

**“EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO EVERY DOOR”: NARRATIVES OF
IMMIGRANT ADULT BASIC EDUCATION LEARNERS**

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For Mehri

My mother whose love and prayers enlightened my life and warmed my heart

For Mohammad

My father who was always there to remind me to stay hopeful and strong

For Arad and Aryana

My nephew and niece who are the reasons why I will never give up

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ABSTRACT

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a broad concept that aims at educating adults with low education. Immigrant ABE learners comprise a significant portion of the adult learners' population who seek education through enrolling in ABE programs. These learners have experienced different learning environments due to their social life process and are motivated to make changes in their social status for a better life. Therefore, it is critical to understand their learning needs through their learning and educational experiences in order to develop an inclusive ABE learning environment.

The purpose of this narrative study was to understand immigrant ABE learners' experience in an ABE setting from a post-critical lens. The three research questions that guided this study were "How do immigrant ABE learners describe their educational experience prior to their enrollment in ABE?", "How do immigrant ABE learners describe their learning experiences?", and "How do immigrant ABE learners describe the role of education in changing their life situations?"

The study was conducted in an ABE organization that offered HiSet preparation classes. The research data were collected through two sets of interviews with six immigrant ABE learners. Another source of the study data was the researcher's field notes. While each participant's process inspired certain key observation about their learning experiences, five themes were generated regarding their shared perspectives toward learning and education. They all experienced interrupted educational processes, held low socioeconomic status both in their home countries and in the US, perceived literacy in terms of learning English, had different learning experiences in different learning environments, and advocated the transformative power of education. The findings of this study suggest that the immigrant ABE learners seek to get

educated in order to change their social status in terms of having a high income job and support their communities. Learning English would significantly facilitate this process for them, as it empowers them to communicate effectively in the American context.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION TO STUDY

Adult Basic Education Context

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a predominant form of adult education that aims at providing basic skills to adult learners in order to improve their quality of life. Spark and Peterson (2000) described ABE as referring to “any fundamental skill that is regarded as essential for adult life” (p. 263). The authors added that the ultimate goal of ABE is to facilitate the skill building to meet the requirements of ‘capitalist economy’ and ‘effective citizenship’. In 1998, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (Title II, Sections 201-251 of the Workforce Investment Act H.R. 1385) proposed programs that were responsible for major indicators of performance including, demonstrated improvements in literacy skill levels in reading, writing, speaking, numeracy, problem solving, English language acquisition, and other literacy skills; placement in, retention in, or career advancement; and receipt of secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. In a prevalent form of adult basic education, adults learn literacy skills and prepare to take equivalency tests to get an equivalent diploma. Non-native speaker adults may also take ESL classes to improve their English language comprehension and fluency.

Adult basic education learners are a social group with special learning needs. They comprise different groups of adult learners ranging from high school drop outs to older adults who are mainly low-literate and low-skilled individuals. In 2013, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) released a survey of adult skills that analyzed the literacy, numeracy, and digital problem solving skills of nationally representative samples of adults, ages 16 through 65, from 24 countries. The analysis indicated that the skill levels of U.S. adults have remained ‘stagnant’ over two decades. In 2016, the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education at U.S Department of Education utilized OECD data to update the information

on adult workers with low measured skills. Accordingly, it reported that across the total U.S. working age population, ages 16-65, there is a significant portion of employed adults with low measured skills. The report indicates that 14 percent of the employed population have low literacy skills; 23 percent have low numeracy skills, and 62 percent have low digital problem solving skills. The Survey shows that two-thirds of Americans with low literacy skills are employed, 60 percent of whom earn incomes in the bottom quintile, or less than \$16,000 a year.

One of the important indicators of low-skilled learners is that they tend to be marginalized minorities. UNESCO identified indigenous groups, migrants, refugees, and prison inmates as marginalized groups that warrant the attention of adult education (CONFINTEA V Background Papers, 1997). The 2016 update of the OECD Survey indicated that 40 percent of low-skilled employed workers are foreign born and 60 percent were born in the US. That said, nearly half of the low-skilled workers are migrants or refugees who do not speak English as their first language.

The immigrants come to the US for different reasons. Isserlis (2008) states that many immigrants leave their native countries in order to escape war. Some other theorizations highlight “push and pull” factor as a reason for immigration to the United States (Alfred, 2004; Joaquin & Johnson-Bailey, 2015; Ojo, 2009). Push factors mainly force the individual to move voluntarily and because of the individual may be at risk if they stay. Push factors may include conflict, drought, famine, or extreme religious activity. Pull factors serve as the factors in destination country that encourage the individuals to leave their home country for better economic opportunities, more jobs, and generally better life. Throughout the proves of immigration, immigrants experience different communities and social contexts that they need to acculturate to.

Velazquez (1996) noted that as migrants move from one community to another, they experience mobility, language, and cultural differences. According to Ullman (2010) and Muñoz (2012), the adult immigrant education started in the late nineteenth century through the stream of “settlement houses” and a movement towards “Americanization”.

Further, these adult learners may bring a degree of prior knowledge from their home countries that they have acquired in their native language to the American adult education setting. “The constant interruption of the educational process, as well as the inability of schools to understand their culture and meet their needs, lead to confusion, frustration, and a feeling of alienation among migrants” (Velazquez, 1993, p. 3). In other words, if the learning environment does not inclusively address the immigrant adult learners’ needs, they may not be able to efficiently go through the learning processes in order to achieve their learning goals. Further, the immigrant adult learners have certain learning experiences that need to be acknowledged in order for them to communicate more actively in their learning environment.

According to Carlock (2016), as adult education is an important denominator for immigrants, it has to develop authentic resources for them. Authentic resources comprise inclusive educational policies as well as learning environment, where the immigrant adult learners are provided with learning opportunities to improve their social status. Adult immigrants and refugees who are enrolled in ABE programs are low-skilled learners who have specific learning needs. Therefore, it’s crucial to provide the immigrant adult learners with adequate educational resources to meet their learning needs, the most important of which being English language acquisition. Emphasizing on this learning need of immigrant adult learners, Lee (2013) wrote:

[The] learning of English as a second language among adult immigrants is an important area of research because this group of people, whose voice is seldom heard by the mainstream society, deserves an outlet to tell us what they can offer to the teaching and learning process. (p. 22)

Further, since ABE curriculum and equivalency tests are all in English, the immigrant adult learners may not be able to communicate their learning needs as well as their prior knowledge throughout the teaching and learning transaction. Therefore, they may be marginalized in this educational context due to their language barrier. “People who have limited or no access to a society’s mainstream institutions and opportunities are forever outside looking in, unable to change their relative position in the social structure” (Merriam, Courtenay, and Cervero, 2006, p. 91). Accordingly, immigrants and refugees’ learning experiences embody complicated learning processes as well as different learning environments that may not have adequately supported them in terms of their learning needs and at the same time aims at making them ‘good citizens’.

Statement of the Problem

The teaching and learning transaction in the context of ABE may be studied from different perspectives such as teaching tools, learning processes, curriculum, and educational policies. Accordingly, there are studies in ABE literature on teaching and assessment tools (Blackmer & Hayes-Harb, 2016; Carter, 2017; Haeran, 2014; Nighingale et al., 2016; Rosen, 2017), learning skills (Appleton et al., 2017; Prins et al., 2015; Rosen, 2016), and professional development (Curry, 2017; Zengler, 2017). Further, the learners’ experience in ABE settings may be an applicable way to analyze whether ABE is accountable for various groups of adult learners, including immigrant adult learners. Meanwhile, there are some studies in ABE

literature that have focused on adults' social skills and roles as well as the reasons for their nonparticipation (Alves Pena, 2016; Miller et al., 2017; Beder, 1991). Fingeret (1983) conducted a qualitative study to understand illiterate adults' processes of developing support groups for each other in terms of adults-in-networks. Her study indicated that adults form asymmetrical networks to support each other in learning processes and that literacy programs should learn to respond to these networks. Accordingly, the studies on ABE have focused on its educational processes as well as adult learners' processes. That said, complementary studies on the experiences of different groups of adult learners may help to have a better understanding of ABE's context as well as contribution to adult learners' processes.

ABE participants comprise a diverse adult student population. Meanwhile, immigrant ABE learners are a substantial participant population in ABE contexts. Velázquez's (1996) study on migrant farm workers' experience implied their alienation in the ABE setting. "Alienation is perceived as the discrepancy between expectations for a role or activity and actual experience within that role or activity" (Velázquez's, 1996, p. 27). However, migrant farm workers are not the only international group of adult students in ABE settings. In fact, international ABE participants come from diverse backgrounds and have different mostly low pay jobs. Immigrant ABE learners share certain characteristics with ABE American students. For example, most of them are described as low-skilled learners and come from low-income social groups. In any case, immigrant ABE learners are non-native English speakers that may imply that they experience language barriers throughout their educational process. Further, their language barrier may result in their inability to apply their prior knowledge and experience throughout their process of attaining skills. However, there are few, if any, studies on immigrant ABE learners' experience in ABE settings. In other words, immigrant ABE learners' marginalization seems to have

disseminated from their sociopolitical status to the insufficient acknowledge in ABE literature.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand immigrant ABE learners' experiences in an ABE setting through a post-critical lens. The postcritical perspective facilitate a post-structural analysis of the learners' experience while considering the researcher's positionality.

Research Questions

1. How do immigrant ABE learners describe their educational experiences prior to their enrollment in ABE?
2. How do immigrant ABE learners describe their learning experiences?
3. How do immigrant ABE learners describe the role of education in changing their life situations?

Conceptual Frameworks

This study aims at understanding the immigrant adult basic education learners' processes and goals through their social experiences. Accordingly, narrative interviews will be used to understand the learners' experiences, needs, and goals through their stories. Therefore, adult learning experience is a predominant conceptual framework of the study include. The participants' experiences will then be examined through critical perspectives toward education that focus on the structural foundations of education and how they inform the learners' processes and experiences. Next sections include a brief introduction to these conceptual frameworks.

Adult Learning Experience

Immigrant adult learners' experiences are the predominant lens to understand their learning and educational processes as well as the development of their goals. This study perceives experience as a socially constructed phenomenon that informs the adult learners'

process and perception toward learning and education. Olesen (1989) described experience as “a subjective process as it is seen from the point of view of the person experiencing. It is also a collective process because when we experience as individuals we also do so through a socially structured consciousness. It is, finally, an active, critical and creative process where we both see and adapt” (Olesen 1989 [1985], p. 8).

Boud and Walker (1991) describe the foundations of the individuals’ experience as an applicable perspective in this study as follows,

An individual's personal foundation of knowledge can be manifested, for example, by: confidence or lack of confidence stemming from past successes or failures; ability to work with others; and reaction of a member of a majority group in responding to a member of a minority group in an organization. This personal foundation of experience is derived from the previous experiences of learners. It is partly acquired from the social and cultural environment, and partly forged by the learners' own awareness and effort. It contains the presuppositions and assumptions; which learners have developed in the past and predisposes learners to any future experience. It is not something about which a learner can readily (if at all) give an account. (p. 14)

Therefore, adults’ experiential learning is constructed through their social processes and encounters. Among different models and theories that have described experiential learning, Jarvis’ (1987) model of experiential learning embodies a constructivist view that seeks to understand the process of linking the learners’ internal world to their external one in terms of their experience. That said, Jarvis’ (1987) model of experiential learning will be used as a framework to understand adults’ experiential process before and during their participation in ABE. Jarvis (2006) identified four frameworks for experience, including consciousness,

biography, episode, and sensation. Jarvis (2006) emphasized a continuum of the two aspects of the experience asserting that “we are aware of our experiences through our sensations, feelings, and thoughts” (p. 72). Further, Jarvis (2006) elaborated on this aspect of experience by asserting that “experience is seamless and relates fundamentally to our conscious awareness of the external world throughout our lifetime” (p. 73).

Constructed experiential learning may be examined by critical perspectives to enlighten the process of their development. Next section entails the critical perspectives that will be used in this study to understand immigrant adult learners’ experiences.

Critical Perspectives toward Education

The critical perspectives toward education examine the structural foundations of education as well as its emancipatory capacities. One of the critical perspectives that is used in this study is the critical theory of education. Critical theory of education entails criticisms of formal educational settings in terms of their reproducing oppressive power dynamics. This framework serves in this study as a way to analyze adult basic education setting in terms of its inclusivity for immigrant adult basic education learners.

Immigrants’ processes of adjusting to the destination country’s culture is studied through their process of social mobility. Gans (2007) defined social mobility as “the movement to higher or lower class or status position” (p. 154). The immigrant adult basic learners’ goals of their enrollment in this program may be explained through their intention to achieve a better social status through upward social mobility. That said, the related theories of social mobility will be discussed in Chapter II of this study and also used to discuss the participants’ processes.

Habermas’ (1975) theory of learning entails three areas of learning, including instrumental, practical, and emancipatory. In fact, Habermas’ (1975) theory facilitates an

understanding of the learners' approaches and motivation to take learning initiatives. In other words, the theory may be applied to understand whether the learners manage to be involved in learning processes to manipulate their environment (instrumental), to facilitate communicative action (practical), or to transform themselves as well as their communities (emancipatory). Habermas' (1975) will be used in this study to understand the different aspects of immigrant adult basic education learners in their social contexts.

When discussing immigrant adult learners' perspectives toward education and its role in their changing status, they may express how it empowers them to improve their life circumstances. In order to discuss the participants' perception toward power, Freire and Foucault's perspectives will be referred to. In his discussion of the relationship between the oppressed and oppressor, Freire (1970) states that the oppressors dehumanize others in order to turn them to objects and facilitate having more. On the other hand, the oppressed aspire to become like oppressors to have more. In fact, Freire (1970) holds that the oppressors have the power and that the only way for the oppressed to become powerful is for them to become like oppressors. On the other hand, Foucault (1980) accentuates the prevalence of power in all levels and dynamics of the society. In other words, Foucault (1980) focuses on the power dynamics within the social context that is reproduced by individuals as well as formal institutions, arguing that it does not belong to a specific social group.

The next section includes the significance of the study in the field of adult basic education and adult learning.

Significance of the Study

Adult Basic Education is a broad formal educational setting that aims at educating a diverse population of adult learners as well as teaching basic skills to adults in order to facilitate

their process of becoming high-skilled workers in society. The democratic potential of the education also implies its intention to provide the adult learners with an equal opportunity to access formal education. Therefore, and in order to develop an inclusive learning environment, ABE needs to identify and address the adult learners' needs and processes. This study may contribute to the ABE literature in terms of describing the immigrant ABE learners' experience in ABE settings. It may also contribute to adult learning field in terms of ABE learners' experience in general and immigrant ABE learners' experiences specifically. Further, this study would convey some implications of practice to ABE policy makers as well as educators so that they accommodate their pedagogical approaches to these students' learning needs and procedures. The postcritical lens of the study helps to understand how the researcher's shared experience with the participants in terms of being a non-native English speaker informs the way the participants' experiences are interpreted. Finally, this study may provide a narrative analysis of how immigrant ABE socio-economic status informs their marginalization in the learning environments they have been through.

Limitations

This study focuses on the experiences of immigrant adult basic education learners who are pursuing their education in a city in southeastern state of the US. However, the participants' experiences may be slightly or even significantly different from that those of the immigrant adult learners who reside in other states of the county. It should be added that the qualitative nature of the study makes its results ungeneralizable to other ABE learners in different educational and cultural contexts.

Another limitation of the study is that as the participants of the study will be immigrants, there will be some language barriers that may hinder optimal communication in the interviews. Further, as this is a qualitative study its results may not be generalizable to other

Delimitations

The participants of the study are only the immigrant ABE learners who want to get their GED. Further, given the fact that there were different series of classes offered in the research site, this research only focuses on the learning experiences of immigrant ABE learners who take HiSet preparation classes to get their GED. Finally, the emphasis of this study is on the immigrant ABE learners' learning and educational experiences rather than the detailed procedures of their immigration that may lead to sociopolitical backgrounds of their social experience.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter I, I reviewed adult basic education definition as well as objectives for adult learners and discussed how they accommodated adult learners' characteristics and processes. Then, I provided a demographic view of low-skilled workers who are main ABE participants in terms of their levels of skills as well as socio-economic status. The next step was to introduce immigrant ABE learners as one of the predominant groups in this setting. Therefore, the stated problem was that there is not adequate study on immigrant ABE learners' experience. The purpose and questions of the current study were consequent sections followed by the conceptual frameworks for the study. Final short sections of the chapter included its significance in the literature, its limitations, and finally delimitations.

Outline of the Study

Chapter I was an introduction to the research idea and processes. In Chapter II, I will review the literature of adult learning followed by a brief discussion of certain aspects of learning, including experiential learning, motivation, dimensions of learning, and self-directed learning. The second chapter also entails selected perspectives toward adult education, adult basic education, and critical perspectives about it. In Chapter III, I will introduce the methodology of the study as well as its attributed methods and procedures. I will then describe the processes of data collection and analysis followed by the criteria for ensuring the trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter IV includes two sections; vignettes of the participants' stories followed by my key observations about their experiences and perspectives, and five themes of the study that were generated through analyzing all participants' narratives in terms of their commonalities in their experiences and perspectives. Finally, Chapter V embodies a review of the process and findings of the study as well as discussing the themes and key observations in terms of the related theoretical frameworks. The next sections in the chapter include proposing some implications for practice as well as recommendations for future research. The study concludes with my final thoughts about the research and its potential contribution to understanding the immigrant ABE learners' experiences and perspectives.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter encompasses a review of adult learning literature along with selected models and theories of experiential learning, motivation in learning, and self-directed learning. The next section is a review of selected research in the field of adult basic education. I will then discuss the theories and perspectives of Freire, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Habermas in terms of critical perspectives of education.

Adult Learning

Adult learning is a broad concept that embodies adults' learning experiences and processes. In the following section, I will discuss adult learning in terms of the characteristics of adult learners, the concept of andragogy, experiential learning, motivation, and self-directed learning.

Characteristics of Adult Learners

The concept of adult learning is embedded in the description of adult learners' characteristics and how they direct their learning process. Smith (1982) described adult learners as having multiple roles and responsibilities as well as accumulated multiple experiences. He also argued that adults' physical and psychological development and different social spheres inform how they reinterpret and rearrange their previous experiences. The author's final notification about adult learners was that they experience anxiety throughout orienting their learning processes.

Adults' learning processes are significantly influenced by their social roles and life situations; therefore, social context is a significant element in adult learning. Jarvis (1987) highlighted the role of social context in adult learning process by stating that, "learning rarely occurs in splendid isolation from the world in which the learner lives; it is intimately related to

that world and affected by it” (p. 11). Accordingly, and as Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (1998) proposed certain principles about adult learning and how it applied to adult learners’ process and experience. Table 1 exhibits a summary of adult learning principles and their features described by the authors. According to the principles, adults have agency and motivation to purposefully solve problems using their experience. From a functional perspective, Gibb (1960) emphasized on adults’ being goal oriented and learning from experiences meaningful to them. Adult learners’ characteristics actually comprise the assumptions for andragogy that will be discussed in the next section.

Andragogy

Knowles (1968) proposed a “new label and new technology” of adult learning to differentiate it from pre-adult schooling (p. 351). According to Knowles (1980), andragogy is defined as “the art and science of helping adults,” that contrast with pedagogy as “the art and science of helping children learn” (p. 43). Merriam (2001) stated that andragogy is based on five assumptions about adult learners as someone who (1) has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning, (2) has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a rich resource for learning, (3) has learning needs closely related to changing social roles, (4) is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge, and (5) is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors. Andragogy’s underlying assumptions imply certain attitudes toward adult learning, including the fact that pre-adult learners are dependent learners that cannot direct their own learning. There were some debates about the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy in 1970s in the articles in *Adult Education and Lifelong Learning Years*. McKenzie (1977) clarified this controversy by asking,

Table 1. Adult Learning Principles

Adult Learning Principle	Feature
Learner's need to know	• Why • What • How
Learners' self-concept	• Autonomous • Self-directing
Learners' prior experience	• Resource • Mental models
Readiness to learn	• Life related • Developmental task
Orientation to learning	• Problem centered • Contextual
Learning motivation	• Intrinsic value • Personal payoff

Note. Adapted from “*The Adult Learner: The Definitive Classic in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*”, by M.S. Knowles, E.F. Holton III, & R.A. Swanson (2005). New York, NY: Elsevier Inc.

Is the word ‘andragogy’ simply a trendy neologism devoid of significance or is the term pregnant with a possible new theory of practice for adult education? Does the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy represent a mere word game, a fruitless semantic joust, a futile exercise in the fabrication of jargon? Or does the distinction between pedagogy and andragogy provide a point of departure for clarifying and amplifying the complex concept of ‘adult education?’ (p. 225)

Meanwhile, Rachal (1983) cautioned about attributing pedagogy only to children’s learning, stating that the term encompasses all education. He believed that ‘andragogy’ can be replaced by ‘self-directed’ and pedagogy by ‘teacher-directed’, justifying that the substituted terms are more self-explanatory and not limited to certain population. Consequently, Knowles (1980) “moved from andragogy versus pedagogy position to representing them on a continuum ranging from teacher-directed to student-directed learning. He acknowledged that both approaches were appropriate with children and adults.” (Merriam, 2001, p. 6). For example, an adult with little knowledge may be very dependent on the educator, while a curious child could exhibit more self-direction in and out of school.

Another criticism of andragogy is that it is context-free. Accordingly, a stream of criticism started in 1990s about the individualistic approach of this concept. Grace (1996) noted that andragogy was introduced to North America in the late 1960s, “when action-oriented curricula that valued individual experience were advocated. The individual had to keep up and self-improvement was in vogue” (p. 383). Grace (1996) added that although Knowles proposed and promoted andragogy for next 30 years, he did not regard “the organizational and social impediments to adult learning; he never painted the ‘big picture’. He chose the mechanistic over the meaningful” (p. 386).

Expressing discontent with Knowles' individualistic approach, the Nottingham Andragogy Group (1983) offered a different set of principles for andragogy. To the Nottingham group, adults are "social beings, products of history and culture; that is, adults are contextually located. In adulthood individuals acquire the capacity to think creatively and critically by integrating affective and cognitive dimensions of learning as one in which adults are encouraged to think critically rather than to accept others' thinking" (Brookfield, 1986, p. 100). Therefore, andragogy takes on a more comprehensive role as not only understanding and contributing to adult learning, but also promoting critical reflection and raising social consciousness in adults.

Three Dimensions of Learning

Different learning theories and models view learning from their respective perspectives such as behavioristic, cognitive, social, and critical approaches. However, one significant element in the progressive models of each approach is how they have considered the impact of social context in the development and process of learning. Illeris (2007[1999]) proposed an integrative model for learning that described the fundamental process of learning as one in which content (the knowledge, understanding, and skills that we learn), incentive (motivation, emotion, and volition), and interaction (action, communication, and cooperation) work together to develop a learning process. Illeris (2007[1999]) accentuated social context as circumscribing the interaction of the content, incentive, and interaction by noting that "learning always takes place within the frames of an outer societal context which, on the general level, is decisive for the learning possibilities" (p. 25). Illeris (2002, p. 120) stated that there should be five stimuli in terms of 'raw materials' for the learning process to be initiated as follows:

- (1) perception, where the surrounding world comes to the individual as a totally unmediated sense impression;

- (2) transmission, where someone else passes on information or transmits specific sense impressions or messages;
- (3) experience, which can include both perception and transmission, we could also limit the use of the word so that experience presupposes a particular activity; i.e., that the learner is not simply receiving, but also acts in order to benefit from the interaction;
- (4) imitation occurs when the learner attempts to imitate or model another's actions; and
- (5) activity or participation in which the learner is engaged in a goal-directed activity, sometimes participating with others as in a community of practice.

