



# **Experiences of Women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa Studying at the University of Iceland**

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MA Thesis in International Studies in Education

University of Iceland

School of Education



**HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS**  
**MENNTAVÍSINDASVIÐ**



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## Ágrip

Við búum í síbreytilegu hnattrænu hagkerfi þar sem líf vinnandi fólks hefur verið í brennidepli á nýrri öld. Í ljósi hreyfanleika fólks á heimsvísu hafa rannsóknir í auknum mæli beinst að alþjóðlegum fólksflutningum. Ein helsta ástæða þess að fólk flytur á milli landa er til að fjölga efnahagslegum tækifærum sínum. Meginmarkmið þessarar rannsóknar er að safna upplýsingum um árangur, áskoranir og hindranir sem konur frá enskumælandi Afríkulöndum sunnan við Sahara (Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa; ASSA) hafa staðið frammi fyrir í námi sínu við Háskóla Íslands (HÍ). Þátttakendur í rannsókninni voru sjö konur frá enskumælandi Afríkulöndum sunnan við Sahara á aldrinum 25-50 ára sem eru í námi við HÍ. Allir þátttakendur höfðu búið á Íslandi í a.m.k. þrjú ár. Þátttakendurnir komu frá fyrrum nýlendum Englands: Austur-, vestur- og suðurhlutum Afríku. Notast var við eiginlegt rannsóknarsnið með fyrirbærafræðilegri nálgun til að öðlast skilning á og lýsa upplifun þátttakendanna. Notast var við hentugleikaúrtak og gagna var aflað í mars og apríl árið 2017. Skilningur á meginþemum rannsóknarinnar byggðist á hálfstöðluðum viðtölum. Niðurstöðurnar sýna fram á að konur frá ASSA standa frammi fyrir verulegum áskorunum, t.d. tungumálaörðugleikum, skorti á samvinnu við samnemendur og samskiptaörðugleikum við kennara í kúrsum sem kenndir eru á íslensku. Vegna þessara vandkvæða upplifa konurnar félagslega mismunun. Þær höfðu trú á því að með því að taka námskeið á íslensku myndu þær auka tækifæri sín í framtíðinni, en takmörkuð íslenskufærni þeirra stendur í vegi fyrir því að þær nái markmiði sínu. Í umræðukaflanum eru lagðar til stefnubreytingar sem miða að því að styrkja konur í sömu stöðu með það að markmiði að auka þátttöku þeirra í námskeiðum á íslensku og þar með að gera þeim kleift að verða þátttakendur í samfélaginu og atvinnulífinu á Íslandi.

## **Abstract**

We live in a fast-transforming global economy where working life has been a key issue in the new century. Because of global mobility, international migration has become a common phenomenon for study. The overarching pattern of human mobility is targeted at enhancing ones economic opportunities. The main objective of this study is to gain insight into the achievements, challenges and constraints that women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa (ASSA) have encountered in trying to attain higher education at the University of Iceland (UI). The participants were seven women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa (ASSA) studying at the UI, and they are between the ages of 25-50. The participants have been living in Iceland for more than three years. All the participants travelled from former English colonies: Eastern, Western and Southern blocks of Africa. Qualitative research method with phenomenological approach was used to be able to grasp and describe the experiences of the women from ASSA. Purposive sampling method was used to select the participants, and the data has been gathered individually throughout March and April, 2017. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to gain in-depth understanding of the main themes of the study. The results from the study revealed that ASSA women have major challenges such as language barrier, lack of student collaboration and student – teacher interaction in pursuing courses taught in Icelandic language. These issues created a perception of social discrimination among ASSA women. The women believe that participating in Icelandic courses would be more valuable in the future, however their lack of proficiency in Icelandic language is the main impediment from reaching their goals. The discussion suggests that policies should be implemented to empower the women to improve their participation in Icelandic programmes in order to increase their social involvement and labour participation in Iceland.

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# 1 Introduction

The movement of people from one place to another to settle is as old as the existence of man. The migration of persons to different nations and across international borders at a given time has become an increasingly common phenomenon which influences almost all nations in different ways. Some migrants are forced to flee their homes and countries to seek asylum because of unfavorable and adverse circumstances such as conflicts, political persecution, and civil wars to name a few, whilst most migrate voluntarily in search of different lifestyles and better economic opportunities.

The wave of social change, with the power of information and communication technology, is bringing the people of the world closer to each other than ever before. With this changing trend, people are becoming more aware and conscious of events and opportunities existing in other countries, and they can take advantage of this knowledge. Education anywhere in the world is possible, as well as job-placement, business, investment opportunities, employment, marriage and cultural exchange possibilities among other things.

I dared to make the most of such opportunities when I moved from my home country to my Icelandic husband in Iceland in 2005. As a teacher and fashion designer, I have always desired to work in one of these fields in my new country, however the one factor that would make this easier, the ability to speak and write Icelandic language became a barrier that impeded that dream. Sandgerði, a typical fishing community was my first settlement in Iceland. There, I was employed in one of the fish processing companies which was my first job experience in Iceland. In 2009, I sought admission and started a full program at the University of Iceland as a full-time student whilst still working full time, which was a very challenging experience. I obtained my first degree in 2011 after a successful completion of the course, as well as a license from the Ministry Education of Iceland to teach English language at the lower level in the Compulsory school.

I further enrolled in a postgraduate program, which was more demanding than I initially thought it would be. First, there was a limited number of courses taught in English at this level, and this compelled me to take courses taught in Icelandic to meet the postgraduate requirement of completing 120 ECT credits. Whilst my basic knowledge in Icelandic was not rich enough to facilitate effective learning at this level, I was presented with another challenge; indigenous students were reluctant to partner with me in group work among other things. Frankly, I do not want to believe that racism exists in schools settings in Iceland but the behaviour of some native students towards immigrant students raises concerns about whether racism is a reality, a perception, or non-existent in higher education in Iceland. Most people may claim that they are not racists, but their attitude and behaviour may suggest the opposite. Just as hooks (2003) emphasized:

In more recent years, as discourses about race and racism have been accepted in academic settings, individual black people/people of color have been to some extent psychologically terrorized by the bizarre gaps between theory and practice. For example: a well-meaning liberal white female professor might write a useful book on the intersections of race and gender yet continue to allow racist biases to shape the manner in which she responds personally to women in color.... She may have “grandiose” sense of herself, that is, she is anti-racist and not all vigilant about making the connections that would transform her behavior and not just her thinking. (p. 29)

My personal experience as a migrant student at the University of Iceland (UI) inspired me to explore the experiences of fellow women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa studying at the University of Iceland.

Women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa (ASSA) studying at the University of Iceland (IU) struggle to assimilate into Icelandic culture, both at their work places and within the university setting. My own experience and evidence from fellow women from the former English-speaking colonies in Africa, challenged me to critically investigate the challenges, opportunities, and hopes for their future. With a critical investigation, this thesis traces compelling narrative stories from ASSA women in the academic paradigm in the University of Iceland and their struggles to attain a higher

education that enables them to seek careers in professions in which they desire to work. The aim of this study is to explore the experiences and academic challenges faced by ASSA women who are studying at the University of Iceland, and how their educational attainment can enhance job opportunities in Iceland. The study also highlights the challenges; lack of knowledge of Icelandic impedes ASSA women in their pursuit of higher education at the UI. The research questions that guide this project are following:

1. What motivational factors encourage women from the ASSA to pursue higher education in Iceland?
2. In what ways do these women confront, address and reconcile any barriers and other academic challenges that they encounter during their studies?
3. What are the expectations of the women from the ASSA upon completion of their chosen courses of study?

Hopefully the results of this study will be a valuable instrument that contributes to the significance of women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa studying at the University of Iceland, and the benefits their educational status will bring to the Icelandic nation.

The thesis is divided into six main chapters and sub-chapters. The first chapter comprises of the introduction of the thesis, the motivational factors for conducting this thesis, and the research questions. The second chapter explains the concepts used in the theoretical framework of the thesis. The third chapter describes the methods used in gathering data. The fourth chapter presents findings; transcription of the interviews and data analyses are fragmented into six themes. Chapter five discusses the results, and this part is also divided into five themes. Chapter six is the conclusion part of the research.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This chapter explores theories that are used in the thesis. Below are seven sub-chapters. First, a chapter on women in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), which describes women's immigration trend in the pre-colonial period. It discusses Foner & Fredrickson's (2004) understanding of the term migration and Rowthorn's (2015) contribution to the study of migration. Statistics from Hagstofa are also used to explore this phenomenon. In the second sub-chapter, education in a global context is discussed. A focus on selected theorists such Nziali & Fayolle is used to elaborate on education and how it serves as an investment for human capital and the advantages it brings to the global community. The third sub-chapter discusses race. Theories by bell hooks, and Sabina Vaught on race are used to develop this sub-chapter. In addition, Du Bois' conception of race is discussed here. The fourth sub-chapter is on migration to Iceland. It examines the main drive of migrant influx to the European destinations including Iceland. This sub-chapter also discusses some statistical figures of immigration of Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa women to Iceland. The fifth sub-chapter elaborates on changing policies of the University of Iceland towards internationalization and globalization of students and how it welcomes new students. The theory of Josef Mestenhauer explains this in details. Other theorist such as Peter Kivisto are also used to support this theory. The sixth sub-chapter explains teacher - student interaction and student collaboration. Here, theories from writers such as Snowman, McCown and Biehler (2009) and Wingstedt (1998) are used to explore this topic. The chapter describes how teacher interaction with students, and also native students' engagement with foreign students facilitate learning. Again a theory of bell hooks (2015) is also used to explain student collaboration. The final sub-topic is on language skills. Theories by Pinter (2006), hooks (2015), and Innes & Skaptadóttir (2017) are used to examine this topic. Several other terms have been used to explain the concepts of the framework.

## 2.1 Women in Sub-Saharan Africa

Women's status as dependants was linked to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) women's immigration trends, which began before the pre-colonial rule. In traditional formal organizations in most SSA countries, choice of marriage settlement adhered to a patrilocal system where the men remained on the patrilineal land, and guarded the patrilineage property (Amediume, 1987). Ifi Amediume explains that men, however sent their daughters elsewhere to serve as wives, whereas non-lineage women were bought for the purpose of reproduction, domestic and economic labour. The main idea behind this whole issue is that after a man paid a bride's price, he was said to have acquired total control over the woman's sexual services and her reproductive and labour powers (Amadiume, 1987: p. 70).

Kohnert's (2007) study identified the following:

Apart from push factors like violent conflicts, terrible human rights violations, population pressure, degradation of natural resources, and poverty, the major part of current migration is due to external pull factors. (p. 7)

One major reason why people, both males and females, especially those from the developing countries, migrate to the West is the search for well paid jobs that can improve their economic status, as well as allow them to support their families back home to alleviate poverty. Stereotypically, people migrate from low-wage countries (country of origin) to high-wage countries (destination countries) to increase their quality of life. Men – and now also women – increasingly participate in migration as part of a family survival strategy, (Cross, Gelderblom, Mafukidze & Roux, 2006). As Adepoju (2005) states, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is a region characterized by a variety of migration configurations, including cross-border movements, contract workers, labour migrants and migration of skilled professionals, refugees, and displaced persons. Research into migration trends reveals that a majority of women are likely to migrate as wives. However, Mberu (2016) argues that the traditional pattern of male-dominated long-term and long-distance migration within and from Africa is becoming increasingly feminized due to evidence of an increase in female migration trends. Mberu (2016) explains that there is a great number of females who now migrate

independently due to their economic needs, instead of following their partners. Before the 20<sup>th</sup> century, female migrants were mostly wives and sex workers, but today female migrants include professional women from Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uganda, Senegal, and South Africa, who now engage in international migration in order to accumulate savings to survive harsh economic conditions at home (Cross et al., 2006: 33). Evidently, the majority of migrants make remittances to support family members through Western Union, MoneyGram and bank transfers for example on monthly bases.

## **2.2 Education in a Global Context**

Education serves as a vehicle for investments by persons that transforms to labour supply and consumption. Education is connected with schooling because it commonly involves teaching and learning in a particular form of setting (Unterhalten, 2005). Therefore, education is a process, which enables all individuals to participate in the social consciousness of the human race. As people share a social consciousness, they naturally adjust their own activities resulting in social reform and progress (Dewey, 1897: as cited in Wadlington, 2013: p. 30). This signifies that education and economy are closely related. Additionally, education aids individuals to use the skills and the knowledge acquired through educational investment to generate income for sustainable economic and social development. The perception that participation in education automatically enhances job opportunities is evident to some extent. Hitherto, the process of empowerment associated with literacy can be understood narrowly in terms of enhanced economic opportunities (Ahearn, 2004; Bartlet, 2008; Robinson-Pant, 2000, 2001, 2004: as cited in North, 2013). The statement above can be established in the sense that it is not always the case that the higher the individual's education, the higher the productivity; it all depends on how smart and knowledgeable the individual is. However, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016) states that knowledge is incarnated in human beings as human capital where technology appears to be central to economic development. In other words, economic development relies customarily on education for productivity, which demands investment of human capital. As Gunnarsdóttir (2013) points out that the most significant resource a country would have is its human capital.

Human capital involves the skills and knowledge that individuals acquire through investments in schooling, on-the-job training, and other types of experience (Becker, 1964: as cited in Nziali & Fayolle, 2015). According to the definition of Nziali et al. (2015), two elements can be identified in the human capital: investment and outcomes. Nziali et al. (2015) clarify that investment includes education and experience, while outcomes include knowledge and skills. Research shows that the former has been found to have lower effect on performance than the latter (Nziali et al., 2015). Although one of these elements is more powerful than the other, they usually work hand in hand. In my opinion, why these two forms of human capital must work hand in hand is that traditionally, investment in education promotes educational experiences, which leads to acquisition of knowledge and skills and in the end a desired outcome is being achieved. On the contrary, some talented or smart people do not really need formal or higher education to produce outcome, however, as the world is hungry for new technologies day-by-day to develop socially, the world at large needs education to inform world citizens about the components of the innovative system of the world. OECD (2016) emphasizes:

Since the mid-20th century, education systems have expanded enormously and human populations have never been more educated than today. Emerging economies and developing countries are now also relentlessly expanding their education systems, seeing education as an indispensable ingredient of modernisation and progress. Indeed, the benefits to individuals and societies of ever more education remain very impressive.

Education over the years is associated with political and social stability which generates favourable conditions for economic and social development. The concept generates human capital, a rational economic choice for every individual. In short, human capital theory focuses more on the contributions made by education and as a result, economic growth is achieved.

## 2.3 Racism

In this chapter, I discuss the topic of racism. I begin by discussing race briefly by adding other theorists' contributions and their views about race, followed by a discussion on the term racism and the effect it has on society. The terms race and racism have largely dominated the political scene from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and beyond. The terms race and racism are intertwined, hence the confusing contextual accounts in the past. In brief, racism cannot be defined without first defining race (Clair & Denis, 2015).

Race is an age-old phenomenon. Eliav-Feldon, Isaac & Ziegler (2009) emphasise that European society including its academics did not accept the term 'race' as a respectable concept after World War II. They clarify that henceforth, the term did not die in the US, therefore, the American people still use it widely in recent times. Clair & Denis (2015) explain that:

The term race was first used to describe peoples and societies in the way we now understand ethnicity or national identity. Later, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as Europeans encountered non-European civilizations, Enlightenment scientists and philosophers gave race a biological meaning. They applied the term to plants, animals, and humans as a taxonomic subclassification within a species. As such, race became understood as a biological, or natural, categorization system of the human species. As Western colonialism and slavery expanded, the concept was used to justify and prescribe exploitation, domination, and violence against peoples racialized as nonwhite. (p. 857)

Eliav-Feldon, et al. (2009) argue that the concept of race is badly abused and exaggerated. Race, according to Fredrickson (2002) is the grouping of human beings of a particular nation based on physical looks, social or cultural characteristics through historical events. Different theorists explain their views on the race concept in diversely ardent manner. For example, Du Bois and the early black nationalists embraced racial collective identity, racial destiny and authoritarian collectivism (Sundstrom, 2003).

