8. **What resources (e.g., materials, individuals, and agencies) are used to support students? What additional resources could be utilised to better support students?**

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## Case Study Commentary

This section of the discussion paper provides a commentary on the case study. Each of the questions raised is further explored.

### 1. What are good ways of getting to know students and developing close relationships with them?

It is important to remember that developing close relationships with students involves:

- Active listening
- Demonstrating empathy, respect and acceptance
- Providing personal encouragement (verbal and non-verbal)
- Developing an understanding of the challenges they face

Learning about students' cultures is important because cultural norms influence the way people communicate, interact and behave. For example, direct eye contact may be understood differently in some African cultures:

*If a kid is talking to the teacher and the teacher says, 'You have to look me in the eye,' that's one thing ... When you go home, and [you're] talking to your dad or your mum ... for someone from sub-Saharan African countries, you're not supposed to look them in the eye. You look on the side. So, imagine a [student] ... gets to school, 'Look me in the eye.' Goes home, 'Don't look me in the eye,' ... It can get confusing.*

*-- Will, Congolese Bilingual School Support Officer*

Information about students' cultures could include learning about their:

- Country of birth and cultural identity (these may be different)
- Religious background
- Languages spoken
- Family structure  
Does the student live with his/her parents and/or with extended family members?

*The makeup of the community is going to increasingly diversify ... Stats just don't do it ... You need to have a fundamental understanding of culture and the issues and the barriers ... It's hugely important.*

*-- Darren, Service Provider*

- Roles and responsibilities within the family  
(e.g., cooking, cleaning, making financial contributions to the family)

In addition, it is important to get to know about other aspects of students' lives. For example:

- What are students' goals and hopes for the future?
- What are their interests?
- What personal challenges and circumstances is the student facing?

*Currently, I'm living alone. I've got no family here. I got separated from my family when I was 13. I came here with a foster family ... They were Somali. And then, a week later, when I was very new to Australia ... I was kicked out of their home and I was homeless a bit.*

-- Fatuma, Student

*... I always wanted to be a nurse ... Since I was 5. Because my aunties, three of them are nurses ... I used to go with them to the hospital, spend the holiday there ... I always wanted to be a nurse.*

-- Angel, Student

## 2. What can be done to help students to be accepted by their peers and promote positive classroom interactions?

Peer relationships play a key role in students' happiness and wellbeing at school.

Positive peer relationships can assist in:

- Developing a sense of belonging
- Promoting positive school engagement and connectedness
- Assisting students to adapt to Australian culture
- Providing students with social support

*When I first came to Australia, I felt like I didn't want to go to school because ... you can't speak proper English, so no one wants to talk to you ... They [other students] don't come around you ... They never come around you ... Since I came to Australia, I haven't got any Australian friends ... Just my African friends ... Most of the time, we speak our language ... When we're sitting alone, we speak our language.*

-- Sayhosay, Student

While school staff cannot forge friendships amongst students, teachers can encourage positive classroom interactions. Here are some suggestions:

- Establish a 'buddy system' for new students
- Change seating arrangements and grouping practices (i.e., paired and small group work)  
*This can provide students with opportunities to get to know their classmates and can aid in reducing isolation for newly arrived students.*
- Facilitate respect for cultural diversity (e.g., engage in class discussions and activities that promote cultural awareness)  
*This can assist all students to become more culturally aware and can combat ignorance and minimise bullying.*
- Provide activities during recess and lunch times  
*For students who do not have friends, recess and lunch times can be difficult. Providing activities during break times can create opportunities for students to establish friendships, making these periods more enjoyable.*
- Encourage students to become involved in extra-curricular activities such as art, music, sport and drama  
*Involvement in extra-curricular activities can increase opportunities for students to develop new friendships.*

*I think a lot of schools are doing more multicultural things, where you acknowledge the different multicultural aspects of who Australia is, but it's not enough to do it one day a year ... It's an ongoing thing.*

-- Daphne, TAFE Educator

### 3. How can students' learning needs be assessed?

Students may experience difficulties in particular subject areas for a number of reasons. One likely reason for African students from refugee backgrounds is grounded in their previous educational experience. Years of limited or disrupted formal schooling can result in significant gaps in learning (e.g., vocabulary, skills, knowledge and understanding).

*I was [at the Adelaide Secondary School of English] for three terms ... It was my first time to be in the classroom. My first time to read, my first time to speak English. My first time in everything about school ...*

-- Sayhosay, Student

For students with limited English language and literacy skills, formative and summative assessments in class are unlikely to determine students' needs or establish the causes of students' difficulties.

Conducting brief, informal assessments, including curriculum-based assessments, can play an important role in understanding the nature and causes of learning difficulties. In turn, these assessments can aid in identifying productive ways of addressing students' needs.