The notion about engaging in experience implicitly necessitates involving reflection to choose the most applicable action that complies with the elements of constructivist approaches of experiential learning. Accordingly, experiential learning along with Jarvis' constructive model will be discussed in the following sections.

Experiential Learning

Experience is defined from both individual and social environment aspects. For example, Dewey (1965 [1938]) described experience in terms of arousing curiosity, strengthening initiative, and setting up desires and goals strong enough to survive a person. On the other hand, Hegel (1967 [1807]) perceived experience from a societal perspective describing it as "the dialectic process which consciousness executes on itself – on its knowledge as well as on its object – in the sense that out of it the new and true object arises" (p. 142). Olesen (1989) provided an accessible definition of experience in accordance with Hegel's description as follows,

Experience is the process whereby we as human beings, individually and collectively consciously master reality, and the ever-living understanding of this reality and our

relation to it. Experiences in the plural exist, as in everyday language, but they are to be understood as partial products of this process. Experience is thus a subjective process as it is seen from the poring of view of the person experiencing. It is also a collective process because when we experience as individuals we also do so through a socially structured consciousness. It is, finally, an active, critical and creative process where we both see and adapt. (Olesen 1989 [1985], p. 8)

In an attempt to link andragogy and experiential learning, O'Bannon and McFadder (2008) proposed a model of "experiential andragogy" to be applied for nontraditional adult experiential learning programs like service-oriented programs. Their model encompasses six stages, including motivation, orientations, involvement, activity, reflection, and adaptation. According to their model, the adult learner should be motivated to attend and learn, become actively involved in the experience, reflect individually or collaboratively on the experience, and "consider how they will apply what they have learned to future experiences" (p. 27). In their model, "it is the process, the interaction between stages, which makes learning possible" (p. 25).

Adult learning encompasses different implications of experiential learning. Adults' life experiences are so engraved in their identity that these experiences also inform their approach to and process of experiential learning. Adults' social contexts and learning environments play a significant role in affective association of learning experiences for them. For example, the more authoritarian the social context is, the more non-reflective learning the adults would engage in. An autocratic educational environment may also imply the affective aspect of learning experiences. Willis (1977) described the impact of an educational environment that dismisses the value of knowledge and individuals' learning as follows:

Where knowledge becomes devalued or worthless, authority, stripped of its educational justifications, can appear very harsh and naked. That is why it is opposed. The teaching paradigm is seen more and more in its coercive mode. The total experience of school is something ‘the lads’ most definitely want to escape from. (p. 77)

Adults earn many different experiences throughout their life span that influence their learning processes. Lindeman (1926/1961) described experience as “the adult learner’s living textbook” (p. 6). Adults’ experience is not just about their learned lessons from life; it also informs how they perceive the world around them. Kidd (1973) argued that adults not only have more experiences, but also have different kinds of experiences that are organized differently. Further, according to Knowles (1980), adults’ life experiences serve as a “rich resource” for learning. Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2011) distinguish children’s experience from adults’ stating that “to children, experience is something that happens to them; to adults, their experience is who they are” (p. 65).

However, according to Merriam and Bierema (2014) experience can also have negative and hindering implications in the adults’ learning process. They argue that “adults can become dogmatic and closed-minded about learning something new because their prior knowledge and experience has worked for them in the past and they see no need to learn something else” (p. 50). Merriam and Bierema (2014) stated that experience is significant in adult learning conceptualizations like self-directed as well as transformative learning. They explained the embeddedness of experience in the process of transformative learning as beginning with “an experience that causes us to question our assumptions about how the world works or how life is. There is something of a disjuncture between our experience and our understanding of it” (p. 107). Self-directed learning is another adult learning construct that encompasses the application

of experience in its process. “While self-directed learning is about taking control of your own learning, what you wish to learn, and how you go about it, involves life experience” (Merriam and Bierema, 2014, p. 107).

Experiential learning theories have differently discussed the process of individuals’ application of their experience according to their constructivist, situative, psychoanalytic, critical, and complexity approaches. Fenwick (2003) stated that these perspectives “raise important questions about the nature of experience and described them as follows:

- (1) reflecting on concrete experience (constructivist theory of learning);
- (2) participating in a community of practice (situative theory of learning);
- (3) getting in touch with unconscious desires and fears (psychoanalytic theory of learning);
- (4) resisting dominant social norms of experience (critical cultural theories); and
- (5) exploring ecological relationships between cognition and environment (complexity theories applied to learning)

Each of the mentioned perspectives entail certain stage models, including Jarvis’ (1987) constructive model to be discussed in the following section.

Jarvis’ learning process. Jarvis’ model of experiential learning embodies a constructivist view that seeks to understand the process of linking the learners’ internal world to their external one in terms of their experience. Jarvis (2006) identified four frameworks for experience, including consciousness, biography, episode, and sensation. Consciousness refers to the ability to be able to be in the world and ‘know’ it. Chalmers (1996, p. 11) offered two definitions of conscious experience as follows:

- Phenomenological: the concept of mind as conscious experience and as a mental state as a consciously experienced mental state.
- Psychological: the concept of mind as a causal or explanatory basis for behavior.

Jarvis (2006) emphasized on a continuum of the two aspects of the experience asserting that “we are aware of our experiences through our sensations, feelings, and thoughts” (p. 72). Biography deals with the outcome of a lifetime that complies with Knowles’ (1980) account of experience in andragogy, where it states that learners bring their life experiences to a learning situation. Jarvis (2006) elaborated on this aspect of experience by asserting that “experience is seamless and relates fundamentally to our conscious awareness of the external world throughout our lifetime” (p. 73).

Episodic experience comes into play at the moment of contacting with the world. Jarvis (2006) introduced the term ‘disjuncture’ to explain how episodic experience contributes to make meaning of new learning situations. “Disjuncture occurs when our biographical repertoire is no longer sufficient to cope automatically with our situation so that our unthinking harmony with our world is disturbed to some degree or other” (Jarvis, 2006. p. 9). According to Dewey, the stimulation of learning occurs when previous experience cannot explain a present situation. Miettinen (2002) explained Dewey’s approach to experiences as follows:

Dewey regarded non-reflective experience based on habits as a dominant form of experience. The reflective experience, mediated by intelligence and knowledge grows out from the inadequacy and contradictions of the habitual experience and ways of action. For Dewey, the basis of, and reason for reflection was the necessity of solving problems faced in habitual ways of action”. (p. 6)

Finally, sensation is the ability to sense the world. According to Jarvis, all learning starts with and is mediated by human sensations of sound, sight, smell, taste, and touch. “We actually have sense experience to which we give meaning as a result of our previous learning experiences, albeit these experiences are themselves perceived” (Jarvis, 2006, p. 75).

Meanwhile, Jarvis (2006) accentuates the role of social context in the construction of experience by stating that “our experience whatever it is, is always constructed and bodily mediated” (p. 75). Jarvis’ (2006) model of learning perceives the learner as a “whole person made up of mind and the body and comes to a learning situation with a history, a biography that interacts in individual ways with the experience that generates the nature of the learning” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The model starts with describing the learner as a whole person in the lifeworld. When the learner encounters an episodic experience that is socially constructed, he or she engages thinking, doing, and feeling as three forms of learning. Jarvis (2006) speculates that “it is perhaps through the emotions that thought can be transformed into action. However, either of these two can dominate in the process of learning and a number of different types of learning can occur: contemplation, rational thinking, desiring, planning, action learning, and so on. In addition, the emotions can have a considerable effect on the way that we think, on motivation and on beliefs, attitudes, and values” (p. 11).

Jarvis’ model of learning process is also called the transformation of the person, where the learners’ four aspects of experience transform them and also develop as a result of the learning processes described above. The final stage in the model is the transformed learner again posited in the lifeworld situation and ready to confront new episodic experiences. Therefore, Jarvis’ model on experiential learning is an applicable framework for understanding how adults’ experiences are involved in their learning process. Although experience is an inseparable

element in adult learning, they will engage it when they are goal-oriented and motivated. Therefore, goal-orientation, self-determination and margin theories of motivation will be discussed below.

Motivation in Learning

Social context is also a critical element in development of motivation in learners. “Motivation is an energized internal state that results in goal-directed behaviors” (Schunk et al., 2014). Andragogy emphasizes on adults’ intrinsic rather than extrinsic motivation in initiating and directing their learning. Harter and Connell (1984) proposed five aspects of intrinsic motivation as follows,

1. Preference for challenge rather than for easy work.
2. Incentive to work to satisfy one’s own interest and curiosity rather than to please the teacher and obtain good grades.
3. Independent mastery attempts rather than dependence on the teacher.
4. Independent judgement rather than reliance on the teacher’s judgment.
5. Internal criteria for success and failure rather than external criteria.

The proposed aspects of intrinsic motivation significantly comply with the principles of andragogy. In other words, they both perceive the learner as a self-motivated and autonomous person who sets and pursues their learning goals regardless of external influences. However, both andragogy and intrinsic motivation’s representations of the learning process are impaired, unless they consider the contextual influences on the development of learning goals and on the perseverance to achieve them. Certain motivation theories have highlighted the role of social context in terms of their providing resources, controlling the outcomes of attempts, or implications of social learning. Some of the related theories will be discussed below.

Goal-orientation. Goal-orientation theories are mainly based on achievement behaviors. In other words, they explain the processes that the learners go through in order to achieve a learning goal. Schunk, Meece, and Pintrich (2014) described goal orientations as the “purposes or reasons for engaging in achievement tasks” (p. 187). In fact, goal orientations embody patterns of thoughts that lead to “different ways of approaching, engaging in, and responding to achievement situations” (Ames, 1992b, p. 261). A goal orientation represents a standard for the individuals, by which they evaluate their performance, success, or failure in reaching a goal (Elliot, 1997; Pintrich, 2000a, 2000c, 2000d).

Carasoli and Ford (2014) notified that goal orientations describe “how an individual frames, focuses, and approaches performance situations” (p.268). Further, goal orientations may be described as achievement goals that are the reasons for doing a task in the first place (Maehr & Nicholls, 1980). Achievement goals may be understood through the behaviors that facilitate mastering a task or those that embody showing capability to do a task. In other words, achievement goals may be discussed in terms of mastery and/or performance goals. Schunk, Meece, and Pintrich (2014) described these two types of goals as follows:

A mastery goal (or mastery goal orientation) is defined as a focus on learning, mastering the task according to self-set standard or self-improvement, developing new skills, improving competence, trying to accomplish something challenging, and trying to gain understanding or insight. In contrast, a performance goal (or performance goal orientation) represents a focus on demonstrating competence or ability and how ability will be judged relative to others, for example, trying to surpass normative performance standards, attempting to best others, striving to be the best in the group or class on a task,

avoiding judgments of low ability or appearing incompetent, and seeking public recognition of high performance levels. (p. 187)

Apparently, goal orientation is founded on an intrinsic and individualistic view of motivation. However, there are different social and environmental elements that explain the formation as well as implementation of achievement goals, whether they are of mastery or performance types. Social goal theory elaborates on the contextual foundations of forming the goals. Wentzel (1999, 2000) introduced three models to represent the potential relationships between social goals and academic goals and accomplishments. The first model comprises a complementary relationship between social and academic goals, where the goals are followed independently and entail independent effects. In the second model that embodies developmental relationships, the social goals foster academic goals that leads to achieving higher levels of goals. In the hierarchical third model, the social goals lead in to academic goals and vice versa. That said, academic goals tend more to be formulated through development of social goals. There are other motivational theories that accentuate the role of context in the formation of individual learners' motivation. Accordingly, self-determination and margin theories will be discussed below.

Self-determination theory. Self-determination theory is one of the comprehensive motivation theories that embodies personal as well as contextual attributes for motivation to be developed. Deci and Ryan (2002) described self-determination theory as embracing “an organismic and a dialectical framework for the study of personality growth and development” (p. 8). The theory is constituted upon the concept of ‘psychological needs’ that helps to describe the characteristics of a supporting versus undermining environment that could contribute to the organism to initiate a new activity or engage in a new situation. Three psychological needs

comprise the elements of self-determination theory: competence, autonomy, and relatedness.

Schunk et al. (2014) described the need for self-directed learning's three elements as follows:

The needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness also share some similarities with the needs for achievement, power, and affiliation... The need for affiliation is similar to the need for relatedness. The need for achievement overlaps, to some extent, the need for competence. The need for power and autonomy are the most different. The need for power reflects desires or wishes for impressing or dominating or controlling others, whereas the need for autonomy is more inward-focused and represents desires or needs for feeling a sense of internal control and freedom of choices and actions. (p. 251)

Autonomy is also affiliated to intrinsic motivation, as they both refer to the individual's internal drive to achieve their goals. Further, they both serve as significant motivational traits of adult learners. Social context is involved not only in the relatedness aspect, but also in competence and autonomy, as it informs the process and direction of the needs achievement and agency too.

Theory of margin. McClusky's (1963) Theory of Margin, also known as the Power-Load-Margin (PLM), is described as contributing to adult education in terms of relating the amount of resources to adults' demands in order to abate motivation for learning. According to McClusky (1970) "Margin is a function of the relationship of load to power. By load we mean the self and social demands required by a person to maintain a minimal level of autonomy. By power we mean the resources, i.e., abilities, possessions, position, and allies, which a person can command in coping with load" (p. 27). Main (1979) offered the following formula of PLM to visually conceptualize the relationship between power and load.

$$\frac{\text{Power}}{\text{Load}} = \text{Margin}$$

Merriam and Bierema (2014) referred to Baum (1987) and Main (1979) and depicted certain internal and external interacting variables of load and power that are shown in Table 2. Consequently, the Theory of Margin is an applicable motivational framework to explain how adults' level of motivation is informed by the load they have to take as well as the resources they access. In other words, the more the load and the less the power they have, the less they are motivated to initiate and pursue learning projects. "McClusky's model does not directly address learning itself but rather when it is most likely to occur" (Merriam, Caffarella, & Buamgartner, 2007). Motivation and experience are significant contributors and drives in adult learning processes that may be conceptualized in different frameworks such as self-directed learning to be discussed in the following section.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning (SDL) is an adult learning concept that emphasizes adult learners' agency in their learning processes. Self-directed learners are described as learners who identify their own learning objectives, find learning resources, implement learning strategies and determine their own learning outcomes (Leonard, 2002). Knowles (1975) described SDL as a process in which "individuals take the initiative, with or without the help of others, in diagnosing their learning needs, formulating learning goals, identifying human and material resources for learning, choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies, and evaluating those learning outcomes" (p. 35). Therefore, the adult learners' ability to set the goals, decide about the process elements, and evaluate their learning along with a facilitating learning context are vital for SDL. Caffarella (1993) supported this idea by pointing out three distinct ideas in the literature on self-directed learning:

Table 2. Load and Power

Load – Self and Societal Demands on Learner	Power – Learner’s Resources to Cope with Load
External motivators	External capacities
• Family commitments • Occupational tasks • Social obligations • Social responsibilities	• Physical health • Economic wealth • Social abilities • Social contacts
Internal, personal motivators	Internal skills and experiences
• Expectations of self • Goals • Values • Attitudes	• Resiliency • Coping skills • Personality

Note. Adapted from “*Adult Learning: Linking Theory and Practice*”, by S.B. Merriam and L.L.

Bierema (2014). San Fransisco, CA.: Jossy-Bass

A self-initiated process of learning that stresses the ability of individuals to plan and manage their own learning, and attribute or characteristic of learners with personal autonomy as its hallmark, and a way of organizing instructions in formal settings that allows for greater learner control. (p.25)

Knowles (1975) described a six-step process of SDL to be considered by learners and instructors in terms of learning contracts. The steps are: (1) climate setting, that is, creating an atmosphere of mutual respect and support; (2) diagnosing learning needs; (3) formulating learning goals; (4) identifying human and material resources for learning; (5) choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies; and (6) evaluating learning outcomes.

Caffarella (1993) also identified four philosophical assumptions underlying SDL, as being humanism, progressivism, behaviorism, and critical theory. Humanist and progressive perspectives center on the learners' experience and self-development, thus "highlighting the notions that learners are primarily responsible for their own learning and that educators serve as guides and encourages in the process" (Caffarella, 1993, p. 26). The behaviorist perspective accentuates the quality of self-directed learning to inspect whether it is a useful activity (Brookfield, 1985; Caffarella and O'Donnell, 1991). This perspective views the process of self-directed learning, including the learning objectives, the strategies to be applied, and the evaluation of whole learning process. Accordingly, Knowles (1975) has a behaviorist approach to SDL in that he identifies certain steps, starting from setting learning goals and ending with the evaluation of the process as well as the learner's performance.

The critical theory perspective views SDL from a social change point of view. This perspective that was initially added to SDL by Mezirow (1985) and Brookfield (1986), "focuses on bringing about change in the present social, political, and economic order through questioning

assumptions held by learners about the world in which they live and work” (Caffarella, 1993, p. 26). According to Brookfield (1986, pp. 58-59), “The most fully adult form of self-directed learning ... is the one in which critical reflection on the contingent aspects of reality, the exploration of personal and social circumstances are all present.” Further, Brookfield (2005) advocated SDL as an adult learning concept that centers at understanding and unmasking power. Accordingly, SDL has a significant emancipatory potential along with its inherent self-actualization aspect.

Moreover, Garrison (1997) viewed SDL from a “collaborative constructivist” perspective that he described as follows:

A collaborative constructivist perspective of learning is intended to be positioned between the more extreme radical and social constructivist positions. A collaborative perspective has the individual taking the responsibility for constructing meaning while including the participation of others in confirming worthwhile knowledge.

Meaningfulness and worthwhileness reflect the cognitive and social perspectives of an educational experience. Therefore, meaning and knowledge are both personally and socially constructed. This balanced integration of cognitive and collaborative learning processes, therefore, defines learning outcomes as both personally meaningful and socially worthwhile. (p. 19)

This perspective illuminates the inherently constructive nature of SDL. In other words, it views the learner’s process in terms of how it is constructed and informed by the social context and learning experiences. This notion may be one of the most inclusive views, as it regards individual and social context collaboratively constructing the learning process as well as experience.

Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007, p. 107) identify three main goals for SDL including, (1) to enhance the ability of adult learners to be self-directed in their learning, (2) to foster transformational learning as central to self-directed learning, and (3) to promote emancipatory learning and social action as an integral part of self-directed learning. Consequently, SDL perceives the individual learner as not only responsible for his or her learning potentials, but also experience a transformational process and ultimately contribute to emancipation of their social context.

Merriam and Bierema (2014) argued that SDL could be a ‘personal attribute’ or a ‘process’. In other words, SDL can be about ‘a self-directed and autonomous learner’ or a ‘way of organizing instruction’. SDL models are also categorized as ‘linear’ or ‘interactive’. SDL linear models describe is as a series of steps that the learners take to reach their learning goals in a self-directed way. The interactive models, on the other hand, emphasize on “two or more factors, such as opportunities people find in their own environments, the personality characteristics of learners, cognitive processes, and the context of learning, which collectively interact to form episodes of self-directed learning” (Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner, 2007, p. 111). Although linear models of SDL embody learning environments in terms of providing resources for the learners in their process, the interactive models have more potential to involve the context in the development of SDL. In other words, while the linear models focus on the SDL process and/or the individual learner, interactive models seek to understand it in terms of the interplay between different aspects of the process, including the learning environment.

Garrison’s (1997) comprehensive model and Hiemstra and Brockett’s (2012) Person, Process, and Context (PPC) models are two significant interactive SDL models that both embody

personal as well as procedural aspects of learning. More detailed description of the models is provided in the following.

Garrison's comprehensive model. Garrison (1997) argued that adult education mostly focuses on “self-direction” in terms of “external control and facilitation” rather than “internal cognitive processing and learning” (p. 20). Therefore, he proposed a comprehensive model, including three dimensions: self-management (task control), self-monitoring (cognitive responsibility), and motivation (entering and task, stating that “self-directed learning has traditionally emphasized on task management and external control” (p. 21).

Self-management. Self-management deals with the external control of the learning process. According to Merriam and Bierema (2014) it “situates the learner within the social context and is the degree to which the learner assumes control of the environment so that she can meet her goals” (p. 68). Garrison (1997) describe self-management as being “intimately linked with goal setting and metacognitive strategies” (p. 22) and also as a “collaborative experience” in educational context (p. 23).

Self-monitoring. Self-monitoring is the element dealing with the learners' cognitive and metacognitive abilities. In other words, it involves “monitoring the repertoire of learning strategies as well as an awareness of and ability to think about our thinking” (p. 24). Self-monitoring is the learner's ability to gauge her cognitive and metacognitive processes, in many ways like double-loop (reflecting on assumptions) and triple-loop (reflecting on the learning itself) learning (Arygyris, 1991).

Motivation. Garrison (1997) emphasized that motivation is a significant element of his proposed comprehensive model, as he described it as reflecting “perceived value and anticipated success of learning goals at the time learning is initiated and mediated between context (control)

and cognition (responsibility) during the learning process” (p. 26). According to Garrison (1997), there are two types of motivation, including entering and task motivation. Entering motivation deals with deciding whether or not to participate in a learning project; while, task motivation is required effort to stay and persist in a task. However, Garrison’s (1997) take on motivation is that of entering one, justifying that “although much can happen to influence motivation during the learning process, effort and persistence will be greatly influenced by the entering motivation state” (p. 27). Garrison (1997) described entering motivation in terms of the attraction to particular learning goals (valence) and the belief that a desired goal will be achieved (expectancy). Expectancy embodies personal traits (competency), contextual characteristics (contingency), and a perception to assess expectancy of success (anticipated control).

Consequently, Garrison’s (1997) model of SDL complies with Jarvis’ (2006) model of experiential learning, in that it perceives SDL from a holistic perspective of the individual learner considering their cognitive, metacognitive, and contextual potentials. Further, the model’s approach to motivation is comparable with that of self-determination theory, where they both accentuate the interaction between the personal and contextual attributes for motivation to be developed. Brockett and Hiemstra (1991, 2012) proposed two interactive models of SDL that highlighted personal, procedural, and contextual aspects of SDL to be discussed below.

Person and process: PRO and PPC. The Personal Responsibility Orientation (PRO) model uses the term “self-direction in learning” to refers to two interrelated dimensions; self-directed learning and learner self-direction. The authors described self-directed learning as a “process in which a learner assumes primary responsibility for planning, implementing, and evaluating the learning process” (p. 24). Trying to define a framework for the two mentioned constructs that while being distinctive, work in an interrelated manner together, Brockett and

Hiemstra (1991) stated that the PRO model is designed “to recognize both the differences and similarities between self-directed learning as an instructional method and learner self-direction as a personality characteristic” (p 26). Although the authors involved instructional aspects of learning environment in their model, that is a level of social context, “individuals assume ownership for their own thoughts and actions” (p. 26). Actually, Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) disagreed with the notion of an individual vs. social dichotomy, asserting that “both the individual and the social dimension are important and that one cannot exist without the other” (p. 131) and in their PRO model emphasized the individual’s responsibility to conduct the self-directed learning.