The definition of race is still very confusing as many writers visualize race through different lenses, including Fredrickson (2002) mentioned above. Different theorists explain their views on the race concept in diversely ardent manner. Du Bois' (as cited in Marcano, 2003) advocacy for race preservation was triggered by his sociohistorical understanding of race. According to history, personal interest and political domination exposed what we refer to today as human races. For Du Bois, these events are historical, so they cannot be retracted. Here, Marcano (2003) also points to Du Bois' frustration in advocating for "The Conservation of Races" as posing a threat against minimizing race distinction and the proclamation of human brotherhood. Du Bois supported his position on the conservation of race by asking some rhetorical questions. He explicitly stated the dilemma:

What after all am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? (p. 219)

Du Bois' idea about the conservation of race makes some sense when one has to answer the questions put forth above. However, in his writings on Douglass and Du Bois, Stundstrom (2003) argues that despite the success of Du Bois' conception of race as purely social, Du Bois has never removed the biological aspect of the race according to his definition of race. Stundstrom (2003) quotes:

Vast family of human beings, *generally* of common blood and language, *always* of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life. (p. 43)

Stundstrom (2003) points out that Anthony Appiah construed Du Bois' conception of sociohistorical definition, as performing the task of individuation, is the scientific, qua biological, conception. The debate about Du Bois' sociohistorical notion, which collapses into biological conception, is regarded by Appiah not to qualify as an authentic biological classification. Appiah concludes that the conception about race as biological is illusory (Stundstrom, 2013: p. 44):

The truth is that there are no races: there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask 'race' to do for us. The evil that is done is done by the concept and by ease –

yet impossible – assumptions as to its application. What we miss through our obsession with structure of relations of concepts is reality.

Because of several critiques on the race concept, race is considered non-existence. As Clair & Denis clarify, among social scientists, 'race' is generally understood as a social construct (Clair et al., 2015: 857). Marcano (2003), in *Sartred and Social Construction of Race*, explains that social constructionists argue that race as a category has no foundation in necessity, precisely because it is entirely constructed. Marcano delineates that what it means to refer to race as a social construct must provide clarity of the process of group constitution, a larger social field, and must also provide an account for existence of a group. In brief, these are the only necessities that could be involved in racialized identities, and would derive from some presumably natural or biological reality (2003). Marcano remarks that once that obligation is rejected, then race as a category is overruled and racialized individuals no longer exist, no matter what their experiences were. Marcano (2003) identifies two models of group constitution. The first of these are Anti-Semite of Jew, based on group identity on race through dominating others, for instance, black or negroes. The second model is a prominent facilitator of history that produces itself in the domain of the other. For example, social labels from history, let us say Syrian refugees, for instance, is a historical social label. These labels, according to the work of Marcano, are constructed by governmental forces such as legislations, agencies, policy making among others.

On the contrary, Stundstrom (2003) emphasizes Appiah's argument on Du Bois' definition of race as quoted above. According to Appiah, Du Bois fails to ascribe the individuals to some race according to his definition of race. Appiah argues that since each constituent is a posteriori property of the different races and not a prior benchmark for membership, the use of "common history, traditions and impulses" to define the races would result in circularity of the argument (Sundstrom, 2003: 44). Sundstrom (2003) argues:

For a race to be a real social kind at some site, given metaphysical pluralism, what has to be present are social forces - labels, institutions, individual intentions, laws,

mores, values, traditions - combined in a dynamic with enough strength to give the category presence and impact at that site (45).

In brief, animal mammals, exist in different species, namely mammals, reptiles, fishes, birds, worms, ants, etc. In the case of human beings, they are naturally similar; all humans have similar organs and blood composition. However, the only dissimilarities of human beings are caused by hereditary factors or external influences, such as climate or geography (Isaac, 2004: as cited in Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, & Ziegler, 2009). Human beings have similar physical features and behaviors, although biologically meaningless when applied to humans – physical differences such as skin color have no natural association with group differences in ability or behavior (Clair et al., 2015). Hence, many theorists disagree with the argument that there are several human races. From this point of view, Antelme (1957) supports the view that there is only one human race, and that everything that places humans in situations of exploitation and subjugation, which creates the existence of various species of humankind, is false and mad.

hooks (2015) also adds that politics of racial domination automatically created a black reality that is distinctively different from that of the white. And here, race may be understood narrowly by many as a socially determined category of humans that can be characterized by physical features of persons in a complex manner.

As with race, the theory of racism is an age-old phenomenon that has been prevalent in all spheres of human enterprise including commerce, politics and education. The term racism pre-supposes that people of a race have the same qualities, characteristics, behaviours and mannerism with regards to superiority or inferiority. This can and has led to prejudice, discrimination and antagonism directed at members viewed as inferior. Racism is the notion that members of a particular race are inferior or superior to those of another race. Racism, in education, particularly within school settings can lead to prejudices that can have detrimental effects on those at the receiving end where members of a race considered inferior are not accorded the same opportunities to develop their potentials as others from a race perceived superior. There are instances where pupils from a particular race are encouraged to excel in

athletics because they are prejudged to be good at the sports and not at any other subject. Racism can blight the vision of leaders to cultural awareness; why students of a race behave in ways that are viewed unacceptable to others whilst the same behaviour in the same context by students of another race are acceptable. This can lead to a high proportion of students from a race being excluded from school compared to students from another race. The sum total of this is a lasting cyclically harmful effect on society as a whole; high exclusion rates leads to increased school dropout rates, which lead to lack of qualifications and therefore joblessness and crime. In the end society suffers from the effects of racism through loss of earnings and hence contributions to the national treasury from those at the receiving end of racism, who then depend on hand-outs in welfare states - a double jeopardy, not to mention dependency on illegal substances and resorting to crime to feed the habit of substance use.

Eliav-Feldon et al. (2009) advice that it is important to be precise and flexible in defining the term racism. Any definition we use should exclude forms of prejudice and persecution that are not strictly racist (Eliav-Feldon, et al., 2009). Definition of racism according to Eliav-Feldon, et al. (2009) should include any systematic attempt to rationalize the division of human beings into groups based on presumed inborn physical and other characteristics as mentioned in the school setting above. According to bell hooks (2015), racism should be investigated in a larger scope than a mere belief of superiority. Vaught (2011) argues that racism is produced by and produces structural racial domination. Consequently, several people benefit from domineering others, and do not suffer the feelings or the wounds inflicted on the exploited or oppressed (hooks, 2015).

In conclusion, white supremacy refers largely to political, economic and cultural systems in which whites overwhelmingly uphold power and material resources. Conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily restructured across a broad array of institutions and social settings. Race inequality may not be a planned and deliberate goal of education policy, neither is it accidental.

## 2.4 Migration to Iceland

International migration is widespread, currently involving a flow of more than 100 million people, and the number of migrants is growing (WCSDG, 2004: as cited in ILO, 2010). According to the theorists Foner & Fredrickson (2004), migration is a common human activity which is perhaps as old as any other human activities.

Migration can be challenging, and may involve loss of families, friends, and vital cultural heritage related to the place of origin. Nikos Papastergiadis (2000) referred to the new phenomenon of migration as “turbulence of migration” (Papastergiadis, 2000: as cited in Kivisto, 2002). Peter Kivisto explains turbulence of migration as a process where, today, millions of people around the globe are leaving their country of birth for other parts of the world.

Usually, migrants move from low-income countries to high-income countries. Thus migrants arrive in response to the labour shortage or higher salaries in the receiving country (Wojtynska & Zielinska, 2010). Hess (2016) refers to low-income nations as most countries of the sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, and to high-income economies such as the United States, Western-Europe, Russia, and Japan. Migration creates freedom of movement between member states. For example, immigrants from the European Economic Area (EEA) and the European Union (EU) move freely without any strict regulations within each others’ countries. On the other hand, countries outside the EU and the EEA lack freedom of movement to chosen destinations, mostly in the EU and EEA and other high-income countries; citizens of these countries are required to obtain visas to enter their host countries.

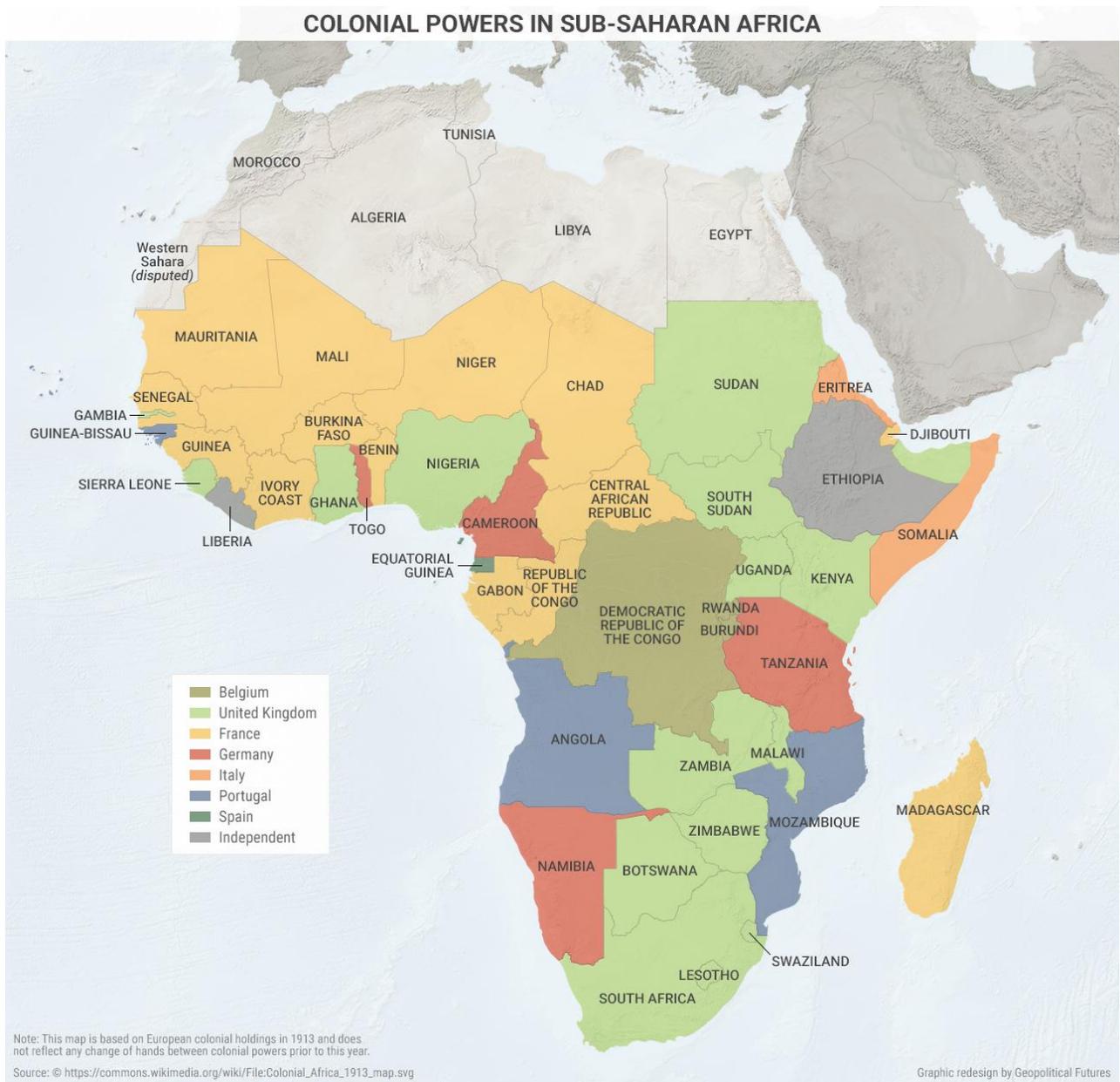
The impact of migration on migrants can be negative or positive. From the point of view of immigrant-sending countries, the impact on their societies varies widely (Kivisto, 2002). For example, poorer nations may lose their talented citizens, so called brain drain through internalization of education to other countries. Positively, it can also increase the GDP of sending-countries through remittances to family members. For the receiving countries, it can result in unemployment causing reduction of wages of unskilled indigenous workers, which can lead to resentment and discrimination and other racial upheavals. It can also result in social and political tension as immigrants

usually face employment assimilation problems in their host countries. Not to focus on the negative impacts only, immigration can offer national economic growth through labour, education and cultural sharing.

Statistics Iceland (2016) informs that since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, immigration to Iceland has increased faster than ever, where high number of immigrant families from around the globe have relocated and are settling in Iceland. The Statistical Office of Iceland provides interesting figures on immigrant population growth from 1996-2016. According to Statistics Iceland (2016), immigrant population through 1996-98 was constant; immigrants in this period registered about 4% of the entire Icelandic population. However, in 1998, the immigrant population began to grow steadily, reached its peak of 7.6% in 2009 and began declining rapidly to 6.8% in 2010. Between 2011-12 the immigrant population decreased again by 2%. This is a result of the economic crisis in Iceland in October 2008 (Ásgeirsdóttir, Corman, Noonan, Ólafsdóttir & Reichman, 2013). From then on, numbers began rising again. According to Statistics Iceland (2017) from 2013-2017, the figures of foreign citizens rose from 6.7%-8.9%.

The number of specific Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries registered in Iceland are 19 according to the records of Statistics Iceland (2016). These countries are Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Malawi, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. As of first January, 2017, the registered number of women ranging from age 25 to 50 from the countries stated above were 220, of which Kenyan women form the majority of the female population.

The map below (Figure 1) shows 16 locations of former British colonies in the SSA. It shows demarcations of colonial powers in Sub-Saharan Africa. Countries shaded in light green are former British colonies.



**Figure 1 Map of Colonial Powers in Sub-Saharan Africa (Source: geopoliticalfutures.com, 2017)**

## **2.5 Changing Policies of the University of Iceland Towards Internationalization and Globalization of Students and how it welcomes New Students**

Globalization is a modern phenomenon that stimulates mobility of people, goods and services around the world in the new century. The purpose of this thesis is to examine how internationalization and globalization of education affect students at the University of Iceland (UI). In this chapter, a brief historical overview and statistics related to UI will first be presented. Second, the author will explore internationalization of education from the lens of Josef A. Mestenhauser's (2000) theory, *Missing in Action*. The author's focus will be on the rise of higher education in Europe with a special focus on the University of Iceland. The author will also examine internationalization of students, and what it brings to Icelandic society.

Iceland is an island and one of the youngest and least populated country in the world. The country is about 103,000 square kilometres in size, and located in the North Atlantic Ocean (Magnússon, 2010). The citizens of Iceland speak Icelandic, a language closely related to the Old Norse. The population of Iceland at the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2017 was 346,750 made up of 176,590 males and 170,480 females (Statistics Iceland, 2017).

The University of Iceland was established in 1911. According to the University of Iceland's statistical records, the total number of registered students in 2016 added up to 12,992 (University of Iceland, 2016). These numbers included 4,387 male students and a total of 8,605 female students. The records of the university since 2010 show a widening gender gap between the number of registered female and male students. The statistics of the University of Iceland (2016) reveal that student registrations in 2010 accounted for 35.2% male students while female students represented 64.8%. The university statistics show that the percentage of registered male students has dropped to 33.8%, while that of female students has risen to 66.2% in 2017. Iceland is a partner of the Nordic Cooperation, and internationalization of higher education is a top priority.