Informal assessments can include informal meetings with individual students to:

- Discuss previous school experiences  
What was the school like? What resources were available? What languages were spoken and taught?
- Identify tasks or aspects of tasks that students find both easy and difficult
- Discuss additional in-class support needs
- Discuss homework routines  
How easy is it to complete homework? What are the barriers to completing homework?  
*Students may have family responsibilities that impact on their ability to complete homework.*
- Explore the student's social experiences at school  
How is the student getting on with other students? How happy is the student at school?  
*Interactions between the student and his/her peers could also be observed in the classroom and schoolyard.*
- Identify words and symbols that the student does not understand  
For example, invite the student to highlight words and symbols from a worksheet/textbook that he/she cannot read or does not understand
- Check the student's reading comprehension  
For example, ask the student to read a section of text aloud to check his/her understanding and establish how long it takes to do this
- Determine how the student works through a task  
For example, ask the student to think aloud as he/she begins working on a task
- Provide additional scaffolding to establish what the student can do with assistance  
*This can aid in determining the level of support that is required to complete set tasks.*

Staff with expertise in assessing the learning needs of new arrivals and those from non-English speaking backgrounds are available for consultation. Please refer to the Directory of Useful Resources at the end of the discussion paper.

#### **4. What cultural mentoring can be provided to students at the school?**

The culture of Australia and the school system is starkly different to what African students from refugee backgrounds know and have experienced in their homelands and in refugee camps. Because of this, there is a great deal to learn in terms of Australian culture. For example:

- Australian ways of communicating (verbal and non-verbal)
- Learning how to seek help
- Understanding appropriate ways to behave in the classroom
- Learning how the education system works in Australia
- Understanding the role of parents in education
- Understanding the various types of careers that are available in Australia

*When the time changes, we have to learn new things; we've got to learn how to ... make life easy ... We've got to know how to manage, how to live life ... and make things better for ourselves ...*

-- David, Student

Cultural mentoring refers to the support that is provided to students to develop knowledge and understandings of Australian cultural, social and behavioural norms. Cultural mentoring is critical for African students in helping them to learn about the school system and the culture of the wider community.

From the research, it was evident that African students need access to cultural mentoring from the time that they enrol in an Australian school. Because different cultural and social issues emerge at different ages and stages, cultural mentoring needs to occur *throughout* a student's schooling. It should, therefore, not be limited to the period immediately following arrival in Australia.

Despite its importance, the research findings suggest that the cultural mentoring that is provided to students is typically unsystematic and there is a reliance on the initiative of individual teachers who see the need for it. This means that not all African students from refugee backgrounds are being provided with cultural mentoring. This can make it very difficult for students to adapt to the Australian culture, which can have implications for their education and career opportunities in the future.

Cultural mentoring can be provided in many ways. Some suggestions include:

- Regular interviews with individual students to:
  - Debrief social and learning experiences at school
  - Monitor student wellbeing
  - Discuss and address any

*... it'd be great to think that they could ... use as mentor figure[s], successful people from their own culture ... that could come into schools and just ... catch up with some of these [students] occasionally and really be like an older [sibling] in a way, for some of these [students] who are missing an adult figure at home and one that they see as a successful figure in their own culture. That could be really quite powerful ...*

-- Linda, Teacher

identified concerns

- Assist students to prepare for emerging challenges
  - Personal mentors
  - Cultural role models
  - A special mentoring program
  - Student support groups
  - Peer support groups with a focus on cultural mentoring
  - A 'buddy system'

In addition, there are organisations which focus on assisting new arrivals to adapt to the Australian culture. These can be consulted where additional resources and/or support is required. Please refer to the Directory of Useful Resources for more information.

## 5. What academic support can be provided to students?

As has been discussed, years of limited and disrupted formal schooling can result in significant gaps in students' knowledge, skills and understandings. Similarly, English language development presents a key challenge for African students from refugee backgrounds, particularly if they have limited literacy skills:

*... for those who have never learned to read and write, the scribbles on a page have no meaning and might as well be decorations -- Wrigley, 2008, p. 2<sup>2</sup>*

Given these experiences, then, it may be unrealistic to expect students to be able to complete the same academic tasks at the same level as their Australian-born peers.

There are many ways that schools can and do support African students from refugee backgrounds to address their learning needs. The following points are considered important when providing academic support to these students:

- Establish open, collaborative relationships with students  
*Good working relationships with students can assist in making them feel comfortable to ask questions and seek help.*

*... whether you've got special needs or whether you're a refugee, if you can't access the curriculum, you can't access it.*

*-- Jacqui, School Counsellor*

<sup>2</sup> Wrigley, H.S. (2008). Working paper: Adult ESL and literacy: Issues and options. Montreal.

- Recognise and assess students' special learning needs
- Modify tasks and assessments when necessary – for example:
  - Divide larger assessments into smaller tasks
  - Provide more scaffolding
  - Provide students with choices and alternatives (e.g., an oral assessment instead of a written task, or a handwritten assignment instead of one that is typed)
- Negotiate help seeking arrangements with students

*Seeking help may be difficult for students. They may not know how to ask for help, or they may not know how to ask appropriate questions. Establishing a special help-seeking arrangement can enable the student to communicate the difficulties that he/she is experiencing.*
- Organise and recruit others to provide support to students – for example:
  - Arrange cooperative working groups (e.g., paired and group work) with supportive peers
  - Establish a peer tutoring system
  - Enlist the help of support staff
  - Establish academic supports that can be accessed during school time (e.g., a 'resource room')
  - Provide after-school homework assistance
- Support the development of English language skills and subject-specific vocabulary and concepts
  - Develop bridging programs to assist students who are struggling with English
  - Assist students to develop an understanding of the styles and conventions of different writing genres
  - Assist students to understand concepts that they find difficult
  - Encourage students to expand their vocabulary

*... I can't speak English well because I wasn't born here ... I'm just learning English as my second language ... The way people speak English here is different than the way people speak it in Africa ... [If an] Australian [is] ... speaking quick, then I can't understand. If they're speaking slowly, I can get it.*

*-- Jurup, Student*

## 6. How can students be supported to make subject choices that consider their interests, capabilities, skills and aspirations?