Although Brockett and Hiemsta (1991) viewed ‘personal responsibility’ as a leading factor in promoting self-directed learning and advocated social context as impacting on the whole process, the PRO model was criticized due to its primary emphasis on the individual. For example, Flannery (1993) argued that Brockett and Hiemstra (1991) “effectively ignore[d] the larger influences of the society” and “uncritically ignore[d] the cultural context of other countries” (p. 110). Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) seemed to agree with a critical argument that the concept of ‘personal responsibility’ had been *politically co-opted* in that “the term has often been used by the political right as a way of —blaming the victims for their circumstances in life because they did not take responsibility to avoid getting into their difficulties” (p. 157). As a result, Hiemstra and Brockett (2012) proposed and updated model of self-directed learning and called it the Person, Process, and Context (PPC) model, advocating the dynamic relationship between these elements. The authors described PPC model as follows:

In the PPC model, the optimal situation for self-directed learning to be most effective is when the person, process, and context are in balance. In other words, the learner is highly

self-directed, the teaching-learning process is set up in a way that encourages learners to take control of their own learning, and the sociopolitical context and the learning environment support the climate for self-directed learning. (Hiemstra and Brockett, 2012, p. 159)

Notifying the supporting role of sociopolitical context implies an acceptance of the fact that procedural and personal attributes of self-directed learning are affected by a social context that is informed by the power relations. Therefore, the PPC model serves as one of the most comprehensive models of self-directed learning in terms of social context at multiple levels including learning environment, socioeconomic status, demographic characteristics such as gender and race, and power structure. However, Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) approach to social context as collaborating with the individuals' rather than dominating over them in all their respects, is implied in the notion that self-directed learning is located at the intersection of person, process, and context. In other words, the adult learners are described as self-directed to the extent that they exhibit personal characteristics, meet procedural criteria, and are supported by the social context.

Adults learn in various formal and informal educational contexts. Meanwhile, adult education is significant formal education that facilitates acquiring knowledge and skills that contribute to the betterment of adults' lives. Next section discusses adult education and its implications.

Adult Education

Adult education is a historically rich concept of formal education that encompasses certain forms of training and continuing educational frameworks that target adult populations. Adult education literature implies ancient roots for this education starting from Greek and

Roman times and continued until contemporary time in its attributed forms such as skill training or literacy. Jarvis (1986) describes education of adults as not a new phenomenon that “has existed for centuries for one form or another” (p. 2). Lindeman (1926) provided an appealing premise for adult education by linking it to lifelong learning by stating that, “The whole of life is learning, therefore, education can have not endings. This new venture is called adult education – not because it is confined to adults but because adulthood, maturity, defines its limits” (p. 6). The author also argued that adult education is not limited to vocational training; it rather encompasses whole life learning by adding that,

Secondly, education conceived as a process coterminous with life revolves about non-vocational ideals. In this world of specialists everyone will of necessity learn to do his work, and if education of any variety can assist in this and in the further end of helping the worker to see the meaning of his labor, it will be education of a high order. But adult education more accurately defined begins where vocational education leaves off. Its purpose is to put meaning into the whole of life. (Lindeman, 1926, p. 7)

Verner (1964) described adult education from an organizational perspective, accentuating the role of an educational agent in the process of adult education. Accordingly, he defined adult education as “a relationship between an educational agent and a learner in which the agent selects, arranges, and continuously directs a sequence of progressive tasks that provide systematic experiences to achieve learning for people who participation in such activities is subsidiary and supplemental to a primary productive role in society.” (p. 32)

Houle (1972) who perceived adult education from a humanistic view of adult learning and process, defined adult education as “the process by which men and women (alone, in groups, or in institutional settings) seek to improve themselves or their society by increasing their skill,

knowledge, or sensitiveness; or it is any process by which individuals, group, or institutions try to help men and women improve in those ways” (p. 32). Further, Merriam and Brockett (2007) identified a self-directed learning element in the process of adult education through describing it as “a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values” (p. 7).

So far, the descriptions of adult education concerned the adult learner within the life span and in relation to organizational agents of education. However, sociological notions of adult education have identified it as posited in a broader social as well as structural context. Accordingly, Jarvis (1986) argued that, “Despite its long history, no sociology of the education of adults exists in the same manner as there are sociological studies of initial education” (p. 3). He postulated that one reason for the problem may be the fact that the phenomenon of adult education has not solidly been identified. McCullough (1980) summarized this problem as follows,

Extracting adult education from its surrounding social milieu – or at least differentiating adult education from its social milieu – is as difficult as determining how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. Is adult education a practice or a program? A methodology or organization? A “science” or a system? A process or a profession? Is adult education different from continuing education, vocational education, higher education? Does adult education have form and substance, or does it merely permeate the environment like air? Is adult education, therefore, everywhere yet nowhere in particular? Does adult education even exist? (p. 158)

While McCullough (1980) offered an affirmation about the latest question, he postulated that “adult education has for sure an ‘organization’ and a purpose that can be structurally analyzed” (p. 159).

With a sociological perspective, Jarvis (1986) identified liberal and radical types of adult education. He introduced three interpretations for liberal adult education as, “education in the liberal arts, education of the free man, and education to free the mind” (Jarvis, 1986, p. 34). Justifying that liberal education requires development of mind, Hirst (1965) mentioned mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy as necessary areas of study to contribute to this education. Liberal education is also founded on the premise that “man is free to become everything that it is intrinsically good for man to be” (Peterson, 1979, p. 37). Jarvis (1986) concluded that “the phenomenon of liberal adult education may have a conceptual bias towards those who are more free” (p. 35). Finally, liberal education advocates an educational process that “frees the mind to function according to its true nature, freeing reason from error and illusion” (Hirst, 1965, p. 115).

Accordingly, to Jarvis (1986) this last element of liberal education is interrelated with the concept of radical education, in that they both advocate a liberation of mind to question the status quo of social structure. “One of results in liberating the mind is that the individual may develop a profound dissatisfaction with the society in which he lives and wish to reform it either gradually or dramatically in a revolutionary form. In this in instance, the result of an educational activity, that may have been regarded as liberal, may only be interpreted as radical” (Jarvis, 1986, p. 37). Radical adult education not only seeks questioning the current social structure and dynamics, but also reviewing the possibilities of making social change. It presupposes that “the individual is constrained by social structures that prevent him pursuing his own interests” (Jarvis, 1986, p. 38)

and regards perpetuating and legitimating the status quo as a function of adult education (Thompson, 1980). This radical notion also complies with Fiallos' (2006) emphasis on transformative adult education, as she states,

For the purpose of our reflection, if education in general and that of adults in particular could reveal the underlying bases of the characters of the global market society, certainly it would be possible to promote at least a more ethical rebuilding of the concept that drive individuals, institutions, and society in search of greater coherence (p. 25).

Radical adult education may also be an applicable framework for critical education, as they both aspire social consciousness and change. Anyways, liberal and radical adult education are two frameworks for this education that can inform different forms of it to be discussed below.

Forms of Adult Education

There are mainly three forms of adult education, including formal, informal, and non-formal. Coombs and Ahmed (1974) described informal education as follows,

Informal education as used here is the lifelong process by which every person acquires and accumulates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and insights from daily experiences and exposure to the environment— at home, at work, at play; from the example and attitudes of family and friends; from travel, reading newspapers and books; or by listening to the radio or viewing films or television. Generally informal education is unorganized and often unsystematic; yet it accounts for the great bulk of any person's total lifetime learning— including that of even a highly "schooled" person. (p. 8)

Mundel and Schugurensky (2008) used the term informal learning instead of informal education. Informal learning is a learning conceptualized as a residual category for all other

learning activities, to include self-directed learning, incidental learning, and socialization (Schugurensky, 2000).

Coombs and Ahmed (1974) defined formal education as “the highly institutionalized, chronologically graded, and hierarchically structured ‘education system,’ spanning lower primary school and the upper reaches of the university” and non-formal education as “organized systematic, education activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children” (p. 8). Some examples of non-formal education include agricultural extension and adult literacy programs. Mocker and Spear (1982) proposed a model of lifelong learning that compares these learning types based on the learner’s level of control over the objectives and means of learning.

The different forms of adult education aim at empowering them to pursue their goals toward a better social life. “Participation in formal adult education can take many forms: English as a second language (ESL), adult basic education (ABE), general education development (GED), credentialing and apprenticeship programs, work-related courses, continuing professional education (CPE), continuing education, higher education, and personal development courses (Merriam and Bierema, 2014, p. 13). Adult basic education is broad field of adult education that provides the adults with the opportunity to get their GED and enter college mostly as non-traditional students. Next section is an overview of the tenets of adult basic education.

Adult basic education (ABE). As a subcategory of adult education, ABE is a broad concept that aims at educating adults with low education. Although ABE and literacy are mostly used interchangeably, literacy is actually integral to ABE. Baatjes (2008, p. 208) described ABE as a “vehicle to integrate poorly educated adults into the emerging global society as parents, productive workers, participatory citizens and fulfilled human beings” and as “necessary to stem

the divisive and destructive forces of polarization and marginalization in and amongst societies.” Beder’s (1991) description of literacy implies why literacy is an integral to ABE as he specifies it to the ability to read and write. Literacy is also identifiable from ABE, because it is not limited to adults, in that it deals with children and youth’s ability to read and write too.

According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (2013), in the US over 30 million adults do not have a high school diploma and 20% of US adults with a high school diploma have only beginning literacy skills. However, the publicly funded adult education system is able to serve only slightly over 2 million young and older adults per year (National Council of State Directors of Adult Education, 2012). Accordingly, the US Department of Education’s 2017 report indicates that ABE enrollment rate has been 43% in 2015-2016.

ABE learners are described as ‘poorly educated’ adults who did not have the opportunity to accomplish their education and get their diploma at high school ages. According to High School Drop Out Statistics (2014), every year, over three million youth drop out of school. They join the 6.7 million youth between the ages of 16 and 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor (Belfield, Levin, & Rosen, 2012). Another groups of ABE learners include employed and unemployed adults, immigrants, and parents. National Council of State Directors of Adult Education’s (2012) report indicates that in 2010-11, 41% of adults enrolled in adult basic education were unemployed and 31% were employed; the rest were not in the labor force. Further, Lowell, Gelatt, & Batalova (2006) predict that in 2030, nearly one in five US workers will be an immigrant. Finally, World Education Incorporation states that most adult learners are parents and primary caregivers of school-age children. Many are motivated to return

to school by wanting to serve as better role models for their children and help their children succeed in school.

From an adult learning perspective, Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) PPC model implies that there should be an inherent interaction between procedural, personal, and contextual elements for an adult learner, so that the learner can achieve learning fulfilment. The studies in ABE literature have addressed these three elements from different aspects. For example, Tate (2012) argued that a passive learning environment hinders adults' productivity in their learning. Relying on adult learning theories, the author suggested 20 strategies that grow memory cells and facilitate long-term retention. In fact, Tate (2012) founded her proposed strategies on proportionate ways to stimulate brain functioning in order to facilitate active learning for adult learners. such as that embodied adults' active engagement. Further, from a procedural point of view, Inverso, Korbin, and Hashmi (2017) suggested that ABE setting needs to build continuing awareness about digital divide and push affordable options in this regard for adult learners by adult educators through innovations.

Meanwhile, some studies have focused on adult learners' experiences as well as motivations in an ABE setting. For instance, Drago-Severson (2014) used a constructive-developmental approach to understand how the motivations of the women for participation in the diploma program changed over time. The author's interview with eight women enrolled in diploma program generated three themes for their motivations: practical goals such as increased work opportunities, needs of their children and families, and leadership aspirations as parents and workers. Further, Finn (2015) discussed that both adult learners and educators bring a lot of complicated experiences could serve as an effective facilitator of a collaborative learning environment. Pointing out the adult immigrants' rich experience in an English as a Second

Language (ESL) literacy classroom, Finn (2015) suggests that communities of practice could significantly contribute to adults' learning processes, as it provides them with an opportunity to take leadership roles and facilitate their peers' learning.

A critical perspective could facilitate a holistic view of the adult learners' experience in an ABE setting in terms of the socio-cultural underpinning of the ABE learners' experiences and motivations. In other words, a post-critical co-construction of ABE learners' narratives about their learning experiences before and during their enrollment on an ABE program, may highlight how their reasons to enroll in the program is explained by their socio-cultural characteristics. Further, ABE learners' experience with the program could indicate how an ABE program understands and addresses their learning needs. Therefore, some of critical perspectives towards learning and education will be discussed in the next section.

Critical Perspectives on Education

Education is a complicated social superstructure that comprises different formal and informal forms. Education is a state apparatus that is both the result of social and economic contradictions and the source of new contradictions at one and the same time (Apple, 2017). The critical perspectives on education discuss its role in reproducing social dynamics and also propose educational emancipatory potentials. In the following, I will discuss some prevalent critical perspectives on education and learning, including critical theory, social mobility, and Habermas' theories of learning, and Freire and Foucault's perspectives toward power.

Critical Theory and Education

Critical theory is a framework to view and question the power paradigms in terms of social structures as well as superstructures. According to Ray (2015), critical theory is a term adopted to situate social philosophy and theory in the heterodox Marxist intellectual tradition of

the Frankfurt School (especially Adorno and Horkheimer) and aims to explore the conditions of both domination and critique of obstacles to emancipation and a 'good society'.

Gibson (1986) stated that critical theory is a label that conceals a host of disagreements among different writers; arises from the (valid) claim that there is always theory underlying, and embedded in practice; holds that scientific (or positivist) approaches to the study of human society are at best ill-conceived, at worst irrelevant or distorted; claims to provide enlightenment as to the actual conditions of social life; acknowledges the sense of frustrations and powerlessness that many feel as they see their personal destinies out of their own control, and in the hands of (often unknown) others; and is significantly concerned with culture in terms of high culture, popular culture, youth culture, and culture and nature that respectively connote centrality of aesthetic experience, culture industry, a specific form of challenge and resistance to dominant adult culture, and humanity's relation to natural world.

Further, Brookfield (2005) proposed five critical characteristics for critical theory that differentiates it from traditional (positive) theory as follows,

- It is firmly grounded in a particular political analysis.
- Its concern is to provide people with knowledge and understanding intended to free them from oppression.
- It breaks down the separation of subject and object, of researcher and focus of research, found in traditional theories.
- It is normatively grounded in that it not only criticizes current society, but also envisages a fairer, less alienated, more democratic world.

- Verification of the theory is impossible until the social vision it inspires is realized; i.e., we will not know whether critical theory is true or false until the world it investigates is created and we can judge its relative humanity and compassion.

Education in general, and adult education in particular serve as applicable frameworks to examine the implications of critical theory both in terms of reviewing the manifestations of power relations in educational procedures and discussing emancipatory potentials of education in a critical theory framework (see St. Clair & Sandlin, 2004). One way to study such implications is to understand learners' experiences in their formal and informal educational contexts.

Gutek (1997) mentions the focus of critical theory as being two related elements in education: critique and reform. He explains that as a critique, it examines the issue of who – what class – controls educational institutions and processes and establishes educational goals and priorities. Using education and schooling to empower those who lack control over their own lives and destinies, raising the consciousness of subordinate groups is crucial for equipping them to wage the struggle, and working the cultural agents that reproduce the social, political, and economic status quo are some implications that Gutek (1997) proposes as the reform aspect of critical theory.

In fact, critical theorists not only explore the structural and contextual keystones of education in order to understand its function in terms of reinforcing and reproducing the status quo that is determined by dominant groups, but also seek emancipatory procedures relying on individuals' autonomy and ability to make social changes happen. Gibson (1986) proposed three elements for the process of critical theorists of education as follows,

They begin from a concern to map the inequalities and injustices of education. Next, they claim to trace those inequalities and injustices to their source, showing the educational

processes and structures by which they are maintained. Finally, they seek or propose remedies to those injustices. (p. 44)

According to Gibson (1986), “critical theorists start from the same point: the fact of evident inequalities in education, taking these as injustices and malformations of educational practice” (p. 45).

In regard to the second common characteristic of critical theorists, Gibson (1986) proposed critical theories as theories of reproduction that “explain how social inequality is reproduced from generation to generation, and how education contributes to that process” (p. 46). He viewed reproduction in terms of economic relations, state power, and culture. As for economic relations, Bowles and Ginitis (1976) stated that schooling develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identifications, which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. According to them, the social relations of school mirror the hierarchical division of labor at work; that pupils (like workers) are not in control of their education (work); that schools monopolize learning through certificates, and pupils are motivated by extrinsic rewards of marks and grades, not satisfaction with the task itself. Finally, Gibson (1986) asserts that cultural inequality and consequently economic inequality is reproduced by education through its language, values, processes, knowledge and so on.

Social Mobility

Social mobility embodies the social entities’ movement through social hierarchy or stratification. There are two types of social mobility, including horizontal and vertical. If the mobility entails a change in position but not in social class, it is “horizontal mobility”. On the other hand, if the social move encompasses a change in social class, it is called “vertical

mobility”, which can be upward or downward. Apparently, an upward social mobility occurs when the individual’s social status changes to a more privileged state. In contrast, a downward social mobility comprises moving from a more to less privileged social status. Gans (2007, p.154) defined economic mobility as “the move to a higher or lower level of income, wealth, education, employment status and standard of living” and social mobility as “the movement to a higher or lower class or status position”. The author also discussed that the potential for mobility depends on “economic opportunities”.

Social mobility may be discussed in terms of its relationship with different social phenomena, including education and immigration. Therefore, I will briefly elaborate on its implications in the fields immigration and education due to the focus of this study.

Social mobility and immigration. Social mobility may be initiated and fostered through different processes, including international migration that has been described as an important element in upward mobility. Gans (2007) described immigrants’ process of social mobility as follows:

Immigrant populations typically move up economically by developing or occupying a new economic niche or by taking over an old one from its present occupants if these have moved up or retired. But the immigrants may also move up if economic growth or technological and social change encourage wholesale changes in the economy. (p.154)

The immigrants’ process to communicate with non-immigrants and become a member of the new society they live in comprises acculturation and assimilation. Also called cultural change, acculturation is an outcome of the contact between two or more cultural groups (Berry, 1980), and is a critical construct used to describe immigrants’ adaptation. Acculturation may be intentional and purposeful or automatic and unintentional. Mentioning that the two types of

acculturation are not easy to distinguish, Gans (2007) discusses that immigrants' process of moving up depends on their initial socioeconomic status. The immigrants who arrive the new country with upper middleclass skills and status can move up more conveniently or need to do less (Feliciano, 2005). That said, the economic context is important, hence, acculturation does not directly lead into upward social mobility.

Park and Burgess (1969) defined assimilation as “a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in common culture life”(p. 735). Further, Gans (2007) ties immigrants' assimilation to their being formally or informally accepted by non-immigrants. “Making themselves acceptable requires obtaining the needed cultural and social skills” (Gans, 2007, p. 155). However, the non-immigrants need to have incentives to accept the immigrants. For example, if the immigrant has a skill set that is significantly needed by the non-immigrants, they do not even require English knowledge. Therefore, the assimilation process depends on non-immigrants' needs and may not directly lead to upward social mobility either. In fact, language acquisition may become a secondary factor in immigrants' process of assimilation if they have the required skill to address non-immigrants' needs.

One of the significant procedures of assimilation for immigrants is learning English. In fact, it is an important investment for the immigrants to become a member of their new country's community. It facilitates everything for them, including finding jobs, getting educated, and communicating with others. “Without strong English skills immigrants are more likely to be in poverty, more likely to raise children who do poorly in school, and less able to become citizens and to join in the political process” (Carliner, 2000, p. 158). Therefore, learning English is a

means and ends for the immigrants to assimilate to the new society that may not directly lead to social mobility, but can facilitate. This may be associated with the function of education in general to facilitate social mobility, which will be discussed below.

Social mobility and education. Sociologists emphasize the critical role of education to understand social inequality in terms of moving in or out of poverty from one generation to the other. In the past centuries, the children of a family inherited their parents' jobs in most of the societies. For example, if the parents were farmers, their children most probably continued their way and became farmers. However, the establishment and expansion of public education transformed this inheriting trend through systematically providing the individuals with the opportunity to decide what to do other than the familial occupations. This aspect of education facilitates meritocracy, where "rewards and position are distributed by ability not social backgrounds and personal connections" (Torch, Arum, & Manza, 2017, p. 233). In fact, education increases social mobility in this regard. However, this is an ideal function of education, as it has also proved to reproduce the social inequalities. Torch, Arum, and Manza (2017) describe this process as follows:

Education systems, however, can also be used to maintain and preserve privileged access to scarce positions if families with more resources are able to invest in more or better education for their children, for example moving to a better neighborhood or paying for private school or private tutoring. Furthermore, educational systems produce credentials, and groups can use these credentials to separate those with privilege from those without it (p. 233).

Bourdieu (1974) explains this function of education in terms of cultural capital that comprises the social assets of a person that promote social mobility in a stratified

society (Harper-Scott & Samson, 2009). Actually, educational systems are based on higher-class students' cultural capital in a way to reproduce their implications and potentials.

[Education] is in fact one of the most effective means of perpetuating the existing social pattern, as it both provides an apparent justification for social inequalities and gives recognition to the cultural heritage, that is, to a social gift treated as a natural one (Bourdieu, 1974, p.32).

In such educational context, meritocracy is mostly associated with the achievement potentials of those who possess cultural capital. In other words, the meritocracy does not perpetuate equality.

Social mobility embodies a pattern of intergenerational inheritance, as it measures the extent to which parents and children are different or similar in terms of their social and economic status. Accordingly, Torch, Arum, and Manza (2017, p. 230) described a high-mobility as the one, where there is “relatively little connection between parents and children’s place in life”. The authors contrasted this concept with low-mobility society, where there is “relatively close connection between parents and their children’s positions when children reach adulthood, social mobility is low” (Torch, Arum, & Manza, 2017, p. 230).

In immobile societies, there is much possibility that the meritocracy applies more for those with more cultural capital; therefore, education does not seem to significantly contribute to those with less cultural capital to move upward in their social status. Torch, Arum, and Manza (2017) indicated that there is low social mobility in the United States explaining,

The intergenerational association of .41 in the United States means that if your earnings are \$100,000 higher than average, then your kids can expect to make \$41,000 more than

average... Your successes (or difficulties) in life are much more closely related to your parents in the United States than elsewhere. (p.232)

That said, if an immigrant comes to the US with a low socioeconomic status background and from a low-mobility country, they are not likely to move upwards in their social and economic status. Meanwhile, one of the major motivations for the immigrants to pursue their education is to find a job that facilitates an upward mobility in terms of higher income and better social status. However, if the educational system of the target country tends to reproduce cultural capital, the immigrants would have low chance for upward mobility through getting more educated.

Anyway, education seems to pave the immigrants' way to achieve the prerequisites of better life circumstances. Carliner (2000) discussed how learning English is a significant investment for immigrants and stated that education would facilitate getting a better job. "Immigrants with little education can often find jobs within ethnic enclaves that do not require a knowledge of English, but most jobs for well educated workers involve extensive contact with natives" (Carliner, 2000, p. 158). Accordingly, education is a means for the immigrants to change their life circumstances. Therefore, they may have an instrumental approach to learning and education. Habermas (1975) has discussed the instrumental learning that is informed by their social context. Next section is a brief review of his theories.

Habermas' Theories of Learning

Habermas (1975) perceives adults as automatic learners who cannot avoid learning, as he states adults have "an automatic inability not to learn" (p. 15). He proposed reflexive versus non-reflexive learning based upon the intentionality of being involved in a learning situation.