De Wit (2000) refers to internationalization of education as a top priority on the agendas of national governments, national bodies, and institutions of higher education.

The definition of internationalization of education is somewhat confusing, as many writers wrestle to find accurate definitions to describe the concept. Jane Knight refers to internationalization of education as the process of integrating an international, intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of institutions (De Wit, 2000). Jane Knight views internationalization as a process, as a response from the international to globalization, which should not be confused with the globalization process itself. In addition, internationalization is viewed as comprising of both international and local elements (intercultural). Universities have broken with the "Hitherto accepted value that knowledge is universal" (Neave 1997:15; as cited in De Wit, 2000: p. 9). This statement is true because internationalization of higher education focuses on the exchange of ideas or knowledge sharing of the parties involved.

According to De Wit (2000), the way people look at and define internationalization of higher education is quite different from what frequently occurs in studies dealing with this theme. Research shows that in most studies, the internationalization of higher education is narrowed down to one or a few activities, e.g. academic mobility, global or multicultural education, area studies, or study abroad. In the Europe Regional UNESCO-CEPES World Conference on Higher Education in Paris in October 1998, Sadlak (2000: p. 5) stresses the need for universities to envision internationalization as a core function of their institutions.

The central meaning of the concept of internationalization of education is difficult to define, and many researchers have struggled with the definition, hence the use of international education interchangeably with internationalization. As a result, writers such as Mestenhauser and Steiner brainstormed the whole internationalization concept and came up with a missing puzzle. For instance, Mestenhauser (2000: p. 6) argues that a "knowledge gap" is the key obstacle to internationalization. Mestenhauser explains there is a knowledge gap between what the organization already knows and things it needs to know. Steiner (2000) also responds to the above statement of conceptual confusion of the terms globalization and internationalization.

Steiner referred to the global as the context, and the international as the privileged relations and skills to be developed within the context. The global as representing the context of education here can mean the overall knowledge worldwide incorporated, and international as a privilege could refer to the mobility of people or knowledge around the world. In brief, as people link together with one another on a common objective, they are partnering or exploring one another (exchange of knowledge). The Nordic Cooperation does not only sponsor exchange students, it also sponsors teachers to go out to study other cultures, and eventually to bring to research.

Mestenhauser (2000) delineates three core groups of barriers hindering internationalization of higher education. These are barriers that are related to knowledge and are vital in terms of curriculum. Also, they are related to change and reform. Examples are university structures and planning mechanisms, preparing students to handle and adjust to changes. Finally, barriers that are related to educational leadership, such as university structures, vertical and hierarchical, which do not reflect the way the global knowledge should be managed. As a result, Mestenhauser brought out missing components that can make internationalization of higher education a better agenda. As De Wit quotes in his writing: "It is higher education at the beginning of a future in which it is returning to the 'Universalism of learning the universal world'" (Clark Kerr, 1994: as cited in De Wit, 2000: p. 9). De Wit further explains that internationalization of higher education is the restoration of the cosmopolitan university of early centuries, which is brought into the new century and coupled with new models, such as the information age, in which society, economy and knowledge are part of a global environment.

We live in a world that is at the same time local and global (Kivisto, 2002: p. 1). As Usher (2009) explains, globalization means citizens are much more mobile than they used to be. Kivisto (2002) quotes in his introduction: "contemporary social relations are no longer necessarily linked to particular places"(p. 1). Kivisto (2002) mentions that implications of the intense economic, political and cultural changes that have dominated the modern system during the past half-century are broad and not well comprehended. Mestenhauser (2000) stresses that to remove barriers of

internationalization and globalization through administration and circular leadership, global universities of the future will require registered students to have a command of at least one foreign language and participate in more sophisticated and lengthy study abroad than what we see today. Mestenhauser emphasizes that international students who are graduating should have skills, knowledge, and attitudes that will enable them to function and to practice their professions in any country or culture of the world, without the need for prior preparation and orientation. The international university as an institution in the new millennium fully tunes in with the trend for leadership driven, multilateral institutional network. It is global and the meaning of global refers to the partners involved being drawn from far-away places, i.e. the global network spans the globe. It is quite clear that for Mestenhauser, internationalization is unthinkable without the interpersonal and intercultural dimensions. He proposes that the role of a modern university must go beyond educating the next generation academically. The university must also work transnationally and fulfil its responsibility as a cultural diplomatic institution.

Innes et al. (2017) argue that Icelandic was emphasised and standardised as part of the construction of Icelandic nationality in the country's struggle for independence towards the end of the 19th century. Innes et al. (2017) explain that Icelandic nationalism depicts language and biological origin as highly interrelated. Preservation of language by nations ensure that the language of the nation is used in all areas of the community. For example, emphasis is laid on learning, and participation by the use of the language in every day life. The majority of immigrants who gained higher educational qualifications or degrees from their countries of origin could not gain employments that suit their educational qualifications due to inproficiency in Icelandic language, which serves as a barrier and social exclusion between immigrants and native speakers. Most immigrants who arrived in Iceland with higher education qualifications from their countries often work in menial jobs such as in the fishing industry , care homes, restaurants, construction works and house keeping where no special skills are required. Due to language deficiencies they mostly associate with their family members and people from their home countries at work places and communicate in their mother tongue (Innes, et al., 2017: p. 23). One disadvantage of this kind of automatic social

grouping is that are not challenged to practice Icelandic, therefore they always speak English and other common foreign languages as a universal language, as well as the immigrants' own mother tongues at work. The Language policy of the University of Iceland as approved by the University forum on 10th May and by the University Council on 19th May 2016 and as part of the University Strategy (2016 - 2021) supports and emphasizes the promotion and development of Icelandic language and ensures that it is usable in all academic fields. *"Icelandic Language is the First language of those who rely on it for expression and communication."* [Icelandic Language and Sign Act No: 61/2011.] The basic principle of the language policy is that the written and spoken language of the University is *Icelandic*, whether in teaching, research or administration. Icelandic is therefore the default language for all work at the University and shall be used unless specific circumstances dictate otherwise.

Secondly, and in similar vein, the University as part of the International academic community recognizes English language also as essential in the work of the University. This is due to international students and teaching staff, and the need to prepare students for participation in the international academic community and the University's preparation in all kinds of international collaboration. It is therefore emphasized that information on the University and its operations as extensive and detailed as possible should be available in English on the University public website and on the University internal web [Ugla]. The University also encourages students and teaching staff to use foreign languages other than English in their academic work where possible. This kind of all round and clearly woven language policy is a key indicator of the University's international framework and its clear vision of becoming one of the world's leading universities. The strategic language policy framework and aims of the University of Iceland may position the University as a choice for most international students and researchers in the world. As the University of Iceland (2016) emphasizes in the University of Iceland Language Policy, because of the university's international collaboration work, English will be used for programs where there is a specific need. For instance, courses taught by teaching staffs who are non-Icelandic speakers must be taught in English. The following section discusses how teachers and foreign students interact in the school setting.

## **2.6 Teacher - Student Interaction and Student Collaboration**

Student engagement and interaction in the common lecture-centered study model is near non-existent. An instructional delivery model, where students have an opportunity to regularly interact with each other and teachers, is an essential way to motivate and encourage students to reach out to each other to solve problems. Apparently, an active learning environment should promote students' interests in the subject and encourage their participation (Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009). Hence, learning of skills and concepts within a constructive framework should occur within meaningful and integrated contexts. Wrenn & Wrenn (2009) denote constructivism as a means of explaining how knowledge is produced in the world. Learning is usually achieved over a period of time, as initial knowledge is revised when new questions arise and the old information and previous knowledge is challenged. While experience is a great teacher, it cannot replace what can be best taught in a classroom and vice versa (Wrenn & Wrenn, 2009).

Most students perceive the value of socio-academic interaction in their learning process through affirming that sharing knowledge and challenges not only develops collaboration skills, but also leads to deeper learning, understanding and greater success. However, a striking hindrance observed by foreign students in this regard is the hurdle of being accepted easily into student working groups or teams, as a result of language barriers, for example. Foreign students' inability to communicate either fairly or fluently in the native language in their recipient country and university settings negatively affects their experience of effective collaboration and team work; they can hardly find other students who may be willing to work with them. As emphasized by hooks (1995):

Through my tenure as Yale Professor, I was often confronted with white students who would raise the issue of why it is black students sit together in the cafeteria, usually at one table. They saw this as expression of racial separation, exclusion etc. When I asked why they never raised the issue of why the majority of tables are white students self-segregating, they invariably said things like "we sit together with folks with whom we share common interest and concerns". They were rarely

at the point where they could interrogate whether or not 'whiteness' allowed them to bond with one another with ease. (p. 156-157)

According to hooks (1995), students bond easily and freely with people with whom they share common interests and concerns. Therefore, foreign students who may find it very difficult to speak the native language of the country in which they are pursuing higher education abroad may end up not being able to form a suitable bond with other students for effective student collaboration to enhance their academic work. Collaboration is crucial for efficient academic performance for foreign students because student-student interactions create a better learning atmosphere and understanding than student-teacher interaction.

## **2.7 Language Skills**

Language is an essential tool for learning, impacting and transferring knowledge. The medium of interaction in school is the vehicle through which understanding and learning take place (Pinter, 2006). As Wingstedt (1998) explains, language is a tool of communication, which may be compared to mechanical tools that may be constructed, corrected, improved, and standardized. Sharing a common language is often seen as an important aspect of uniting a nation (Innes & Skaptadóttir, 2017). Through language, people negotiate meaning: that is people ask questions, provide answers, express themselves et cetera.

Usually in higher institutions, international and migrant students face language proficiency challenges and problems when they study in the university environment, where they are alien to the language used as a medium of instruction in the recipient university. Wlodkowski & Ginsberg (1995) identify that because teachers and students of diverse classrooms originate from different communities, the languages used are different. Language proficiency, fluency and efficient usage have immense effect on an individual's ability to learn and develop due to its vital role in the transmission of information, regulation of cognitive processes and facilitation of easy cultural integration, whilst not complicating the issues with social, political, and other concerns (Wingstedt, 1998). Hence, the need by non-native speakers of other languages to

develop language learning tools for classroom participation and other academic purposes.

Non-Icelandic speaking students may find it more difficult to participate in class and write assignments in courses taught in Icelandic, in the same way as a non-English speaking student would struggle to work in an English speaking university. Language problems can be stressful and can indirectly increase the work load of international students such that they may have to spend more hours learning and reading than native students would. This is because it is easier for a native student to understand what the lecturer says than for a foreign student studying in a second language. However, language fluency and proficiency are essential determinants and keys to successful integration and effective learning processes and a less traumatic environment in a new culture. Language acquisition also boosts confidence and facilitates academic performance of students. It is an important ingredient for motivation and a recipe for good academic work.

### **3 Research Methodology**

This chapter presents the main qualitative research and sampling methods that were used to gather data for this study. A phenomenological qualitative research (PQR) approach was employed for the study because the study focuses on investigating the specific experiences of the women from the ASSA who are studying at the UI. As Paley (2017: 9) highlights, PQR is suitable only for delivering an “in-depth insight into experiences”. As the researcher is an insider, i.e. a woman from the ASSA studying at the UI, this method seemed the most appropriate method to explore the women’s experiences.

Creswell’s (2012) approach of purposeful sampling method was used to select locations and participants. To investigate and gain understanding of the topic, a qualitative design was chosen, as it is best suited to address a research problem in which variables that would be explored are unknown (Creswell, 2012). Qualitative data are usually collected through a combination of methods, including observation, interaction, and document review (Houser, 2012). For the purpose of accurately answering the research questions put forth in the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted in addition to document review. In addition, selection of participants and sites should reflect the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, in qualitative research, the researcher and the subject interact freely with each other.

#### **3.1 Data Collection Methods**

The main data collection method was interviews (one-on-one, by telephone, and via e-mail). Participants answered an interview guide including demographics, which were used to collect information on age, place of origin, purpose of moving to Iceland, educational background, professional background, motivation for higher education in Iceland, field of specialization at the UI, ways by which the women confront challenges

faced in their studies, impacts of higher education, and hopes and economic opportunities of women from the ASSA after following higher education in Iceland.

### **3.1.1 Interviews**

Interviews involve personal contact, i.e directly to the participant where the actual words from the participants' own mouth can be recorded. Creswell (2012) argues that a qualitative interview occurs when researchers interview participants by asking general and open-ended questions and record their responses on tapes, which are later transcribed for analysis. Hennink, Hutter & Bailey (2011) explain the transcription of an interview as the act of making a written record of an interview or a group discussion for data analyses. Here, one-on-one interviews and telephone interviews, and focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim onto a written record. First, a one-on-one interview is a process where the researcher asks questions and records answers from only one study participant at a time (Creswell, 2012). This type of interview is popularly used by qualitative researchers. It was also selected based on the participant's willingness to speak and share their opinions spontaneously. A telephone interview is the process where the researcher calls the interviewee on phone and asks a small number of general questions (Creswell, 2012). To achieve a clearer recording, the researcher needs a special telephone adaptor that connects to the phone and the tape recorder. Creswell (2012) notes that, in this type of interview, the researcher does not have a direct contact with the interviewee, therefore it can be difficult for the researcher to comprehend the perception of the interviewee. It can be costly as well. An e-mail interview is a data gathering tool that is useful when participants are geographically disseminated. It involves the use of computers as well as internet access. It is useful because it can create a meaningful conversation between the researcher and the participants where more information about the topic can be obtained.

The interview methods help the researcher to gain understanding of themes of daily lives from subjects' own perspectives (Kvale, 1996). It is a way of doing which involves in-depth interviews and/or observations of humans in natural and social settings (Lichtman, 2006).

For this study, seven women from the ASSA who are students at the UI were interviewed using the methods previously described. Individual interviews were conducted in the participants' homes, over the telephones and via e-mail. Since prospective participants are not supposed to be under any pressure to participate in any research, they were allowed to choose the interview methods. One-on-one interviews were conducted for three participants in their homes, because the participants requested for that option in order to feel comfortable, and also to avoid interruption by others. Other two participants also requested for a telephone interview because of timing convenience. The researcher and the participants decided on a time for the interview. The last group of two participants explained that they were not able to meet with the researcher personally because of their line-up activities at the university, therefore they answered the interview guide via e-mails. The interviews were conducted only in English, since English was it is the only common language that the researcher and the participants could communicate in for the best reciprocal understanding. Even though one of the participants and the researcher shared a common understanding of a dialect, the interview was conducted in English to avoid inaccurate or literal translation from the dialect to English since this can always pose problems in retranslation. The interviews were conducted outside the university and working hours, and were tape recorded on a mobile device, which were later transcribed. Each interview lasted between 35-45 minutes.

Challenges were encountered with all three forms of interviews for the data collection. For example, for one of the one-on-one interviews, the entire recordings were lost. Therefore, the researcher arranged for another interview, which wasted resources and time on both parties. Another challenge faced was lost of parts of the telephone recordings, where some small bits of information got lost. As a precaution, the researcher jotted down the interviewee's responses during the interviews. In one of the e-mail interviews, the researcher was not satisfied with most of the responses. Therefore, the researcher humbly requested for the missing information, which the participant then provided.