Subject choices play a key role in shaping students' future educational and career pathways. Unlike many Australian-born students, African students from refugee backgrounds may have no contact with individuals outside of the school with knowledge and understanding to assist them with this process.

Preparing these students for the post-school transition, therefore, requires:

- Cultural mentoring

*Some students may have very limited knowledge and understanding of the post-school pathways and education and career options that are available in Australia. Cultural mentoring can assist in broadening students' understanding and assist them to make informed decisions about their post-school options.*

*The most challenging thing is what I want to do when I finish high school ... It's really confusing because I don't know ... This is my second year in Australia, see? And it's very big for me. I don't really know how things work. I don't know what I need to study. I don't know what I want to do. It's very, very hard ...*

*-- Sayhosay, Student*

- Educational guidance

*Assisting African students from refugee backgrounds to make appropriate subject choices requires more than the provision of subject information and advice. Rather, it requires time and support to consider the implications of subject choices for subsequent education and career pathways.*

- Relevant workplace experiences

*Because some students have a limited understanding of the careers available in Australia, arranging suitable work experience placements is critical to developing their understanding of the world of work. Work experience placements that align with students' interests and goals can assist students to understand the roles and responsibilities associated with their chosen career pathways.*

- Career counselling

*The research highlighted that some African students from refugee backgrounds possess unrealistic post-school aspirations relative to their current skills, knowledge and capabilities. Assisting students to develop longer term career plans can aid in enabling students to achieve their future goals while engaging in education and training courses that are appropriate to their current knowledge and understanding.*



*I always used to say ... 'It doesn't mean you can't get there ... You can't get there yet. You have to do some other things.' So, for a successful post-school outcome, you need to be working strongly with them during their time with you, especially in the last couple of years, from a realistic perspective. Be honest with them and just let them know ... [Otherwise] they just create fanciful ideas.*

-- Jacqui, School Counsellor

*I think some families put their children ... under pressure to excel before they're ready ... Maybe, they're expecting their child to go to university straight after school and maybe they might need another pathway before they get to uni. So, sometimes, the students that I've seen might be putting themselves under a lot of pressure or their families are putting that young person under a lot of pressure.*

-- Rachel, Service Provider

## 7. How can schools effectively communicate and engage with students' parents and caregivers?

Following migration to Australia, African parents and caregivers are typically very hopeful that their children will become well educated. Unfortunately, because of cultural differences, parents and caregivers often do not know how to best support their children's education. Some parents and caregivers experience difficulties because of a lack of understanding of:

- How Australian schools operate
- The expected roles that parents play in their children's education
- The importance of completing homework
- Subject choices and how these influence post-school options
- Education and employment options that are available in Australia

*Despite this limited understanding, parents and caregivers were a strong influence in shaping students' education and career aspirations. The aspirations that family members had for their children were strongly shaped by their knowledge of careers that exist in Africa.*

*Most of the careers [that] most of the parents know ... is [a] teacher and doctors ... They don't know the other jobs, like social work. In Africa, there is no social work ... Some parents, they don't know ... that different career opportunities exist here in ... Australia ... Our parents, they don't have enough knowledge ... about education here in Australia, but they still have the moral support ...*

-- Emmanuel, African Service Provider

*In Africa, the parents, they are not interested with the ... performance of their children in the school ...*

*The parents in my country [Burundi], they go to the final ... proclamation day ... when they say ... these children achieved to go to the next class ... And another day ... is enrolment day. That's all ... The teacher has full responsibility for everything.*

*-- Emmanuel, African Service Provider*

The study's findings revealed that in many of the African countries from which the students came, teachers assume full responsibility for children's education. Parents support their children's education by enabling the teacher to take all responsibility.

The school can, therefore, be a foreign environment to parents and caregivers of African students from refugee backgrounds.

Encouraging parents and caregivers to become involved in school events and activities can aid in

making families feel welcome at the school. This can also aid parents in taking on a more active role in supporting their children's education.

The difficulties associated with navigating the Australian education and employment systems are further compounded by the limited English language and literacy skills of parents and caregivers. Many African parents and caregivers are likely to have poor literacy skills in English and other languages.

*Most of the kids ... they need support. And they are not getting that support ... There is zero support ... [because] most of the families are illiterate.*

*-- Luol, African Service Provider*

Providing families with written information, even if it has been translated can, therefore, be problematic.

Effective communication with parents and caregivers with limited literacy skills needs to involve verbal communication. This can require the use of an interpreter<sup>3</sup> to ensure that information is provided in an appropriate and accessible way.

There are staff who work to foster positive relationships between schools, families and communities. Please refer to the Directory of Useful Resources for further information.

## 8. What resources can be used to support students?

There are many resources that can be of assistance to schools, staff, and students and their families. These include:

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<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1 provides a series of strategies to consider when using an interpreter.

