

The Role of Volunteerism on Social Integration and Adaptation of African Students at a Mid-Western University in the United States

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Abstract

This study examined the role of volunteer experiences on Black African international students' social integration and adaptation at a predominantly White Mid-Western university in the United States. The study explores micro-level interactions and relationships fostered during volunteering as well as feelings of inclusion/exclusion and personal satisfaction. Thirteen participants who had volunteered in services that required substantial interactions were interviewed. Four themes on the positive influence of volunteering on social integration and adaptation were identified, namely; fostering of feelings of inclusion and belonging, enhancement of social cohesion of diverse people, fostering of feelings of self-validation, and attainment of social, cultural, and human capital. However, other participants in this study felt inadequate, alienated, and devaluated during the volunteer process. Fear of not being understood, feelings of incompetence, and the cumbersome bureaucratic process in the application process deterred some participants from volunteering with some services. The authors conclude by providing recommendations for international students in general, institutions of higher learning, and volunteer agencies.

Keywords: social integration; volunteerism; adaptation; international students; multicultural environment; student participation

International students' adaptation to a new culture is a major concern in higher education research (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005; Tanaka, 2002). Studies have shown that some international students experience disillusionment as they seek to acquire expected behaviors that are needed for participation as competent members of the host society, and this often results in stress, negative perceptions of self, and frustration (Mellow, van Slyck, & Eynon, 2003). It is not surprising that negative feelings of social and cultural detachment by incoming college students is

cited as one of the leading causes of students' dropping out of college (Nuñez, 2004). The Student Integration Model proposed by Tinto (1975) provides a useful theoretical framework to conceptualize the social integration of international students in general. The central concept of Tinto's model that is of interest to this study is the degree to which the integration of college students into the social and academic aspects of the university determines their levels of persistence or dropout. The higher the degree of integration, the greater will be the commitment to college completion. Drawing from this model, it is quite evident that the social integration of international students into the formal and informal social systems of US college environment can play an important role in ensuring their adaptation and eventual academic success. This study draws on the fact that international students studying in the United States are more likely to experience social and cultural detachment on and off campus, given the rifts between their heritage and the American cultures. Undoubtedly, social integration of these international students into the formal and informal social systems of the host environment is crucial. Maundeni (2001) defines social integration as the provision of equal opportunities accompanied by an atmosphere of mutual tolerance. Social integration, therefore, entails feelings of belonging, inclusion, connectedness, participation, and recognition, which are of paramount importance for the adaptation of international students.

It is, however, debatable if the process of integration is the same for all international students given that they come from different countries representing multitudes of cultures (Manguvo, 2012). From an earlier study that compared the levels of acculturative stress among international students from different regions, Constantine et al. (2005) reported that African students at US campuses exhibited significantly more signs of acculturative stress and depression than their Asian and Latin American counterparts. In response to such eventualities, Manguvo (2012) argues that the context of reception of international students is dependent upon the attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes that members of the host have toward specific groups of international students. In the case of African students, their social integration is possibly complicated by negative stereotypes, for example, in the areas of crime, violence, and drugs that are often associated with their African Americans counterparts; because of the racial homogeneity between the two groups of people (Nwadiora, 1996). Furthermore, negative images about Africa such as famine, poverty, sickness, and war that are embedded in the minds of some people in Western countries may result in negative perceptions of African students (Manguvo, 2012; Traore, 2006). Such negative perceptions can have paramount ramifications on the capacity of African students to adapt and socially integrate. Given these trends and arguments, this study sought to establish some insights into how African international students negotiate into the social fabric of their new environment.

We perceive volunteer experiences as one of the avenues by which we can examine the social existence of African international students when relating to social integration and adaption. The conceptual framework for this study is based on the fact that volunteering is associated with broader social processes and outcomes, one of which is social integration (Berger, Dinca-Panaitescu, Foster, & Meinhard, 2005). A previous study with several ethnic groups in Canada by Berger et al. (2005) provided evidence that volunteerism impacts positively on social integration through provision of high quality social networks, a sense of belonging and trust, and an enhancement of self-esteem to various ethnic groups. Other studies have also shown that involvement in volunteerism may ease the process of adaptation for immigrants/sojourners. For example, Handy and Greenspan (2008) observed in a study with Canadian immigrants that volunteering could potentially attenuate the effects of relocation as immigrants sought to regain the social and human capital lost in the migration process. In a related study, Ksienski (2004) reported that involvement in volunteering helped to socialize and affiliate sojourners into the mainstream culture.