### **3.1.2 Instruments and Procedure**

The researcher used mostly open-ended questions (Creswell, 2012) from the interview guide to gather data for the study. The interview guide was written in English and all the interviews were also conducted in English. The precise procedures used for the data collection were as follows:

First, the researcher contacted the participants personally, through telephone conversation, and messages through social media, and introduce the topic and the reason for the study. The researcher allowed the participants to choose the form of the interview that suited them. Second, one-on-one and telephone interviews were audiotape recorded. Third, the researcher used probing mechanisms to obtain further information (Creswell, 2012). Here, the researcher asked sub-questions under each question to elicit in-depth information. Fourth, the researcher used notes during and after the interviews to memo down remarks or circumstances described in the interviews. Note taking was also used to serve as a backup for the recordings, should any information be missing on the recordings or should there be any problems with the recordings. In such cases, the notes could be used to fill in the missing information. Fifth, a verbatim transcription (Henninks, et al., 2011) was conducted for the one-on-one and the telephone interviews for each recording. Finally, the transcriptions were typed onto word document, which were saved in computer files for effective data analysis.

### **3.1.3 Data Analysis**

In qualitative research studies, the data are analysed to form answers to specific research questions (Creswell, 2012). In other words, data were analysed by addressing the research questions and hypotheses (Creswell, 2013). Developing themes from the data helped me as a researcher to understand the topic of study, which later lead to the finding of results to the research problem. Creswell (2012) further explains that themes, also referred to as categories are similar codes gathered together to form a major idea in the database. In the current data analysis, inductive themes were used. The researcher developed themes from the interview guide, and also from the data

collected. Induction, according to Heit (2007) involves a number of other cognitive activities including categorization, similarity judgement, probability judgement, and decision making. Developing themes engaged the researcher on a daily bases constant thinking. For example, weighing the themes to the literature reviews to judge whether they corresponded.

Creswell (2012) stresses that analysing and interpreting the data involves drawing conclusions about data, and representing it by using figures, tables, and pictures, and finally explaining the conclusions in text to provide answers to the research questions. Information gathered from the participants' interviews, and notes, were used for the data analysis. Findings were organized from selected themes for effective analysis. Literature reviews were used to frame the research while notes were also used to track the research. This process enables the reader to be able to understand what is currently known about a topic (Fink, 2010). Because of the great amount of information collected in this study, it is critical for the researcher to organize the data in computer files, USB drives, and file folders to keep the data secured. The results are presented using descriptive analysis, providing information for a detailed discussion of the results (Creswell, 2012). The detailed results, which provide explanation of the findings, were summarized and presented in general statements.

### **3.2 Participants**

Purposeful sampling method was used for the selection of the participants. In purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). As Houser (2012) identifies, purposeful sampling is a characteristic in which the researcher identifies criteria for the type of informant most likely to assist in answering the research questions. The participants in the current study were selected based on being identified as people who migrated from the former English colonies of the SSA. In addition, the participants have particular characteristics such as same gender, immigrant experience, and experience of labour and higher education in Iceland that can enrich the data. The participants' willingness to participate in the study helped to provide in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. Houser explains that these criteria often involves a shared experience of

a specific demographic group, or simply the willingness to share information with the researcher. Getting to know and to interview people of your own ethnic group or people with similar background helped the researcher to acquire more information about subjects and people who share similar backgrounds. The field of geographical location is examined through this lens.

The group of participants comprised of seven women from the ASSA, studying at the UI. All participants had been living in Iceland for more than three years. Participants were identified through friends, at the university premises, and in meetings of African self-help groups, hence the application of purposeful sampling method. The participants were selected based on the site (UI), and their willingness to participate in the study. Data were collected in February and March, 2017.

### **3.3 Documents**

Published documents such as statistics, reports, memos, emails, newspaper articles, and so forth are important sources of data for the study. These sources provide valuable information to guide researchers in understanding central phenomena in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2012). Documentation in social research is crucial; it is the research instrument which is not just a simple source of information (Prior, 2008), but also a very vital instrument capable of influencing the key research processes of data collection, data analyses, and report writing (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: as cited in Prior, 2008: p. 822).

Because the study focuses on women from the ASSA enrolled in the UI, the university's data on students' registrations was utilized. In addition the researcher used the data published by the Statistics of Iceland on immigration of ASSA women.

### **3.4 Limitation of the Study**

Limitations are potential weaknesses or problems with the study identified by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). The sample size used in this study is small. Undoubtedly, there are more women from the ASSA studying at the UI, however for this study, the researcher purposely chose seven women to interview. Limitations also help readers

judge to what extent the findings can or cannot be generalized to other people and situations (Creswell, 2012). In this study, the main limitation is that it is a small sample.

### **3.5 Potential Ethical Issues**

An ethical statement that covers issues of anonymity and confidentiality have been sent to each participant. An informed consent form is a statement that participants sign before they participate in research (Creswell, 2012). This statement contains information about the study which are important to the participants' decisions as to whether they are willing to participate or not. It also entails how the data will be interpreted and used.

A certain ethical issue or challenge in qualitative research is the status of the insider. As a researcher with ASSA background conducting a study on women of ASSA background, I played the role of the insider, which could have its merits and demerits. First, as a woman from the ASSA, it was easier to identify and approach my participants. I also have a better understanding of the culture as we share similar cultural backgrounds. In Bonner & Tolhurst (2002), the advantages as an insider-researcher are significant. First, as an insider-researcher, there is a greater chance of in-depth understanding of the culture being studied. Second, the possibility of changing the flow of social interaction unaccountably is limited. Finally, because the insider-researcher largely establishes a good relationship with the respondents, accurate information are usually obtained.

#### **3.5.1 Informed Consent**

Participants were contacted to seek their participation in the study. They were also informed about the main purpose of the study, how the research would be conducted, and the methods for storing data. Creswell (2012) emphasizes that the participants' right to know the purpose of the study is also very necessary. Participants were briefed about the benefits and the possible risks involved in the study. Upon their agreement to participate in the study, they were given informed consent forms to sign before they participated in the study. Participants were allowed to withdraw from the research

whenever they want to. Typical informed consent (Creswell, 2012) was discussed with the participants. Creswell elaborates, an informed consent form should summarize the participants' rights, including their rights of withdrawing from the study at any time.

### **3.5.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity**

In every research the rights of the participants need to be secured. It is important to protect the privacy and confidentiality of individuals who participate in the study (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the researcher sought consent from the participants and assured them that the participants would be anonymous, and no identifiable information would be assigned to reports or publications (Silverman, 2005). This serves to ensure that the information gathered are protected against mishandling and manipulation. It explains that data collected or findings, or what participants say should be reported at face value without any alteration to suit predictions of any group of people. Information gathered should not be revealed without the permission of the participants.

### **3.5.3 Researcher's Position as a Disadvantage**

Disadvantages for being an insider-researcher may be as follows: participants might assume that the researcher has lots of information about the research problem therefore they would be unwilling to provide more information if the researcher does not categorically ask for those background information. Being an ASSA woman and studying at the UI may have affected the interview process. Unconsciously making wrong assumptions about the research based on the researcher's prior knowledge can be considered a bias (Unluer, 2012). Additionally, the insider needs to be cautious about not being biased in this case; the insider must not forget her role as a researcher.

## 4 Findings

The aim of this thesis was to explore the experiences of women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa (ASSA) studying at the University of Iceland (UI), therefore the author used narrative discussions form of interview guide and direct quotations recurrently. In this chapter, the data are categorized into five different themes including sub-themes. The first theme includes immigration trends; family reunion, education exchange, work or political need. With the second theme, the author explores the participants' motivation for higher education in Iceland and field of specialization. The third theme highlights the ways to confront and reconcile academic challenges faced at the UI. Under this theme topics such as language of teaching, student and teacher collaboration are discussed as well as racial discrimination, immigrant students' support and equity in education. The fourth theme explores impacts of higher education. Under this theme the author discusses topics such as knowledge expansion, transformation, and empowerment. The fifth, which is the final theme explores hopes and expectation of higher education in Iceland. The topics discussed under this theme are market choices, women's struggle to get into the labour market of Iceland, and giving back to Iceland.

As noted, my data were collected from seven ASSA women who were studying at the UI and had been living in Iceland for at least three years. The majority of the participants were full-time students and some were also self employed whilst others were in full-time or part-time employments and were employed in jobs related to the courses they were studying. Others were working as school assistants in compulsory school after school programmes and in preschools. Some were working as sales personnel in department stores, and as cleaning agents in cleaning firms. In this chapter, the backgrounds, experiences, and participants' reasons for migrating to Iceland are discussed. I introduce the seven participants and discuss their backgrounds, experiences, and their reasons for migrating to Iceland.

My participants were between the ages of 25 and 50 at the time of the research. These women came from the former British colonies of Sub-Saharan Africa; originally from the eastern, western, and the southern parts. They were studying in various faculties at the University of Iceland (UI). From the data collected, the women were studying in the faculties of Humanities, Education and Social Sciences. The women were pursuing graduate, postgraduate, and Ph.D. programmes. All of them spoke English as a second language; English is the official language of their countries of origin. In most of their countries of origin, English is the language of instruction in compulsory and secondary schools, thus they had matriculated through their education system using mostly English. In addition, most of them speak more than two local tribal languages. Names stated in this study are not the participants's real names; their real names have been substituted with pseudonyms to protect their identities.

#### **4.1 Immigration Trends: Family Reunion, Education Exchange, Work or Political Need**

One of the aspects of this study was to better understand what the women's motivation for migration was. When the author interviewed these women to gain understanding of the immigration trends, different reasons emerged. Three of the participants from separate locations gave very similar reasons, while the other four gave me quite diverse reasons for their relocation.

Three of the seven participants relocated to Iceland to join their Icelandic husband. The other four gave other reasons: an exchange study programme, work and lastly for political reasons.

Some African cultures require that a woman needs to move to her husband's house after her bride price has been paid. As Reese, Moshin, Tay, et al. (2016) elaborates:

In the prevailing patriarchal system, the bride's family or clan is commonly categorised as wife-givers (or lifegivers, manegsan/umane) and the husband's family as wife-takers (or life-takers, fetosan). This complex practice of bride price obliges the husband's family to offer the wife's family gifts, offerings and contributions of traditional items such as livestock, food, handmade craft and jewellery for ceremonies and other significant life events such as marriage and

funerals, throughout the period of marriage. In addition, at the time of the marriage, gifts are exchanged, although the most valuable are generally provided by the groom. Barlake (also known as lia) commonly involves remittances made over extended periods of time from the husband's family to the bride's family, and in the modern context, often involves cash payments. (p. 2)

In this regard, Akinyi (an East African), Bupe (a South African), and Dodzi (a West African) moved to join their partners according to their cultural and ethnic heritage. These women confessed that they were very excited to join their Icelandic husbands. Bupe met her husband in her home country and they decided to marry. She then decided to move to join her husband in Iceland when he had returned home. She admitted that she was extremely excited to visit Iceland upon hearing all the beautiful stories about the small country from her husband.

Dodzi also admitted that she came to Iceland because of her husband who is Icelandic. Dodzi had some knowledge about Iceland before meeting her Icelandic husband:

Before I met my husband, I have two friends who all are married to Nordic men. One in Denmark and the other in Iceland. We talked on the phone regularly about Denmark and Iceland. Yeah, I know quite a lot about these two countries. In fact, I thought I was gonna go to Denmark so I started learning Danish, but that dream land turned to be Iceland, I found my future husband in the small beautiful country. Quickly, I researched a bit more about the beautiful country. Hmmm, I just was very excited and ready to relocate as soon as we started talking over the internet. He came down and we married, and he came back to Iceland, and I joined him as soon as my visa to Iceland had been approved.

Dodzi expressed her mix feelings for meeting her husband in a foreign land although she was full of excitement to join her husband. "My worst nightmare ever was how to cope with the cold weather here in Iceland. I kept complaining till Bjarni assured me, "honey don't you worry about the cold, I will heat you up (laughter)."

When I asked Dodzi how long she intended to stay, she answered with passion:, "intend to live here until my 60s."

Akinyi answered when she was asked how she felt when the husband invited her to Iceland, she stated: “Although I had travelled to numerous countries around the world, my heart was filled with so much joy when my husband asked me to come and live with him here.” Akinyi thinks Iceland is a comfort zone, however she has other plans for relocation when there are better job opportunities elsewhere:

I have lived here for six and a half years, whoa 7 years in June! Ummm how long?  
For now I would say this is home, so I would only move if my husband and I get a stable job elsewhere, that has a great environment for our kids.

Unlike the first three participants who relocated to Iceland for family reunification, the other four participants relocated to Iceland for different reasons: for work, for vocational exchange study programme, and because of a civil war in their country.

Abla from East-Africa, was 20 years old when she came on a vocational exchange programme, and has been living in Iceland since 1999. She explained that the exchange study was a volunteer type of exchange study programme for cultural exchange between countries for job experience. Abla has a lot to say about her relocation process. When she was asked to explain what vocational exchange means, she explained: “Emmm exchange student in terms of vocational work, rather than studying. Emmmm, I came here for the sake of that and I have been here ever since.” Abla further clarified that this programme usually involves host families who welcome students, and also, host employers who train students for a period of 12 months.

When Abla completed the vocational exchange study program in the year 2000, she seemed to like Iceland so she decided to stay. She went to the Immigration Office of Iceland to ask if she could stay and fortunately for her, her request was accepted with conditions. The conditions were that she had to travel out of the country for three months for the status to change from student to residency. She did exactly what she was told: “I actually flew to London for about five months, actually four months for my papers to go through, and I came back.”

Ife from East Africa has been living here for more than eleven years, and she explained that she contracted a work permit to come to Iceland to work in one of the hotels in the capital city. When the author asked her how long she intended to stay, she

replied: “Will live longer, if not forever.” Her motivations for moving to Iceland were to work to get higher salary to improve her economic status.

Fatu from West-Africa, had a different story. She had been living in Iceland for about 20 years. She explained that she came to Iceland on a tourist visa and shortly after her arrival at Iceland, a civil war broke out in her country so she applied for extension. She states: “My initial intention of coming to Iceland is to visit; however upon my arrival in Iceland, war broke out in my country so I asked for extension to stay and I have been staying since.” Fatu said that she presented her case to a legal practitioner who assisted her to get her visa extended.

Akua from West-Africa, had been living in Iceland for close to three years and her reason for coming to Iceland was to further her education, but she intends to remain in Iceland because she likes the country. When asked what attracted her to come and study here rather than elsewhere, she responded: “I wanted to know how it feels to be in another school and to see how their education system works. More so to learn more about different places and the culture and different people as well.” The author was curious to find out if Akua had any intention of finding a soul mate in Iceland, just like the other participants. She was not so explicit about her plans for marrying in Iceland, or an Icelandic citizen, however, she commented:

I discovered Iceland through my cousin who lives here with her family. Although, I came to school and must return to my country after the programme, I want to stay because I’m in love with Iceland, so I want to have family and raise my children here because I think Iceland is a cool place to raise children.

Exploring the women’s intention for settling in Iceland, the author discovered, based on the data, that although the ASSA women relocated to Iceland for diverse reasons initially, such as family reunion, work, education, and because of political turmoil, they are now realizing that without getting a higher education in Iceland they cannot work jobs that enable them to improve their economic status. Also, these women want to be recognized and respected in the Icelandic community.

## **4.2 Motivation for Higher Education in Iceland and Field of Specialization**

Immigrants in Iceland face problems with job placement. They accept to work all kinds of unskilled jobs despite their professional qualifications due to language barrier. A major reason leading to this problem is that Icelandic is regarded as the national or the official language of the people of Iceland in order to preserve the purity of the the language.

All the women from the ASSA who were not satisfied with their employment status have diverse reasons that led to their enrolment in higher education. When the author asked the participants what their motivation for seeking higher education in Iceland is, they all gave various reasons for their choices. However, most of them believed that after higher education they would get a better job, and greater income working within the field of their study.

