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## Job-Search Experiences of Ghanaian Immigrants in New York City

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Samuel Obeng

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Walden University  
2024

Abstract

Job-Search Experiences of Ghanaian Immigrants in New York City

by

Samuel Obeng

MS, Walden University, 2013

BA, Rutgers University, 2010

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Social Psychology

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## Abstract

There is an abundance of literature on the experiences of immigrants in the United States. However, little is known about the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States, although it is highly likely that they experience the challenges that confront other immigrants, such as employment discrimination. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City. The theoretical framework was a combination of Seligman and Maier's learned helplessness theory and Rotter's locus of control theory. This study was designed to answer questions related to the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City and to the role of perceived discrimination in their job-search processes. Twenty participants took part in the study; the data were collected from semistructured interviews and were coded and organized using themes based on the participants' experiences. Patterns identified in the participants' responses led to the creation of initial themes, which were developed into larger (main) themes; these were (a) discovering sources of job information, (b) being proactive and strategic, (c) applying for jobs with clear job descriptions, and (d) having uncomfortable and discriminatory experiences. The results of this study may help to create positive social change through an awareness of the challenges that confront Ghanaian immigrants in their job searches, and new immigrants from Ghana may be able to learn from their predecessors' experiences.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Globalization has encouraged many people to emigrate from their home countries (Black et al., 2022), but regardless of their reasons for doing so, immigrants typically have experiences very different from those of the natives in their destination countries. Tegegne and Glanville (2019), Jiang and Renema (2021), and Hendriks and Bartram (2019) all have found that, in destination countries, there are immigrant–native gaps in well-being (happiness), which exist mainly because immigrants experience a deficit of social capital in their new location (Tegegne & Glanville, 2019).

The patterns of migration between developing countries and the industrial West indicate that emigrants leave for various reasons, especially economic ones (Khalid & Urbański, 2021). On this point, the Migration Policy Institute (MPI; Lorenzi & Batalova, 2022) and the Pew Research Center (Anderson & Connor, 2018) have reported that the number of sub-Saharan African residents emigrating to the United States and the United Kingdom has been increasing at an exponential rate. Citizens of one African country, Ghana, have been immigrating to the United States since 1990 (Goodman, 2020). According to Goodman (2020), before 1990, many Ghanaian immigrants visited the United States temporarily, but in the years following 1990, they perceived that their government was failing them, so they took to looking for prosperity and a permanent home elsewhere; hence, their frequent immigration to the United States.

While other sub-Saharan countries, like Nigeria and South Africa, are well covered in the literature on immigrants, Ghana is barely to be found (Emeka, 2016; Flahaux & De Haas, 2016). Nevertheless, Ghanaians have emigrated to many countries

around the world, and they appear in great numbers in the United States and the United Kingdom, although the United States receives the larger portion (MPI, 2020). In mid-2020, the MPI estimated that about 131,000 Ghanaian immigrants were residing in the United Kingdom, and the MPI's 2015 profile report stated there were about 230,000 Ghanaian immigrants and families in the United States. These numbers warrant a study of the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States. The findings of this study may be useful to future immigrants and to those who help them navigate the immigration process and could be used to inform policy decisions. Becoming aware of the challenges faced by Ghanaian immigrants in New York City, the Ghanaian government could educate its citizens to discourage unplanned emigration. For future Ghanaian immigrants looking to stay in New York City, this study's findings could provide a guide for them to follow. The study focuses on the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in the city of New York.

The remaining parts of this chapter cover the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the theoretical/conceptual framework, the nature of the study, and its limitations and significance; the final section summarizes the chapter.

### **Background**

Because immigrants are unique individuals from the same or different countries, they may have different life experiences in their destination countries (Segal, 2019). Notwithstanding these differences, immigrants share some similarities in their life experiences (Colom Andrés & Molés Machí, 2017). One common challenge is a lack of

knowledge about their host nations (Cereci, 2020). New immigrants looking for jobs can benefit from the experiences of already-established immigrants by soliciting their advice. For example, new arrivals may not understand how to complete a job application, prepare for a job interview, or overcome a language barrier. They may also receive financial support from established immigrants, such as rent for the first few months after their arrival, as well as other types of support, such as being shown around the neighborhood. Moreover, for newly arrived immigrants to become established and independent, they must find work. Scholars have identified some of the challenges immigrants face in this area; however, they have not delved into how Ghanaians search for jobs in the United States. Consequently, there is very little literature to report on.