Habermas (1975) described these two learning as follows:

Reflexive learning takes place through discourses in which we thematize practical validity claims that have become problematic or have been rendered problematic through institutionalized doubt, and redeem or dismiss them on the basis of arguments. Non-reflexive learning takes place in action contexts in which implicitly raised theoretical and practical validity claims are naïvely taken for granted and accepted or rejected without discursive consideration. (p. 15)

Reflexivity connects to reflectivity in learning, as Jarvis (1992) postulates that “reflexivity monitoring of action is referred to as a basis for reflective learning” (p. 37). It has also been associated with critical reflection of individuals (Lash & Urry, 1994). Reflexivity in the modern society has been described as having “central role in helping people navigate their way through the world” (Dyke, 2009, p. 290). According to Dyke (2009) capitalism in modern reflexive society demands labor that is more “flexible, reflective, able to problem solve, within clearly defined limitations, autonomous” (p. 292). The author concludes that education needs more reflexive students in order to address the requirements of the reflexive modern society. Therefore, Habermas’ (1975) account of reflexive learning implies how the individual learners engage in reflection to deal with social world phenomena. On the hand, non-reflexive learning is involved when the individual learns during action and not through reflection.

Habermas’ postulation about learning also embraced three areas of knowledge generation that are “knowledge constitutive”; i.e., they indicate the mode of exploring knowledge and if its claims can be warranted. The three areas define learning domains and are founded in different dimensions of social existence including work, interaction, and power. The three areas will be briefly described below.

Work knowledge. Work refers to the ways one manipulates and controls one's environment. In this area, knowledge is acquired through empirical investigation and governed by technical rules. An action in this area is described as appropriate if it is capable of effective control of reality. The type of human interest at this level is technical that inspires 'instrumental knowledge', where the individual seeks cause and effect.

Practical knowledge. The practical domain of knowledge identified human social interaction, also called communicative action. Habermas (1970) described communicative action as follows:

Communicative action is governed by binding consensual norms, which define reciprocal expectations about behavior and which must be understood and recognized by at least two acting subjects. Social norms are enforced through sanctions. Their meaning is objectified in ordinary language communication. While the validity of technical rules and strategies depend on that of empirically true or analytically correct propositions, the validity of social norms is grounded only in the intersubjectivity of the mutual understanding of intentions and secured by the general recognition of obligations (p. 92).

Further, Habermas (1992a) stated that the practical knowledge "starts from the trivial assumption that subjects capable of speech and action cannot help but learn" (p. 165). In fact, in the practical domain of knowledge, although the social norms may be associated with empirical or analytical propositions, their validity is founded in the intersubjectivity of reciprocal understanding of intentions. An appropriate action in this domain is determined through its potential for understanding the meaning rather than cause and effect relationship.

Emancipatory knowledge. Habermas identified the third area of cognitive interest as "emancipatory" that "involves an interest in self-knowledge, that is, the knowledge of self-

reflection, including interest in the way one's history and biography has expressed itself in the way one sees oneself, one's roles and social expectations" (Mezirow, 1981, p. 5). Knowledge in this domain is acquired through self-reflection and transformative learning that leads to transformed perspective.

Table 3 shows Habermas' model of the ways of understanding and their interests. In his model, hermeneutics deals with "the understanding and interpretation of human interaction" (Gibson, 1986, p. 36). Therefore, and according to this model we communicate with our context at different levels, including instrumental, collaboratively communicative, and emancipatory. It seems to follow a trend, where we start with just pursuing our benefits, collaborate with others and construct common goals, and going out of box, question the structure, and contribute to social change. Adult learners are constantly involved in different domains of learning due to their social roles as well as goals in life.

Next section includes a discussion on power and how it may be produced and reproduced by education.

Power Dimensions

Power has two different contradictory dimensions, including repressive and liberator. Emphasizing that adult education praises liberator power, Brookfield (2005) state the difference between the two as follows:

Repressive power is seen as constraining and coercing, bending its subjects to its will.

Liberator power animates and activates, helping people take control of their lives.

Different critical perspectives, including those of Foucault and Freire have analyzed this process, stating that the individuals intend to reproduce the power dynamics through getting the education. (p.120)

Table 3. Habermas' model: Ways of understanding and their interests

Discipline (i.e. mode of understanding)	Focus of enquiry (social experience)	Interests	Organization of knowledge
Positivism	Work (instrumental action)	Technical	'Law-Like' accounts
Hermeneutics	Interaction and language	Practical	Hermeneutic accounts
Critical theory	Power	Emancipation	Critical analyses

Note: From “*Critical Theory and Education*”, By, R. Gibson, 1986, p. 37. London: British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data.

Freire and Foucault discuss these two dimensions of power in terms of its impact on individuals' relationships with each other and the role of knowledge and education in this dynamic. The following sections are brief overviews of their critical perspectives.

Oppressed, oppressor, or none of them. Freire's critical perspective highlights the repressive aspect of power, notifying that the power is in the hands of the oppressors and that the oppressed want to earn the power to become like the oppressors. He states that the oppressed suffer from duality, are afraid of freedom, and are self-depreciated and fatalist. Notifying that the oppressed aspire freedom to exist authentically and are at the same time afraid of this freedom, Freire (2006 [1970]) describe their duality as follows:

They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided; between ejecting the oppressor within or not ejecting them; between human solidarity or alienation; between following prescriptions or having choices; between being spectators or actors; between acting or having the illusion of acting through the action of the oppressors; between speaking out or being silent, castrated in their power to create and re-create, in their power to transform the world (p. 48).

According to Freire (2006 [1970]) the oppressed have internalized the image of oppressors perceive their circumstances as being a result their fatal destiny. "Under the sway of magic and myth, the oppressed see their suffering, the fruit of exploitation, as the will of God – as if God were the creator of this "organized disorder" (Freire, 2006 [1970], p. 62). Finally, the oppressed duality has caused them not to trust themselves, hence self-depreciating. "Never do the realize that they, too, "know things" they have learned in their relations with the world and with other women and men" (Freire, 2006 [1970], P. 60). Freire (2006 [1970]) concludes that

oppressed aspire to become like the oppressors in order to earn the power in their hands. In fact, the oppressed identity is in becoming an oppressor.

On the other hand, the oppressors aspire to have more through exploiting the oppressed. Freire (2006 [1970]) discussed that the oppressors dehumanize everything as well as the oppressed in order to transform them to objects of “their purchasing power” (p. 58).

For the oppressors, what is worthwhile is to have more – always more – even at the cost of the oppressed having less or having nothing. For them, to be is to have and to the class of the “haves” (Freire, 2006 [1970], p. 58).

Meanwhile, Freire (2006 [1970]) highlighted the role of education in preserving or transforming this power dynamic. According to him, in the prevalent ‘banking education’, education becomes an act of depositing and “the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filling, and storing the deposits” (Freire, 2006 [1970], p. 72). Having described the dehumanizing role of banking adult education that preserves the above mentioned power dynamic, Freire (2006 [1970]) proposes liberator education, where the educator believes in mutual humanization. For Freire (2006 [1970]), education may contribute to empowering both oppressed and oppressor to be liberated and develop an equal social context. As a result of such process, there will not be an oppressor, not an oppressed.

Although Freire believes in the oppressed potential capacity to transform the power dynamics, his approach to power is mostly repressive. In other words, he perceives power as being in the hands of the oppressors. While Freire perceives power as being in the hands of power holders, Foucault describes it as being disseminated at different levels of social structure. Next section includes a brief discussion of Foucault’s account of power.

Power and knowledge. Foucault describes power as being prevalent in all aspects of individuals' lives. "Power is neither given, not exchanged, not recovered, but rather exercised, and in only exists in action" (Foucault, 1980, p. 89). Further, Foucault (1980) questions the model of ideological manipulation and economic function stating that, "power is conceived primarily in terms of the role it plays in the maintenance simultaneously of the relations of production and of a class domination" (Foucault, 1980, p. 88).

Accordingly, the power relations are diverse and contextual and the social mechanisms of control that establish them are haphazard and do not follow a systemic process. In other words, the dominant groups do not set up control mechanisms to preserve their authority; rather, they find out about certain procedures have arisen that could "become economically advantageous and politically useful" (Foucault, 1980, p. 101) in preserving the dominant group's position. Therefore, when the dominant group find certain practices as advantageous to them then "as a natural consequence, all of a sudden, they came to be colonized and maintained by global mechanisms and the entire state system" (Foucault, 1980, p. 101). That said, the power is central to human relations through their interactions within their contexts and is not exclusive to a specific dominant group.

One of the significant elements of Foucault's work is his approach to the relationship between knowledge and power. "Whoever is in a position of power is able to create knowledge supporting that power relationship" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 137). Therefore, when the society accepts a source of knowledge, it strengthens some and limit the others in terms of their establishment of power. Further, as a result of this mechanism, some knowledge becomes legitimate and some, unreliable. Therefore, the institutions, where the individuals are taught the legitimate and official knowledge (Apple, 2000), come under careful examination. "The exercise

of power perpetually creates knowledge and conversely knowledge constantly induces effects of power... it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 137).

Accordingly, although Foucault perceives power as disseminated and represented at different societal levels, he highlights the role of institutional knowledge in reproducing the power dynamics as well as relations.

A Synthesis of the Concepts

Adult learning is characterized by adults’ need and readiness to learn. Adults learners are motivated learners whose learning is facilitated through their constructed experience and self-concept. Adult learners’ experiential learning is constructed in their social environment as Jarvis (1986) explains. Their motivation may also be examined through the relationships between the load and power in their life as McClusky (1970) describes. Further, adults’ goal orientation process is informed by their self-concept and also learning needs.

Accordingly, context is identified as a critical element in adults’ learning processes such as self-directed learning; a concept that has been discussed from linear as well as interactive perspectives. Hiemstra and Brockett’s (2012) Person, Process, and Context model discusses context as a critical element that informs the development of self-directed learning process. Therefore, adults’ learning process may be perceived in terms of their motivation and experience as well as their procedures in directing their learning. Meanwhile, the context plays a crucial role in development of their learning process, as it informs their learning experience.

Adult Basic Education (ABE) is a formal and broad form of adult education that embodies different programs like GED tests and English as a Second Language. ABE is a diverse educational context, encompassing different groups of adult learners, including immigrant adult learners. The research has indicated that learning English is one of the important

learning needs of immigrant adult learners. They are also enrolled in GED programs in order to get their equivalent diploma. Immigrant adult learners' being English non-native speakers imply a critical requirement to communicate their learning needs as well as prior knowledge in their ABE classes.

Accordingly, a critical analysis of ABE setting may help to understand its inclusivity in terms of meeting immigrant adult learners' needs. Further, and in order to understand immigrant adult learners' experience, it may be helpful to examine their processes in the framework of the learning types as Habermas postulates. In other words, it may help to understand immigrant adult basic education learners' process in terms of its being technical, practical, or emancipatory.

Immigrant adult learners' motivation to enroll in ABE programs may also be discussed through their social mobility process. That said, the immigrant adult learners may intend to get more educated in order to assimilate in the American society through an upward social mobility. Meanwhile, the immigrant adult learners' perception towards power and how their education may contribute to their empowerment in life is another discussion that Foucault and Freire's arguments of power and education could explain effectively.

Chapter Summary

Chapter II included an overview of adult learning and adult educational literature. It also encompassed critical perspectives on learning and education to facilitate a critical understanding of adults learning process as well as educational experiences. In Chapter III, I will discuss the methodology of this study that was applied to understand immigrant adult basic education learners' learning and educational experiences as well as their perspectives toward education's power. In the next chapter, I will describe the methodology and process of conducting the study followed by the provisions I took to ensure its trustworthiness.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand immigrant ABE learners' experience in an ABE setting from a postcritical lens. Accordingly, three research questions that guided this study were: (a) How do immigrant ABE learners describe their educational experience prior to their enrollment in ABE?; (b) How do immigrant ABE learners describe their learning experiences?; and (c) How do immigrant ABE learners describe the role of education in changing their life situations? Chapter III addresses the qualitative methodology and methods applied throughout this study. In this chapter, I will discuss why and how narrative inquiry was the most applicable form of qualitative research methodology. I will also explain how postcritical approach to data analysis would illuminate my positionality in the context of the study. The chapter also involves the procedures and initiatives taken in selecting the site and the participants, developing interview protocol, collecting data, analyzing the data, and promoting the trustworthiness throughout the study.

Qualitative Inquiry

This study aims to understand adult learners' perceptions and experiences with their educational processes. Therefore, the opted methodology for this study should facilitate an interpretive understanding of the learners' experience. "Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials- case study; personal experience; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; cultural texts and productions; observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts – that describe routines and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, p. 3). Consequently, qualitative methodology serves as an applicable framework to conduct this study as it would provide the adult learners with an opportunity to share their constructed educational stories. Flick's (2009)

account of the essential features of qualitative research as (a) appropriateness of methods and theories; (b) perspectives of the participants and their diversity; (c) reflexivity of the researcher and the research; and (d) variety of approaches and methods in qualitative research that further supports the application of qualitative methodology for this study.

Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experience (Merriam, 2009). This notion of qualitative research is very much applicable in working within social settings as it's critical to understand individuals' constructed worlds in order to communicate with them in a significant way. The researcher's prior experience and positionality plays an important role in this process because they are studying the process as an integrated part of the whole social setting. Accordingly, the researcher's positionality plays an important role in the interpretation of the participants' constructed worlds. In other words, the researcher interprets participants' constructed perceptions due to their constructed frameworks. Further, the power dynamics between the participants and the researcher may significantly impact the way the participants represent their constructed world.

Analytical Framework

The immigrant ABE learners' experiences embody their stories and processes in the educational settings they have experienced. Clandinin and Connelly (2000, p. 20) described narrative inquiry as a "way of understanding experience" that qualifies it as an applicable method to understand their experiences through their construction of their stories. Czarniawska (2004) defined narrative as a type of qualitative research in which "narrative is understood as a spoken or written text giving an account of an event/action or series of events/actions, chronologically connected" (p. 17). Narrative is actually the textualized lived experiences of individuals.

According to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), narrative researchers perceive stories as a crucial element of human experience. “First-person accounts of experience constitute the narrative “text” of this research approach” (Merriam, 2009, p. 32). That said, narrative studies comprise one’s story as one has experienced it as well as the researcher’s understanding and interpretation of the story. Creswell (2013, pp. 71-72) described the features of narrative studies as follows,

- Narrative researchers collect stories from individuals (and documents, and group conversations) about individuals’ lived and told experiences.
- Narrative stories tell of individual experiences, and they may shed light on the identities of individuals and how they see themselves.
- Narrative stories are gathered through many different forms of data, such as through interviews that may be the primary form of data collection, but also through observations, documents, pictures, and other sources of qualitative data.
- Narrative stories often are heard and shaped by the researchers into a chronology although they may not be told that way by the participants.
- Narrative stories are analyzed in varied ways. An analysis can be made about what was said (thematically), the nature of the telling of the story (structural), or who the story is directed toward (dialogic/performance).
- Narrative stories occur within specific places or situations. The context becomes important for the researcher’s telling of the story within a place.

Narrative studies take different forms, such as biography, autobiography, life history, personal experience story, and oral history. Personal experience story is in fact and person’s story found in life episodes and personal and communal situations of one’s life (Denzin, 1989a).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) highlighted the collaboration between the researcher and the participants through the social interaction with milieus stating that, “An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling, the stories of the experiences that make up people’s lives, both individual and social” (p. 20). This notion of narrative inquiry is closer to a sociological approach to narrative research, where the researchers seek to understand how the participants’ stories are embedded in the interaction between the inquirer and the participants. Chase (2005) described the researchers’ interest in the sociological approach of narrative research:

how people communicate meaning through a range of linguistic practices, how their stories are embedded in the interaction between researcher and narrator, how they make sense of personal experience in relation to culturally and historically specific discourses, and how they draw on, resist, and/or transform those discourses as they narrate their selves, experiences, and realities. (p. 659)

In a discussion on critical researchers’ positionality towards the participants and how the hegemonies may be reproduced in the context of the research, Hytten (2004) stated that, Critical researchers argue that the hegemony of dominant structures creates a false consciousness in people that disables them from effectively challenging the status quo. Yet, what we have not considered enough are the ways in which many critical researchers substitute one form of hegemony for another. That is, they do not truly problematize their own understanding of the social world, and rather argue for the oppressed to replace their false consciousness with the “critical consciousness” the researcher has. (p. 96)

Postcritical research addresses this issue through requiring the researchers to consider

their positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation throughout their research.

Post-critical research engages critical perspective on both the researched experience and the researcher's epistemology. "For the post-critical researcher, then, this coupling of critical and post-structural perspectives means taking seriously issues associated with positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation" (Anderson, 2014, p. 71). Noblit, Flores, and Murillo Jr. (2004) mentioned the issues to be considered by post-critical ethnography as positionality, reflexivity, objectivity, and representation. The authors describe positionality as the explicit presentation of the "groups and interests the post-critical ethnographer wishes to serve as well as his or her biography" (p.21). Reflexivity catches redesigning the observed and observer. "Redesigning the observed involves consideration of voice, polyphony, and montage and redesigning the observer involves working toward dialogic and bifocal (emic and etic) exegesis that elaborates the alternative possibilities, identities, juxtapositions, and outcomes in any scene studies ethnographically" (Noblit, Flores, and Murillo Jr., 2004, p. 22). According to McCadden et al. (1999), reconsidering objectivity surpasses writing. "Theorizing post-critical ethnography of education should be represented in the same tone as its writing – balancing tentativeness and surety and evoking a sense of temporality" (McCadden et al., 1999, p. 33). Finally, representation concerns acknowledging the "uncertainty about adequate means of describing social reality" (Marcus & Fisher, 1986, p. 8).

As a former social activist who has worked with various groups of disadvantaged groups of the society, the researcher has constructed perspectives about adult learners who have not been able to complete their education at school time. Therefore, the postcritical perspective of the research would enable the researcher to systemically check her assumptions and positionality in interpreting the research data.

The next section entails a review of paradigmatic framework of the study followed by the researchers' epistemology and reflexivity.

Paradigmatic Framework

Paradigms may be defined as the worldviews or belief systems that guide researchers (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this section I will discuss the philosophical worldview assumption that I brought to the study. I will also describe my experiences with adult learners and also as an international student in the US to clarify another aspects of the framework to interpret the participants' experiences.

Epistemology

This qualitative study is founded on constructivism. At the heart of constructivism is a concern for lived experience, or the world as it is felt and understood by social actors (Schwandt, 1994). Guba and Lincoln (2005), described constructivism as “transactional and subjectivist” (p. 195); the one that is based on co-created findings. Guba (1990) stated that from a subjectivist perspective, “the inquirer and inquired into are fused into a single entity and findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two” (p. 27). Further, Lincoln and Guba (1985) identified constructive epistemology as being founded on the philosophical belief that people construct their own understanding of reality; we construct meaning based on our interactions with our surroundings. Finally, constructivist epistemology according to Guba and Lincoln (1994), assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we know. The investigator and the object of investigation are linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world. Constructivism “recognized the importance of the subjective human creation of meaning, but doesn't reject

outright some notion of objectivity. Pluralism, not relativism, is stressed with focus on the circular dynamic tension of subject and object” (Miller & Crabtree, 1999, p. 10).

While constructivism highlights subjective construction of the reality and knowledge, social constructionism accentuates the role of social context in the development of this formation. Kim (2001) compares the epistemology in constructionism and constructivism in terms of their approach to meaning making. According to the author, in constructionism “there is no meaning in the world until we construct it” and in constructivism “people create meaning through their interactions with each other and the objects in the environment”.

Describing social constructionism as a cousin of postmodernism, Doan (1997) states that it focuses on “how ideas and attitudes have developed over time within a social, community context” (p. 129). The author adds that social constructionism deals specifically with “the narratives or discourses that have taken on a normative standard against which people measure and judge themselves” (Doan, 1997, p. 129). Social constructionists rather stories that are inspired by the person's lived experience. In other words, it comprises the individual's own voice, perception, and experiences instead of a domain of expert knowledge. In fact, the narratives that are based on lived experience imply the experience of personal agency (Adams-Wescott, & Isenbart (1995). Accordingly, and since social context plays an important role in the participants' construction of narratives, social constructionism is a critical aspect of this study's epistemology.

Reflexivity

One of the significant points about qualitative research is that the researchers should be aware of their experience with the group they are conducting the study with as well as the phenomenon they are studying. Being aware of the prior experiences and hence biases, would

help the researchers to be more focused. Hatch (2002) stated, “The capacities to be reflexive, to keep track of one’s influence on a setting, to bracket one’s biases, and to monitor one’s emotional responses are the same capacities that allow researchers to get close enough to human action to understand what is going on” (p. 10). Therefore, in this section I will outline my experience as a social activist in Iran, where I worked with adults who dropped out of school. I will also share my experience as an international student in an English speaking educational system to highlight how this experience would imply my interpretation of immigrant adult basic educations’ experience.

As a children and women rights advocate in Iran, I worked with disadvantaged groups from the community who were mainly from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. The children worked on streets or as illegal workers in small and large businesses to help their families survive poverty. Therefore, they could not go to school mainly because they had to work during school time. Further, their families could not afford school expenses. Some of these children had drug addicted parents who were either in jail or unable to work because of their addiction. Some other children’s parents were low income workers who could not afford their family life. My role in this context was to identify the learning needs of these children and develop educational programs for them, so that they learned to read and write and potentially prepare to go back to school. Meanwhile, we negotiated with schools to admit these children at nightshifts. As a social activist, I was also involved in campaigns that aimed at helping these children reach their educational and health rights.

My other initiative in the context of working and street children, was to work with their parents in terms of providing them with educational opportunities. In other words, as most of their parents were illiterate or had very low education, I collaborated in developing literacy

programs for them. Further, I developed and conducted workshops for the parents to address their concerns about how to deal with their children's problems. Throughout this process, I observed how different learning environments that these adult learners had experienced informed how we should communicate the topics and contents with them. In fact, the learners' experiences impacted on the development of their learning needs as well as approaches. For example, they needed to learn how to read because it enabled them to find better jobs.

Another group of adult learners that I worked with were disadvantaged groups of women. They also came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and most of them dropped out of schools. I worked with them as a social worker and educator in mainly two centers. One was for women who were at social risk and needed to learn skills and work to support their families. My role as a social worker in this context was an invaluable transformative learning experience for me, as I learned more about their cultural contexts, where education was an inaccessible and luxurious value. Another institution I worked in supported women who had quitted addiction. We developed different workshops and training sessions, including literacy programs for these women to facilitate the process of starting a normal social life for them. I observed how these women strived to use all their learning capacities to accomplish the courses and improve in their process. Meanwhile, their prior life experiences both motivated them to learn new things and hindered their process. In other words, they wanted to make a change and not repeat their previous mistakes. However, they were exhausted and sometimes disappointed with the life circumstances and were potentially ready to give up.

The aforementioned experiences imply how I perceive the background of adult learners who dropped out of school at younger ages and want to resume their education. My understanding is that they come from low socioeconomic backgrounds; their learning

experiences explains their learning motivations as well as barriers; and their main reason to pursue their literacy education is to make a change in their life.

Another aspect of my positionality deals with the fact that I am an international student in the US and all my prior education has been in a Persian speaking context. Although I was fluent in English and did not have significant language barriers when I started my education here, I had a lot of challenges communicating my prior knowledge to the English speaking educational system. Moreover, I encountered a new learning environment with a different culture as well as teaching and learning transaction. Adjusting to all these differences was both stressful and exciting for me. In my experience with the immigrant adult learners, I could connect with the frustration that they described about their language barriers. I could also resonate with their challenges in an English speaking learning environment. This is another indicator of my subjectivity in the process of conducting this research. In other words, I heard my voice in some of their comments about the hardships of applying their prior knowledge in the new learning context. Accordingly, at some points we just looked at each other and I got their point. This sometimes undermined the fact that my educational process was significantly different from theirs and I started at a higher level of education.