Akinyi mentioned that, for her there were several factors that challenged her towards pursuing higher education in Iceland. First, because she wanted to pursue a master's degree, and to do that she had to study Icelandic language at a higher level and therefore started with a BA in Icelandic as a Second Language. Her secondary reason was to get back to a job that she has a passion for. Akinyi's field of specialization is in International Affairs, and she stated that she went to one of the well-known universities in her country and completed a bachelor's degree in Public Relations. Her BA thesis focused on public relation's importance of internal communication - the difference between the Western world and African countries:

With my background in public relations, my main task where I worked was to help refugee in resettlement. In addition to that I worked at ..., and had the opportunity to travel across all the continents. I have developed a passion for learning from different cultures, regimes and democracies and how states can learn from each other as they are connected in many aspects. International Affairs is easily the best course to learn this principles effectively.

Dodzi said that her motivation for seeking higher education was curiosity. She mentioned that she was curious to experience the European schooling system to

compare with that of her country. Secondly, her motivation for higher education is for future employment purposes. Another reason for pursuing the programme is that the course was taught in English and in the area of education. She mentioned that her field of specialization is education and business: "Education because I like to be part of development of people, and business because I want to make money and also to impact."

Akua who also has a bachelor's degree in from her country of origin, is now pursuing her undergraduate programme in the School of Education, International Studies in Education mentioned that her motivation towards higher education in Iceland is to experience the educational system in Iceland and also to learn the culture and to visit places. She commented: "I wanted to see the education system of another country and pick out what I think is best and see how I can implement it in the education system in my home country."

Bupe who started her higher education in Iceland, declared that she decided to pursue education in business administration in the University because she trained in shorthand office management and had been working as a secretary back in her home country. Because she was interested in business administration, she enrolled in Bifröst University, one of the business administration universities in Iceland. She realized that the programme was very expensive, and therefore she looked into other options and came across Social Education within the School of Education. Bupe emphasized:

As I mentioned before, I enrolled in Bifröst Uni and ... emmm I didn't like it because it was too expensive. I couldn't afford so I decided I will come to UI. After, I went on an exchange program in Copenhagen University and came back to UI to the School of Social Sciences under which I did business administration. When finished, I decided to do what I want to do, so I decided to switch to social education in 2012. I have been studying since eeheem 2009.

Bupe said that her main motivation to learn to become social educator was a family member who has a disability, so she thought this programme would be great to understand and work with people with disabilities as far as impacting the skills and the

knowledge on other people back in her country. She thought that many people from various African countries disregard and disrespect people with disabilities, and therefore treat them with disrespect. Bupe remarked: “disable people need support, they need love just like any normal human being, they are brilliant, you wouldn’t believe it till you got closer to them.”

Fatu explained that her motivation for higher education was first of all self-motivation. She thought that to be able to get a lucrative job in Iceland one would have to go to school. Another reason was to investigate how things work here. She explained that she knows how to create things, for example creating designs and to sew clothes but she did not know how to do it academically, theoretically or methodologically structured so she first of all enrolled in a vocational school in Reykjavík. That is how she started school in Iceland. Also, her previous employer, who was lecturing at the UI, then informed her that there are courses at the UI that she could take to enhance her Icelandic and from there she could take courses of her choice. She thought there was so much sense in what the former employer told her, and therefore, she decided to take on the challenge to go to school. She enrolled in the UI Iceland to study Icelandic as a Second Language.

Abla had a different idea about her motivation for furthering her education at the UI. Abla, after migrating to Iceland, was attracted to business courses. Her dream was to further her education in business, therefore she took the initiative to pursue this programme when the opportunity came. She remarked:

I actually have an interest in business. And I actually went to a few courses in business outside the university while in Iceland and when I got my job in a hotel, in a hotel that I have been working in ten years ago, I decided that I will like to pursue the degree. The opportunity was, it never came along the years but somehow about few years ago, I took the decision that I will take few courses, taking it as slow as possible and pursue this dream of earning a degree.

Ife, a journalist in her home country is also motivated to further her education in Iceland. When asked what her motivations are, she said: “I want it to get a better job,

better pay, and to empower myself. Also, people can listen to you and respect you when you have higher education.” She identified that her level of Icelandic was not high enough to pursue courses that are taught in Icelandic, so she decided from the start to take courses in English. She enrolled in English Literature and Linguistics programme in the faculty of Humanity. When the researcher asked for the reason for choosing English courses only, she responded: “Because I studied journalism in my country and I feel this is the only course I can do to improve my status. I can’t do courses in Icelandic, no, not academic Icelandic, too difficult.”

My participants mentioned different motivational factors that led to their interest in higher education in Iceland. The unifying factor for all of them was to explore more job opportunities. Their motivation is also driven by their previous educational background. For example, Dodzi has a background in teaching so she enrolled in a teaching programme to compare the experience in Iceland to that of the settings in her country. Dodzi and Ife are both interested in higher education to enable them to explore better job opportunities in Iceland. Bupe has a background in business administration, but she diverted to Social Education because of two key factors; the business course was too expensive for her, and secondly a family member in Africa is a disabled so she developed interest in social education that she could impact in others back in Africa the significance of social education. Aku is also interested in education for her future career. Akinyi wanted to maintain her status in public relations. In brief, all the participants have a specific interests for higher education since they believe that through higher education they can explore better job opportunities. However, the participants faced significant barriers in their studies as will be discussed in the next section.

### **4.3 Academic Challenges Faced**

Relocating and studying in a different culture can be challenging for international students and women from ASSA are no exception as evidenced by the current study’s participants who faced academic challenges. The informants mentioned three main challenges they faced during their studies. These include language of teaching, students

and teacher collaboration, and racial discrimination. First, the UI language policy emphasizes Icelandic language to be the number one language of instruction. This is to encourage and promote the use of the Icelandic language in all academic fields (University of Iceland, 2016). Lack of language proficiency has contributed to foreign students' tending to exclude themselves from the majority of class activities and course work, and this impacts negatively on their academic performance. Second, the problem of student and teacher collaboration in the school settings is a challenge faced by ASSA women studying in the university. Lastly, the students were faced with racial discrimination during class activities. Women from the ASSA perceived that some indigenous students and teachers are prejudiced against them and they are verbally attacked, and they find the experience daunting to promote student - teacher collaboration. These themes are discussed below.

#### **4.3.1 Lack of Language Proficiency**

A vital cultural heritage of the Icelandic society is Icelandic language. A section of the language policy of the university points out that Icelandic should be made the default language for all work in the University. Seemingly, UI is one of the international academic communities which participates in collaboration in the fields of teaching, research, and administration (University of Iceland, 2016). However, due to the university's international status, UI needs a universal language, which is English to be able to achieve its objectives as a member of the international community. To this end, UI uses English as an international language to allow smooth participation of international staff and students of the university, and as result, some courses are taught in English and the students who are taking courses taught in Icelandic can be allowed to take exams, write and present assignments in English.

Although foreign students are given the options to take exams or to present assignments in English, they face some other academic problems. For example, the ASSA women pursuing courses taught in Icelandic complained that for them to pass each course and do it well, they have to really go slow and use various software techniques like Google Translate and Íslensk-ensk orðabók (Icelandic Online Dictionary and Readings) to translate unfamiliar vocabularies. Others discussed seeking help from

their partners or husbands, or other students to interpret assignments for them. However, the participants reported this was difficult as it created extra work for their husbands or partners or made them dependent on the good will or interest of school mates. Dodzi, admitted that even though her husband did not complain about helping her with translations and computer programmes for her school assignments, she felt uncomfortable asking for help very often. She commented: "I used my husband most often to assist me in courses that I took in Icelandic, but very often I felt really bad, really really bad for giving him more responsibilities."

For those who were pursuing degree courses and the language of instruction was Icelandic, their struggle was with the Icelandic language. Although students get support in terms of using course materials on English and are also allowed to submit assignments in English, they still have to work extra hard to catch up with the rest of the class. For instance, they have to improve their Icelandic and prove to their teachers that they understand the advance terminologies used in the various fields such as social sciences, international affairs and in business. Akinyi stated:

Currently doing my master's programme, the challenges are mostly language. International affairs has a really advanced language usage, my first semester I had to begin with Icelandic history, so obviously I worked twice as much more than native students.

Fatu's story was perhaps one of the clearest illustration of the language gap. Fatu remembered how she started her programme in Icelandic as a Second Language, and as she entered her second year of her graduate programme (i.e. learning to become a Social Educator), she discovered more interesting programmes that she had been attracted to. In the beginning, she believed her level of Icelandic was good enough so she decided to pursue a programme in relation to social work, as she believed she was good at listening to people, and quick at solving family issues. Fatu was confident about her knowledge in Icelandic, so she switched to the Faculty of Social Work where she faced great challenges. Before she registered for the courses, she was informed that most of the courses were taught in English. After she started the program she realised that there was a big gap in her Icelandic language skills and the learning requirements.

Fatu admitted: “And I felt challenged at that time that the education system that I’m used to in my country is not the system is here.” Her major fear was that the indigenous students at UI were not very social, especially with foreign students. Fatu stressed that realizing this gave her the strength at that point in time to strategize her mode of learning to enable her to fill in the language gap. For Fatu, writing assignments in Icelandic was overwhelming:

I felt that I was making the grades but it’s just a grade of pass. But I didn’t let it discourage me, you know. I’m like, as in my mind I still know what is going on, even though I could not go and pass exams. So anyhow, I was there, I didn’t make it. Like I was saying, I am making the grades but it wasn’t strong enough.

Dodzi on the other hand has a slightly different opinion about Icelandic language usage at school. She remarked that there was no language barrier although lessons are taught in Icelandic. According to her, main vocabularies were always given in English, and she speaks some Icelandic therefore it was easy to participate and she always enjoys the lessons.

The participants overall emphasised language proficiency as one of the challenges affecting their adjustment and relationship with the rest of the students, and as a result affecting their academic performances. The participants found in general that Icelandic students they encountered with were not ready to spend time with the foreign students even during group work. This will be discussed in details in the chapter 4.3.2.

#### **4.3.2 Student and Teacher Collaboration**

In my examination of how the students perceived the value of socio-academic interaction in their learning processes, it was evident that, most students affirmed that sharing knowledge and challenges does not only build collaboration skills but also leads to deeper learning, understanding and greater success. However, a striking hindrance observed by the ASSA women was the issue of the lack of acceptance of foreign students, who study courses taught in Icelandic, into working groups or teams. Foreign students’ inability to communicate either fairly or fluently in the language of their recipient country and at the university weakens their effective collaboration and team

work; they could hardly find native students who were willing to work with them. Another hindrance is that, some teachers fail to acknowledge the need for and organize inclusive classroom atmosphere whereby student–teacher collaboration or student–student collaboration teaching strategy is encouraged, to empower those foreign students who are striving to study in the default language.

Even though participants who took courses in Icelandic complained about language barriers in selecting preferred courses, they admitted that the majority of their lecturers offered quality education and were very supportive except a very few of them who did not understand why foreign students who were not perfect speakers of Icelandic should enrol in courses taught in Icelandic. Participants who took courses in Icelandic mentioned that they did not have enough self-confidence to engage in discussions in class and usually hesitated to participate in debates because of fear of making grammatical errors.

However, students who were pursuing courses in Icelandic language, including Akinyi acknowledged that teachers do take into consideration their language defects and allow them to hand in their course works and to take exams in English. They also added that some of their teachers have gone as far as sending them English links on school materials that have only been in Icelandic. The participants agree that the challenges arise in class, when they have lots of debates, games, presentations and discussions all taking place in Icelandic. Akinyi narrated her experiences with her colleagues and teachers:

I think I make fool of myself here, and there lol but thankfully the attitude towards me from my teachers and students has been nothing but positive. Some have gone as far as congratulating me for being so disciplined. I am getting good grades so I guess I must be doing something right! I think because I am not proficient in Icelandic, the teachers are forgiving.

Bupe expressed that when it was time for class discussions and other class activities, she struggled really hard to make her points due to her limited Icelandic language skills; however, she states that this does not stop her from participating. She confidently

indicated: "I participate in class, and if I am not very confident about how to say something to make some sense I switch to English language and my colleagues listen to me." However, she was proud to say that she makes good grades and that explains that she gets equal treatment just like the native Icelandic students. Abla had a similar experience with her business programme but her story is slightly different. She stated:

When it comes to the negative, yes due to negative problems. In degree is the language. Especially me, this is something I struggle with when it comes to the sciences. I have to be ... I'm forced to be a bit slower than others due to the sciences because not only am I learning what they are teaching in a degree in Icelandic, but also I am learning the terms in Icelandic of what they are teaching. It's a double edge sword for me, and it turns to be very difficult and I must admit that it's extra hard work, as well as extra dedication to be able to eehhh to be able to overcome these challenges.

Abla emphasized:

I have some that do not care really. Yes, I do write exams in English, not all of them but at least I sat for three exams that are in Icelandic. They were difficult, they were extremely difficult, and I have to admit that I failed two of them because of that, yes I failed. And I am working on the challenges. I have to repeat those two courses, and I am working on the challenges. That's what I'm doing.

When the author asked how she felt after failing these two exams, she admitted that she was thinking of giving up for a really long time but she looked at other foreigners who have done it and she said to herself, "if they could do it, then I can do it as well." I was curious to find out from Abla if she made any attempts to confront the problems. She acknowledged that it was all her fault in the beginning in the sense that she did not demand from her lecturer that she wanted to take these exams in English. Meanwhile, before she went for her resit, she tried to negotiate with the lecturer to give her some past questions in Icelandic for her to practice on, but he declined her request. The researcher was curious to know if she believed she was treated equally to other students, her response was:

Emmmm I think I do. But again the perception in the beginning ... I have to prove myself. I must say that the perception that always when they look at me and that this girl does not speak Icelandic, things will not go well.

Abla acknowledged that in all the negative experiences she had with her colleagues she believed that she got a reasonable treatment from most teachers. She commented:

It's not bad at all. But there is that perception, there is a perception that ummmm maybe she is not understanding, okay which to a certain extent, maybe what I'm saying but I think he could be right. But only because it takes longer for me to understand it, not because I'm not understanding but rather it took me long to understand it so well then next of the class is understanding, I am still getting there so by the time I'm getting there, he's already on the next.

All the participants acknowledged that lecturers were very considerate when it comes to writing assignments. They admitted that their lecturers allowed them to submit assignments in English. When asked if exams were also allowed in English, their responses were different. Some were given English papers to write while few others were not allowed to write their exams in English. Those who wrote their exams in Icelandic expressed some dissatisfaction about the outcome of the exams. Akinyi emphasized her appreciation for the support from her lecturers:

Fortunately, I have been very lucky to have amazing professors, having studied in two faculties, Icelandic as a second language where all students are either foreigners or second generation Icelanders. I was the only African in all courses in Icelandic, the teachers were fair, and often very understanding. I studied while pregnant and I received exceptional support even on days that I questioned why I am taking the course.

Abla also thinks that the University is very supportive in the fact that the curriculum is wide and it has a range of choices, and very interesting. She also thinks that it covers all the basics of business in a comprehensive manner. She notes that the UI is providing an extremely wonderful choice in what to learn in business. Abla, after completing her first academic year at UI believed that the administration provides resources that are very supportive especially for students who have Icelandic as a second language. She

mentioned that she was happy about some teachers' efforts to feed international students with information about how to organize their learning and where to fetch information during the course of their learning. Some also explained to foreign students who are studying courses taught in Icelandic that they could request for assignments and exams in English language if they so wished:

For example, most of the lecturers, not all of them but most ... ehhs turns to emmm, provide exams in both languages: Icelandic and English. And as well as they turn to provide a system where needed in regards to learn more in case you have a problem in Icelandic language. They provide a version or advice in extra training on English, or they give you a feedback on where to go on the same course in English.