In every country, employment processes are governed by laws (Campos et al., 2018; Cooney, 1998). Atiso et al. (2018) found that employment-related laws confuse Ghanaian immigrants in their pursuit of employment, and they struggle in their job searches due to the poor quality of information. They rely on word-of-mouth from their friends, church members, and others in their community to learn about job openings. Very few Ghanaian immigrants use the library for information. The authors also found that the libraries available are not equipped with the right support for immigrants. For example, they usually have resources that are in English, which is not Ghanaians' native language. Also, the library resources are not mainly for immigrants, which renders them of little use to the Ghanaian immigrant population. In their study of Ghanaian immigrants in Norway, Badwi et al. (2018) found job searching to be a challenge for this population. While the Ghanaians in Norway used their immigrant social networks to land menial

jobs, they found professional and semiprofessional jobs through their social networks with Norwegians. According to the authors, employers in Norway are skeptical and see immigrants as a risk because immigrants do not understand Norwegian work practices. In another study, Ghanaian immigrant interviewees recounted how they were denigrated in their workplace due to their social and racial background (Coe, 2020). Zaami (2015) concluded that due to bad neighborhood influences on a group of Ghanaian immigrant youths in a setting in Canada, these individuals experienced social and spatial exclusion, which had a negative effect on their life experiences. Zaami, therefore, concluded that social exclusion can lead to unemployment and that there was perceived employment discrimination among the Ghanaian youths.

This study is needed because the job-search challenges of Ghanaian immigrants have yet to be explored and because being aware of challenges is an asset to potential Ghanaian immigrants. Thus, the results of this study can help inform Ghanaian immigrants living elsewhere about what searching for a job in New York City is like and enable them to decide if New York is a good place for them to live. The challenges of Ghanaian immigrants, outlined above, include a lack of knowledge about their host nation (Cereci, 2020), language barriers, unfamiliarity with employment-related laws (Atiso et al., 2018), socio-spatial exclusion, and employment discrimination (Zaami, 2015). Based on the research that addresses the challenges to immigrants posed by lack of knowledge about their host nation (Cereci, 2020), language barriers, and unfamiliarity with employment-related laws (Atiso et al., 2018), this study adds to the knowledge about

Ghanaian immigrants and provides present and future researchers with an additional source of information to support their work.

### **Problem Statement**

Many Ghanaians have traveled to the United States for diverse reasons (Coe, 2020; Goodman, 2020). More specifically, many Africans came between 1980 and 2009 for a higher education and a better way of life (Williams-Forson, 2014). Before 1990, Ghanaians used to travel temporarily outside their country for work and education (Goodman, 2020); however, in the years following 1990, the perception that their government was failing them prompted many Ghanaians to look elsewhere for prosperity and a permanent home (Goodman, 2020). In 2015, the MPI (2020) reported that Ghanaians had been migrating to the United States in great numbers; in 2020, the MPI noted that between 2014 and 2018, Ghanaian immigrants in the United States totaled 167,000, with higher percentages residing on the East and West Coasts. Nineteen percent resided in New York, 9% in Virginia, 9% in New Jersey, 8% in Maryland, 6% in Texas, 6% in Georgia, and 4% in California,

The streaming of Ghanaians into the United States is not itself a problem; the problem is the challenges they face as immigrants, which range from a lack of acceptance in their community of residence to employment discrimination (Seaton et al., 2018). Cooray et al. (2018) found that certain segments of U.S. residents held discriminatory beliefs against employing immigrants, elderly people, people with low levels of education, and those with low-level income households. This finding suggests the prevalence of the discrimination immigrants encounter when trying to acculturate



themselves and assimilate into American society. In one study, Nkimbeng et al. (2020) discussed the participants' challenges, including people's dislike of their accents and their presence in the country and unfair treatment in the workplace. This study focuses exclusively on the findings of authors such as Atiso et al. (2018), Badwi et al. (2018), Coe (2020), and Goodman (2020), which relate specifically to the job-search challenges of Ghanaian immigrants.