Method

In this section I will describe the procedures I used to conduct the study and analyze the data. I will start with the process getting IRB approval and then describe the site followed by the process of selecting the participant. I will then explain the procedures of data collection and analysis to be discussed in more detail in next two chapters.

IRB Approval

As the participants of this study are human subjects, I needed to request the Institutional Review Board of the University of Tennessee to approve my research proposal. Therefore, I completed and submitted the form that required me to explain in detail the research goals, procedures, and material. My proposal was approved and I was able to officially start collecting data.

Site Description

The site for this project is an adult basic education organization that is located in a city in southeastern State. This organization is a private, non-profit corporation specializing in unique business solutions for employers, innovative training opportunities for individuals, and a popular Driver Education Program. Some of the courses offered in this office include English as Second Language (ESL) and HiSET preparation classes. The HiSET exam is a five-part test that the State of Tennessee uses in the process of issuing a high school equivalency credential. The five parts include reading, writing, social sciences, science, and mathematics.

Table 4 shows the diversity of the enrollees of the classes by age, ethnicity, and gender. The diverse population of the enrolled adult students in the site, where I conducted my research was a prominent implication of the range of diversity of the whole organization in the district. Next section entails the process of selecting the sample as well as the participants.

Sample Selection & Participants

One of the significant themes of my research goal is to understand the experiences of immigrant adult learners. In other words, I intended to understand their process and stories both in their current educational context and the ones they experienced prior to this institute. Merriam (2009) described purposeful sampling as “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to

Table 4. Enrollees by Age, Ethnicity, and 73Gender from 07/01/2018 to 06/30/2019

Age Group	Asian		Black or African American		Hispanic/Latino		Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander		White		American Indian or Alaska Native		More than One Race	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
16-18	4	4	69	36	28	27	2		300	201			22	14
19-24	23	17	291	81	77	124	3	3	409	340	7		44	46
25-44	58	168	388	260	153	361	2	4	571	656	7	9	29	28
45-54	13	87	60	61	32	92		4	91	113			4	6
55-59	6	15	28	17	16	14			30	47				
60+	10	10	13	24	3	27		2	36	25				
Total	114	301	849	479	309	647	7	13	1437	1346	14	9	99	94

Note: This table was adapted and accumulated based on the demographic information that the institution provided.

discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 77). LeCompte and Preissle (1993, p. 69) suggest using criterion-based selection instead of purposeful, where the inquirer create “a list of the attributes essential” to her study and then “proceed to find or locate a unit matching the list” (p. 70). Accordingly, I used criterion-based sampling in terms of maximum variation sampling. In describing maximum variation sampling, Patton (2002) stated that, “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon” (p. 234). My criteria for selecting the sample were that the participants of the study were adult basic education learners age 18 and above, were enrolled in the organization’s “regular” high school equivalency classes, and wanted to take HiSET test to get the GED.

I first asked seven students if they wanted to have the interview with me and then five more came to me and asked if they could be a part of this study. Accordingly, I ended up interviewing 12 adult basic education students. Having analyzed the data of the first set of the interviews, I contacted the participants to set up the member checking interviews through phone calls. Eight participants, including six immigrants and two American students responded to my call. That said, I lost three immigrants and one American adult student in my second set of interviews. Given the general goal of this study being to understand the adult basic education learners’ experiences through their educational processes in their socio-cultural contexts, I decided to focus on the immigrant adult basic education learners in order to focus more specifically on the immigrant learners’ experience. Therefore, I analyzed the data related to six immigrant adult basic education learners.

In Chapter IV, I will tell the story of each participant and discuss their specific perceptions about themselves as learners, their learning process, and their perspectives about how education can bring about changes in their lives. I will also discuss the shared themes of all participants.

Data Collection

Qualitative data are derived mainly through observing the interactions of the participants with each other in their environment as well as from the interviews with the participants. Patton (2002, p. 4) described qualitative data as “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings, and knowledge” that are derived from interviews; “detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, actions” noted through observations; and “excerpts, quotations, or entire passages” taken from different types of documents.

Collecting the data for this study started after the Institutional Research Board (IRB) office at the University of Tennessee approved the research proposal. The data for this research were derived through conducting interviews and observing the participants’ interactions in their learning environments.

Observation. One of the terms of IRB approval was that I could not mention anyone in the observations but the participants and their interactions, as we did not have the consent of everyone to be mentioned in the research. Therefore, my observation process embodied two sections. I spent the first week just observing the classes and taking notes to identify the characteristics of the learning environment of the participants. I drew the plan of the class locating the students and the educator and labeled the students by their gender, ethnicity/nationality, and a number. I did so to be able to identify them in describing the dynamics and interactions. I also took notes on the topic of the class, the questions and answers,

and the educators' responses to different types of questions as well as the way they addressed the students' needs. The instructional tools and teaching methods were the other considerations I had in my initial observation.

The classes were held in morning and afternoon shifts. Each shift included three concurrent classes. Each class focused on one subject, including reading, math, and social studies. There were different activities in each class. In other words, the instructor taught the subject and then asked the students to do work on their hand outs and solve problems or read from their texts. There were instructional books, calculators, and laptops in each class that the instructors used when they needed. Although all instructors used both direct instruction and learning activities, they had different teaching styles. For instance, one of them used KHAN Academy more often, one used the projector more, and one used group activities. The instructors taught all the subjects throughout the week.

Each class included 10 to 12 students. They had different skills with different instructors. The students participated in the activities of the class and answered the questions. They didn't interact with one another a lot. However, the Arabic speaking students who were mostly female, explained some instructions for each other in their language. The instructors asked the students if they knew the content from before and they didn't share much. I found out later that many international students didn't answer this question because they couldn't communicate what they knew not that they didn't have the prior knowledge.

Once I selected the participants, I initiated another round of observations in which I took notes of their interactions with the educators and with other students in the class. Their questions for different topics, their participation in class activities, and their reactions to different instructional initiatives in the class were my main considerations in taking observational notes. I

referred to their learning procedures in the class at some points in our interview as well, specifically when they were sharing about their learning processes. I merged my observation notes in data analysis stage in a way to describe the learning environment first and then locate the participants in that context.

The interview process. The first step of this process was to develop an interview protocol. The research goal and questions were the main resources used to develop the protocol. Having revised the questions a couple of times, I asked two of my colleagues to conduct a ‘bracketing’ interview in order to identify my biases as well as underlying assumptions of the questions. According to Creswell (1998), qualitative researchers often acknowledge and “bracket” their prior investigative observations and current expectations at the outset of their research studies. Tufford and Newman (2010) described bracketing as a method in qualitative research to reduce the possibility of deleterious effects of assumptions that may distort the research process.

I also developed an Informed Consent that explained the research purpose and process in simple language and acknowledged that the participants could withdraw from the study anytime they wanted. Although all of the participation implications were explained in the Informed Consent in detail, I elaborated on the participation terms and the participants’ rights throughout the study before the interview started and explained why their signature was important. I also assured them that I would use pseudonyms for them. I also explained to the participants that there would be two sets of interviews and I would come back later to ask them some follow up questions. I clarified that there would not be a second Informed Consent for the second interview and by signing the form then, they were consenting to participate in the second interview as well.

Upon IRB terms and conditions, I waited for the students to finish their classes or went to them before the class started to invite them to participate in the study. I was cautioned not to ask the students to participate in their teachers' presence, as they may feel obligated to do so. As some students asked me for extra time to think, I would wait for them to get back to me later that day or even the next day as well.

As all of the participants preferred to do their interviews in the center, we had two options; we could either use one of the classrooms or the library that was a quiet and mostly unoccupied space. Choosing the classrooms did not allow flexibility in setting the time, as we needed to conduct our interviews before or after the class times. Therefore, we agreed to do the interviews in the library during the class times, when nobody used the space. It was a quiet and fairly large room with four big desks and a number of desktop computers. As the copy machines were also in the room, at some points the educators came to quickly pick their copies. I paused the recording and waited until they left the room and then resumed the recording.

The first set of interviews embodied questions regarding the participants' general educational experiences and life stories. I also asked them questions about their learning preferences, perceptions, and processes. Having analyzed the data of the first set of the interviews, I developed small descriptions of the participants' stories and formulated some follow up questions based on their answers to clarify their views. I also generated two major questions to ask all participants due to the general themes of the interview data; making a change, benefits of education.

I did not start the member checking interviews right away. In other words, I described my process of data analysis in simple language for the participants emphasizing their contribution to my understanding of their experiences. I had developed a chart of some general

codes of the initial data that I showed the participants and asked if they agreed with them as significant elements of their experiences. I also read the short descriptions of their stories to them and asked if they wanted to add or change any details in their stories. Then I asked them some follow up questions based on the first interview. We finished the interview with their final comments about their experiences or any questions they had for me.

I used a Sony voice recorder to record their interview upon the participants' consent. All but one of the participants consented and for that one participant, I just took notes. Further, all but one of the interviews were conducted in English. However, as the majority of the participants were not native English speakers, I needed to rephrase the questions at some points. There were many points which I needed to ask the participants, even the English speaking participants, to repeat what they said as I could not comprehend them clearly the first time. Meanwhile, I conducted one interview in Persian as the participant was from Iran and we could communicate better in our native language. I finished both sets of the interviews asking the participants if they had anything to add.

Data Analysis

Having collected all of the study data in terms of interviews and field notes, I started the data analysis process, transcribed all the first set interviews myself, but had an agency transcribe the follow up interviews to save time, and used both content and narrative analysis elements in the process of data analysis. Smith (2000) compares these to analysis processes in terms of their objectivity. In other words, content analysis facilitates reducing "large body of qualitative data to smaller and more manageable form of representation" in order to "extract desired information from a body of material (usually verbal)" (Smith, 2000, p. 314). In order to conduct content analysis, we need to code the material, put them in categories, and then generate themes.

On the other hand, the proponents of narrative analysis emphasize subjectivity. Riessman (1993) describes narrative analysis as allowing a holistic approach to discourse that preserves context and particularity. Further, Riessman (2008, p. 11) defined narrative analysis as “a family of methods for interpreting texts that have in common storied form”. In fact, the sequence of actions and events is what distinguishes narrative analysis from other forms of qualitative research analysis, including content analysis. In other words, the researcher represents the story in a chronological order that has a beginning, start, and end. Another aspect of narrative analysis that implies its subjectivity is that it’s case-centered as opposed to variable-centered. Mishler (1995) argues that variable-centered approach of analysis takes the agency and consciousness from the individuals, whereas case-centered approach restore agency in the research.

Coding process. The coding process in this study embodied the initial coding of the data using NVivo and second round of coding to generate themes. I used Attribute, Descriptive, Dramaturgical, Initial, In Vivo, Process, Values, and Versus methods in the initial stage of coding. Attribute method is used to describe fieldwork setting, participant characteristics, data format, and time frame of the data (Saldana, 2016). Moreover, descriptive coding “summarizes in word or short phrase – most often a noun – the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data (Saldana, 2016, p. 102). The participants of the study introduced themselves in different way that I recorded through attribute and descriptive coding.

Dramaturgical coding is basically a literary and language method that is used to analyze narrative interviews. Saldana (2016) described this coding method as approaching “cultural life as performance and its participants as characters in social dramas” (p. 145). I used this method to code the participants’ stories in terms of the way they linguistically constructed them. Initial coding breaks down qualitative data into separate parts, and then examines and compare and

contrast them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This coding method helped me to divide the coded data to smaller sections in order to situate them in the context of the experiences. In Vivo coding embodies “the terms used by [participants] themselves” (Strauss, 1987, p. 33) and is also referred to as natural and emic coding. This coding system provided a space to use the participants’ actual statements. In addition to the participants’ direct quotes, their processes and taken actions were coded through process coding that according to Charmaz (2002), applies gerunds to connote action in the data.

Finally, as the participants expressed their perspectives towards learning and education, values and versus coding were applied as well. Saldana (2016) described versus coding as identifying “in dichotomous or binary terms the individuals, groups, social systems, organizations, phenomena, processes, concepts, etc. in direct conflict with each other” (p, 137). In fact, the participants talked about how much they valued education and contrasted it with other perspectives that didn’t value it. Further, as immigrants, the participants compared many aspects of their social and educational experiences that could be coded through value and versus coding processes.

Having coded all data in terms of their descriptive, linguistic, procedural, and evaluative nature, I manually conducted the second cycle of coding to generate themes for the study. Accordingly, I used Pattern and Axial coding methods for the second cycle process. “Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis” (Saldana, 2016, p. 236). Pattern coding helped me put the initial codes together and explore the generated themes out of them. I also used axial coding to reassemble the data in order to generate themes. Boeije (2010) states that the purpose of this

coding is “to determine which [codes] in the research are the dominant ones and which are the less important ones ... [and to] reorganize the data set: synonyms are crossed out, redundant codes are removed and the best representative codes are selected” (p. 109). That said, I used this coding method to identify more dominant codes that informed the themes of the study.

Having coded the data, I represented the data in two forms that are explained in the next section.

Representing the data. I first transcribed all the interviews and sorted out the field notes and then then wrote the vignettes of the participants’ narratives. In doing so, I integrated the participants’ stories that they shared through two interviews and made minor grammatical changes in order to make their stories more fluent in English. That said, the vignettes are told in first person, as they represent exactly the participants’ stories. In fact, I wanted to represent the narrative data in two forms; the participants’ expressing their experiences and my interpretation of their stories. However, as the participants didn’t speak a fluent English, I made some changes to make the vignettes more readable. Anyway, in the Themes section in Chapter IV, I have used direct quotes from the participants without making any changes. Each vignette was followed by two key observations about the participant’s experience as well as perception. Actually, I aimed at highlighting the differences between the participants through discussing my key observations about them.

The data were also represented in terms of general themes of the participants’ experiences and perspectives. Accordingly, five themes were generated that implied the similarities in the participants’ constructed narratives. Chapter IV embodies the description of the two representations.

Having a postcritical perspective, I reconsidered the objectivity of the study in terms of its being tentative and related to the participants social experiences. Further, I was aware of the representation limitation as I was not completely aware of the participants' social reality. My positionality in interpreting the data was my other consideration in representing the data. In other words, as an international student who doesn't speak English as her first language, I positioned myself as sharing the participants' experience in an English speaking educational setting that I needed to be aware of in representing the data.

The next section includes a discussion on the trustworthiness of the study.

Trustworthiness

Every research study starts with a purpose, applies a specific method, and reaches and communicates results. However, only the studies that provides evidence that their result are true and generalizable are counted as legitimate and trustable. Merriam (2009) discussed that the effectiveness of research studies is correlated with their rigorous conduct, stating that "they need to present insights and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners, and other researchers" (p. 210). Further, according to Rossman and Rallis (2012) a research study is trustworthy when it is able to be used to "improve social circumstances" (p. 59). The authors then emphasize that the audience of a study should be able to trust its integrity in order for the study to be useful. "It must be credible to potential users, whether these are other researchers, policymakers, practitioners, or the participants themselves" (Rossman and Rallis, 2012, p. 59).

Rossman and Rallis (2012) mentioned three interrelated sets of standards as for addressing the trustworthiness in a qualitative study. "First, was the study conducted according to norms for acceptable and competent research practice? Second, was the study conducted in a way that honored participants – was it conducted ethically? Third, was the researcher sensitive to

the politics of the topic and setting?” (p. 60). I addressed all three questions throughout my study, in order to ensure its trustworthiness. In other words, I highlighted my study’s truth value, elaborating on the fact that multiple understandings of the truth (including my own) are presented in the study. I also discussed the methodology applied to generate findings (rigor) of the study through explaining how narrative study would address the research goal as well as the question. Further, I demonstrated the usefulness of my study through discussing its generalizability in Chapter V.

Regarding the fact that the participants in the study were not highly educated and that most of them were not native English speakers, I dedicated time to go through the informed consent for them and explained different sections to them, so that they have a clear idea of their rights as well as the process of the study. They were aware that their participation was voluntarily and they could withdraw any time they wanted. In my follow up interview, I shared my initial analysis of their first interview and asked them to help me elaborate on the initial results. I also emphasized that all this process is thanks to their considerate participation. Accordingly, I highlighted their significant contribution to the whole research project.

As I was introduced to the participants by the officials of the institution, where they were taking HiSET preparation classes, their first impression was that I was a part of the institution and want to get their feedback about the classes. Therefore, while I was sensitive to the politics and regulations of the institution, I clarified for the participants that I was an independent researcher and their experiences would not be disclosed to the officials.

The trustworthiness of both quantitative and qualitative research designs is founded on their validity and reliability. As reality is a multidimensional and holistic rather than objective phenomenon in qualitative research, Merriam (2009) stated that, “what is being investigated are

people's constructions of reality – how they understand the world” (p. 214). Accordingly, Wolcott (2005, p. 160) described the “credibility” as the correspondence between research and the real word”. Merriam (2009) mentioned four strategies to ensure credibility, including triangulation, member checking, adequate engagement in data collection, and researcher's reflexivity. My triangulation of data embodied conducting two sets of interviews, doing observations before and after the interviews, and taking field notes. Further, the process of the second set of interviews was actually a member checking with the participants to make sure there wasn't a misinterpretation in the first set of the interview. I did a field research before starting the data collection process. I spent one week in the first set of interviews in order to do purposeful observation and conduct the interviews. Having spent three months analyzing the data, I went back the site and conducted to second set of the interviews. Accordingly, I dedicated an adequate amount of time to collect the data to address my study's credibility. Finally, I stated my reflexivity in the Chapter III of my thesis to highlight my positionality in the whole research context.

Merriam (2009) discussed that the generalizability in qualitative research can be thought in terms of reader or user of the study. “Reader or user generalizability involves leaving the extent to which a study's findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations” (p. 226). Accordingly, the results of this study can contribute to the improvement of the immigrant adult basic education learners' experience in this formal educational setting. In order to address external validity, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested *transferability* in which, “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do.” The inquirer needs to provide “sufficient descriptive

data” to facilitate transferability (p. 298). Merriam (2009) proposed two strategies to address the transferability of a qualitative research, including thick description and maximum variation.

Thick description refers to “a description of the setting and participants of the study, as well as a detailed description of the findings with adequate evidence presented in the form of quotes from participant interviews, field notes, and documents.” (Merriam, 2005, p. 227). Accordingly, I coded and categorized all participants’ quotes through NVivo, took detailed field notes, and collected documents about the institution’s curriculum and well as the demographic information of the enrollment rates to support the findings of the research. On the other hand, maximum variation deals with selecting a study sample that embodies a broader variety of participants. Accordingly, the participants of this study include adult learners from different ethnic and sociocultural backgrounds that facilitates the transferability of the study.

Finally, reliability addresses the replication potential of research findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) conceptualized reliability in qualitative research as “dependability” or “consistency”. In other words, “rather than demanding that outsiders get the same results, a researcher wishes outsiders to concur that, given the data collected, the results make sense – they are consistent and dependable. The question then is not whether findings will be found again but whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (Merriam, 2005, p. 221).

Triangulation, peer examination, investigator’s position, and the audit trail are the strategies that have proved to facilitate the reliability of a qualitative study.

In addition to triangulation and reflexivity procedures that I described earlier, I conducted “bracketing” interviews with my peers to realize my assumptions in developing my interview protocol and also examine the generalizability of the study design. “An audit trail in a qualitative study describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how

decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, 2005, p. 223). Accordingly, I provided detailed description of all the procedures I took in the Chapter 3 of the thesis in order to enable the reader to follow transparently the process of the whole study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter III included a description of the methodology along with the paradigmatic frameworks and my positionality as the researcher. Meanwhile, the postcritical perspective is described to acknowledge the prevalence of my assumptions as well as perspectives that may inform how the data are interpreted. The next section was a review of the method and procedures followed by the processes of data collection and analysis. The Chapter concluded with justifying the trustworthiness of the study due to the criteria applied to ensure it.

In Chapter IV, I will represent the research data in terms of the participants’ vignettes and five generated themes of the data.

CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS

Chapter IV includes two sections. The first section embodies vignettes of the participants followed by key observations about their experiences and perspectives. This section aims at reviewing the participants' stories and their unique ways of perceiving education. The second section includes the generated themes of the study that highlight the commonalities of the participants' experiences.

Section I: Participants' Stories

In this section the vignettes of the participants' stories will be presented. Actually, their stories in terms of the experiences and perspectives that they shared through the two interviews were integrated to develop the vignettes. Further, as the participants did not speak fluent English, I made minor corrections in the grammar to make the vignettes more readable. However, nothing has changed, been added, or removed in narrating the participants' stories. At the end of each vignette, I added two of my key observations about the participant. In doing so, I intended to highlight the unique approach each participant showed through their construction of their narratives. Finally, the order in which participants are presented are alphabetical.

Baran

Baran is from Iran. She is in her 40s, is married, and does not have any children. Baran is a housewife and sometimes helps her husband in his store. She is taking HiSet preparation classes to get her GED and study either computer science or makeup design in college. The following is Baran's story as she tells it.

I am from Mahabad, a city in Kurdistan province in Iran. I quit school when I was about 14 years old in Iran and immigrated to Norway at the age of 26. I stayed in Norway and with a family member of mine for a couple of months and then immigrated to Finland, where I lived for

thirteen years. I established an independent life in Finland that comprised some opportunities as well as challenges for me. I started learning Finish language in the immigration office there. They offered daily classes and also provided us with the opportunity to work part time in terms of internship course in order to practice speaking Finish language. That was a great experience for me, as I was able to purposefully communicate with people speaking a different language. I enjoyed the Finish language classes as the teachers dedicated enough time for each student and we could ask as many questions as we wanted. Further, these classes provided me with the opportunity to learn to read and write Latin words that I did not have a clue about in Iran.

Having become a Finish citizen, I moved to Norway again and lived there for a year. Meanwhile, I learned Norwegian language that was easier for me to comprehend thank to my learning experience in Finland. I met my husband who was an Iranian-American citizen in Norway. We got married and I immigrated to the US as his wife and became an Iranian-American citizen. I am very happy with my marriage, as we support each other in many ways in life and he provided me with a convenient lifestyle that I appreciate.

I took a lot of English classes when I started my life in the US, intending to effectively communicate with others. Some of the classes were offered every day and some just twice a week or so. I preferred daily ones, as I could practice speaking English more effectively. I like learning English, but it is very hard for me to articulate the language. Therefore, I need the teacher to explain everything in person for me, so that I can focus on my learning. One of my issues in this institute is that they teach most of the contents by Khan Academy that is an audio recorded instructional tool. We need to listen to the descriptions and instructions and then solve the problems or answer the questions. That said, I don't have a lot of chance to speak or listen to my teacher speak in English.

Although I am learning English for better communication with others, I prefer individual classes as well as learning activities to group projects. I cannot trust my peers in their knowledge level and need to study with a teacher on whom I can rely in my learning process. I don't want anything to hinder my learning process, neither working with others who may not have enough knowledge, nor the ones with whom I may disagree. Another challenge I have with group classes is I can't concentrate when other students talk while teacher is teaching. It is so hard for me to focus that I ask everyone to be quiet and listen.

I am a hardworking learner and practice and study a lot. I apply different techniques to solve my learning problems, including using Google translate, asking teachers for help, and writing everything as it helps me remember. Exams are the most stressful part of education for me. Therefore, I manage to calm myself down through taking deep breath, asking teachers for help, and using affirmative sentences that boost my confidence.