- Teachers who are experienced in working with students from non-English speaking backgrounds
- School counsellors
- Educational consultants
- Bilingual School Services Officers
- Community Liaison Officers
- African Community Leaders and Elders
- Migrant and refugee services
- Interpreters and translators
- Counselling services outside of the school
- African students from refugee backgrounds and their parents and caregivers
- Cultural awareness guides

For further information, please refer to the Directory of Useful Resources in the following section.

## Cultural Understanding Quiz: Commentary

1. **What percentage of African refugees come to Australia as Illegal Maritime Arrivals (commonly referred to as 'boat people')?**

*Answer:* 0%

The majority of African refugees live in refugee camps, or in refugee-like situations until their claim has been processed. Most African refugees do not have the opportunity to escape violence and persecution by boarding a boat in order to enter another country in which to claim asylum.

2. **What is a key difference between an asylum seeker and a refugee?**

A refugee is someone who has fled their country of origin and cannot return because of a fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

An asylum seeker is someone who is seeking protection and awaiting approval for refugee status, but whose claim has not yet been decided. Not every asylum seeker will be recognised as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum seeker.

3. **When African students are talking with their teachers, they show respect by giving them direct eye contact.**

Providing elders, teachers and those in positions of power with direct eye contact is considered disrespectful in some African cultures. This is an important consideration when working with African students.

4. **Which of the following situations qualify an individual as a refugee? Tick all that apply.**

*Answer:*

- ✓ Someone outside his/her country of origin and cannot return because of persecution
- X Someone who has been forced out of their home due to flood activity
- ✓ Someone belonging to a political group that wants to overthrow an oppressive government
- X Someone whose home has been destroyed as a result of tsunami activity
- ✓ Someone who is unable to practice their religion because of a fear of persecution

Recall from Question 1 that refugees are individuals who have fled their country of origin and cannot return because of a fear of persecution on the grounds of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion.

Being unable to return home because of natural disaster, therefore, does not qualify someone as a refugee.

5. **What are the main religions that are practiced in Africa?**

Christianity, Islam and Animism. Animism refers to the religious worldview that all living things possess a spiritual essence.

6. **Traditionally, what role do African parents play in their children's education?**

In many of the countries from which newly arrived African families have come, parents play a very limited role in their children's education by Australian schooling standards. The role of the parents is to enable teachers to exercise full responsibility for their children's education:

*In Africa, the parents ... in my country, they go to the final ... proclamation day ... when they say ... these children achieved to go to the next class ... And another day ... is enrolment day. That's all ... The teacher has full responsibility for everything.*

-- Emmanuel, African Service Provider

7. **What is the nature and quality of education in refugee camps? Tick all that apply.**

*Answer:*

- There can be up to 100 students in a given class.
- All students learn English.
- Learning resources (e.g., textbooks and stationery) may be limited.
- All students learn to read and write in refugee camp schools and receive a quality education.

Schools in refugee camps are often not compulsory. This means that some African students may arrive in Australia with little or no formal schooling.

Refugee camp schools often have very large class sizes, with limited teaching staff. This means that some African students who attended school in Africa may have received very little learning support.

Instruction in refugee camps is not always provided in English. Consequently, some African students arrive in Australia with very little or no English.

Refugee camp schools are often very under-resourced. This often means that resources to support learning (e.g., stationery, textbooks and technology) are unaffordable. In some instances, African students may arrive in Australia without knowing how to hold a pen or pencil, or use scissors. Similarly, schools in refugee camps are often staffed by individuals who, themselves, have only had limited education. Consequently, although African students may report attending school in

Africa, the quality of their education may have been compromised by numerous factors.

8. **Many newly arrived African families are obligated to send money to relatives who are living overseas, even if they are financially struggling themselves.**

The pressure to send money to relatives overseas is *“a burden that ... every single refugee family ... or 90 per cent plus would be experiencing ...”* (Darren, Service Provider)

9. **How much time can students spend in a New Arrivals Program before they are enrolled in a mainstream school?**

Students can remain in a New Arrivals Program for up to 18 months. Should students need additional time in the program, a review is conducted.

10. **Refugee camps are safe places for men, women and children.**

Refugee camps are rarely safe places for men, women and children. Rather, they can be very dangerous places, where individuals struggle to survive and meet basic daily needs amidst poor hygiene standards and nutrition. The environment is unsafe and individuals are typically at risk of physical and sexual abuse. Survival is often achieved by non-compliance to refugee camp rules and regulations. When African students arrive in Australia, they can maintain this learned behaviour, of pushing in order to survive, which can pose challenges in the Australian schooling context.

11. **On average, how much money per fortnight does an African refugee receive from the Australian Government when they first arrive?**

*Answer:* \$492.60 (Newstart Allowance) + \$80.67 (Rent Assistance) = \$573.27 per fortnight

The main forms of assistance that are provided to refugees include the Newstart Allowance (i.e., unemployment benefits) and rent assistance.

12. **How does this fortnightly payment compare to an Australian-born person who is receiving financial assistance from the Government?**

*Answer:* The same

The idea that refugees in Australia receive higher social security benefits than age pensioners and other Australians, and that they receive free housing, is a myth. Refugees receive the same amount of assistance as other permanent residents. Similarly, if refugees are in receipt of other social benefit schemes, such payments are made at the same rate as all other permanent residents. Refugees are not provided with additional extras and they must meet the same requirements as other residents.