While the scholarly literature on the immigrant experience in the United States in general is abundant, there is very little research on Ghanaian immigrants (Emeka, 2016; Flahaux & De Haas, 2016). Searches for keywords like *Ghana*, *Ghanaian immigrants*, *experiences*, *work experiences*, and *job experiences* yield very few to no results pertaining to Ghanaian immigrants' experiences or their searches for employment. Nevertheless, Ghanaian immigrants share the challenges of other immigrants. Atiso et al. (2018) explored Ghanaian immigrants' information needs regarding employment, family ties, and parenting. Admitting that their study was not exhaustive, they called for a more in-depth look into these topics. According to the authors, a group of Ghanaian immigrants in Maryland indicated that their primary concern was about job searching and the regulations associated with it. For that population of immigrants, the need for job information and the means to acquire it became their primary concern in the United States. In New Zealand, Boamah (2018) studied Ghanaian immigrants' information needs and their means of acquiring information, and identified uncertainty and a lack of clarity in how this population gets and uses information.

The challenges noted above are not peculiar to Ghanaian immigrants; they are societal problems, and they call for a study of how Ghanaian immigrants' thoughts, feelings, and perceptions are constructed within social contexts. In social psychology, it is appropriate to study the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of social groups, in this case, those that relate to job-search experiences (Power & Velez, 2022).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City, considering topics ranging from how they learn about job openings to how they complete job applications and how they handle job interviews. The scope also includes whether these immigrants perceive discrimination in the job-search process.

### **Research Questions**

RQ: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City regarding the job-search process?

Research Subquestions:

1. How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings?
2. What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications?
3. What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants preparing for job interviews?
4. How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experiences with the job-search process?

5. How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process?
6. What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process?

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is composed of elements from two theories: the theory of learned helplessness (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019) and the concept of locus of control from social learning theory (Rotter, 1966). The theory of learned helplessness was derived from observations of the conditioned unresponsiveness of dogs that had been exposed to aversive stimuli in uncontrollable and inescapable situations, and that then ceased attempting to escape from the aversive stimuli, even in controllable situations (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019). In short, the dogs had learned that attempting to escape was of no use. The theory was extended to humans, who were seen to behave similarly (Abramson et al., 1978). Researchers have employed the learned helplessness theory in diverse ways. For instance, Elmslie and Sedo (1996) found that, as a result of discrimination, jobseekers permanently gave up pursuing certain jobs because they had often failed in their past attempts to get those jobs. According to the concept of locus of control, which originated with Rotter (1966), a person's center of control is perceived as internal or external. When individuals attribute the success or failure of their actions to the environment, they are considered to have external (environmental) locus of control; however, when they attribute it to themselves, their locus of control is considered internal. Cooper and Kuhn (2020) documented how their

participants' internal locus of control helped them to succeed in their job-search endeavors. These theories will be considered in more depth in Chapter 2.

### **Conceptual Framework**

In this study, the job-search experiences of Ghanaians in New York City were investigated. Job searching involves the actions taken and the experiences of participants in their attempts to secure an income-earning job. For example, the participants might or might not use social networks to discover job openings, to complete an application for a job, or to get a job interview. While engaged in these activities, they might interact with people (immigrants or nonimmigrants) who discriminate against them in one way or another. In addition, the immigrants' levels of education before and after migrating might play a role in their job-search experiences. I also examined their social support systems (i.e., social networks), as these systems can facilitate acculturation and curb acculturative stress (Panchang et al., 2016).

Logically, job searching is not an activity that takes place in a vacuum. It involves the use of social networks (Panchang et al., 2016) and information acquisition, which can be formal, informal, or both (Alho, 2020). Moreover, the success or failure of the job-search process may depend on the strength or weakness of the social ties used to acquire information (Brashears & Quintane, 2018; Klinthall & Urban, 2016). These connections will be explained in more depth in Chapter 2.

The conceptual framework described above relates well to the experiences of the participants. This is because there must be some human interaction in the job-search process, such as in social networking and information acquisition. Participants spoke to

their experiences, and the interview questions were designed to solicit relevant responses (i.e., data) from them. A strong alignment between the interview questions and the experiences of the participants strengthened the relevance of the data collection and analysis (Brönnimann, 2022).

Both the theories of learned helplessness and locus of control are concerned with human interactions, and both involve aspects of success and failure. While some job seekers might be successful at finding a job, others might fail. Also, both theories capture aspects of human interactions before and during the job-search process. For example, social networks play a key role in the job-search process. The locus of control theory posits that someone who attributes the outcome of any action to themselves will see the need to connect with others to succeed. Learned helplessness theory posits that an individual will not keep trying at something because they failed constantly in their past attempts. However, there are people who have defied the odds of what the learned helplessness theory is generally perceived to assert; in these cases, the positive side of the locus of control theory can be invoked. Within this framework, the common attributes of success and failure helped to inform the construction of the interview questions and guided the data collection process.