Students facing this kind of academic problems are not interested in joining their peers in class, but rather stay at home to focus on how to finish their assignment. Fatu commented that she was not going to some classes, she needed to catch up with assignments: "Like I was saying those classes I could not attend, I really didn't pass those courses." Fatu said that she had been advised by one of her course lecturers to seek counselling at the time and that was very helpful. She said that she had been advised to take English courses that would strengthen her English. She acknowledged that when she took some English courses from the School of Education, she noticed that both teachers and students were very helpful when it came to assignments and group activities compared to her own department.

Here, Dodzi pointed out that she felt she did not get equal treatment because her knowledge in using the Microsoft Windows 7 computer was quite challenging. Also, there were times when she felt she had been marked down on assignments by some teachers. The researcher wanted to investigate this further to understand if Dodzi had a problem relating to her teachers, and she replied: "I have a great relationship with all my teachers in exception of two teachers who are also foreigners."

When the author asked Abba about her relationship with lecturers and student colleagues, this was her respond:

No, I have not had any cordial relationship with any specifically because the nature of my classes does not make it possible: the class is full of working people who are always in a rush to go. Most of the students are not young, but rather working people with families and there are really no interactions. The only time they really get close is during group discussions periods. Because it's only five weeks for us to meet and after there is no chance you see each other again because people take courses according to what they need.

Akinyi did not take students who discriminate based on color as serious people. She jokingly stated:

Are there any particularly unique experiences that stand out? When you are a tall black girl with big afro hair, you definitely stand out in Háskóli Íslands, fortunately, I add on warmth into this cold country, this is what I have been told by my peers and professors as well.

Akua who is studying education, had also not experienced any language barrier when it came to teaching and learning because she took her courses in English. She remarked that what she had experienced so far was how to learn and study or collaborate with her peers in class, and this helped her to learn not only about herself but other cultures and people, and also to respect one another. When I asked if she faced any language problem, segregation or racial discrimination at the university, she responded: "Not really because most of the students I'm in class with are foreigners and the language used is English so everything is ok." Akua indicated that her only adjustment problem was that some of the lectures began as early as 08:30, which was a bit challenging for her.

The data collected indicate that the participants, especially those who took courses taught in Icelandic, were unhappy about students' collaboration in the university setting. They perceived that if the relationship between foreign students and indigenous students were good enough, they would have struggled less to fit into work groups, and thereby gain the confidence to speed up the language learning. The women also commented that they were unhappy about some lecturers who appeared to be unsupportive, and blame the students for not selecting the suitable courses. The

next chapter explores how higher education in Iceland affects the lives of the ASSA women.

### **4.3.3 Racial Discrimination**

Women from ASSA tend to exclude themselves during class activities because of the perception that native students discriminate against them racially. They complained that when it comes to group discussions, some white students do not want to include black students. They usually would start giving flimsy excuses, which show their intentions of not being interested in working with black students.

From the data gathered, some participants complained about their fellow students' attitude when it was time for group discussions. Ife was unhappy about an experience she had with some students. She said that some indigenous students and Eastern-Europeans sometimes exhibited certain attitudes to show that they are not interested in working with foreign students, especially the black ones: "This discrimination does not come from Icelandic students in general, it has come from my group, the study groups, the group work, but it is rare, temporary."

Abla had a bitter experience with one of the adult women whom she thought that would sympathize and applaud her for her braveness, but this woman reacted negatively to her during one of the group activity sessions. She commented:

Although, if they do see that I'm making an input, they judge before they get to know me. I remember the very group work that I had, the very last one I had eh-h-h when I asked the group if I can join them, the first reaction that I get, was from one of the ladies asking, are you going to show up for this group work? But it's group work, you know almost suggesting that I would not be dedicated enough. Yet this woman did not know me. This was our first lesson, this was our first class, and you know, we ... I was not emmm dedicated as she was in the group work, which has really really annoyed me.

Abla said that in their first group work where every student was supposed to choose a group partner, she asked a course mate if they could work together as a group but the woman undermined her intelligence by passing a rude comment. She said that the

comment made by this woman made her so upset and really affected her self-esteem, as well as affecting her performance in the course:

You know, it had its problems but we finally did everything, we passed the group work, and it's finished and I'm happy to say that it went well. In fact, the objective was reached, was achieved but the process was extremely difficult.

Ife confirmed that she had experienced racial discrimination in her class where the majority of the class are non-native speakers. She emphasised:

This time around, it was not from native Icelanders but another immigrant from Russia. She accused us blacks as lazy people.

She also thinks that students on campus do not warm up to people of black race because they perceive them as totally different people.

#### **4.4 Impact of Higher Education**

Most of the participants had completed their first degree and started working in their chosen professions in their countries of origin, before they relocated to Iceland. The status they once attained had challenged the ASSA women to chase higher education in Iceland in order to reclaim their self-confidence and to empower themselves in the Icelandic society as a whole.

The author asked the respondents to talk about whether the university has any positive impact on them, and all of them confidentially responded positively. Akinyi stated:

Yes, I have learned so much, but more so as I mentioned earlier because my course deals with international issues, current issues, I offer real examples that are not just on text books, which I think it's an add on.

Dodzi also acknowledged that the university had a great impact on her. Nevertheless, she stated that her attitude towards life has completely changed:

Now, I analyse situations very well taking facts into consideration before making a conclusion. Also, the university empowered me with the knowledge I am using

today in establishing my business and impacting on others. In fact, the university is what has given me the future that I am building for myself now.

Bupe is also very happy to have seized this opportunity to further her education. She acknowledged that higher education in Iceland had positive impacts on her in many ways, most especially in the field of disability studies:

It impacted so much on me. It helps me to understand better students with all forms of disability disorders. For example, autistic disorders and most of these students that are with intellectual disorders. It also educated me as to how to assist fellow Africans who have disability children and they do not know where to seek assistance.

Abla was also on similar page with the other students: "I think the uni first of all has given me an opportunity, which is extremely positive. The fact that I have an opportunity to eeh increase my studies, you know." She disputed the point that immigrants in Iceland tend to believe that they cannot further their education because of the Icelandic language being used as medium of instruction. She pointed out that UI gives so much resources to support students despite the language barrier, which is a very good thing. There are numerous courses which are taught in English especially in the faculty of education. Abla added:

I think it is extremely important, it is a very good thing that the uni is doing, eh, they have made English the basically legal language and I think a lot of people don't know they're doing this. Is a legal language in the UI but, I think my experience with the uni perhaps is great because I have the opportunity to study, and I am very happy with that.

Abla added that five years ago, she was looking for accounting courses to take but because of her level of Icelandic two schools rejected her application. Luckily, one school accepted her, and she did the programme and she passed it well: "That gave me the job in the hotel that I'm working in now, and that is why I said I'm going to pursue a degree in business."

The researcher was curious to find out if the participants are willing to continue with their education despite all their hassles. It was noticed that they have different interests. Akinyi who is pursuing her graduate degree, thinks she will not seek further education. Abla who is a graduate student, is aiming for an MBA degree: “That is definitely my dream. Emmmm because it is such a delicate situation of studying, but I’m focusing on finishing the little steps. You know, yeah, MBA will be very good for me, even if I’m 60 (big smile).” Dodzi remarked:

I have not decided whether I will go further than PhD for as at the moment I am overwhelmed with workload from my business and that has slowed down on my studies. So as at the moment, I can’t tell where I stand in regard to going higher on my studies. You never know, even though we are struggling but you never know until maybe after that.

Although Dodzi is an advocate for women’s empowerment for higher education and has been studying all her life, she also explained that attending school throughout one’s life time is boring. She remarked:

It’s not just school! You need a school, but it’s not the most important. When you are a teenager, you need something so as to start in the labour market but we have something. “Ese gamea?” You know what I mean!

Despite the academic challenges encountered at the university, the women were very enthusiastic about completing their programmes. They believed that after their programmes, they would find better jobs which could change their status socially and economically. The chapter below explores what precisely the expectations of ASSA women towards the future are.

#### **4.5 Hopes and Expectations after Higher Education in Iceland**

In the data presented above, ASSA women talked about their goal with obtaining higher education in Iceland. This chapter explores further the women’s hopes and expectations after graduation.

When asked about their hopes with regards to the Icelandic labour market, the author got different responses. Akinyi's main goal was to influence policy making to resolve gender issues in Africa:

I would like to work parallel to the government, but maybe also with the government should I find something fascinating. But my main goal is to form an NGO or policy making especially with African countries in gender issues and human rights movements.

According to Dodzi, when she completed her graduate programmes at the UI followed by her MBA from the UR, she was still struggling to find a job that is related to her field of study:

Before I started with my studies, I was hoping to find work after studies. But the reality of the difficulties in finding work challenged me into building my own business. Establishing ones business, I am able to learn so much from it and in the process of establish another one which is service oriented. So yes, my hopes were not realised, but rather, through the challenge, it has opened a bigger door for me, all because through my education, I am able to analyse situations better and making the most out of every failure.

Bupe also mentioned that she's already working within the desired field, and she is very happy about her courage in furthering her education. She explained that she took an 80% job position as a social educator for Reykjavik City working with autistic children, and she got good remuneration: "I am already in the Icelandic labour market with what I like to do (smile)." Abla on the other hand had a different view, and she shared her intentions:

Actually my strategy is to finish my education and go back home. Emm, I think my biggest fear is to go back home without my education. That is my biggest fear and I'm not interested in doing that. That is my biggest fear. And I think that is, what drives me is the fact that when I do finish I can go back home and I can settle.

Fatu and Abla shared the same opinion of going back to their home countries to establish themselves. The author wanted to find out from Abla what she meant by

going back home to settle, and what she was going to work with there: “Yeah, may be to help others or teach. I think the two things that are keeping me here is my education and of course my daughter.” Abia explained that her daughter is just eight, and by the time she expects to finish her MBA, her daughter will probably be a grown woman, so she would either leave her here or she could come with her and continue studying in their home country. Contrarily, Ife had quite a different view. She commented: “Oh no! If I have to go back home, unless the president of my country offered me a job in the government, then I can consider that but no.” Ife emphasized her statement:

No, I’m not making a joke, I’m being serious here. If I got a job in the government, literally in the government with the ruling party, then yes, I will consider going back home, less than that, no! I’m saying this because I love politics and I think that is what I want. Back home that is what I want to be. Home is where your heart is, my home is my children and my children are with me in Iceland.

When asked if the participants had any regrets considering the struggle to further their education, they all responded that they had no regrets. Akinyi remarked: “Absolutely not. I only wish I could have done it sooner.” According to Dodzi, she did not regret her decision at all, and she said: “Not at all, if not anything, I’m really thankful I have this education.” She pointed out that although she had disappointments when searching for a job, it all contributed to projecting her career and she questioned:

Should I change something for anything? May be I can change that I can do things faster, but I, (silence) no, I seriously can’t change anything. The people that are mean to me are forgiven.

When Ife was asked whether she regretted her action in pursuing higher education in Iceland, she emphasized: “Not at all, it is worth it going to school to upgrade and empower oneself.” Bupe with a cheerful smile stated: “No regrets at all. I am very grateful for the opportunity, I achieved a lot.”

When the author asked if the respondents had any intentions of relocating to their home countries after their degrees, they shared different views. Akinyi responded: “Only if I find employment that can support myself, kids and husband, everything is

possible in my line of studies.” Dodzi intended to relocate to her country in her 60s although she likes Iceland: “I love Iceland, but I will certainly go and settle back in my country in my 60s.” Dodzi further explained: “I feel more at home now in Iceland than Ghana. Even though I don’t speak fluent Icelandic, when I’m thinking now I think I fit in, but I have to go back in my old age. When the author sought to understand why she’s moving back to her country in her 60s even though she likes Iceland, she replied:

I don’t want my children to throw me into the nursery home, honestly. I work with the elderly and I realize how lonely they get. Back home, elderly people are happier when they get older in their family homes, they are always surrounded by loved ones.

Bupe and Akua gave different reasoning about their intention to return to their sending countries as they noted that they really loved Iceland and they perceived Iceland as their home. However, Bupe said:

One main reason I will go home is may be to go and introduce to my people how to handle people with disability. Most of them are highly intelligent, they need just a bit of support to unearth their talents.

When I asked my respondents what advice they had for other ASSA women who have not yet started their education in Iceland, the respondents gave similar advice. Dodzi advised that:

If you have even the slightest interest to advance your education and are not afraid to do it in Icelandic please check the Háskóli program, visit the school to get advice. I hope that in the future they will introduce more English courses. You find support and understanding if you are a mother like me, if you have studying challenges like dyslexia or exam fever or if you work shifts, you can do it gradually, as I did took a year off maternity leave and resumed back.

Dodzi said that she would advise ASSA women that Iceland is full of opportunities, so they should take advantage of the no tuition fees of the nation’s university, and get a quality education that is available in the country and empower themselves with higher education, as this would equip them with skills

and knowledge for a better future. She explained further that the women can get refunded from their unions, and get education to better themselves, and enlighten themselves. And also, to have the tools so that when the opportunities come they could jump on them. She made a good analysis:

Because you know, like things are going now and you are to go back home. What are you going to do if you have no education, no business skills? I mean, wherever you go with education, you have the skills, the competence, you can fit right in. But business without mentality makes no sense.

Ife is encouraging fellow ASSA women to go to school: "Start from somewhere, a diploma, etc. You can do it, it is not too difficult. You can get all kinds of assistance to pursue your education, it is priceless. Go for it." Ife again acknowledged:

It takes a lot of courage to decide to go back to school in Iceland because when one considers how much work he did back home, how much time schooling he did because you wasted time as one is in Iceland.

Ife emphasized that mothers especially need to show good example to their children. They should be role models for their children's future. They need to show their children that they can create opportunities for their children to also pursue their education to the highest level. She explained that going to school is about feelings, therefore her only plea to ASSA women in Iceland with regards to education is to ask them to gather the courage to go to school. She explained that doing cleaning jobs for a living is not a crime but people need to empower themselves with education which their children can emulate. Ife shared a joke:

When I moved here, someone told me a story that I would never forget. Her kid was asked at school, what does your mother do? She answers, "Mamma mamma skura." It's a joke, there is no shame in doing that but when you stay here for 5, 8, 10 years, unless you are a very big fan of cleaning, you gonna show your kids that you can read books, it's ok to do that.

Abla has a different view about educating oneself. She advised that educating oneself in a foreign land, especially in Iceland is not as easy as one would think. It can be very demanding; mentally and physically, it is exhausting. She commented:

I mean eeeeh, to tell you the truth, education is not for everyone. Some people want to pursue, some people don't want. But I think those that want to pursue, I say is, what I want to say is don't give up! Keep up the passion. Know that it is a difficult battle, know that it is a very hard battle but you do win the war by getting a degree.

It is interesting to find out that the majority of the participants are motivated to continue their education in Iceland based on their previous educational background. Findings show that not all of these women have Icelandic husbands. This might have a greater influence on their language skills and motivation towards their participation in higher education in Iceland. From the interviews, these women have gained different experiences of immigration. The data revealed that four out of the women obtained bachelor's degrees in their sending countries, while the rest had diploma education and other certificates before migrating to Iceland. The majority of the women gained at least three years' work experience from their various countries before their relocation. Four of them were in full-time employment when they relocated to Iceland, but the other three were just fresh from college when they moved to Iceland. In brief, the women were empowered towards higher education to gain professional recognition for full participation in the labour market of Iceland.