There is normally a two-year waiting period for newly arrived residents before payments such as Austudy, Carer Payment, the Newstart Allowance, the Sickness Allowance and the Youth Allowance can be received, and a 10-year residence requirement in order to be eligible to receive a Disability Support Pension or an Age Pension. In the case of refugees, these waiting periods are waived due to special circumstances; namely, that refugees have no other means of financial support.

**13. What are some major differences between schooling in Africa and Australia?**

The African schooling experiences of newly arrived students are typically characterised by rote learning, memorisation and recall. In Australia, students are seen as independent and autonomous learners who are actively engaged in seeking information.

Corporal punishment is typically reported by newly arrived African students in reflecting on their experiences of school. In Australia, other behaviour management strategies are used.

**14. The majority of African families spend a relatively short time in refugee camps (e.g., six months).**

African families typically spend many years in refugee camps. Some African youth are likely to have been born in refugee camps and may have never seen their family's homeland.

**15. In Australia, teachers may observe that African students experience difficulties in making plans and goals. What are some underlying reasons for this? Tick all that apply.**

*Answer:*

- Life in a refugee camp is about daily survival rather than making long-term plans.
- Many African students don't want to adopt the Australian system.
- Priorities in a refugee camp often change on a daily basis.
- African students don't want to look to the future; they are consumed by the past.

Life in a refugee camp can often be very unpredictable, requiring individuals to reorder their priorities in order to meet basic needs. Making future, long-term plans is, therefore, impractical.

In observing the behaviours of some African students, it can seem as though they don't want to adopt Australian culture. It must be acknowledged, however, that these young people are often experiencing multiple resettlement challenges. There

is a general desire to become part of the 'mainstream' Australian community while also maintaining an African cultural identity. In a sense, they can be caught between 'multiple worlds'.

In engaging in dialogue with African students, many look forward to the future and the opportunities it brings. In some cases, African students don't acknowledge the role that their pasts play in shaping the present and future. Rather, they are forward-looking.

**16. What are some common barriers that prevent African families from becoming involved in their children's education in Australia?**

A number of factors can make it difficult for African students' parents and families to become involved in their children's education. These include, but are not limited to:

- a. Many African families and parents may have low literacy levels, preventing them from understanding written information that is sent by their child's school
- b. Some parents may be unable to communicate in English and, therefore, require an interpreter which may not always be available
- c. Parents and families may have work commitments that prevent them from having the time to visit their child's school
- d. Parents and families may have limited access to reliable transport, making it difficult to travel to and from their child's school
- e. Some parents and families may be experiencing mental health issues as a consequence of previous trauma that they have experienced
- f. Traditional roles of parents can prevent them from becoming actively involved in their child's education
- g. Parents may feel that the school is a formal setting in which they feel unwelcome

**17. African students share similar cultural, tribal and family traditions irrespective of the African country from which they came.**

While there are some similarities, all African cultures differ. Differences can occur within particular cultural groups. For example, the 'South Sudanese' culture is comprised of multiple dialects and cultural traditions.

**18. Why might African students not complete homework? Tick all that apply.**

*Answer:*

- ✓ Homework is a foreign concept and students may not understand why it is important.
- ✓ African students may lack appropriate facilities to study at home.



- ✓ African students may not have literacy skills that enable them to complete homework.
- ✓ African students (especially females) may have domestic duties, leaving little time for homework.
- ✓ Some African students have missed a great deal of formal schooling and consequently, may not have the necessary conceptual understanding to complete homework.

In a study of African students' post-school transition experiences, many students reported that they did not have homework while they were studying in Africa. Rather, all schoolwork was completed in class. The importance of homework in the Australian context may, therefore, be a foreign concept to some students.

Some African students may lack appropriate resources to complete their homework. For example, the homework task may require a student to examine a newspaper. If the student's parents are illiterate, it is unlikely that the family will have a newspaper for the student to use. Similarly, the family may lack the finances to purchase a computer and Internet connection, making it difficult for the student to complete homework that requires the use of technology.

For African students with limited formal schooling experience, homework tasks may be difficult to complete because of conceptual gaps in their understanding. Similarly, limited literacy skills can make homework difficult to complete because of language demands. Where parents and families have limited literacy skills, African students may lack adult assistance with homework.

African students may also have a range of roles and responsibilities within the family. For female students, these responsibilities can take the form of caring for younger siblings, preparing meals and cleaning the home. These tasks can reduce the time to complete homework.

19. **Teachers in mainstream Australian schools should not have to provide African students from refugee backgrounds with any special treatment or support. These students need to learn to fit in to be like all other students. This is part of learning the Australian culture.**

African students from refugee backgrounds have typically missed years of limited formal schooling. In addition, those that have had some education in Africa may not necessarily have learned English. These are key considerations that can critically impact upon African students' participation, engagement and success in the classroom.

## Directory of Useful Resources

This resources directory is divided into: Educational Resources; Interpreting and Translating; Migrant and Refugee Services; and Material Resources.