I have lived in four different countries in the world. Although I did not finish school in Iran, I had a lot of learning experiences there that I could use throughout my life in Finland and Norway. Meanwhile, my educational process in these two European countries provided me with a great opportunity to acquire the knowledge I needed to improve my life. The accumulated knowledge I brought to the US facilitated my process significantly. In other words, I developed learning preference as well as strategies that effectively helped me to proceed in my educational process in the US. In fact, my learning experiences facilitated my educational process and vice versa.

I am happy with my life circumstances in the US. I can support my family in Iran, I love my spouse, and I like my experience with learning English. I intend to enhance the quality of my life through advancing my education in college. My two favorite majors to study are computer

science and makeup design that I like the second more and am going to become a makeup artist. I may be able to use computer skills through my makeup design studies.

Key observations about Baran. Baran didn't communicate with other students and focused on her work and solved the problems individually. She implied this fact when she said that the other students distracted her. Baran participated more actively in reading classes than in social science and mathematics classes. Having interviewed with her, I found out that she preferred reading class because it was more directly related to English proficiency.

I interviewed Baran in Persian, as we both speak the language. Our shared language and background both facilitated and hindered the interview process. Baran couldn't speak English fluently, so speaking Persian helped her a lot to conveniently share her experience. On the other hand, she did not share specific details about her educational experience in Iran, as she believed I knew everything and did not need to hear more. Baran's experience with living in different contexts was the basis of her evaluation of life and educational processes. Some of the highlights of her experience were as follows.

Language is critical in education. Baran speaks Kurdish as her native language. This is one of the non-official languages spoken in western region of Iran, where the official language is Persian. That said, Baran has experienced two levels of learning environment in terms of language. She learned and communicated in Kurdish in her immediate learning environment and acquired education via Persian language. When she immigrated to Europe she realized she needed to learn other languages in order to proceed in her education as well as profession. Having immigrated to the US, Baran found English to be the gateway to any social and educational achievement.

Accordingly, Baran perceived a foreign language as the critical facilitator of any educational process she wanted to go through. Therefore, acquiring language was the first thing she needed to consider in her educational experience. Interestingly, she did not trust her peers and classmates to help her in learning any languages and the teachers were the only frames of reference in this regard. One reason may be that language significantly helped her survive in her social life and she did not want to exhaust her efforts to learn and communicate.

Better circumstances. Baran did not share a lot about the details of her life circumstances in different contexts. She conservatively shared that she had some learning experiences in Iran, some challenges and opportunities in her independent life in Europe, and happy marriage in the US. However, her narrative embodies increased satisfaction through her life in different contexts. In other words, she liked her educational experience in Finland much more than in Iran and her life circumstances the most in the US. That said, she perceived her life experiences in diverse contexts as increasingly satisfying. However, Baran described satisfaction from her own perspective rather than the actual description of the social contexts she had lived in. Therefore, I did not have a sense of the society in general, but of Baran in those societies.

Dara

Dara is a 32 year-old white male from Kurdistan in Iraq. He is married and his only son is one year old. He is currently a car general service technician, but intends to study networking at college after he gets his GED. Accordingly, Dara is taking HiSet preparation classes that he believes provides him with the opportunity to improve his English speaking as well as comprehension. The following is the vignette of Dara's story.

I studied human resources at university in Kurdistan for two years and had an office job in this field there. I immigrated to the US three years ago as my wife's dependent who was an American permanent resident at that time. In fact, many members of my family, including my

siblings, cousins, and in-laws live in the different states of the US. I stayed in Georgia State for a year and liked it so much, as I could hang out with my cousins and visit my in-laws more often and therefore, did not feel homesick much. However, we needed to move to Nashville so that my wife could pursue her education and work. We do not have the chance to meet the family so often then that makes life even harder.

Living in the US has brought about a lot of changes in my social and personal life. As soon as I entered the country, I realized I needed to learn English to survive. I did not study English back home, as I did not need it for my profession, neither my education. I also did not plan to immigrate at that time, so I did not manage to improve my English. However, learning English became my first and foremost priority here. I needed to learn English to communicate with others and to find a job and possibly upgrade in it. Having taken the initial English tests, I found out I should start from the beginner level. I went to English classes and practiced every day. My English comprehension improved, but I still needed to work on my speaking and writing. I also found out that my Human Resources degree was not valid in the US, so I needed to get an equivalent diploma here to be able to go to college.

When we moved to Nashville, I searched for centers that provided preparation classes for HiSet test. I had a hard time communicating with them via email or phone, due to my poor English speaking. Therefore, I came here in person and explained my situation and registered for the classes. I work in the morning and attend the afternoon classes. I attend math, social science, and English skills classes here, all of which I like so much. However, I have some issues in my process here. For example, I cannot communicate my prior knowledge of mathematics in English. Further, I need to learn and practice English every day that I cannot here, as the

classes are offered on certain days of the week. Although, teachers are supportive here and answer all our questions, I feel I need more opportunity to practice English.

English is very important in many aspects of my life. My boss told me I was a good car technician and could raise in my position. However, he conditioned my promotion on a high level of English speaking and comprehension. My wife and I work very hard to afford our life. She works all day and is off on weekends and I should work on weekends too. So, we do not have much time to spend together. It is very different in my country. In other words, men work out of home and women stay home and take care of children. I want to be able to support my family in a way that my wife does not need to work. So, I need to earn more money via getting better jobs that is based on my English fluency.

Many things are different here from Kurdistan. We need to work hard and all the time here to survive. Meanwhile, there are a lot ways to get whatever we want conveniently. For example, we can get most of what we need and like in Walmart for cheap price. Further, we do not need to have cash with us to shop, as we can use our credits. However, we need to be cognizant of any possibility to earn more money. In Kurdistan, we work less hours, spend more time with the family, are not able to get whatever we want at will and for cheap prices, and cannot use credits.

I intend to study computer networking in college that would enable me to get better jobs that pay higher. That way, I would be able to support my family and then my wife will not have to work outside. This is how education would help me make significant changes in my life. Therefore, I will do my best to speak English fluently, as it is the gateway for all of the changes I want to make in my life.

Key observations about Dara. Dara came to afternoon classes and he usually arrived late that was because his work shift that took long. He didn't talk to the other students in the class but asked many questions from the instructor. In the math class, he shook his head when they worked on formulas. When I asked him what was he smiling about, he said they were all familiar to him, but he didn't know how to communicate them in English. Dara's impression about his life and educational experiences was in terms of comparing the US with Kurdistan. Some of highlights of his experiences were as follows.

Significance of English. Dara spoke a broken English that he was proud of because he believed he had tried hard to be able to communicate his ideas in English. He perceived English as the gateway to any achievement and change in his life and evaluated any educational process in the US based on the way they offered English classes. For Dara, English would enable him to upgrade in his current job, to be able to go to college, get a better job and earn more money. In fact, he believed English would facilitate more income for him that would help him support his family.

Dara did not communicate with other students in the class and when I asked him why, he said he preferred to talk to English speaking people so that he could practice speaking English. In other words, English was his means and ends in his communication with others.

Dara equaled education to English acquisition. He believed English acquisition was the core of any educational process and consequent changes in his life. He even talked about his educational process back home, emphasizing on his failure to learn English. In fact, all of Dara's educational process and experiences were put in a shadow through prioritizing English acquisition.

Lifestyle. Dara liked certain things about life style in the US. It was appealing to him how they could get what they liked for cheap price and without having to pay in cash. He

believed if he could earn more money, he would be able to provide more convenience for his family. According to Dara, you can't buy everything you want with no cash in your pocket in Kurdistan.

However, Dara did not like the busy life and work schedule that was imposed on him and his wife. He implied his preference of Kurdish life style through comparing the working hours in Kurdistan and the US. He complained that due to the intense workload, he did not have much chance to spend time with his family and concluded that by having a high income job, he would be able to live closer to his favorite life style that is working less hours.

Advocating the family life style in Kurdistan, Dara believed their life should change in a way that his wife does not need to have a job and could stay home and take care of their child. In other words, Dara intended to develop a similar lifestyle to what they had back home while living in the US. Yet he believed the only way to establish such ideal life was to earn more money that may be facilitated through getting more education; i.e., learning English.

Enoch

Enoch is a 23-year-old black male from Ghana, Africa. He has lived in the US for a year and is taking HiSet preparation classes and aimed at studying information technology at the college and possibly joining US army. The following is a vignette of Enoch's story.

I was born and lived in a small city in Ghana, where I finished high school and studied computer software engineering at college for a year. I studied hard and got good grades throughout my school and college studies. Having searched for a job for about a year, I was hired in a regional board that was a governmental organization as a software engineer. This job paid well and enabled me to happily support my family.

As a young person, I was annoyed with my age mates' life styles. Many of them dropped out of school at very young ages, committed different types of crimes, drank too much, and used

drugs. Not intending to take the same path, I managed to continue my education. I believed that I could help them change their mindset and take a different approach to life as an educated person. Accordingly, I talked to a lot of young people I knew about the aftermaths of their wrong choices and encouraged them to go back to school and continue their education. Meanwhile, I thought a lot about possibilities to support my community more significantly.

My family, like many other families in my town, suffered from poverty. Many families couldn't afford school. Further, there were not many schools in our area and we had to travel long distances to attend classes that added up to the expenses. Therefore, many students quit school or did not attend classes for long periods of time.

Due to insecure circumstances I immigrated to the US as a refugee last year and could not follow my dreams there. My first endeavor was to follow up on the possibilities to continue my studies here. Meanwhile, I found out that I needed to add an affidavit to my certificates, because my date of birth there did not match my identification document. The affidavit was so expensive that I could not afford paying for it. Therefore, my degree was not validated and I was required to get GED in the US in order to qualify for college admission.

As I live in Nashville, I need to take HiSet test to get my GED. While taking the courses, I take the preparation tests in order to qualify for the scholarship that would pay for my main test. I like everything about my learning experience here, including the pedagogy, the teachers, the content, and the learning environment. Although I know a lot of the content presented here thanks to my prior education, I like the way it is instructed here. We can ask as many questions as we want. The load of lessons and homework is sensible and we can handle easily. It is very different from education back home, as they assigned a lot of homework and we needed to study

very heavily to prepare for the classes and exams. We also had a lot of exams that was very stressful. Accordingly, I enjoy my educational experience here.

I also appreciate the opportunity to study in this learning environment. As a slow learner and who is also a procrastinator, I am inspired to study with adult learners who are concentrated, purposeful, and hard working. They ask good questions, are disciplined in the class and with homework, and are very motivated. Thanks to the proactive co-learners, I concentrate more in the class and try to do my homework on time. One of my motivating observations is that many of these learners cannot speak or understand English as well as me, but participate more than me in class discussions. Our country is colonized by the Great Britain and that is why our educational system is in English, therefore I can speak and understand English well.

I have two tentative plans for after I get my GED. As I mentioned earlier, I was developing an idea to get to a position that gives me enough power to support as many people as I can. I believe US Army would approach me to my dream, because it gives me a lot of skill and power to fight against inequality. A US Army soldier can work beyond borders; therefore, I will be able to support all people in the world, including my people. My father is concerned with this decision, as he believes it is very dangerous. My other plan is to study information technology at college and become a computer engineer. I will be able to get a good job with a high pay with this major that would enable me to support my family and community again.

Taking either way, I intend to continue my education and get the highest degree I can. I believe education is power and gives us knowledge. Coming from a disadvantaged community, I have observed how social problems reproduce themselves. Therefore, education is one of the

most important elements that can seize this process through transforming people's perspectives. I want to use the education's power to help people to live a better life.

Key observations about Enoch. Enoch was an active learner in the class. He participated in class activities and answered the questions. He also communicated with other students in the class, especially with Samuel and another male student. Enoch was one of the participants who came to me and said he was interested to have the interview with me and share his experiences. He was a fluent English speaker and mostly shared his perspectives than his actual experiences. The following are some of the key observations about his approach to life and education.

Social responsibility. Enoch comes from a low socioeconomic background. Therefore, his observations and actual life experiences are significantly informed by his social context. What makes Enoch a special person is that he has developed a deep insight about social responsibility in his family, his community, and other people in the world. In other words, his committed personality made him support his family while working on the regional board. Further, he was concerned with his community's lifestyles and wanted to help with encountering the social issues that led to the disadvantaged conditions they lived in. Therefore, he felt responsible to support the young people by giving them advice regarding their choices in life. Enoch is thinking of becoming a US Army soldier to be able to support more people that is a result of his sense of responsibility in the society.

Enoch has a main reason for his philosophy of life to support others. He wants to stop the reproduction of the social issues, as he believes is the root of poverty and crime. He does not want the other people to experience what he and many others have experienced. Accordingly, Enoch did not focus on himself, but perceived himself as a member of the community who was

striving to help others to become better people. He advocated that the only way to stop the reproduction of social issues is to help more people to transform and that it is educated people's social responsibility to contribute to this process.

Education is power. While the other participants discussed how education gives one the power to have a better life, Enoch perceived it as the power itself. In fact, Enoch described the education as the power he needed to commit to his social responsibilities. His perspectives toward education implied that he perceived himself as a powerful person throughout all periods of his life. In other words, the reason why he felt responsible about his social context was that he believed his education had given him the power to take this role. Enoch did not talk about more money or better job a lot; rather, he advocated education as the power required to establish a better life for himself and all the communities he lived in.

Pedro

Pedro is a 55 year-old Hispanic male from Guatemala. He is divorced and has four children, two sons and two daughters, and lives with his daughter at this time. Pedro has lived in the US for more than 30 years and has learned English through work and some ESL classes. He works in the kitchen of Marriot and Hilton hotels and is now taking HiSet preparation classes to get his diploma and upgrade in his current job. Pedro's vignette is as follows.

I came to the US as an illegal immigrant in 1984, when I was very young in my early twenties. I lived in California state, where a lot of people like me lived and worked illegally. I had a college degree in accounting and had an office job in Guatemala. However, I could not continue this job in the US, as I was illegal and also could not speak a word in English. Therefore, I started working in restaurants, cleaning tables, washing the dishes, and sweeping the floor. The more I worked, the better I could comprehend English through talking to my bosses, fellow workers, and customers. Meanwhile, I took ESL classes and improved quite fast.

However, I had to quit going to the classes at times, due to inflexible working hours that hindered my English education.

I did not like our community in the city I lived. There were many other Guatemalan young people there that I used to spend my free time with. We played soccer on weekends and watched TV together. However, they drank and used drugs a lot that I did not like. They ignored my note that it was dangerous to use drugs before playing soccer, so I did not hang out with them anymore. Generally, there is a lot of crime and violence in the communities like mine in that state. That said, I decided to go back to Guatemala after a couple of years, at the time of Gulf War as I remember.

Having returned to my home country, I met my wife and we got married after two years. In Guatemalan traditional culture, you cannot have intimate relationship with your fiancé until you get officially married. Of course, this was true for that time and younger generations have a very different approach to life and relationship and do not observe this tradition. Anyway, life was very hard there because I could not find a well-paid job and we had a lot of financial problems. On the other hand, my mom, who was a permanent resident in the United States at that time, filed immigration application for me. Accordingly, I came back to the US with my wife and eight-month daughter, as a legal immigrant this time. We came to the California state again, where we had three more children and lived for about ten years.

Meanwhile, I started working in Marriot hotel as a waiter and in the kitchen. I also took ESL classes to improve my English in order to be able to speak English more fluently and improve in my job. However, I had to pause at times, as I needed to work hard and support my family. As I mentioned before, we did not have a good and safe community and as our children grew older, we got concerned about their security because of the gangs there. Therefore, we

decided to move to a safer place and chose Tennessee. I liked the first small city we moved to here, as there was not any traffic and people were friendly and supportive. However, we needed to move to a larger city so that our children could go to better schools and we ended up in Nashville.

My wife and I started having some problems with each other after a while and we finally separated when our children grew older and could live on their own. We did not have a good family life then, but everything is more peaceful at this time. I live with my older daughter and my other children have good lives, working hard and studying. While working in Marriot Hotel, I got another job in Hilton Hotel too, where the Chef has promised me I could work with him if I get my diploma. Therefore, I am now taking HiSet classes to get my GED and go to culinary college and get a degree there. I want to improve in my job and become a chef, but I know I should work as an assistant for a while. I am a hardworking learner and will do my best to get the degree and also a better job.

Key observations about Pedro. Pedro had the longest time of stay in the US, so most of his narrative was about his process in the US. In fact, he did not share much about his own country and described his community in the US to provide a picture of where he came from. Pedro was also one of the oldest students in the institute. He didn't communicate with the other students a lot, but he went to the teachers in the classes and asked them questions. Pedro didn't ask a lot of lesson related questions, rather he asked about the tests and which parts were more important for the tests.

Pedro did not speak English fluently, although he had lived in the US for more than three decades. However, he was skillful in communicating what he wanted to share with the limited English knowledge that he had. Some of key observations about his process are as follows.

Reactive approach. Pedro has taken a lot of initiatives in life to respond as many contextual circumstances as possible. Listening to him sharing his story, I envisioned a person who is reacting to certain occasions through making changes. Pedro is not a passive person, as he has made a lot of efforts to survive and also support his family. However, his narrative implies that he has been reactive rather than proactive in this approach to life. In other words, many of his decisions were reactive rather than authoritative to solve the immediate problems. That said, Pedro's life process is significantly informed by the social contexts he has lived in.

Self-efficacy. Pedro was not a fluent English speaker, but he believed he was a great English learner. He recurrently emphasized his achievements in the process of learning English in the US and perceived himself as an independent and hard-working learner. This reminded me of self-efficacy in learning that elaborates on an individual's attitude toward their innate ability to reach their goals. Pedro did not doubt for a second about his ability to continue his studies in a culinary college, as he believed in his ability to exhibit a successful performance in learning cooking in an academic setting. For Pedro, as an efficacious learner, any obstacle in the educational process, if any, was a result of an outside factor not the individual capability.

Samuel

Samuel is a 25-year-old black male from Congo. He came to the US as a refugee from Uganda two years ago. He is taking all HiSet preparation classes in the center and wants to study nursing in college and pursue his studies in medical school from there. Samuel shared his story as follows.

I was born and lived in Congo until I finished middle school. Congo was very insecure. There were a lot of tribal wars in Congo. The hostile tribes attacked each other and took whatever they could for different reasons. For example, if we had a cow that was an important

investment for us, they came and took it by force because of enmity. It was also very probable that they kill us through attacking our houses.

Therefore, although I just needed to study a two more years to complete my studies and get my diploma, I had to move to Uganda as a refugee to save my life. Although I had financial issues in Uganda, it was a peaceful place compared to where I came from. I had to work hard to afford school and be able to pursue my education. Anyway, I did my best to make the best use of the opportunity to continue my studies in a safe place.

I also had to face some challenges in my educational process. I could not start from high school in Uganda because the official language for education was English there, while it was French in Congo. That said, I had to start from lower levels, equal to middle school again that I did. I liked the educational system there. There were a lot of tests as well as preparation classes. They asked us questions about the content every day for which we had to study and prepare. The school system was also strictly disciplined. If we arrived school after the teacher, we would definitely be punished. Anyway, I studied hard aiming at getting my diploma, going to college, and studying medicine.

As refugees, we needed to be moved to a third place and I was told I was moving to the US. I really did not have any plans for it, but apparently I needed to leave Uganda. The sad news was that I needed to move before I finished my high school that meant no diploma again. Therefore, having moved to the US, I started looking for classes to continue my studies and get my diploma. The good point was that I did not need to start from scratch, as most of my recent education was in English. Therefore, I had minor issues with the language and proceed conveniently. Actually, I know a lot of what is being taught here, as I learned them in Uganda in the same language. In fact, learning English has been a great learning experience for me, as I

have learned a lot through this language. Further, it has facilitated an effective communication with others for me and therefore, I've been able to establish good relationship with others.

There are lot of things I like about the American lifestyle as well as educational system. You have to work hard here, but are able to get what you want even with a low income. Further, free education is offered in many centers and you also can use different bonuses to take tests and proceed in your process. Although I am not happy that they do not offer lab education so that we can do experiments here, I generally like my educational experience here. For example, while I needed to study a wide range of courses to qualify to study medicine in Uganda, I only need to complete few and certain courses to be able to start medicine in the US. In other words, the courses and majors are less interconnected in the US and that is what I like about here.

Education has always been so important to me. In fact, it has been my first and foremost concern in the different places that I have lived. I believe education gives you whatever you want in terms of dignity, job, and money. Everyone respects you as an educated person and you have the power to decisions for yourself and do what you want. I have always wanted to become a doctor to help my people fight the diseases. I envision myself going back to Congo and Uganda one day as a doctor who was educated in the US and help people there.

Key observations about Samuel. Samuel was always smiling. He was actively participated in class activities and answered questions. Samuel sat close to Enoch and a couple of other male students in the class. Samuel was a persistent learner who perceived education as the turning point to transform his life. Some of highlights of his perceptions and experiences are as follows.

Consistency. Samuel wanted to become a doctor. This was his dream and goal in Congo, in Uganda, and in the US. He worked different jobs everywhere he lived to afford his education,

but nothing could take away his passion for his favorite job. At some point he stated that he wanted to make a change in his country by helping his people deal with infections. He also said he never left Congo or Uganda at his will and he had to make a decision to survive. Therefore, his persistence in his will to become a doctor and serve his people may be because he was never actually disconnected from his context and wanted to have a role there. He even evaluated all learning environments and pedagogical processes on the basis of whether they prepared the students to study scientific majors like medicine or not.

Power of education. “Education is the key to every door”. That is how Samuel described the significance of education. He believed all he could have all the power he needed to change his own as well as his people’s lives through being educated. For Samuel, power embodied a lot of money, a good job, and high social standing. He advocated the role of education to achieve all of these opportunities that he did not want just for himself, but to be able to empower the people of his country as well.

Vanida

Vanida is an Asian female from Burma who is in her thirties. She immigrated to the US with her husband and two children when she was 22 years old. Vanida is taking HiSet preparation classes aiming at going to college and studying computer. The following is a vignette of Vanida’s story.

I was born and lived in Burma until I was five years old. There were a lot of civil and tribal wars there and we had to leave the country to save our lives. Therefore, we went to a refugee camp in Thailand, where I lived there for about 17 years. My family and I had work hard to survive, as we did not have any financial support or support there. Having worked for a couple of years, I finally could go to school at the age of nine.

We mainly studied language and basic levels of science at school and did not learn English very well there. Getting education in the Thailand refugee camp requires paying money. In other words, the more money you have, the more education you may get. In fact, education is a luxury there. Therefore, coming from a working class, I could just study until 8th grade and quit school to work and support my family until I immigrated to the US at the age of 22.

I had a hard time when I came to the US. I needed to continue working to survive. However, language barrier was significantly restricting me in many aspects of my life. I could not speak and comprehend English; therefore, I had a lot of issues communicating with others, applying for jobs, or even getting my drivers' license. That said, I needed to take ESL classes that was challenging for me again, as I did not have anybody to take care of my little kids.

I waited until my parents came to the US as refugees and then started learning English from level one and progressed to the higher levels quickly. Meanwhile, I worked hard and financially supported my family that made me very exhausted in my English classes. Having worked for a couple of years, I had to quit work to take care of my sick father who passed away last year. I did not go back to school afterwards to dedicate time to continue my education. This is not what many people in my community choose to do. There are a lot of Burmese people in the US who cannot communicate in English because they do not learn how speak the language. They believe they should just work to survive. This perspective is rooted in their life experience back home, where education is a luxury in life. One thing that these people fail to understand about the US is that education is not a luxury in the US. I mean, it is not just for rich people. There are lot of opportunities to get free education and that is what I like about American society. Further, there are many people here who support you in many aspects. That is why I am motivated to continue my education here.