## 5 Discussion

In the previous chapter, the women's participation in the study was described and explored with emphasis on the main objectives of this study, which was to gain insight into the achievements, challenges and constraints that women from the ASSA encountered in trying to attain higher education at the UI. Themes were developed and supported by the interviews and literature review of the study. Themes that were developed include language proficiency, racial discrimination at school, equity education, knowledge expansion, empowerment and transformation, lost employment opportunities, and hopes and expectations of women from the ASSA after graduating from the UI.

The women from ASSA migrated to Iceland for various reasons, without considering the language of the host country. Although these women individually listed four reasons for their relocation to Iceland, the study reveals that their principal aim was to relocate to Iceland, work and improve their economic and social status. Additionally, fundamental reasons such as marital, further studies abroad, employment opportunities, and political unrest were mentioned.

All the participants acknowledged that their main motivation for seeking higher education in Iceland was to gain better recognition to their previously attained degrees, as well as gaining access to fully participate in the Icelandic labour market. In addition, higher education degrees can ensure them higher salaries, which will improve their economic and social status. They also believe that attainment of higher education attracts greater respect, and can also boost the aspirations of ASSA women's children for attaining university degrees in the future.

For these women to achieve their goals, they were encouraged to participate in the state's university in Iceland (UI), which they found very affordable. In the process, they confront many academic challenges that are discussed below.

## 5.1 Language Proficiency

In reference to the language policy of the University of Iceland (2016), the university emphasizes Icelandic as the written and spoken language of the university specifically in teaching, research or administration work. The significance is to promote the development and encourage students to use and maintain the value of the Icelandic language. Language proficiency is a major academic challenge faced by ASSA women studying at the UI. The participants who migrated from ASSA to Iceland have encountered very similar academic challenges in their higher education attainment. Despite this, their experience of school culture at the university varied. The results of the current study reveal that all the women face challenges in their attempt to complete courses taught in Icelandic language. Evidence show that four of the participants started their programmes in Icelandic, and one of them switched to English Department due to language limitation problem. According to 'Ugla' the University of Iceland's website, UI is part of the International Academic Community (IAC). University of Iceland (2016) therefore, recognizes English as essential in the work of the university. This statement, as indicated in the language policy of the university, also guarantees students, both native and foreign the free choice of programmes taught in English, but does not limit them to choosing only between courses taught in Icelandic. Although foreign students are not under any obligation to choose courses taught in Icelandic, some students maintained that their fields of specialization can only be found in courses taught in Icelandic, and they are hopeful that after graduation, they will get employment. Consequently, three participants maintained that studying in Icelandic is very difficult academically, and they needed to work harder than other students; twice as hard to achieve good grades. Stalker (1994) identifies language as the most immediate barrier facing the modern-day immigrants, i.e. the inability to communicate in the local language. Stalker (1994) maintains that for a foreigner to find a job, get education or gain access to benefits of the host country, one must have the skills to communicate in the host country's language. It could be a good idea that foreign students are taught language learning strategies such as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) (Wlodkowski, et al., 1995). Wlodkowski et al. (1995) explain BICS as a social language that assists learners to participate in everyday

informal, and conversational exchange. This skill will equip learners to interact both at school and in any working and social environment.

Akinyi, Bupe and Abla, who are taking their courses in Icelandic, admitted that although they speak Icelandic on daily bases and have no difficulty with communication, they perceive academic Icelandic language as difficult compared to other languages they have learned. The idea of taking courses in Icelandic is very challenging for immigrants who have very limited knowledge about the language. On the contrary, the other three participants who are studying programmes in English have already taken some courses that are taught in Icelandic. Their experiences with the language are the same, although, Dodzi testified that her lecturers usually provide key words in English language, which helps her a great deal to follow the lecture. In brief, all the participants rated the Icelandic language as the major impediment for selection of desired courses and active class participation.

Akinyi remarked that as she is doing her master's programme in International Affairs now, her challenges are mostly language related. She argued that International Affairs does indeed require advanced language usage. Unfortunately, she had to take Icelandic history in her first semester of the programme, therefore she needed to work twice as much as the indigenes. Four of the participants agreed that their challenges arise in class, where they have lots of debates, games, presentations and discussions going on in Icelandic. Akinyi remarked that sometimes she thinks she makes a fool of herself during debates, but student colleagues and her teachers give her positive encouragement and she is very grateful for that. She admitted that she is not proficient in Icelandic but she gets good grades, and that is very encouraging. Bupe admitted that during class discussions and other class activities, she struggles with her limited Icelandic language abilities, but she pushed herself through the process by sometimes using English to make her points clearer. Abla also dismissed the fact that not all Icelandic teachers have that capability to support learners in that manner. She stated that one of her lecturers told her that if her Icelandic is not good, then his class is not the best place for her. For her, this open confrontation is demoralizing, and she almost dropped-out of the course. Schools are often the site of some of the most serious

friction with the host community – with arguments about the crowding of schools by immigrants and the intrusion of alien cultures (Stalker, 1994). Although accommodating immigrant students in the mainstream classroom for many teachers is like working double, educators must bear in mind that when immigrant's performance in the school setting performance is very low it will result in a fall in educational standards.

Although, these participants acknowledged that the majority of lecturers are considerate in allowing foreign students to turn in assignments in English and also allowed to take exams in English, the other participants' statements reveal that the women still struggle to assimilate with indigenes and get some help because some indigenes' attitude towards immigrants in class are appalling. The majority of the women recognized that before one could take courses in Icelandic and pass with good grades, they would need to work extra hard and use software to translate unfamiliar vocabularies. Also, women whose husbands are Icelanders sometimes get help from their partners, and those who do not have Icelandic husbands or partners need to seek help elsewhere; either from class mates or other friends. The women described that most indigenes are unfriendly and unapproachable, so approaching them for assistance is always the hardest decision to make.

There are indications that ASSA women are letting their fears go, and mastering courage to enrol in universities to empowerment, however, there are still underlying obstacles blocking them from reaching their desired goals. It is important to critically investigate, understand and find solutions to the challenging issue of language barrier and the negative school cultures these foreign women face daily in trying to improve their status.

## **5.2 Discrimination and Social Isolation in the School Community.**

When immigrants are denied equal rights and equal treatment, they usually feel agitated and experience racial discrimination. For example, some local people react negatively to immigrants and shout negative comments at them in the malls, offices, work places, and even at the school premises. It is a very uncomfortable situation when one experiences discrimination and rejection, then many questions come to mind: "is it

because I look different biologically?” “Yes, I think it’s because I’m black,” is the usual response from blacks. Martinot (2000) argues that the term *race* already puts us in a dilemma of misconception. The author critiques that it is racism that makes reference to biological differences for the purposes of suppression to campaign for opportunities and benefits for itself. In brief, many people refer to such wicked acts as racial attack. As Stalker (1994) designates, racially based attacks are by no means confined to Europe. Stalker points out that this behaviour usually brings resentment, tension and major clash if the minority could no longer accommodate the unspoken resentment (Stalker 1994). Arguably, scientific research discloses there is no more than one human race; the human race is just the only one, as Kwame Appiah maintains in (Stundstrom, 2003) race is illusory. Which means that race is not real, but socially constructed by a group of people.

Abla in her interview described the oldest classmate, who asked her with aggression whether she was going to show up for the group work, prejudiced against her because of her skin colour. The participant grumbled and said that this woman’s attitude affected her participation in the group exercise, she kept thinking about the incident as unfair. Stalker (1994) refers to race as just one way of selecting a particular group to be scapegoated. Racial issues are sensitive and they prompt conflict, prejudice, discrimination, and segregation. Race is a red-flag issue (Piazza & Sniderman, 1993). Ife, who is in an English programme confirmed that she had experienced similar prejudice and discrimination in her class even though the majority in that class consists of immigrants. She noted that this time around, it was not from native Icelanders but another immigrant from Russia. She thinks that students on campus do not warm up to people who are black because they perceive them as a totally different creation. Martinot (2000) emphasizes that as far as racism is a lived experience, it is also a social experience that is very widely shared. It is noted that every individual has some form of racism in his/her gene. They usually unveil it when they meet other individuals as a result of insecurity. Martinot states: “There is in us a soil prepared to receive and germinate its seeds the minute we let down our guard.” Stoler (1995) argues that racialized concepts of the bourgeois self were peculiar to the colonies and applicable

there alone. Stoler highlights that the solicitation of race is understood as a rhetorical political strategy. The perception that human race are different causes people to think differently and behave strangely towards one another.

One of the responsibilities of the university is to maintain equity education and offer academic support for foreign/immigrant students. The following chapter discusses available immigrant students' support

### **5.3 Equity Education and Academic Support for Immigrant Students**

One of the aims and objectives of higher education is to provide their students with excellent facilities; both for international and local students to facilitate their learning process. The main agents responsible for providing these facilities are student information services, student registry, counselling, disability and mental health services, other university amenities, centre for career and employment, and support for learning Icelandic language. In addition, disadvantaged students at the university are also entitled to student counselling that deals with issues that are both personal, of family, social, and other pressures factor that may affect students' academic life and performances.

In a multicultural society, cultural communities generally demand various kinds of rights they think they need to maintain their collective identity (Parekh, 2000). Participants believe that the university offers facilities including quality education, which can be achievable through quality teaching. Sometimes students lack information as to where to get help, and it is the responsibility of teachers to recommend guidance services of the institution to assist the affected students if the teachers cannot tackle the situation themselves. Equity education involves inclusive education where every student's needs are being catered for in the mainstream learning environment. Although universities encourage autonomous learning to promote research, students' academic performance depends heavily on teachers.

Fatu acknowledged that when she was lagging behind in her Icelandic courses, one of her teachers invited her to his office, and advised her to speak with the student counselling services for assistance. She said that she acted on his advice and it worked

for her. She has switched to English programmes, which has kept her in the school till date. She admitted that she is happy with her performances ever since, because she has a greater feeling of belongingness than before; belonging referring to feeling accepted and welcomed (Parekh, 2000).

All the participants acknowledged that lecturers are very lenient when it comes to writing assignments and exams. The participants admitted that their lecturers allow foreign students to turn in assignments in English, sometimes exams are provided in English, although not all lectures at UI provide exams in English for the students. Akinyi emphasized her appreciation for the support from her lecturers. She mentioned that she feels she gets equal treatment to other students because she gets good grades. Abla also thinks that the university is very supportive and has very effective and interesting materials. In her opinion, the UI provides extremely wonderful choices of courses of study. Abla also noted that lecturers advise students towards extra materials in English; they direct students as to where they can find English version of the course material. She thought that this is a brilliant support that the university offers to foreign students.

Contrarily, Dodzi's story was slightly different from the others. Because Dodzi takes most courses in English, except a few, she acknowledged that learning in Icelandic for her is always so fun. She said that she never experienced any language problems because most of the main vocabularies are always translated in English. Talking about equal treatment, Dodzi said she has always been marked down by two of her department's lecturers, who also have immigrant status, but she could not testify if their behaviour was race focussed. Also her difficulties using computers in doing assignments was a big issue and she felt she did not get the support she needed. She also pointed out that she experienced some degree of segregation on the social level. Abla also had encountered a language barrier in her business studies when it comes to class participation and this has almost caused her to drop-out of studies. She said that she struggles with the Icelandic academic language, especially in sciences, because learning the terms alone in Icelandic is another hurdle to jump across. She said that although she is proficient in Icelandic, she must admit that learning such a technical

course comes with extra hard work. She admitted that she failed two subjects because she could not give detailed accounts of the exam questions in Icelandic. She said that she takes responsibility for failing those exams because she did not ask the teacher prior to the exam whether she could take it in English or not. Abla stated that the perceptions people conceive about foreigners in class are enormous. First, they think they are lazy to learn the Icelandic language. Secondly, they think maybe they do not understand anything in class, but nobody would be courageous enough to approach you to find out if you understood or not, not even teachers. It is like nobody minds anybody's business, and it is quite sad.

It is evident from the above that some women were having problems handling language issues in their courses. Fatu on the other hand had a hard time with studies in Icelandic when she was studying to become a Social Worker, but she got some help. She argued that the school system that she was used to in her home country has such a different culture to the one here in UI where she noticed that students are not related with one another because the foreign students are always separated from the others. She admitted that she was always late with assignments because she needed to fill a big gap in her Icelandic that caused her to miss some sessions, and this affected her grades and quitting school was becoming an option. She said that her absence in some sessions became noticeable to some of the teachers and she had been advised to seek counselling, which she did and got help. After seeking help she decided to switch to the English Department to help her improve her academic performance. She acknowledged that the English Department especially in the School of Education offers a good learning atmosphere where she noticed a positive attitude from both students and lecturers. According to her, everyone is supportive of one another and nobody is left in isolation. Ife and Akua did all their studies in English, and both of them said they have good relationships with their teachers, and they enjoy parity in the setting.

Internationalization and globalization of education indirectly engage multicultural education since students come from diverse backgrounds. Empowering social and school cultures through the use of the dimensions of multicultural education for students will develop positive racial attitudes and values in them. Multicultural

education involves reconstructing the culture and organization of the school so that students from diverse social, ethnic, and gender groups will experience equality (Banks, 2015). J. A. Banks suggests that the four dimensions of equity education; content integration, knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, and equity pedagogy are necessary to create a relaxing and friendly learning atmosphere for international students. Like any other society, a multicultural society needs a broadly shared culture to be sustainable (Parekh, 2000). To promote a good school culture, all students must respect one another to create a problem solving climate.

#### **5.4 Empowerment and Transformation**

Gender equity dominated the political scene, where many politicians became advocates for female education. The feminist movement continues to be the most powerful force fighting for social justice (hooks, 2015). Today, women in many parts of the world, especially those in the West, have equal rights as their male counterparts; they enter universities and work outside the home. Even though there has been overwhelming growth in tertiary education in ASSA today, there are still disparities in enrolment despite the millennium agenda that focuses on Education for All (EFA). To this end, the women from the ASSA living in Iceland decided to empower themselves with higher education. The women have some education from their home countries but they thought that they needed more exposure and empowerment and as Unterhalten (2005) emphasizes the GAD (Gender and Development) theory, the Post-structuralism, and the Human Development approaches can improve women's social status. In her book, Unterhalten (2005), the GAD theory emphasizes the importance of redistribution of power. Here, equity education, which was lacking in the colonial era in ASSA countries was restored. In a nutshell, all the participants focused on accessing higher education in Iceland to improve their social and economic status. In other words, the ASSA women took action to improve their education, and gradually they are transforming through the knowledge acquired at the university.

Akinyi, admitted that she gained so much knowledge from pursuing this course, more so as her course deals with international issues/current issues, so the university helps her to offer real examples that are not just on text books, which she thinks help a

lot. Bupe is not an exception, she is also thankful for the opportunity to further her education. She acknowledged that higher education helps her to understand students with all forms of disabilities, and she is pleased to have started working within her field of study. Akua also stated that she gained knowledge on practising active collaborative learning from the university which is a positive thing. The Women in Development (WID) approach, which stresses the expansion of education for girls and women (Unterhalter, 2005), is targeted by women development and empowerment whereas education is the main agency. In this vein, the ASSA women in Iceland in recent years are trying to educate themselves to reconstruct their social status.

Abla is also on a similar page as the other students. She remarked that she thinks the university has given her an opportunity that has impacted her life extremely positively. She disputes the argument that immigrants in Iceland cannot pursue their education because most courses are taught in Icelandic. She added that the UI provides lots of resources to support students to break down the language barrier.