Our goal in this study was, therefore, to examine how African international students make sense of their social conditions of existence through volunteerism, given how social integration may

be intertwined with civic participation. We hypothesized that, through participation in volunteerism, African students would foster feelings of belonging which would enhance their social integration and adaptation into the American academic and social environment.

Research Questions

- To what extent is volunteering related to Black African international students' adaptation and social integration into the cultural and social fabric of their host society?
- What barriers deter Black African international students from volunteering?

Methods of Study

Research Paradigm

This study adopted an interpretivist research paradigm because its underlying assumptions are useful for an investigation of feelings of social integration and adaptation among sojourning international students. Interpretivists assume that knowledge and meaning are acts of interpretation; as such, there is no objective knowledge that is independent of people's thinking and reasoning (Gephart, 1999). In concurrence, Myers (2009) posits that the interpretive paradigm is underpinned by observation and interpretation, where observation entails data collection, while interpretation involves drawing inferences from the observations and making judgments based on the observed patterns and some abstract patterns. Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm is concerned about understanding reality from the subjective worldview of the participants; as such, it heavily relies on the subjective relationship between the researcher and the participants (Reeves & Hedberg, 2003). In line with these assumptions, the findings and conclusions of this study were a fusion of observations made through data collection processes and inferences drawn as relating to social integration and adaptation of African students.

In seeking a research methodology that would provide an ontological and epistemological fit within an interpretive theoretical paradigm, we employed a narrative approach to investigate feelings of social integration and adaptation among African students. A narrative approach seeks to understand how people put meaning onto events and how they shape themselves through the stories they create about themselves, others, and the world around them (Roscoe & Madoc, 2009). Therefore, we presume narratives as powerful ways by which African students in the United States may reflect and interpret the conditions of their existence as they navigate into their new environments.

Participants

Approval for the study was granted by the Institutional Review Board and potential participants were reached out to through the African Students Association at one Mid-Western university. At the time of data collection, the university had a total enrollment of over 32,000 students, of which only 64 were from Sub-Saharan Africa. Originally, 27 African students volunteered to participate in the study but some had never volunteered in the United States, whereas others had either volunteered in services that did not allow much interaction, or had last volunteered for more than six months; as such, these were excluded in the final sample.

The final sample consisted of 13 participants who were involved in volunteer services that required substantial interactions and were either involved or had been recently (less than six months) involved in volunteering at the time of data collection. This was intended to have information-rich cases for an in-depth understanding of their volunteer experiences and how they possibly impacted on their social integration and adaptation. Table 1 below shows the demographic characteristics of the participants and the volunteer services in which they were engaged. In order to

protect participants' identity and maintain confidentiality, the names given in Table 1 are all pseudonyms.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants in this study and their volunteer services

Participant	Gender	Age	Program	Country	Yrs in US	Volunteer Service
Sam	Male	24	Graduate	Cameroon	3	Church
Chaka	Male	26	Graduate	Rwanda	2	Food bank, church
Rebecca	Female	32	Graduate	Zimbabwe	4	Hospital, campus events
Adam	Male	40	Graduate	Kenya	2	Refugee camps, food bank
Jorum	Male	21	Undergrad	Nigeria	1	Campus events
Chido	Female	21	Undergrad	Ghana	2	Hospitals/ health centers, church
Lavenda	Female	35	Graduate	Zimbabwe	3	Church
James	Male	37	Graduate	Kenya	4	Refugee camps, church
Tunde	Female	19	Undergrad	Nigeria	5	Campus events, food bank
Nunu	Female	36	Graduate	Zimbabwe	4	Attorney general, campus events
Solani	Female	21	Undergrad	Nigeria	6	Campus events, church
Nyeshia	Female	27	Graduate	Ghana	4	Public schools, campus events
Obert	Male	27	Graduate	Rwanda	2	City council

Data Collection and Analysis

We employed the interview guide approach recommended by Beechem, Anthony, and Kurtz (1998), where the same general areas of information was collected from each participant regardless of their diverse volunteer experiences. This allowed a degree of freedom and adaptability in getting information from the participants. The interviewer and principle investigator was an African international student studying at the same university which might have posed some limitations in this study. With the positionality of the interviewer, it is apparently evident that some form of bias was inevitable. To deal this potential bias, as advised by Corbin and Strauss (2008), one of the co-authors, a non-African researcher reviewed the codes, themes, and subthemes in order to identify objective versus subjective ones.