Both theories were used to check for equitability among the variables, ensuring that some did not receive preferential treatment. They were used to interpret the variables of this study, namely, discrimination, social networks, and language barriers. Interview questions related to these variables were generated under the guidance of the theories.

### **Nature of the Study**

This is a qualitative study based on interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA); it involved semistructured interviews with Ghanaian residents in New York City (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), conducted in their social and religious settings. Qualitative studies are effective for analyzing narratives of participants' perceptions and experiences (Atkinson, 1998; Baksh, 2018; Daba-Buzoianu, 2017). The theoretical underpinnings of this study are Overmier and Seligman's learned helplessness theory (Abramson et al., 1978; Overmier & Seligman, 1967), which is applied in the field of social psychology to human perceptions and experiences (Seligman & Maier, 1967) and the concept of locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Phenomenology is also relevant, as it focuses on people's subjective experiences and their interpretations of the world (Baksh, 2018). The participants in this study were asked open-ended interview questions because these invite respondents to give detailed answers.

Qualitative research is preferred to quantitative analysis for exploring a phenomenon because it uses variables to examine predetermined conditions (Baksh, 2018; Patton, 2002). Within the qualitative research tradition, IPA was used to explore, examine, and interpret the experiences of the research participants (Alase, 2017). Phenomenological methods can be used to solicit information about the experiences of small groups of participants over an extended period of time (Giorgi, 2009). The phenomena under investigation here were the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City in their job-search processes.

## Definitions

*Cultural distance*: The similarity or dissimilarity of one culture to another (Kil et al., 2019).

*Discouraged workers*: Job seekers who have stopped looking for jobs due to discrimination (Heslin et al., 2012).

*Discrimination*: The unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age, and sexual orientation (American Psychological Association, 2019).

*Emigrate*: To travel from one's homeland to live in another country (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

*Expectancy shift*: A change in outcome expectancy due to skill or chance (Lopez-Garrido, 2020; Rotter, 1966).

*Immigrate*: To travel to and enter another country to live permanently (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

*Personal helplessness*: The belief of an individual that they are helpless while others are not (Hiroto, 1974).

*Social bonding*: The formation of social networks within one's (e.g., an immigrant's) ethnic and cultural community (Chuatico & Haan, 2020).

*Social bridging*: Immigrants' networking beyond their ethnic group and across community boundaries to connect with the culture of their host country (Chuatico & Haan, 2020).

*Unfair labor practice:* Discrimination by an employer in regard to hiring, tenure of employment, or any term or condition of employment in order to discourage employees' membership in a labor organization (National Labor Relations Act, 1934).

*Universal helplessness:* A condition in which individuals learn to give up efforts to help themselves and think everyone else is helpless as well (Hiroto, 1974).

### **Assumptions**

For this study, I made the following assumptions: (a) that the participants would be honest and give truthful and credible information when answering interview questions, (b) that the participants who signed the consent form would be indicating an intention to willingly share their experiences, (c) that informing participants about the purpose of the study and using open-ended questions would motivate them to be detailed in their answers, and (d) that there would be no adverse effects from my speaking to qualified participants,.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

This study involved Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City. Within this population, the participants were of working age and were working or actively seeking work. Both men and women, aged 18 or older, were included. However, although the sample consisted of residents from New York City, the findings cannot be presumed to be transferrable to all Ghanaians living in that city. The findings only provide some insights into the job-search experiences of the participants. A qualitative study, especially of this narrow a scope, may not produce generalizable results.



### **Limitations**

The participants' native language is Twi, but the interview protocol was written and administered in English. Although all participants used English, I had already planned for those who would want to speak their native language. With the help of a professional translator, I was able to translate the interview protocol into Twi, and I found an independent evaluator to do a back-translation to the original interview protocol. Back-translation is a three-step quality control method applied to an already completed translation (Brislin, 1970). In Step 1, the content is translated from one language (L1) to another (L2). In Step 2, an independent language expert translates L2 to L1. In Step 3, the translator in Step 1 checks to ascertain that the meaning is intact. Such a back-translation may not be executed with exact words; communicating the meanings of concepts is the key idea (refer to Chapter 3 for more details).