### Educational Resources

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#### Department for Education and Child Development (DECD) Services

31 Flinders Street, Adelaide SA 5000

8226 1000

[www.decd.sa.gov.au](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au)

#### Educational Psychologists

Educational psychologists work in partnership with schools and student services to support students from non-English speaking backgrounds. They assist schools to cater more effectively for the social, emotional and academic needs of these students by:

**Jill Brodie-Tyrrell:**  
**Psychologist**  
8226 3212  
[jill.brodie-tyrrell@sa.gov.au](mailto:jill.brodie-tyrrell@sa.gov.au)

- Providing psychological services to students and teachers in New Arrivals Programs and Intensive English Language Centres
- Conducting psychological assessments of students with complex learning and/or emotional needs
- Liaising with outside agencies that work with migrants and their communities
- Consulting and collaborating with other psychologists in relation to particular students

#### Community Liaison Officers (CLOs)

Community Liaison Officers:

- Liaise with school staff, students, families and communities
- Interpret and translate for schools, families and communities
- Work with schools to develop understandings about students' cultural backgrounds
- Provide information about the Australian education system and curriculum policies to parents and caregivers

African Communities Contacts:

**Ker Wol Mading**

8207 1547 [ker.mading@sa.gov.au](mailto:ker.mading@sa.gov.au)

**Abdullahi Ahmed**

8226 3594 [abdullahi.ahmed@sa.gov.au](mailto:abdullahi.ahmed@sa.gov.au)

- Encourage parental participation in school activities, events and committees
- Work closely with schools communities and outside agencies to ensure that students are provided with access to appropriate educational programs
- Provide information about post-school pathways
- Encourage student retention at school

### **Bilingual School Services Officers (BSSOs)**

Bilingual School Services Officers are individuals who are fluent in English and one or more other languages. They are employed to assist students in schools with English as an additional language or dialect. Rosie D'Aloia can be contacted for the BSSO register.

**Rosie D'Aloia: EALD Programs**  
8226 2756 [rosie.daloia@sa.gov.au](mailto:rosie.daloia@sa.gov.au)

### **Innovative Community Action Networks (ICAN)**

Innovative Community Action Networks provide case management services, literacy and numeracy support, life skills training, e-learning opportunities, and flexible learning programs to young people aged 6-19 years who are:

**Amanda Dey**  
8226 0471 [amanda.dey@sa.gov.au](mailto:amanda.dey@sa.gov.au)

- Enrolled at school, but are at risk of leaving early
- Disengaged and/or are not re-engaging to a pathway involving work, further study and/or community participation

ICAN offices are located throughout metropolitan and regional South Australia. For further information, visit [www.ican.sa.edu.au](http://www.ican.sa.edu.au).

### **Special Education Resource Unit (SERU)**

72A Marlborough Street, Henley Beach SA 5022  
8235 2871 [web.seru.sa.edu.au](http://web.seru.sa.edu.au)

The Special Education Resource Unit provides a range of learning and teaching materials and specialised services which support children and students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

## Interpreting and Translating

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### Interpreting and Translating Centre

24 Flinders Street, Adelaide SA 5000 8226 1990      [www.translate.gov.au](http://www.translate.gov.au)

In addition to being able to utilise bilingual staff in the education department for interpreting and translating, the Interpreting and Translating Centre provides interpreting and translating services in approximately 140 languages and dialects. Fees and charges do apply.

## Settlement Support Services

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### Australian Refugee Association (ARA)

304 Henley Beach Road, Underdale SA 5032  
8354 2951      [www.australianrefugee.org/](http://www.australianrefugee.org/)

The Australian Refugee Association supports refugees to settle in Australia through a range of settlement services such as employment and migration services, and youth services including homework assistance for school students, and assistance in preparing for work.

<p><b>Renee Singh</b>  <b>Manager, Youth Services</b>  8161 3306    <a href="mailto:renee.singh@ausref.net">renee.singh@ausref.net</a></p>
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Homework Clubs are run during the school term in various locations around Adelaide. For further information, please contact Renee Singh.

### ARA Jobs

30 Regency Road, Kilkenny SA 5009      8268 4444  
130 Henley Beach Road, Torrensville SA 5032      8354 2600

ARA Jobs is a specialist job services provider for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For further information, visit [www.arajobs.com.au](http://www.arajobs.com.au).

### Migrant Resource Centre of South Australia (MRCSA)

59 King William Street, Adelaide SA 5000      8217 9500  
[www.mrcsa.com.au](http://www.mrcsa.com.au)

The Migrant Resource Centre provides a range of settlement services to individuals who are in the first five years of resettlement in Australia through case management and targeted services. MRCSA operates from various metropolitan and rural locations.

### **Multicultural Youth South Australia (MYSA)**

Shop 9, Millers Arcade, Hindley Street, Adelaide SA 5000 8212 0085  
[www.mysa.com.au](http://www.mysa.com.au)

MYSA provides case management and case work to young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds between the ages of 12 and 30 years. MYSA also conducts outreach programs in homes, schools and communities.

### **Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service (STTARS)**

12 Hawker Street, Bowden SA 5007 8346 5433 [www.sttars.org.au](http://www.sttars.org.au)

The Survivors of Torture and Trauma Assistance and Rehabilitation Service offers free, confidential individual and group counselling, information, support and advocacy for those from migrant and refugee backgrounds who have experienced tortured or trauma as a result of war, violence, persecution or unlawful imprisonment before arriving in Australia.