On a positive note, the positionality of the interviewer helped in gaining access to and formulating a sense of trust with the participants. This was especially important given the potential sensitivity of some of the issues that were discussed. The interviewer was able to create an empathetic relationship with the participants, who in turn were open to share their feelings and experiences. In general, the interviews lasted between 45 and 93 minutes.

After taping and transcribing the interviews, member checking with participants was conducted before coding to make sure the transcripts accurately represented their authentic responses. Next, as highlighted by Miles and Huberman (1994), data reduction was conducted by using descriptive codes, which summarized participants' responses. In line with the goals of this study; words, phrases, or sentences related to feeling of inclusion/exclusion, adaptation, and social integration were identified and recurring ideas were clustered and classified into categories of description. Four major themes were generated and several subthemes were drawn from each theme, each demonstrating qualitatively different ways by which volunteer experiences may have possibly impacted on participants' social integration and adaptation. After identifying the themes and subthemes, raw data were reviewed again to verify the themes and subthemes that had emerged.

Lastly, peer debriefing among co-investigators was done to decrease possibilities of unconsciously overemphasizing and/or overlooking some information by the principal investigator.

Results

Four major themes linked to adaptation and social integration were identified; each of the themes describe the various positive ways by which volunteer experiences potentially enhanced participants' social integration and adaptation. The third theme describes negative feelings that some participants felt during volunteering and the last theme addresses barriers that deterred some of participants from actively engaging in certain volunteer services.

Theme 1: Positive Influence of Volunteerism on Social Integration

Volunteerism provided an opportunity for participants to positively engage in society, creating cohesion among diverse people and enhancing feelings of inclusion, self-validation, and belonging among the participants.

Subtheme 1: Social inclusion. In line with findings from previous studies (e.g. Ksienski, 2004), one dominant subtheme that emerged on the positive influence of volunteerism on social integration was the enhancement of feelings of social inclusion and belonging, as highlighted by Sam, who had just volunteered at a church renovation project:

The whole project was very exciting for me because of how receptive everyone was to me. They were all very interested in getting to know me, they didn't even care that I didn't speak good English. They loved to teach me things. They were very understanding and patient to communicate, so, I was part of the team from day one.

Participants also felt socially accepted as volunteers and confessed that the host society presented them with equal opportunities to volunteer as those provided to citizens:

Interviewer: Have you ever been turned down after making a request to volunteer?
Solani: Um, so far I have never been turned down at all; maybe it's also that I have just applied to those two places. But I don't think anyone can discriminate me because I am from Africa because the places I went to, the people were very nice, they really wanted people to come and volunteer, so I think they would want to accept everyone who applies.

Subtheme 2: Social cohesion. Berger et al. (2005) define social cohesion as an ongoing process of developing a community of shared values, challenges, and opportunities among people of diverse orientations. Previous studies have shown that volunteerism can have a social cohesion effect as it glues people of diverse backgrounds together in their capacity both as clients and as peer volunteers (e.g. Berger et al., 2005; Jenson, 2002). Participants in this study reported that they shared a common cause when they offered to do good for their society; and as such, they tended to devote little attention to racial and ethnic differences that were inherent among them. This is portrayed by James and Adam respectively:

Recently, I worked with people from Myanmar; I think that is the new name of Burma. We were working with them, they don't speak English, but we were working with them setting up a house and I was so impressed. Now I have friends from Burma. Some of them when we meet, we feel that there is that personal touch. And then about Caucasian Americans, they all became friends.

There are so many people who want to volunteer in refugee camps but you find that they are not able because of language differences. But I have seen many of them helping them in things like athletics, buying them things like clothes or taking them out to do an activity, and it's really good. I remember one time we took the refugees out for fishing and it turned that these refugees had very good fishing skills, because they grew up fishing, there in Africa, and they really know it [fishing]. So we went to the lake of the Ozark [to fish], and these guys [Caucasians] were very surprised and they actually learned fishing techniques from the refugees.

Subtheme 3: Self-validation. Consistent with findings by Musick and Wilson (2003) that volunteering produces self-validating feelings, participants in this study had positive feelings of personal satisfaction after engaging in various forms of volunteerism. Some participants were confident that they possessed skills that were highly valued and that they could positively improve their community:

Interviewer: How were you welcomed when you visited the organization and informed them of your willingness to volunteer?

Adam: The moment I went to the people who are managing the volunteer organization, they were so impressed because they lacked people who could work with the Burundi refugees, they had very, very few staff to help them because of language difficulties, because most of the refugees don't speak English, but some speak Swahili. Because those refugees fall sick, I have to take them to hospital, and I have to go there [hospitals] and translate their ailments and what the doctor is saying.