Currently, my husband works full time and I work part time and come to school. I enjoy learning English and other scientific content. Sometimes, I realize I know some contents that are being taught that makes me feel both excited and frustrated. I feel excited because I like that I have the knowledge. On the other hand, it is frustrating that I cannot share what I know due to language barrier. Anyway, I will continue my studies here, get my diploma, and study computer in college. My goal is to find a good job that pays more money and provide a good life for my family. I am also going to help my community as an educated person and encourage them to put education as a priority in their life.

Key observations about Vanida. Vanida attended the morning classes once a week. She was quiet and just took notes and solved the problems individually. She sat next to a Hispanic female student and just talk to her both sessions that I was there. Vanida was a hardworking person who perceived the effectiveness of education through its impact on the individual's working life. Some of highlights of her perceptions and experiences were as follows,

Assiduous personality. Coming from a working class, Vanida had to work hard in Burma, her home country; in Thailand, where she was a refugee; and in the US, where she immigrated as a refugee and permanent resident. In fact, Vanida was a citizen from a low socioeconomic status who had to work hard to survive. While sharing her experiences, she never complained about having to work hard, as she perceived it as a way of life or better to say, a way of being. Therefore, she did not want to study not to work hard anymore; rather, her goal was to be educated to earn more money with the same amount of working. In fact, one could see how an assiduous person perceives better life and life convenience through hard work.

Education as a material. Vanida could not pursue education in Thailand camp because it cost a lot to get higher education. She stated that education was a luxurious material where she

came from and you needed to earn enough money to purchase and have it. This caused Vanida to perceive education as a material that could be expensive or cheap. This was implied in her advocacy for American educational system as well. In other words, she liked educational system in the US because it was free. Accordingly, she stated that as education is offered for free or for a very low price, we should not miss the opportunity. This reminded me of the sales seasons in the markets that people manage to get goods not because they are good but because they are cheap. However, Vanida valued education in terms of its providing better opportunities to earn more money. That said, she evaluated education as a means to reach the ends of more money that was actually the outcome of harder work. In fact, more education was an equivalent to more work that highlights its materialistic aspect.

In section one, I introduced the participants by sharing their stories and highlighting their unique approaches to education informed by their social and life experience. In addition, there are also common themes in their life and educational processes that will be discussed in the next section.

Section II: Themes from the Data

In this section, I will discuss the common elements that connect the participants with each other in terms of the themes of the study that according to Richard (2005) are integrating and relational ideas from the data. In fact, the themes in this study comprise the participants' answers to the research questions. The research questions that inspired development of the themes were, (a) How do immigrant ABE learners describe their educational experience prior to their enrollment in ABE?; (b) How do immigrant ABE learners describe their learning experiences?; and (c) How do immigrant ABE learners describe the role of education in changing their life situations? Accordingly, the themes address the participants' shared

experiences toward education and learning as well as their perspective about the transformative potentials of education. The following are the five generated themes of the participants' shared experiences.

Theme 1. Interrupted Educational Process

All of the participants went to school in their home countries and some of them like Enoch and Dara got college degrees there. However, they had to change directions for different reasons, including non-affordable education, school being far from home, having to flee from the home country, having to work hard, or their degrees not being validated. For example, Samuel went to school both in Congo and Uganda, but had to quit school because he had to move to a safer place to survive. The following is how he explained the recurrent interruptions in his process,

So when tried to test me, because I didn't know English, so they said me I have to go lower lever. Then I started again from level five, level five. So I again started ... so that was the low level, not high school, that's low level, then I started from level five, six, seven. They call that seven levels, low levels. Then I go to high school, in high school we have to study six years, of high school, then I started from first year, second year, third, forth, fifth, then sixth level, that's when I was now wanting to get to my high school.

Education was so expensive in refugee camps in Thailand that Vanida, like many other children in her community, quit school after she learned to read and write. She described this situation as follows,

It depend their family life because we are refugee we don't have much money it difficult find money to raise the family. Some parents they cannot provide the kids to go to school to buy supplies for their kids so their kids say my parents doesn't give me so they quit school so they

find money by their own this is why we ... they try to go to college or university but the parent cannot pay for that so they quit and they work.

This was not the only time Vanida had to quit enrollment in an educational program. Although she needed to learn English in the US to survive, she could not go take the classes regularly because there was nobody to take care of her little kids.

I start conversation class then I start level one but that I time I have small kids, babies with me, I can't go to class, I can't study.

At a later time, she had to quit taking classes to work hard. She said she was too exhausted to take classes.

That's very tired I don't have time to take care of my whole work sometime very difficult to learning then I work three years very hard at the Tyson.

Enoch had different interruptions in his educational process both in his home country and in the US. He had to quit school at times in Ghana because it was very far from where he lived that he described as follows,

Some villages they walk for miles before they go to school, they get to school. And from school they walk for miles before they go back home. And so it's when they feel like going to school is when they go to school. Because they don't have education, they don't have school in their area to go to school. They have to walk to another place for school.

Another interruption in Enoch's educational process was when he found out he could not use any of his degrees in the US, as his date of birth on his identification certificates was different from his degrees by mistake. He had to apply for an affidavit for this degree that was too expensive for him to afford. Therefore, he decided to get his GED in the US to be able to go

to college. In other words, Enoch resumed his educational process from a lower level than his actual status. The following is how he tells us the story,

I came here, actually to go and decide of my birthday, my born date, I made of those mistakes made on born date, for my passport and my certificate. There was a mistake, so I had to, you know, redo everything over again. So that's why I'm here... there is a way to get an affidavits attach to my certificate. So when the affidavits is issued, you can add to it and you can use it. So the affidavits is the solution to the problem... I planned on getting it but it was like, the amount of money requested was like way too much.

Pedro's story embodies certain points in time that he had to quit school, either because he had to work hard or he had to go back to his home country. He had to quit his ESL classes at different times because he could not adjust his work schedule to the class times. He was also too tired to take the classes and fell asleep in the class.

I can't handle both because sometimes you know I had a flexible schedule does not let me change my study program. By the time I go to school during the night and worked the whole day then I mean I fall asleep when I was in class.

Baran quit school many years before she left Iran for unknown reasons. Although she did not specify the periods of her language learning processes in Finland and Norway, her narrative implied different episodes of educational processes during her stay in the US country as she says,

We tried to learn the language while I was there...I went to Finish language and different classes in Finland... Then I went to Norway and started learning Norwegian.

When I asked her if she could speak the two languages she said she did not complete the processes and just learned to read, write, say basic sentences in the languages. Baran did not

share details about her processes in the different countries she had lived in. Anyway, I could infer how her educational process was informed by her immigrating to different countries.

Dara came to the US with a degree in Human Resources. However, he was not able to get an ‘office job’ as he calls it, because he did not have English literacy. That said, he needed to start a completely new educational process focusing on ESL and then getting a college degree to get a better job that he implicitly describes as ‘office job’.

Theme 2. Low Socioeconomic Status Here and There

Except for Baran, who did not share specific details about her socioeconomic background, other participants talked about their having to work hard to support their families and also to afford school. Anyway, Baran’s hope of getting a degree to have a good job and help her husband may suggest that she feels the need to financially support her family. Baran talked about her life getting better over time, emphasizing that the circumstances have been increasingly more satisfying throughout the time that may also include her socioeconomic status.

Samuel did not specify his economic status, but he talked about having to study hard in his hope to become a doctor and help many sick people who live in his community that implied where he comes from. Further, Samuel’s moving to different places due to insecure conditions, indicates the violent social circumstances for him.

Pedro had to work hard to survive both as an illegal and then legal immigrant in the US. He cleaned tables and washed dishes in the restaurants. Further, Pedro couldn’t afford his life in Guatemala, which convinced him that he needed to immigrate to the US as soon as he could. According to Pedro, the young people in his community used drugs and drank too much that is a characteristic of disadvantaged communities. Moreover, he mentioned the gangs’ violence in their neighborhood as the main reason for their moving from California to Tennessee.

Dara did not specify his socioeconomic status in Kurdistan, but he talked a lot about his having to work hard in the US to support his family. While he liked the lifestyle in the US in terms of being able to buy whatever one wants without having to pay cash and for cheap, he complained about the exhaustive process of working so hard to survive. Dara's ultimate goal was to learn English, get a degree, and get a better job for a better life.

Vanida's story embodied severe poverty and the necessity of hard work to survive and to afford education both in Thailand and in the US. Anyway, she did not aspire a rich life; rather, her ideal life was the one where she could find a better pay job with her education and support her family better. In other words, Vanida perceived wealth from the poverty point of view. Further, Vanida's impression about her community implied that they did not value education so much, as they always needed to work. In fact, education was a luxury for her community who were from low socioeconomic status.

Enoch was very involved in the shortcomings of his family and then community because of the social issues as well as financial status. Actually, poverty comprised a significant element in Enoch's educational experience, as he talked about how financial limitations hindered his process and put him in trouble. He also elaborated on his community's illiteracy due to the fact that there was not a school in their area and that they had to travel long distances to go to school. The following is a story he told about one of the days of his school,

In my stay in Africa, everywhere that I go, when I see people walking around, people sitting on the road side begging for money, people who doesn't have anything, I just looked at them and I just give them what I have. I just want to see smile on people's faces. So it was sometime ago, I had nothing, when I was in senior high school, I had nothing and everybody was on vacation, and I had to go home and I had nothing on me. I

stayed on campus like for the whole day until around six in the evening, and I had to come home and I had nobody to call to. Because we don't use phone on campus. So I went to the station to catch a car and take me to my region where I am from and I went to the man and I told him I'm sorry and he helped me out. He gave me more than I had to have. And I think he's the person who has motivated me all these years. I was at very young age that time and it was something very big for me like you don't know the person, where the person is coming from, you just talk to the person, and the person gives you something more than what you want. You are so excited. So it made me feel like it was irrespective of how the person is where the person is from, even if you don't know the person, it's not a must, but if you have it, you have to help.

The stories of the all participants imply that they were from low socioeconomic status both in their home countries and in the US. This is implied in these immigrant ABE learners' impressions about the communities they lived in and also in the way they described their financial status throughout their life.

Theme 3. Literacy is Constituted Through Learning English

When asked about their learning experience, the participants talked about their process of learning English as the main component of becoming literate. This was not limited to their learning process in the US, as they also mentioned learning English or failure to do so as an important indicator of their educational success here in the US. In fact, English was both a means and ends for the participants. Therefore, their learning experiences comprised their language barriers and their consequent strife to overcome them through a self-directed process. In fact, the participants' ultimate goal was to learn English to use it as a means to reach their goals, such as earning their GED, going to college, and having a better job that pays higher.

Samuel needed to learn English in Uganda to be able to go to school there. Therefore, his English knowledge and comprehension facilitated his educational process in the US that he described as a good learning experience. Enoch was a fluent English speaker, as it was the formal language in his country's educational system. Therefore, he had the required level of literacy to pursue his educational process in the US. Accordingly, he characterized himself as a young and knowledgeable learner compared to his peers, due to his English knowledge.

"English is very important because you can use it everywhere in the world". This is how Baran explained her hard work to learn English. She considered herself as a hardworking learner who was striving to acquire English in order to become a literate individual in the society who could make her way. Apparently, learning Finish, Norwegian, and then English languages were the predominant components of her learning experience.

Dara had a similar account of English as a critical indicator of literacy. He regretted that he did not learn the language in Kurdistan and unknowingly deprived himself from acquiring English. Dara could not use his college degree from his home country just because he did not have English literacy in the US. His extended story of learning English in the US embodies a self-directed process, where he planned to improve his English skills, took classes, asked questions from English speaking as well as more educated people, and evaluated his performance through his ability to communicate at work. Dara perceived English as the most important component to facilitate his process to get a better job and earn more money.

Vanida's basic literacy in her own language did not help her survive in the US and she needed to learn English to be able to work and continue her education here. Vanida described her learning experience in terms of her process of improved comprehending and articulating English and how it could help her get a degree and consequently a better job.

Pedro had the lived in the US longer than all other participants. However, his life process hindered him from accomplishing English skills in an effective way. Therefore, he did not have the minimum literacy requirement to promote in his current job. Yet, he was satisfied with his process of learning English and described it as a good learning experience, as it gave him a sense of self-efficacy in learning. The following is how he shared his experience:

By the time I came, because probably I was very young I was enthusiastic to learn my English like a second language and had a chance to get enrolled in a very good program in ESL I was take me to change every level to A1 to eight like every three months then be eight, be two, like in three years I have to have finished my ESL like English as a second language in three years but what I did, I moved from A1 to B1 and that was probable short time. And I have a experience to have a good teacher he helped me a lot... My English was not good when I was learning was so fast, I get good grades. Everything was, like the homework and everything it was the number one, and the teacher gave me a like, always once I get present or something and every time I get good score gave a book or something like a good present here because we got a good grade.

Theme 4. Where You Learn Tells How You Learn

Having experienced different learning environments, the participants constantly compared the different learning contexts they had experienced. Although most of them appreciated the learning opportunities they had in the US, they liked certain features of their prior learning experiences.

Enoch who was impressed by other adult learners' motivation and passion to learn in the HiSet classes, identified this learning environment as an encouraging one that transformed his perception of learning. The following is how he described this context:

What motivates me is the people around you know, we all have different stories but you know, when you come and see different types of people, older than you being in the same class, it's amazing because you are trying to get somewhere too, and I'm young and I feel like I have to look up to down, because I was thinking getting the diploma here is like, is a waste of time, but when I came and I saw the people around, I was like you really have to get it. Because everybody is fighting for the same thing irrespective of how old they are. Yes they still want to get the diploma, so you see how important it is to get it, so you have to get it.

Further, Enoch compared pedagogical processes in Ghana and the US in terms of the work load and tests in the two systems. He believed the American system was more flexible and they had more time to study; whereas, they had a lot of tests in Ghana and had to study long hours to prepare for the classes as well as the tests. Generally, Enoch liked his learning environment in the US better than Ghana discussing that it was more motivating for him.

Pedro shared more about the process rather than the context of his learning. However, he appreciated that he could communicate what he learned with his colleagues as well as the customers of the restaurants he worked in. In fact, his informal learning environment was implicitly supportive for him to improve his English speaking as well as comprehension.

Samuel, who wanted to become a doctor and needed to learn chemistry and physics more specifically, complained about the learning environment in the ABE center for not letting them use the labs. He believed they needed to do some experiments in the labs to learn the contents better and that is what made the classes in Uganda more appealing for him. The following is how he described the difference:

Because of some times as my career I want to be a doctor, so I was thinking there were some labs here around so I don't know I see some but I don't know what they do there so I want to know more about them... So you perform some experiments, experiments because everything we do here is theory. We don't perform practicals...

In Uganda or Kongo everything we do suppose we do something like in chemistry we do some experiments we say if you mix an acid and water you get this think of this, you are doing practicals. It is in biology we get experiments, not just stories, do something which is life.

However, Samuel appreciated the opportunity to continue his studies in a safe place compared to his previous contexts and said he wanted to stay in the US and accomplish his education.

Describing education as a great opportunity in the US, Vanida was happy that she did not need to worry about the expenses for getting educated in this country, which was a huge difference from what she experienced in Thailand. In fact, that she had the privilege to have education in the US motivated her to do her best to adjust her busy life to the school schedule to be able to continue her education. She also appreciated the supportive learning environment here stating that,

Many people live here they helping us how to improve our life in the United States. Yeah that's why we started with there. We don't know how to go to class, they teach us how to get there. We don't have a plan. They teach me how to ride the bus to get to class.

Baran did not want to share her educational story in Iran. Anyway, she liked her learning environments in Finland and Norway, describing them as effective ways to learn the languages. She appreciated how she had the opportunity to practice speaking Finish and then Norwegian

through working short term jobs in real world situations. She also liked the fact that they had daily classes and believed it helped them practice the language on a regular basis.

Baran did not like specific features of ABE classes in the institute where we met. For example, she complained that she was distracted with other students talking while the teacher was teaching stating that, “some of the students talked a lot and this does not help me”. The instructors in the research site used videos produced by Kahn Academy to present the content and also do additional practice. Khan Academy is a non-profit educational organization aiming at creating a set of online tools that facilitate students’ learning. Its website that is mainly in English, entails supplementary practice exercises and materials for educators. Baran did not like Khan Academy, as she said it did not give them the opportunity to speak and ask questions. In other words, she did not perceive the tool as interactive, stating that,

Khan Academy is just the videos. It’s just writing. You have to read it all that you sometimes don’t feel like it. But when you are in a class and a teacher is explaining for you, it helps a lot.

Baran was doing her best to find her way in her new learning environment to effectively learn English. Therefore, she took both group and private classes to provide herself enough chance to practice and ask questions.

Dara needed to learn English as soon as possible and criticized ABE classes in this institute, as they did not offer daily classes, hence, he did not have enough chance to practice speaking English. He elaborated on his learning need as follows:

I want one class to repeat it every day. Because if I come here every day, I will get a lot of thing, come one week, two hours, or two days, I guess that’s not too much for me.

Anyway, Dara tried to provide himself with an opportunity to practice speaking English through going to work and communicating with his colleagues and the customers of the auto service center, where he worked in. In fact, he took Pedro's approach in facilitating his learning through his informal learning environment at work, explaining that,

I look at it they are work is good, I say why you know, why I would not work like this correct? My wife helps me she said to me if you want, don't go to work, just study I say no , I want to go to work, and to study because if I go there, I will talk with people, if I don't go, I will study a lot of because I cannot practice, at home, I will practice with who? But if I go to the work, if I talk to people, I will practice every day. That I want to go to work I'm go to school is better because sometimes when I at that job, I will talk with person, I say this sentence I will use it past, this sentence I will use it -ing because I study.

Theme 5. Education's Power is Transformative

One of the questions in the interview specifically asked about the participants' perspectives about education and the changes it made in their lives. The participants may be classified in two groups based on their answer to this question. Pedro, Baran, and Dara talked about their personal lives and how education may help them change their own life. On the other hand, Vanida, Enoch, and Samuel expressed how they wanted to transform their communities through getting educated as well. However, all the participants identified education as a turning point in their lives, as it empowered them to achieve their goals, whether it is being finding a better job and earning more money or contributing their communities.

Pedro aimed at promoting in his job through getting a degree with a culinary major and have a better life through getting his desired job as a chef assistant. Accordingly, he advocated

the effectiveness of education stating that, “I told this getting involved in the education. At the universe. I yet to get a complete our goals.”

Dara elaborated on the transformative power of education, stating that, “I know, exactly. It will change my life”. As mentioned in Section One, Dara’s ideal lifestyle was to work less and earn more. Accordingly, he perceived education as facilitating this process for him through qualifying him for better jobs. In fact, Dara sought to get more educated to earn more money and support his own family and did not indicate any interest in transforming a broader community outside his life zone. He justified that this is how you should live to survive in the US, as he stated,

In this country, if you don’t have degree, you cannot make a lot of money and then your work every time, it will be hard.

Advocating education as a significant facilitator of personal change, Baran said, “Education helps you improve in your life”. For Baran, education increases experience and helps one to perform better in her different roles. She envisioned an educated mother as being able to support her children more effectively, stating that,

If I have children, I can help them with their lessons better as an educated mother rather than an illiterate mother.

Similarly, Vanida believed that education would make her a more supportive mother through enabling her to help her kids with their education. However, she advocated education as empowering her to impact on all the contexts she was involved in, including her own family and her community, emphasizing that,

Now I have an opportunity to continue the education so if I improve everything here, if I graduate here to continue college I can help my kids. I can help my kids. I can help my family. I can help my neighbor, too.

Having described her community as preferring working to education, Vanida expressed her passion to help them have better lives. In fact, it was a pleasant transformative experience for her to be able to have different role in her community. The following is how she implies this positive impression:

Every time they need help, they need some ... they want to go somewhere they don't know how to get there, they don't know how to speak, they don't understand what people are talking about so they need help all the time. That's why if I improve the education here I can help more people like that because I love to help people.

Samuel's quest to change to a different person is implied in the following quotation: "If maybe you were poor in previous years. So due to education, you can be someone who is important through education." However, Samuel did not just strive for his own improvement in life and appreciated the opportunity of contributing to his people through education, as he stated,

So education it can help you just like to do changes in your life. If maybe you were poor in previous years. So due to education, you can be someone who is important through education. So through education again, it can help you to develop in your country maybe I'm here but my original country is in Congo. So if I get education and I learn more, I can still develop my country because I have studied and I have an experience. I develop my country and all life goes on well.

Enoch's sense of social responsibility informed how he idealized the effectiveness of education. He aspired a power that enabled him to not only support his community, but also transform them to better people. Enoch characterized his community as follows:

I used to have some age mates, they drop out of school and they were doing their own stuff, they do what they want which it was immoral. Like it wasn't ... people see them to be bad people... You know for example they drink too much. They smoke. They don't go to school. They try to bully other people and stuff... They didn't blend in with the society because everybody sees them as outsiders like how they react, what they do and their stuff.

Discussing that the social problems reproduce themselves if you do not stop them, Enoch stated that he felt obligated to help them change their way of thinking and then life. Below is how he explains his commitment to social responsibility.

And they actually you know when somebody's going through stuff and you don't ... maybe they need somebody to talk to. They need somebody to talk to before they can change. So I think when they get somebody like that to talk to it's gonna be alright... You know you see some people going through struggles you need to help them and transform them to become something better... I feel like I'm comfortable in my zone and you know you see some people going through struggles you need to help them and transform them to become something better. To have a goal and achieve what they want in life.

For Enoch, education could significantly change this situation through helping the individuals to think and live differently.

Well education is actually on another level. Education gives us knowledge. Education gives us knowledge and it's power. It's power. Because if somebody is educated the

person knows when and what to do with their life. When and what to do with their life.

You know I feel like mostly when somebody's way more educated the person believe in a certain kind of way that they blend in with the society. They blend in with the society and they can go far in life. They can go far in life. Education is a great thing to do. It's a great [institution] to go through.

Apparently, one of Enoch's important goals was to support his family and community by the education he attained.

Chapter Summary

In Chapter IV, I presented the result of data analysis in terms of participants' vignettes, their unique approaches to learning and education, and also the common themes of their experiences. In the next Chapter, I will review the process of this research and then discuss the results based on the related theories and models in the literature followed by this study's implications for practice.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with an overview of the framework and the process of the study as well as the findings. The next section is the discussion based on the data analysis and through examining the data in the theories, models, and critical perspectives in the literature. After the general conclusion of the study, the implications of the practice will be discussed followed by recommendations for future research. The chapter will conclude with a brief statement of final thoughts.

Overview of the Study

The current study addresses a quest in the field of adult basic education regarding the learning needs of immigrant adult basic education learners. In fact, this study facilitates this understanding through exploring these learners' experiences as well as their perspectives toward education. Accordingly, the purpose of the study is to understand immigrant ABE learners' experience in an ABE setting from a post-critical lens. The post-critical perspective facilitates a post-structural analysis of the learners' experience while considering the researcher's positionality. The consequent research questions were as follows,

1. How do immigrant ABE learners describe their educational experience prior to their enrollment in ABE?
2. How do immigrant ABE learners describe their learning experiences?
3. How do immigrant ABE learners describe the role of education in changing their life situations?

This is a qualitative study, as it is exploring immigrant adult learners' experiences and perspectives. Meanwhile, I decided to gain an understanding of the learners' experiences through their stories. Due to my own experience and positionality toward the educational processes of

low socioeconomic status adult learners, I opted to use a postcritical perspective, so that I am aware of my assumptions about the stories that are being shared.