### **Youth JET**

151 Hutt Street, Adelaide SA 5000 8227 0933 [www.youthjet.com.au](http://www.youthjet.com.au)

Youth JET provides support to migrant and refugee young people aged 12-30 years in the following ways:

- Career and life coaching
- Case management
- Resume writing and interview preparation
- Individual and group workshops about education and employment pathways
- Training opportunities and support to develop new skills for employment in Australia
- Work experience and placement opportunities
- Mentoring

## Material Resources

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### Classroom Materials:

#### A New Life for Refugees

[www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/A\\_New\\_Life\\_1.pdf](http://www.immi.gov.au/media/publications/pdf/A_New_Life_1.pdf)

This 10-page resource is designed for schools. It provides information about Australia's Humanitarian Program and includes suggested classroom activities.

#### Behind the News

[www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3343578.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/btn/story/s3343578.htm)

This five-minute story follows a family of newly arrived refugees from Liberia, Africa as they settle into South Australia. This short clip can be used to generate discussion about the challenges that newly arrived families face.

#### But We are Strong

[www.carouselmedia.com.au/films/but-we-are-strong.html](http://www.carouselmedia.com.au/films/but-we-are-strong.html)

This 30-minute documentary tells the stories of five young women who survived the war in Sierra Leone. Issues of extreme poverty, child prostitution, witnessing murder and limited access to education and healthcare are presented in this film. This documentary could be used to generate discussion about the rights of the child and to better understand the refugee experience of young women. Given the issues presented, a mature audience is recommended for this film.

#### Culture Shock

[www.changemedia.net.au/port-adelaide-ara-march-2010/](http://www.changemedia.net.au/port-adelaide-ara-march-2010/)

This 14-minute film is a peer-produced documentary about the lives of young refugees and the challenges of coming to Australia. The DVD version of this documentary (which can be obtained by contacting the Australian Refugee Association) contains a series of interviews with the participants. The documentary can be used to generate discussion about the challenges of migrating to Australia as a refugee.

#### The Harmony Project

[Australian Refugee Association. \(2008\). The Harmony Project. Adelaide: Australian Refugee Association.](#)

The Harmony Project was developed by the Australian Refugee Association and is a manual designed to enable schools to focus attention on issues facing refugees in Australia and promote intercultural exchange. Although the activities and teaching

materials are targeted towards primary schools, they can be adapted for secondary school students. Please contact the Australian Refugee Association for this resource.

### **Welcome to Kakuma**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qVRF9i59ZM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qVRF9i59ZM)

This three-minute YouTube clip is a short preview of the film 'Welcome to Kakuma' which about the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. It is available to purchase in full on VHS tape or DVD from the Centre for Refugee Research, University of New South Wales. Visit [www.crr.unsw.edu.au](http://www.crr.unsw.edu.au) for details on purchasing the film.

### **Support Materials for Students:**

Dulwich Centre Foundation. (2011). *Life-saving tips: Special skills and knowledge from young Australians*. Adelaide: Dulwich Centre.

This resource was produced by the Dulwich Centre in collaboration with young Australians from Muslim backgrounds to share a series of life-saving tips for young people. This resource is available in text and audio-visual formats and can be accessed from: [www.dulwichcentre.com.au/life-saving-tips.html](http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/life-saving-tips.html).

### **Further Reading:**

Antenucci, R., Brodie-Tyrrell, J., & Prescott, K. (2010). *Working with ESL new arrivals: Creating positive classroom environments: A resource for school leaders and teachers*. Adelaide: DECS.

This resource is focused on educators who are working with newly arrived students with English as a second (or additional) language (ESL). It suggests ways to support these students to acquire behaviour that is socially appropriate in Australia. This article can be accessed from:

[www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/files/links/ESL\\_positive\\_classrooms\\_v8.pdf](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/files/links/ESL_positive_classrooms_v8.pdf).

BoysTown (2012). *Kids Helpline information sheet: Culturally and linguistically diverse young people*. Brisbane.

This seven-page information sheet provides an overview of some of the challenges facing young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds. It also provides data about the use of the Kids Helpline by CALD young people. This information can be accessed from: <http://www.kidshelp.com.au/teens/get-info/information-sheets.php>.

Brown, J., Miller, J., & Mitchell, J. (2006). Interrupted schooling and the acquisition of literacy: Experiences of Sudanese refugees in Victorian secondary schools. *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, 29(2), 150-162.

This paper describes the findings of a study of mainstream schooling experiences of Sudanese students in two Victorian secondary schools. All eight student participants had significant gaps in their prior schooling. The authors consider the impact of interrupted education on literacy, the demands of subject specific language for such students, and related cultural and social language issues. This article can be accessed from: [www.alea.edu.au/documents/item/76](http://www.alea.edu.au/documents/item/76).

Burgoyne, U., & Hull, O. (2007). Classroom management strategies to address the needs of Sudanese refugee learners. *Literacy Link*, December, 5-6.