Dodzi claims that the university has a great impact on her in the sense that her attitudes towards life have completely changed. She said that she analyses situations very well, taking facts into consideration before reaching a conclusion. Also, the university has had equipped her with the knowledge she is utilizing today in establishing her business, and also impacting on others. She strongly believed that the university is what gave her the future that she is building for myself now. Fatu also agreed that the university has given her the strength to strategize herself towards active learning. She said that she would have dropped-out of school if it hadn't been for the supportive resources available. She confessed that she is working harder than ever and her level of understanding theories are getting better and better.

All the interviewees have different views about furthering their education after completing their current stage. Abla decided that no matter how slow she goes, she is determined to finish her MBA program before her 60s. Akinyi said a masters degree is her target while Bupe is not sure she will go beyond masters or not. Ife and Fatu said that a bachelor's degree is okay for now. Dodzi is not sure if she is seeking further education beyond her Ph.D. programme, and Akua is sure that she'll study beyond

graduate degree. Dodzi argued that when it comes to certain age groups, all is not just about schooling. She added, education is important for everyone, however, it is not the most important. Dodzi recommended that young people need university education to establish themselves in the labour market. As Usher (2009) describes, university or higher education as the highest hierarchy of education where life careers are usually built. Women from the ASSA were motivated towards university education in Iceland because they want to build future career that to open avenues for decent jobs.

## **5.5 Lost Employment Opportunities**

Albeit, higher education is becoming a social label, but it is still a choice. Nonetheless, the advantages of education are enormous; it empowers every individual and increases economic growth when human capital is being produced to decrease unemployment. Education is important in that it confronts social exclusion and creates social benefits for all the parties involved.

Education emphasizes democratic values, equality, and encourages young peoples' participation in societal activities. All the women in the study anticipated that their prospective higher education degrees will ensure them increase recognition when it comes to finding decent jobs, rather than the low-skilled jobs they have been doing since their arrival in the country. Migrants in employment are usually segregated in low-skilled occupations more likely to be over-qualified for their work (International Labour Organization, 2010). The condition of working low-skilled jobs triggers the women's motivation towards attainment of university education. In his study, Rowthorn (2015) identifies that economic factors are the main driving force behind the flow of immigration because low income earners from the East migrate to the West in search of better jobs in order to accumulate savings to survive harsh economic conditions at home (Cross, et al., 2006). The majority of immigrants are obliged to support families in their home countries, therefore they send remittances regularly. As well as language barriers this burden also compel highly educated immigrants to accept any low-skilled occupation.

Others may migrate to their new destinations in search of better schools to change their status, and to build better lives for their children in order to reduce the harsh economic pressure they have been facing back in their countries. A specific context in which female migration takes place from ASSA was investigated by Adepoju (2005). Adepoju analysed SSA as a region characterized by a variety of migration configurations, including cross-border movements, contract workers, labour migrants, and the migration of skilled professionals, refugees, and displaced persons. Before the 20th century, the traditional trend of women migrants was either women migrating as wives or as sex workers. As Stalker (1994) notes, migration involves millions of skilled professional people where more and more female migrants are skilled professionals. It is evident that majority of the women in the study migrated to Iceland for greener pastures. One of the participants who migrated as a contract worker openly admitted that she came to Iceland to work in order to improve her economic status. Two others, who came here as exchange students and decided to stay, were also attracted by the good economical and the political atmosphere the people of Iceland are enjoying hence, their decision to stay put and make some more money. As Mberu (2016) argues, the traditional pattern of male-dominated long-term and long-distance migration within and from Africa is becoming increasingly feminized due to evidence of an increase in female migration trends. Mberu (2016) explains that there is a great number of females who now migrate independently due to their economic needs instead of following their partners. In the current study, the three participants did not just arrived in Iceland as wives. They also secured jobs to support their families both here and abroad (home countries). Cross, et al. (2006) quotes “now also women – increasingly participate in migration as a family survival strategy.” The three women who migrated to Iceland as wives are all professionals from their home countries. Their motivation to obtain higher education in Iceland is a beaming one. Even though, the women found out that most courses are taught in Icelandic, most of them have tested the waters by taking some courses in Icelandic alongside their English courses. Those who could not find their field of specialization in English continue studying in Icelandic despite the challenges. They believe that they stand greater chances in the labour market in the future when they take courses in Icelandic.

Akinyi admitted that she was motivated to seek higher education in Iceland based on two factors. The fact that she already is a bachelor's degree holder from her country Kenya, it is a long standing dream to further her education to obtaining her masters degree in International Affairs. The other reason was to participate in a job she has passion for. Despite the challenges in participating in courses taught in Icelandic language, Akinyi was ready to challenge herself to learn Icelandic as a Second Language to equip herself for the real courses she wanted to study. As Cicourel (1982) argues, it is insufficient to study language or training programmes without any relation to the class stratification system of the country of employment. Most immigrants make some effort to learn the language including those migrants who are there on temporary basis (Stalker, 1994). Stalker points out that the speed of which immigrants learn the local language depends on a number of dissimilar factors, including the country of origin, people's educational backgrounds, and the community one lives in. For example, if an immigrant lives in a community crowded with people who speak the immigrant's mother tongue all the time, the chances of learning the host country's language are very small. Innes et al. (2017) also reveal from their study that majority of immigrants secured employment where people from their country of origin live to enable them communicate fluently in their foreign language. Dodzi's motivation for seeking higher education was basically future employment purposes, as also stated by the first participant. She also admitted that because the course was taught in English and in the field of education, she decided to pursue it. Akua, who also holds a bachelor's degree from her country is now pursuing another undergraduate programme at the university. Her motivation for higher education in Iceland is the chance to experience the educational system in Iceland, and also to learn about Icelandic culture. Bupe who started her higher education in Iceland declared that she decided to pursue a business program at the university because she has training in the subject and had been working as a secretary back in her country. Her field of interest is business administration, therefore she enrolled herself in one of the universities in Iceland where she studied Business Management as her major and switched from this university to the UI to study Social Education at where tuition fees are much cheaper and affordable as compared to her previous university.

The respondents perceive that in order to gain social control, and overcome bias, and discrimination against foreign professionals in the labour market of Iceland, it is important to obtain degrees in one field of specialization in Icelandic universities. Although some of the women obtained professional degrees in their countries, the majority of employers ignore these certificates, but rather exploit these migrants as unskilled labourers because of lack of proficiency in Icelandic language. Additionally, some participants who completed their studies in Iceland and attempted to find jobs in their professions faced challenges of recruitment. The affected participants narrated that everytime they sent job applications to organizations, messages such as: “Því miður verður ekki af ráðningu þinni í þetta sinn, takk fyrir sýndan áhuga.” This literally translates to: “We regret to inform you that you did not get the job, and thank you for showing interest.”

Dodzi maintained that before she started her study, she was hoping to find work after obtaining her degree. But the reality of the difficulties in finding work challenged her into building her own business. Dodzi mentioned that after she established her own business, she realized that the daily running of the business helped her to learn a lot. She announced that she is opening another business, which is service oriented. She also mentioned that even though her hopes for gaining employment were not realised, the challenges she faced has opened a bigger door for her. She emphasised that her success was because through her education, she was able to analyse situations better, and learn from every failure. Apparently, when people are confronted with conflicting situations, they are usually confused and hopeless. Obviously people with higher education qualifications but cannot secure a job to match their qualifications lose their self-esteem. Parris (1982) stresses that the daily stratificational practices and social controls that migrants face in the institutional sectors of their job places is worrying. The situation of experiencing two cultures with constraints of one's country of origin and the receiving country brings about identity problems of ambivalence, alienation and rejection (Cicourel, 1982). Cicourel raises the concern that the education and training of the migrant worker must conform to his labour and employment.

Although majority of the participants acknowledged they love Iceland, they did not preclude plans of moving back to their country of origin (Innes, et al., 2017). However, Ife declared her intention to stay longer, perhaps forever because of her children. She explained that her children are Icelanders and she needs to be here in Iceland to support them. Akua, on the other hand strongly maintained that Iceland is her home that she has come to stay. Bupe loves Iceland and would like to remain here forever, but her only concern is that if she remains here the rest of her life then all she studied as a Social Educator will be in vain. She stated that she would like to go back to her country to go and impart the knowledge she gained from her studies to the people of her country. Akinyi agreed that she loves Iceland, however, if she and her husband would find a better job elsewhere after her degree, she would not hesitate to relocate with her family. Dodzi stated categorically that she would relocate to her country of origin in her 60s. Fatu revealed that she would go back to her country after she completed her degree. She mentioned that, she would seek a job with her new qualification and start life afresh. She added, she wants to go back home to impact others with the knowledge she acquired as a Social Worker.

Abla also revealed her intentions after schooling in Iceland. She stated that her plan is not to remain here, but finish her education and go back home to set up a business or impact to others the knowledge she acquired at the UI. She explained that relocating home without a university degree is her greatest fear, therefore she has strategized herself to complete this programme and move on with her MBA, after which she will relocate. Her major concern about her relocation comes back to the fear that her opportunities for using her certificate to obtain a desirable job are limited, unless something changes in the future. She felt sorry that migrants have so little chances of working with what they want to work with. Unemployment rates and job security often differ between native workers and migrant workers in regular status (International Labour Organization, 2010). It was identified that some disparities characterised by factors such as differences in migration status, skill profiles, or the nature of jobs and employment sectors (International Labour Organization, 2010), are usually indorsed with differential treatment.

## 6 Conclusion

The preceding chapters have emphasized a number of essential issues underlying challenges and hopes for the women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa who are trying to empower themselves academically at the University of Iceland to be able to fit into the labour market in Iceland. Significant conclusions can be inferred from the data presented in this study.

The issues relating to ASSA women's access to education and economic rights are far complex. Thus, initially the women in the study migrated to Iceland for diverse reasons; to join partners, further education including vocational exchange, employment, and for political reasons. As the participants became aware of the educational opportunities and the significance of higher education in Iceland, they were motivated to enrol themselves in the University of Iceland to be able to equip and empower themselves for better employment prospects, in addition to improving their labour participation and social involvement in Iceland.

Furthermore, the study results also revealed that the majority of the women faced language challenges at both the institutional and the societal levels. Thus, they felt isolated at their work places, and are also having the same experience within the school setting, owing to their inadequacy in Icelandic language skills. Because of that, they remain in the lowest positions in the labour market. They are usually employed in preschools or the compulsory school settings as school assistants, or housekeepers, waitresses at hotels and restaurants, care givers in nursery homes or hospitals, cleaners or fish factory workers. According to some of these women, working in some of these low-skilled job positions has had some negative impacts on their lives, e.g. lowering their self-confidence, and the feeling of racial isolation. In addition to labour discrimination, the women are faced with language skill problem at the university. Although the women were determined to achieve their goals by enrolling in higher education in Iceland, they still meet some obstacles in the course of their studies. The

results revealed that even though some of the women from the ASSA who are studying at the University of Iceland pushed themselves harder to participate in courses taught in Icelandic language in order to improve their social and labour participation, they lack effective student-teacher interaction and student collaboration in the school setting. As a result of this, ASSA women face challenges of anxiety, rejection, exclusion and discrimination. Although the school can be a place to tackle social, political, and environmental problems, some minorities in the school settings could be stuck with adverse experiences in the course of their academia that could result in an increase in school drop-out rate of a country like Iceland.

Additionally, the results from the study also revealed that the participants have acknowledged that courses taught in Icelandic offer more job opportunities in Iceland than courses offered in English. This is because the Icelandic nation embraces their language as their first cultural heritage, hence language proficiency in Iceland is very significant in every field. The above stated findings or problems can be addressed by implementing policies that can monitor and stimulate immigrant students' motivation for higher education and successful labour participation. Suggested solutions are summarized below.

First, the issue of language proficiency which is a major obstacle facing majority of the women from the ASSA can be tackled conscientiously. As a student and a citizen of Iceland, I agree with the authorities that language is a vital cultural element of every nation and needs to be preserved for future use. The best way the Icelandic nation can maintain and preserve this heritage is to institutionalize it. Despite the fact that there are numerous beginner courses for immigrants all over the country, these courses seem to only satisfy the requirements of Icelandic Immigration Agency (IIA) that is aimed at each immigrants getting a hundred and fifty (150) hours of Icelandic Beginners' Course, and also to pass the citizenship exams, and that is it. For these courses, some immigrants are not enthusiastic about learning the language, and therefore go through the system only to obtain certificates to cover the hours required by the IIA towards their citizenship.

It is evident that education is not for everybody, therefore those who persevere towards achieving higher education need to be highly motivated. For instance, lecturers should encourage students to engage in collaborative learning to strengthen students' active participation. To this end, I humbly appeal to the university hierarchies, especially the School of Education to make Icelandic language a core subject for all international students. This course must be innovative. For example, international students should involve students in more field trips, to visit industries to attract students' motivation to partake in the course with great joy, since learning languages can sometimes be very boring without motivation. In addition, international students who are willing to take courses taught in Icelandic must get support from both teachers and student colleagues. For instance, collaboration learning models should be encouraged between students by involving students in group activities. Also, resources should be provided for international students based on allocating teachers to support international students individually in various subjects. They should also be encouraged to partake in internship programmes organised by the university. This would enhance their participation in practising their Icelandic language skills, and also to introduce them to the replica of their future career experiences.

As a result, some of the participants suggested to the Icelandic Ministry of Labour and Employment that immigrants who have degrees and were working within giving professions in their countries before coming to Iceland should be granted the opportunity to work with their education qualifications in their chosen careers. With this, they can be motivated to learn the Icelandic language technically. Some also suggested that more English courses should be introduced to reduce their frustration of feeling isolated. They believe that when these policies are implemented, the immigrant students of the University of Iceland will feel a sense of inclusiveness and belongingness to the Icelandic society to reduce the perception and conflict of racial discrimination. Language is a glue that can bring people of different nationalities together.

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# Appendix A

## Interview Guide:

### Introduction

My name is Catherine Enyonam Sævarsson. I am a master's student from the International Studies of Education programme – Faculty of Education at the University of Iceland. I am conducting a research on the experiences of women from the Anglophone Sub-Saharan Africa (ASSA) studying at the University of Iceland. As mentioned in our conversation and in the e-mail, the interview will last between 30-45 minutes. In addition, all the information gathered from the interview will be used for academic purposes, and will be treated with confidentiality. You will also remain anonymous. The questions you will be asked are as follows:

1. Can you tell me your name, age, your country of origin, educational status, and a bit more about yourself, and languages you speak?
2. Can you tell me why you came to Iceland, how long you have lived here, and how long you intend to stay?
3. Can you tell me about your level of education back home?
4. Can you tell me why you enrolled yourself at the UI?
5. What is your field of specialization/major?
6. Can you explain why you chose this field?
7. What is your motivation for seeking higher education in Iceland?
8. Tell me a little bit about your educational experience at the UI? Are there any particularly unique experiences that stand out?

- a. What are some of the academic challenges you have faced? For example, language, segregation, or any experience of racial or gender discrimination in the university community?
9. Do you think you get equal treatment just like any other student? Please explain in detail if yes or no.
10. Tell me about your relationship with teachers, native Icelandic speaking students and immigrant students?
11. Do you think the university has any positive impact on you? Can you describe briefly your experiences?
12. How far do you intend to go? Do you intend to go beyond bachelor or master's degree?
13. What are your hopes in the Icelandic labour market after the completion of your program?
14. Do you have any regrets of enrolling yourself in higher education?
15. Do you have any intention of relocating back home?
16. What advice do you have for the women from your country who live in Iceland and have not had any higher education or no education at all?

Thank You!