Another participant, Nunu, who helped translating audio tapes at the Attorney General's office, had this to say:

It was a very busy time of the semester; exams, term papers, and stuff. I could have simply said "I am busy" because the translations are so involving. But then I thought of the family of the victim, and imagined if it was me. The suspect gets away with it simply because no one could translate the tapes, because no one could understand what he [the suspect] was saying. So it gives you energy. So I left all my work, put it aside, and did the translation. It's about justice, social justice, justice for the victims' family. So I felt very good to be doing that.

Theme 2: Capitals for Social Integration

Participants in this study gained human, cultural, and social capital during their volunteer activities, which are necessary ingredients for sojourners' navigation into the social fabric of their new environment.

Subtheme 1: Social capital. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) define social capital as the sum of resources that are accrued from a durable network of institutionalized relationships (such as those fostered during volunteerism). Consistent with theoretical arguments put forward by Putnam (1993), our study showed that participants gained social capital through numerous networks that were fostered during volunteering:

Interviewer: Have you made new connections from volunteering at that refugee camp?

Adam: Oh! Truly, I have come to know so many people, counselors, professional people from guidance and counseling because these are the people I have ever worked with. I am now in contact with some professors, be it professors of law, when they come for volunteer work, they don't come as professors, they come to make contacts. I am in touch with many

teachers in [name] public schools and I am also in touch with several nurses and doctors when I take them [the refugees] to hospital.

Aroian (1992) argues that the main source of support for sojourners is their own social networks. In this study, participants' wider social networks provided access to social benefits as they profited from the resources of their volunteer networks. The social networks fostered during volunteering provided aid in situations of need, as Obert testified:

I know one lady whom I was working with and the husband happens to be an auditor, and when I was doing my tax returns, I actually didn't know how to file them, so I talked to her and she introduced me to the husband and the husband helped me. I was able to now get in touch with this family and the husband really helped me unlike other places where you have to pay, actually, he did my tax returns for free.

Subtheme 2: Cultural capital. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), cultural capital refers to attitudes, knowledge, and preferences of a community. Similar to findings by Handy and Greenspan (2008), four participants in this study were reportedly presented with an opportunity to learn norms and values and other codes of behavior that were appropriate for their adaptation through volunteerism. For example, Jorum, who volunteered with a peer mentoring program on campus, said the encounter gave him an opportunity to learn how to communicate in a culturally appropriate way:

I learned a lot about American culture. . . and also other cultures because the [peer mentoring] program is for all students, even non-Americans. Like I now know the things to say and what not to say, how to say them and to whom. Like in my culture we often don't speak directly when we discuss important issues. We kind of, go round in circles; I think you know what I mean. Americans tend to be more direct. . .

Subtheme 3: Individual human capital. Participants also gained individual human capital through involvement in volunteerism, which is one of the key factors in the adaptation process of sojourning students. Several alternative forms of individual human capital include job experiences, language proficiency, work habits, and other general skills (Sicherman, 1991). In this study, Chido, for example, who was a practicing physician in her home country reportedly learned new work habits when she volunteered extensively in hospitals:

. . . like when I was in Zimbabwe, you would go to a patient and just say "hi, I am so and so, I want to do this", and then from there you are quiet, you do your stuff and you don't talk to the patient. But here I have realized that you don't do that, you go there, take your time maybe two minutes or so introducing yourself who you are what you are doing there, what you gonna do for how long and how exactly will you do that and afterwards when you are actually doing the procedure you talk to the patient and make them feel very comfortable. So you continuously talk to your patient as you do things, so that you have a very good working environment.

Chaka also shared similar sentiments on the gaining of individual human capital:

The people I have been working with are very hard working people; very hard working, people who would go to greater length to ensure that what we are doing has been perfected and what we are doing is actually helping. So, something I have learned from them is tenacity, to be able to follow on to what you are doing so that you improve the life of the people.

We also found that volunteerism was connected with language proficiency in some ways as it provided a platform for practicing and perfecting language skills, especially for Adam and Nunu who volunteered to translate for refugees and the Attorney General's office respectively:

. . . I speak with refugees who are from Burundi and the only language that those people speak is Kirundi, most of them cannot even speak Swahili, neither can they speak English, so translating has helped both my English and my Kirundi, I am now, I can say I am now more fluent in both languages.