The study was conducted in an adult basic education organization in the capital of state of Tennessee through two sets of interviews. The participants of the study included American and immigrant adult learners. However, as only two American students participated in both sets of interviews, I decided to focus on the experiences of the immigrant adult students. Therefore, this study focuses on the experiences of six immigrant adult basic education learners.

The data from the study include interviews as well as the field notes of the observations. The data were analyzed through two levels of coding. Having restructured the story of each participant, the key observations of the participant's experiences as well as perspectives were discussed. On the other hand, all of the codes were applied to generate the themes of the study that indicated the commonalities of the participants' learning experiences and perspectives toward education. The next section highlights the findings of the study.

Findings

As mentioned earlier, the findings of this study comprised two parts; the key observations for each participants, and the themes of the study. The details of the findings are mentioned in following sections.

Key Observations

The participants were from different countries in the world with different educational and sociocultural backgrounds. Therefore, this section involves the unique aspects of their experiences. Baran was a female adult student from Iran who aimed at learning English and getting a college degree to become a makeup designer and support her family. Baran was very happy with the changes in her life and believed the circumstances of her life are getting better

throughout time. She also described English as the critical element of education, as she always needed to learn a second language in order to pursue her education in a formal setting.

Dara was a male Kurdish adult student who strived to support his family through hard work. He described English as the significant element of education as it facilitated better communication, getting a degree, finding a better job, and consequently earning more money. Dara compared the lifestyles in Kurdistan and the US advocating certain features of the first and some elements of the second. In other words, Dara appreciated that they could have what they wanted for cheap prices in Walmart without having to pay in cash. However, he preferred the lifestyle in Kurdistan, where they did not have to work many hours and had more time to spend with their families.

Enoch was a young adult learner from Ghana. He had big wishes for his life like joining US Army and studying information technology in college. Enoch's ideals were inspired by his great sense of social responsibility to facilitate transformation in his community's perspectives. He was annoyed by the behaviors of the young people in his community and wanted to do something to stop dissemination of these behaviors. For Enoch, education has the power to change his and all people's lives significantly.

Pedro was from Guatemala and was taking the HiSet preparation classes in order to get his diploma and get a culinary degree in college. He wanted to promote in his job in the kitchen of a restaurant to be a chef assistant. Pedro's decisions and initiatives were basically reactions to his life circumstances. In other words, he did not make long-term plans for his life, as he needed to take immediate actions to response to specific conditions. Pedro had been learning English throughout all decades he had lived in the US and perceived himself as a hardworking and self-efficacious learner, although he did not speak a fluent English.

Samuel was from Congo and spent a long time in Uganda due to insecure conditions. Throughout all his educational episodes, he consistently aimed at becoming a nurse and then a doctor. For Samuel, education would give him the power to become an important person and help his community as a doctor.

Vanida was from Burma and lived in Thailand refugee camps for most of her life. Vanida's goal was to get a college degree in computer science to get a better job, earn more money, and support her family as well as community. Vanida was an assiduous person who had worked all her life and perceived a better job as the one in which one works the same amount, but with higher wage. In Thailand refugee camps, education was very expensive and not many people could afford to go to school. Therefore, for Vanida, education was a luxury and free education was an opportunity. This implied a material perspective towards education.

Themes from Data

The themes that I generated from the data mainly addressed the research questions that asked about the participants' learning as well as educational experiences and also their perspectives about how education facilitated change in their lives. Accordingly, this study includes five themes, including interrupted educational processes, low socioeconomic status in their home countries and in the US, perceiving literacy through learning English, learning environment as impacting on the learning experience, and the transformative power of education.

The generated themes of the study may be examined in terms of existing models and theories of learning in general and adult learning in particular as well as the prevailing critical perspectives toward them that will be discussed in the next section.

Discussion

The generated themes of the study suggest that the immigrant ABE learners go through different learning processes, which may be examined through their characteristics as adult learners, motivation, experience, self-direction, and empowerment process. This section will discuss each aspect in terms of their application to immigrant ABE learners' experiences.

Adult Learners

Being identified as an adult learner is not just ascribed to the age of the learner; rather, there are certain characteristics and processes that describe the adult learners. The participants of this study had met almost all of the adult learners' features mentioned by Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2005), including their need to know, self-concept, prior experience, and readiness, orientation, and motivation to learn. In other words, these immigrant adult basic education learners realized their needed to know English and other required topics to move forward. They also identified themselves as hardworking and curious learners and directed their learning process in a way to achieve their goals. Further, the learners came to this educational context with the prior knowledge they had acquired through their prior educational processes. Moreover, the life situations of these immigrant ABE learners motivated them to prepare themselves to initiate a learning process to reach their goals.

The participants' experience may also be analyzed through Habermas' perspective in that the immigrant adult learners are involved in learning activities from reflexive, practical, and emancipatory levels. For example, Baran's emphasis on learning English to have a better control of her social environment associates with her reflexive approach to learning. However, Baran's motivation to communicate with others through learning English would explain how she implements communicative action. Further, her reflection on her own history convinced her that

she had experienced positive change in her life that she wanted to pursue in her life. In other words Baran's account of emancipatory learning reflected her intention to make more changes in her own life rather than her community.

Dara also engaged more reflexive and practical levels of learning, where he wanted to learn English to have better control of his environment through establishing better communications with others. Dara's emancipatory level of learning mostly comprised his enthusiasm for making his life situation in the US closer and more similar to what he had in his home country. That said, Dara didn't envision making changes in his community; rather, he intended to improve his family life situation.

Pedro was on the same camp as Baran and Dara on prioritizing the levels of learning. He wanted to get his degree and get a better job to have a better hold of his personal life. Pedro didn't aspire making emancipatory changes in his community or his life. However, he had incorporated communicative action throughout all his process in the US, as he learned most of his English via communicating with others and used this improved English to establish even better communications as well.

The other three participants were had more emphasis on emancipatory learning in their approach to education and learning. Samuel's reflexive level of learning embedded in his endeavor to get his degree and become a 'more important' person as he said to have a better control over his life. He also was involved in the practical level of learning through his endeavor to communicate with other educated people he knew to learn about their processes. Anyway, Samuel's main focus was on emancipatory level of learning, as he wanted to make changes in his community through preventing others to die of sickness and poverty.

Enoch's approach to Habermas' proposed levels of learning was somehow similar to Samuel. He wanted to get his degree and serve the global community through joining the army. Enoch's emancipatory approach to learning informed his process at reflexive and practical levels of learning too, as he wanted to get his degree to become more powerful to communicate with others as a knowledgeable person.

Vanida's hardworking personality explained how she perceived the different levels of learning. She aspired more authority in her environment to improve her family's life status. Vanida's endeavor to get educated embodied her aspiration for better communication in her social environment and also contribute to emancipatory changes in her community.

Accordingly, the three levels of Habermas' (1975) learning theory, could be observed in the immigrant adult learners' processes of learning and education. Meanwhile, the adult learners' motivation, experience, and self-direction are informed by their learning processes that are by far influenced by their socioeconomic status. Some of the implications of this aspects of learning are discussed below.

Motivated Adult Learners

All of the participants were highly motivated to pursue their education in order to get a good job and change their lives and even help their communities to have better circumstances. In fact, they were significantly goal oriented in their initiatives. The participants had different levels of goals, including establishing a better life, getting their GED, and getting a college degree. However for Vanida, Pedro, Dara, and Baran, learning English was facilitated by getting their GED; hence, it was their first goal. Accordingly, all their initiatives were goal oriented; whether in terms of mastery or performance goals. One example is the participants' process of learning

English, where the participants aimed at mastering English fluency and also becoming competent in articulating the language.

The participants' processes of setting goals indicate that many of them developed their educational objectives to address an individual need in order to comply with their social context. Therefore, the participants' goal orientation was inherently contextual rather than individual. In fact, their educational goals accentuate their intention to move upward in their social status. When speaking about their strife to learn English, the participants imply their aspiration to assimilate to the American society by developing better communication skills. Moreover, they perceive education in general and English knowledge in particular as significant facilitators of their process of acculturation in their new context.

Another motivational theory that may be examined through the participants' experiences is the theory of margin. According to McClusky (1963), motivation is a function of the relationship between the load that the individual should take and the power one has to handle to load. That said, the more power and the less load, the more the motivation will be to take the learning initiatives. However, the data from this study shows that although most of the participants are loaded with different responsibilities, and have very few resources to handle them, they were very motivated to pursue their education to attain a better life. In fact, the low level of power by itself serves as a motivator to take learning initiatives. Consequently, the ratio between the load and power may function differently for different groups of social groups due to their socioeconomic backgrounds.

Experienced Adult Learners

The immigrant ABE learners had lifelong learning experiences thanks to the various social environments, in which they have lived. Meanwhile, they came to the ABE setting with

different educational levels. However, they were not able to communicate them in their ABE classes due to their language barrier and also because they were not provided the opportunity share their prior knowledge. That said, and because most of the participants were exposed to the content knowledge in a non-native language, most of the learning experience was episodic for them according to Jarvis' model. In other words, the participants experienced disjuncture at many points of their learning process, regardless of the fact that they had learned the content before or not. This also implies how the ABE institutional knowledge tends to reproduce power relations through invalidating a form of knowledge and legitimating another that ties into Foucault's (1980) account of the relationship between knowledge and power. In fact, the participants' process of experiential learning, as Jarvis (1987) describes, tied into the institutional knowledge that ABE that invalidates their prior knowledge through dismissing it. Although the participants were conscious about their learning experiences that they had attained through their lifespan, their language barrier hindered them to communicate in their current educational context. Accordingly, the immigrant ABE learners in this study do not meet the requirements of O'Bannon and McFadder's (2008) "experiential andragogy", as the model necessitates the relating of relating motivation, orientation, involvement, activity, reflection, and adaptation for the learning to occur. In other words, despite their being actively involved in educational initiatives, the participants' process of experiential learning completed due to improper support for their experience in their current learning environment.

Goal-Oriented but not Self-Directed Adult Learners

Self-directed learning is founded on the adult learners' agency and taking independent learning initiatives in their learning process. In order to change their social status toward higher positions, the participants planned to pursue their education. Therefore, the learners self-initiated

their learning process that is an important element of self-directed learning as Caffarella (1993) puts it. However, the participants did not meet Garison's (1997) model of self-directed learning that highlighted the significance of self-management and self-monitoring for self-directed learning to occur. In other words, the participants did not manipulate the learning environment to comply with their learning needs; rather, they sought to assimilate to their learning environment even at the cost of ignoring their prior knowledge. Moreover, the participants' only source of monitoring their learning process were their grades in English and other subjects offered in HiSet classes; (i.e., they did not use metacognitive strategies to evaluate their learning process and only referred to the other's reactions toward their process). However, the learners had both entering and task motivations in their learning process, as they purposefully took the learning initiatives and persisted in their process to accomplish their goals.

Personal responsibility is the prominent elements of Brockett and Hiemstra's (1991) PRO model of self-directed learning. The participants' intentionality to pursue their education was basically an implication of instrumental approach to education to achieve their goals. However, they did not indicate the agency and sense of responsibility that is required in the PRO model to be identified as self-directed learners. Further, the participants' learning and educational process indicated that they were partly identified as self-directed learners according to Hiemstra and Brockett's (2012) PPC model. In other words, they were motivated and goal oriented learners, but did not exhibit authority and agency in their learning process. Further, their language barriers hindered them from proper communication in their teaching and learning transaction that is an important element of their process. However, they had developed learning strategies that facilitated their process. The immigrant ABE learners' learning experiences were informed by the learning environments and social contexts throughout their lifespans. In fact, their Context

element in PPC model, is the strongest component of self-directed learning for the participants of this study. In other words, one can examine the participants' self-directed learning mostly through the contextual impacts in their process.

Accordingly, the immigrant ABE learners in this study were motivated and goal oriented learners who sought to take the learning initiatives that approached them to their socially constructed goals. However, they may not be identified as self-directed learning, as they do not meet all the qualifications of being such learner.

The final part of the discussion focuses on the participants' approach to power and how they perceive education as approaching them to their aspired power.

Empowered Adult Learners

Except for Samuel who spelled out his aspiration to become a powerful and important person, none of the other participants explicitly talked about their ideals to become powerful people. Instead, they highlighted how education could help them change their social status through helping them get better jobs. This may be associated with Freire's (1970) impression of the oppressed identity, in which they intend to become like oppressors and have more. In fact, they may perceive power as in the hands of dominant groups and education as the only way to approach that power.

However, the participants' narratives indicated that they examined different levels of power in their current lifestyles. For example, Vanida and Enoch supported their families in their home countries. Further, Dara and Vanida had important roles in their families to survive in the US. Pedro's responsibility in his family life gave him the authority to decide where they should live in the US. Accordingly, the participants had different levels of power in their personal that ties into Foucault's approach to power.

That said, education had a significant role for the participants to alter their power dynamics. In other words, it helped them to change their social status to the one, where they could have more money, live better lives, and support others. Accordingly, the participants did not aspire the power just for their own good, but to be able to improve their power relations in their personal and social life.

My postcritical lens throughout the study helped me be conscious about my assumptions about the educational and learning processes of individuals with low socioeconomic status. In other words, I was aware that I associated the participants' experiences with their social backgrounds and with my own experience with the similar populations in my home country. Accordingly, I actively engaged in reflection on my own thought process and how I interpreted the participants' experiences.

Summary

This study aimed at the understanding the immigrant ABE learners' experience in an ABE setting from a post-critical lens. Accordingly, the findings of the study indicated that immigrant ABE learners' journey informs their learning and educational experiences. All of the participants of the study experienced interruptions in their educational processes for different reasons. They either had to quit school in their countries for war or needed to resume their education in the US due to incompatibility of the educational systems. This may be an implication of non-inclusive educational system in the US that marginalizes the groups of the students who don't possess the same knowledge level as the ones holding cultural capital.

The immigrant adult learners in this study identified success as achieving their learning goal in terms of English fluency and a degree that provides them with the opportunity to get better jobs. In fact, they perceived whatever that paved the way for their upward social mobility

in the US as success. Accordingly, they were enrolled in GED classes and worked hard to learn English and get their equivalent diploma for two main goals; to establish better communication with others, and to qualify to higher paid jobs. This whole process made goal oriented adult learners out the participants of the study that aspired success through higher education.

Meanwhile, they incorporated different levels of learning in their process as Habermas (1975) has proposed. In other words, the participants intended to have better control over their environment through establishing better communication with others. They aspired making changes in their families as well as their communities through the power that they assumed to get with the education they acquired. That said, they perceived the education to make them more like the powerful people they knew and wanted to use that to serve their communities instead of exploiting them that is an emancipated perspective.

This study may inspire some practical implications in the field of adult basic education that will be discussed below.

Implications for Practice

Adult basic education is a broad field of adult education that encompasses different areas of practice. Although this study focused on the experiences of immigrant ABE learners who were taking HiSet preparation tests, its findings may be applicable in other ABE contexts as well. One of the significant findings of this study that is supported in ABE literature is the immigrant ABE learners' need to improve their English proficiency. Anyway, this proficiency is not just limited to the learners' ability to speak; rather, it is important for them comprehend the academic content and also communicate their knowledge in the learning environment. Therefore, one implication for practice of this study would be to give an independent test to assess the non-native English speakers' level of English knowledge. The result of this test would enable the

adult educators to adjust their instruction to the immigrant ABE learners' level of English comprehension and proficiency.

Another practical implication of this study may be to introduce ABE instructors to Evidence-Based Teaching Strategies (EBTS) that embody strategies that clarify what the instructors are teaching and what the students are learning that could facilitate students' achievement. EBTS include ten strategies as follows,

- state clear learning goals
- show and tell
- use questions to check for understanding
- summarize new learning in a graphical way
- provide multiple practice opportunities
- provide students with regular feedback
- be flexible about the time it takes to learn
- get students working together
- teach strategies not just the content
- nurture metacognition

Many of the strategies seem to be applicable to be purposefully used in in ABE classed in order to facilitate the learning process for all ABE learners, including immigrants. Flexibility about the time that different learners need to adjust to the teaching and learning transaction, may significantly contribute to the immigrant ABE learners' process in the context. Further, putting the immigrant ABE learners from the same country in the same group to work together and collaborate in developing what they already know to the present content. Finally, the instructors may use different strategies to help the ABE learners to nurture metacognition in terms of

evaluating their learning process. For example, the instructors can use the KLEW questionnaire to reflect on their leaning experience. KLEW embodies four questions as follows:

- What did you know?
- What did you learn?
- What is an evidence of your learning?
- What do you want to learn

Accordingly, the ABE learners would be given an opportunity to metacognively reflect on the learning process and share their learning needs.

A more general implication for educating the ABE instructors is to make them familiar with adult learners' characteristics that necessitate a learner-centered instruction. In other words, the ABE classes need to be developed in a way to provide the adult students with the opportunity to actively engage in the teaching and learning context through sharing their experience and contribute to the process of instruction. There are many collaborative teaching strategies that the instructors may use in their classes in order to develop such interactive learning environment. Finally, it may be helpful to ask ABE learners the questions included in Brookfield's (1995) classroom Critical Incident Questionnaire (CIQ) that asks them about their class experience. The questions mainly ask about the adult students' most convenient as well as confusing moments of learning throughout the class. Accordingly, the immigrant ABE learners would have the opportunity to share what helped and also hindered them in their learning experience in the class.

The next section discusses some recommendations for future research informed by the process and findings of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

Immigrant ABE learners go through different educational processes that inform their learning experiences. Therefore, these learners' experiential learning process embody personal as well as contextual elements. Accordingly, one possible research idea may be to conduct a case study to understand immigrant ABE learners' process of experiential learning from Jarvis' perspective. In other words, the immigrant ABE learners' consciousness, biography, episode, and sensation and how they collaborate in forming their process of experiential learning may provide an understanding of their learning process in terms of their connection with their context and their processing of the information.

As discussed earlier, the adult learners are motivated to achieve their educational goals in order to change their status. Therefore, they come to ABE educational setting with different levels of motivation that is interconnected with their context and competence. That said, an explanatory mixed methods study may help to examine the immigrant ABE learners' motivation in terms of their self-determination and then conduct interviews to understand how their social experiences inform their level of self-determination. Further, and as the participants of this study perceived themselves as motivated and self-efficacious learners, an explanatory mixed methods study would also help to assess their level of self-efficacy and then explore their perspectives and processes regarding their self-concept in this regard.

One the significant themes of this study was the participants' perceptions about education and power. Accordingly, a phenomenological study to develop a specific understanding of these learners toward education and power together or separately may pave the way to theorize how their perceptions about these two phenomena were constructed and what it looks like.

The participants of this study were from different countries and hence, they had diverse backgrounds. A consequent recommendation for future research may be to conduct an ethnographic study to understand the learning as well as educational experiences of immigrant ABE learners from a specific country. In other words, different research projects could be developed to understand the learning experiences of Ghanaian, Congolese, Burmese, Guatemalan, Kurdish, Iranian, and any other communities as was conducted in this study. An ethnography would contribute to a more focused understanding of learning experiences of enclaves of immigrant ABE learners.

My final recommendation is to conduct a comparative study to understand how immigrant ABE learners' experiences are different or similar in American versus European educational contexts. This may be an archival study on the different educational policies in Europe and the United States in terms of their approach to adult basic education as well as to language acquisition. This study would illuminate the immigrants' learning experiences in the different countries they land.

Final Thoughts

Diversity and inclusion are two critical tenets of every learning environment. Throughout the process of this research study, I was reflecting on the factors that inform diversity in the ABE setting. My other consideration was the extent to which this setting is inclusive for all adult learners, including immigrant ABE learners. One significant implication of this study was that in order to make a learning environment inclusive, it is not enough to develop inclusive teaching strategies. Rather, it is critical to consider the contextual foundations that form the learning experiences as well as needs and then develop teaching and learning transaction process that addresses these needs.

Immigrant adult learners have taken the initiative to pursue their education and make a change. While being cognizant that this change may not lead to upward social mobility, it is important to boost their motivation through providing them with more equal learning opportunities through helping them to overcome their language barriers. Immigrant ABE learners are important members of ABE community that should not be marginalized in this educational setting.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about your educational background.
 - a. How far did you go?
 - b. What led you to leave school?
2. Tell me about your family
 - a. How many sisters and brothers you have?
 - b. How far did your sisters and brothers go?
3. What led you to be enrolled in ABE?
4. What were you hoping to learn?
5. When you come up with a problem, what do you do for help?
6. When do you feel you've learned something new?
7. What do you do if you find out you need more training in a specific topic? How do you do it?
8. Is there anything that you still need to learn that are not offered here?
9. What do you hope to do after you finish your training here?
10. How do you describe yourself as a learner?
 - a. Do you like learning new things?
 - b. What are your favorite subjects to learn?
 - c. How do you like to learn best?
11. Is there anything you want to share?
12. Do you want them to follow your educational path or a different one? Say more.

Appendix B: Informed Consent

Dear Student,

My name is Sara Nasrollahian Mojarad and I am a doctoral student in Educational Psychology and Counseling, Adult Learning program at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. I am exploring Adult Basic Education learners' learning experiences before and during the ABE courses.

Your participation in this research will be a great help to understand Adult Basic Education learners' experiences and also to help instructors develop teaching practices that help the learners learn better.

Risks

There are no foreseeable risks beyond those encountered in everyday life except for the possibility of breach of confidentiality. I will protect against this risk in the following ways

- Consent forms containing names will be securely stored in a location separate from the data

Confidentiality

Confidentiality of data and study records will be protected as explained above. Further, while the results of this study may be published, your name will not appear on any of the results.

Contact Information

If you have any questions concerning this research study, before and after your consent, please do not hesitate to contact me (snasroll@vols.utk.edu or my advisor, Dr. Ralph Brockett (brockett@utk.edu). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the UT Office of Research IRB Compliance Officer at utkirb@utk.edu or (865) 974-7697.

IRB NUMBER:

APPROVAL DATE:

IRB EXPIRATION DATE:

Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be destroyed. If you are interested in participating, please complete the "Consent" section below on both copies of this form. Keep one for your records and return one to Sara Nasrollahian Mojarad at 618 Greve Hall.

Consent I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study as specified below:

_____ Sara Nasrollahian Mojarad may use your interviews. I wish to have the following pseudonym used instead of real name

Pseudonym: _____

_____ I am interested in being participating in an interview, please contact me at

Contact Information: _____

Participant's Name _____

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

VITA

Sara Nasrollahian Mojarad is from Iran. She earned her Bachelor in English Literature and her Masters in Educational Psychology at Allameh Tabatabaei University in Tehran, Iran. Sara started her social activities during her undergraduate studies. She worked with different social groups as an educator and also an educational researchers. Throughout her social engagement, Sara observed how disadvantaged social groups' learning experiences were informed by their social life processes. Therefore, she collaborated to develop educational programs for working and street children and disadvantaged women in order to compensate for the deficiencies in the formal educational settings in Iran. Meanwhile, Sara decided to pursue her education and get her PhD that she believed would empower her to have a systemic understanding of educational processes through learners' experiences.

Sara enrolled in the PhD program in Educational Psychology, Adult Learning, at the University of Tennessee in the United States. There she learned about the adults' learning processes and experiences. She also had the opportunity to examine how pedagogical processes could facilitate inclusion in formal educational settings. Sara has a sociological approach to learning and education, where she believes in order to develop an effective learning environment, one needs to understand the societal backgrounds of learners and also the structural foundations of education.

Sara recently began her new journey as a teaching and learning specialist at the University of Iowa. She intends to pursue her research interest to contribute to the development of inclusive and equitable learning environments in different formal educational settings.