This two-page article provides a discussion of classroom management strategies to support Sudanese refugee students. It includes a discussion of learning characteristics of Sudanese learners in addition to challenges that impact on learning. This article can be accessed from:

[http://www.acal.edu.au/publications/newsletters/LL2007/0712\\_v27n6LitLink\\_www.pdf](http://www.acal.edu.au/publications/newsletters/LL2007/0712_v27n6LitLink_www.pdf)

Department of Education and Children's Services. (2007). *Count me in! A resources to support ESL students with refugee experience in schools*. Adelaide: Department of Education and Children's Services.

This resource supports a whole-school response to students from refugee backgrounds who have exited New Arrivals Program centres and are now attending mainstream schools. The document can be accessed from:

[www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/files/links/Count\\_me\\_in\\_1.pdf](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/files/links/Count_me_in_1.pdf).

Department of Education and Children's Services. (2007). *Curriculum and pedagogy in the New Arrivals Program in South Australia*. Adelaide: ESL Program, Curriculum Services.

This resource is targeted towards teachers in the New Arrivals Program, but can be a useful reference for teachers in mainstream schools. The document outlines the purpose of the New Arrivals Program in addition to exploring the curriculum and pedagogy that is used to support new arrivals. This resource can be accessed from:

[http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/files/links/NAP\\_Intro\\_v4.pdf](http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/literacy/files/links/NAP_Intro_v4.pdf).

Lutheran Community Care. (2009). Births, deaths and marriages resource directory 2009: For the African communities in South Australia and service providers. Adelaide.



This resource describes the cultural traditions associated with births, deaths and marriages in nine cultural groups spanning Eritrea, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Sudan. This resource may be useful in supporting African students who have experienced a birth, death or marriage in their community and provide a greater understanding of the associated rituals.

Quappe, S. & Cantatore, G. (2005). What is cultural awareness, anyway? How do I build it? Accessible via:

<http://www.culturocity.com/articles/whatis-cultural-awareness.htm>.

This three-page article provides an overview of cultural awareness, its importance, and levels of cultural awareness. The article concludes by describing a series of attitudinal positions that facilitate the management of cultural diversity.

# Appendix 1: Considerations for Using an Interpreter

Listed below are some strategies that should be considered when using an interpreter to communicate with families of students from non-English speaking backgrounds:

## Before the Meeting:

- Seek the family's permission to use an interpreter
- Where possible, avoid using family members or students to interpret
- Find out about the family's cultural and language background in order to arrange a suitable interpreter
- Establish whether the family would prefer a male or female interpreter
- Try to use the same interpreter each time to facilitate continuity, trust and rapport
- Be aware that the family may know the interpreter from the community and this may have implications for confidentiality
- Meet the interpreter separately before speaking with the family to:
  - Explain the purpose of the meeting
  - Discuss when breaks will occur in the dialogue to allow time for interpreting
- Arrange a quiet space to conduct the meeting
- Set aside ample time to speak with the family

## During the Meeting:

- Sit in a triangular or circular formation, facing the family, with the interpreter sitting between
- Speak directly to the family, not the interpreter
- Explain the role of the interpreter to the family
- Speak slowly and clearly, pausing to allow time for interpreting
- Explain concepts clearly and avoid using jargon
- Check that the family has understood what you have said
- Allow time for the family to ask questions
- If the interpreter stops to clarify something with the family in their own language, ask the interpreter what has been said
- Similarly, if the interpreter discusses something in English, ensure that the family is informed about what has been discussed
- Summarise what has been discussed where necessary during and at the conclusion of the meeting

## After the Meeting:

- Take time after the meeting to debrief with the interpreter

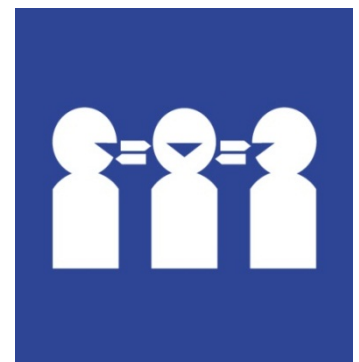


Image: [www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/NIS/](http://www.immi.gov.au/living-in-australia/help-with-english/NIS/)

## Appendix 2: Main Languages of African Communities in Australia

This section of the discussion paper contains information relating to the main languages that are spoken by the African Communities in Australia. In addition, a map is provided to aid in understanding the geographical context of Africa. Information was adapted from Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. (2007). Raising children in Australia: A resource kit for early childhood services working with parents from African backgrounds. Brunswick, Victoria.

WEST AFRICA	CENTRAL AFRICA	HORN OF AFRICA
<b>Shared Languages: English and Mende</b>	<b>Shared Languages: French and Swahili</b>	<b>Shared Language: Arabic</b>
<b>Liberia:</b> Liberian English  <b>Sierra Leone:</b> Krio	<b>Democratic Republic of Congo:</b> Lingala  <b>Rwanda:</b> Kinjarwanda  <b>Burundi:</b> Kirundi	<b>Sudan:</b> Dinka, Nuer, Bari and Shilluk  <b>Somalia:</b> Somali  <b>Ethiopia:</b> Amharic, Tigrinya and Oromo  <b>Eritrea:</b> Tigrinya and Tigre



Map: ICEF Monitor. (2012).  
Market snapshots: Botswana, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Sudan.  
Retrieved 6 May, 2013, from  
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