. . . I had never translated, I mean an official translation like this before and the tap plays very fast and you are listening, and writing at the same time. One tape is like one hour another like one and half hours, and you have 10 of them. So you need to be really fast and accurate so you don't misrepresent what the person [suspect] is saying. So, word selection is very important because you are doing it really fast.

Theme 3: Negative Experiences

Despite the many positive ways by which volunteerism potentially enhanced social integration and adaptation, other participants reported somehow negative feelings of alienation, devaluation, and inadequacy after their volunteer experiences, and these feelings potentially had long lasting effects.

Subtheme 1: Social alienation. Two participants reported having feelings of alienation while volunteering in a group dominated by Caucasian Americans. Alienation refers to conditions, feelings, and orientations that discourage participation (Kalekin-Fishman, 1996). For example, Jorum, who volunteered with the peer mentoring program on campus, narrated how he felt alienated as he could not relate with most of the participants during and after the workshop:

. . . in another way I felt like I was not exactly within the group because after the training and if we get sometimes to meet, say during lunch break, you would see that the culture and stuff, you don't really feel like this is what I am but, otherwise during the training, I really feel that we are doing good together, but after that you realize that, well we are a little bit different, you will begin to think that well, I am a foreigner, but they [colleagues] were very nice but you just feel that we are from different places.

Subtheme2: Inadequacy and self-devaluation. Nyesha developed feelings of inadequacy when she volunteered as a child minder at her church. Such feelings of inadequacy potentially resulted in self-devaluation and negative perceptions of own competence:

At first I was very excited to help out with the kids. Kind of paying back because other parents also watch over my kids during church services. So I felt like I should also volunteer, and also because I wanted to interact with kids, like pre-kindergarteners. Naturally, I just love kids anyways, and then what happens? I go there; the kids just stare at me, and they look very uncomfortable. I felt very bad. Maybe they [the kids] don't interact that much with Black adults, because the church is predominantly White. This was an embarrassment, I never signed up to help with the kids again.

Subtheme 3: Failure to make connections. Some participants in this study failed to make significant networks during the entire periods of volunteering as Rebecca, who was volunteering with a local hospital, testified below:

After volunteering and stuff, everybody will be rushing home, someone rushing to school, so there was no time to foster relations, but otherwise they were so nice, if I had tried really hard, like take somebody's phone number or email, I think I would have made friends.

Theme 4: Barriers to Volunteerism

The literature records numerous reasons that hinder sojourning people in the United States from volunteering with mainstream organizations. Although all participants in our final sample had been involved in volunteerism in one way or another, the desire to volunteer with some services for two participants was inhibited by fear of not being understood because of their accents, which made them seriously reconsider whether to volunteer or not:

Interviewer: Are there any factors that sometimes hinder you from volunteering?

Lavenda: I think the only thing that may actually make me think twice about going is probably my accent, more like I will ask myself “are they gonna hear me properly, what I say?” So most probably I would go to any organization but I would think twice to go to some organization like will they be able to hear me, will they take me because of the way I speak? Because you may speak to some people and they don’t hear anything at all. So, maybe I just think twice.

Nyasha: [Name of organization] has this wonderful program. We go out to [name given] public schools and read stories to kids, middle schools. I love this program because as graduate students of color, we reach out to them, and inspire them, especially children of color, so it’s a noble idea. So our president [of the organization] asked for volunteers. But middle scholars may have a hard time hearing me; I mean my accent, especially when someone hears me for the first time. So I just told him no, and he looked very upset. It was difficult to express my actual fears to him, so I just said no.

Another factor that was reported by most participants as a deterrent from volunteering is the cumbersome bureaucratic process involved in the application process. James testifies:

In Kenya, when you hear there is a crisis, be it hunger or anything and you want to help, you simply take some food and go and help the starving people, you do not need to fill in any papers or get approval from any office. Here it’s a different story, we wanted to go to Joplin, but hey, the accreditation process was so frustrating, eventually, we managed to do something but the bureaucratic process here may actually be discouraging.

All in all, findings from this study show that participants had varied volunteer experiences relating to feelings of inclusion, belonging, and self-validation. Interestingly, most participants developed positive feelings during and after the process of volunteering that could potentially hasten their social integration and adaptation to the host culture.

Discussion

This study examined the role of volunteer experiences of Black African international students in their process of integrating and adapting to the American society. In this study, participants had varied experiences; both positive and negative, when relating to social integration and adaptation. Interestingly, and consistent with findings from previous studies (e.g. Chareka, Nyemah, & Manguvo, 2010; Handy & Greenspan, 2008; Musick & Wolson, 2003), volunteerism fostered positive feelings of belonging, inclusion, self-validation, and recognition in most participants, which potentially facilitated adaptation and integration to the host culture. By providing equal volunteer opportunities for all aspirants regardless of nationality of origin, the host society helped foster a sense of inclusion and belonging in participants, which potentially helps eradicate feelings of foreignness that most international students have upon entering US colleges and universities.

In our study, volunteerism provided opportunities for participants to meet with diverse people while taking civic action in the community. Because volunteerism cuts across barriers of race, ethnicity, and nationality, which isolate and alienate people, it challenges society to be tolerant

to diversity (Jenson, 2002). As Leonard and Onyx (2003) point out, by bridging diverse cultures, volunteerism is socially cohesive by creating a society based on a common cause. For international students seeking to adapt to the host society, this cohesion can have a positive impact on their adaptation and social integration process.

Consistent with findings by Handy & Greenspan (2008), the findings from this study also showed that volunteering can attenuate the effects of relocation for international students as they seek to regain the capital lost in the migration process. Volunteerism was an important tool from which participants learned several aspects of the host culture that could potentially hasten their successful integration and adaptation even in other professional and nonprofessional endeavors. For example, this study showed the role of volunteerism in building social networks. As noted by Berry, (1997), the quantity and quality of interpersonal relationships fostered during volunteering determine participants' orientation towards the host culture. In this study, networks fostered during volunteering created productive social relationships between participants and members of the host, which in turn could be crucial for social integration and adaptation.

When international students arrive in a host country, they may find that the human capital they brought with them is not very relevant to their adaptation (Aguilera & Massey, 2003). As highlighted in this study, volunteering provided opportunities to learn norms and values and other codes of behavior that are appropriate for adaptation; for example, how to present themselves and how to behave at work. If successfully adopted, some of these norms, values, and work habits may serve as both a baseline and compass to their adaptation (Ksienski, 2004).

Despite the aforementioned positive influences of volunteerism on social integration, findings from this study also showed the negative experiences from volunteering that potentially impedes the social integration and adaptation process. For example, two participants in our study reported feelings of alienation, self-devaluation, and inadequacy following their initial volunteer experiences, which could further inhibit them from volunteering in future. As a result, a vicious circle may be created in which negative volunteer experiences lead to withdrawal, which in turn might make it difficult for members of the host to foster relationships with the sojourning international students. Thus, the initial volunteering experience is crucial as it can have long-lasting effects on future involvements. There is a need, therefore, for volunteer agents and peer volunteers to regularly affirm the competency of new international volunteers through appreciation and encouragement.

We also found factors that could potentially act as barriers to participants' volunteering. Consistent with findings by Chareka et al. (2010), formal volunteering with an organization was not well known among Sub-Saharan African students, therefore it became difficult for them to engage in highly structured and professionalized forms of volunteerism.

Our findings also showed that participants' accent was a major deterrent factor especially with volunteer services that required interaction with kids. Furthermore, previous experiences of inadequacy and fear of being racially discriminated against discouraged other participants from volunteering. Such negative feelings may lead to self-segregation, thus, potentially impeding the social integration and adaptation process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The pursuit of international students' social integration and adaptation is of paramount importance to the multicultural US institutions of higher learning. This study raised an important indicator that researchers might use to explore international students' lived experiences relating to their adaptation processes and social integration in the United States. If social integration of international students is

conceptualized by their social roles, or the number of social ties they have, then there is an argument that volunteerism can help by adding roles and promoting social ties (Musick & Wolson, 2003). Thus, civic participation through volunteerism is one of the avenues by which universities might pursue as they seek to create better contexts for international students. As demonstrated by the findings of this study, and consistent with findings from previous studies, promoting and facilitating volunteerism among international students can go a long way in combating their social exclusion.

Limitations

Our findings, however, should be considered in light of potential limitations. First, because our goal was to examine the influence of volunteerism on social integration; it is possible that our perceptions uniquely influenced the formulation of our research questions, which, in turn may have affected the data we acquired. Second, our final sample of 13 participants is small, and thus, generalizability of the findings to other African students is cautioned. Third, although international students from the continent of Africa arguably share some fundamental cultural similarities, we may have lost some unique experiences associated with each country by analyzing data from participants from six African countries. Fourth, our study was conducted at a proportionally White dominated university located in a predominantly White community; hence, the generalizing the findings to other universities and communities is cautioned. Despite these notable limitations, our findings are still deemed reliable and usable in understanding the role that volunteerism can play in international students' social integration and adaptation.

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