Because I intended to recruit participants in social and religious settings, such as cultural associations and churches, I placed my flyers by Ghanaian grocery stores and churches. All participants learned about the study through the flyers I posted at those locations; they contacted me by phone or email to express their interest in participating. Participants were also reminded about the purpose of the study by verbally assuring them of confidentiality. Also, as participants did not know me, I verbally assured them that it is against the code of conduct of research ethics to share their information with anyone beyond the study without their consent and that their information would be kept private and confidential.

For any researcher, due to prior experiences, bias is a real possibility during data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009); that is, a researcher's views may influence and taint the results of a study. I am a Ghanaian immigrant, so I perceived the chances that my life experiences could be similar to those of the participants, and that could influence the results. Creswell (2009) and Janesick (2001) recommended recognizing this potential bias at the initial stage and being aware of the effects it can have on the study. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), bracketing is a process where a researcher appreciates their own cultural and emotional experiences but treats every phenomenon as a new experience. Bracketing, too, can be used to help lessen research biases (Tufford & Newman, 2012). Being aware of potential bias and knowing how to handle it can minimize the possibility of its influencing the results of a study (Malone et al., 2014). Being aware of my potential biases as a result of my cultural background and country of origin, I used bracketing and treated participants' experiences as new experiences.

### **Significance**

Travel across international boundaries, as in temporary and permanent migration, takes place for diverse reasons. While some migrants readily fulfill their purpose for migrating, others may struggle. Understanding immigrants' experiences can provide insight into whether they have fulfilled their purpose for immigrating to the United States and can help other immigrants in their endeavors to prosper. As Ghanaian immigrants in the United States, particularly in New York City, seek a livelihood there and a means of sending remittances back home, job searching and finding employment are a necessity. The findings of this study provide information for Ghanaian immigrants that can help

them succeed in their quest to find work. Furthermore, this study contributes insights about the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants to the immigration literature.

Not much information is to be found about Ghanaian immigrants in the United States, let alone about their job-search experiences. For me, this became apparent when I had trouble finding useful information about Ghanaian immigrants on the Walden University Library database. As mentioned in the Problem Statement section, one of the challenges Ghanaian immigrants encounter is employment discrimination. This study and its findings, at the very least, contribute information about Ghanaian immigrants in the United States and hopefully shed more light on their job-search experiences. In practice, future researchers can use this study as an entry point into their research work or as contributing material.

### **Summary**

This chapter has presented the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the theoretical framework, the nature of the study, and its limitations and significance. The study addressed one main research question and six Research Subquestions, which were: (a) What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process? (b) How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings? (c) What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications? (d) What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants' when preparing for job interviews? (e) How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experiences with the job-search process? (f) How do social

networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process? and (g) What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants' job-search processes?

The challenges faced by immigrants in their host countries are abundantly documented in the literature on immigration, and Ghanaian immigrants outside and inside the United States are no exception. However, the challenges they encounter at their destination sites are less of a problem than the tendency of Ghanaians to keep migrating in spite of the challenges. Authors such as Goodman (2020) and the MPI (2020) have identified economic reasons, as in finding better employment outside their country of origin, behind these persistent migration patterns. The purpose of this study was to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States. Two theories, learned helplessness and locus of control, guided the work. An IPA, a traditional form of qualitative research, was employed, featuring interviews with participants in their social and religious settings. Although there are limitations to the generalizability of the findings to Ghanaian immigrants in other parts of the United States, this study should be useful because the findings add to the limited amount of information about Ghanaian immigrants the literature has to offer.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertaining to the topic and situates the topic within a theoretical framework. It lists the databases accessed and the search engines used, lists key search terms and their combinations, describes the iterative search process, and explains how much information there is (or is not) about the topic. The chapter also covers the theoretical foundations of the study, describing the origins of the theories involved and their application and providing the rationale for choosing the theories,

grounded in a literature review pertaining to the key variables. The chapter ends with a summary and conclusion about previous studies at the crossroads of employment and immigration that pertain to this study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Many Africans, including Ghanaians, have emigrated for diverse reasons. According to Coe (2020), Ghanaians experience high social status in their home country but low social status in their destination countries. Therefore, they seek to uplift their social status through emigration, to work hard to earn money for remittances, and to acquire property back home. Goodman (2020) found that the immigration of many Ghanaians to the United States stemmed from the transformation of Ghana's economy and politics. Furthermore, more specifically, Williams-Forson (2014) found that many immigrated to the United States for a better education and way of life. The MPI (2020) reported that, between 2014 and 2018, 167,000 Ghanaians emigrated to the United States. Some problems these immigrants face include racial discrimination (Seaton et al., 2018), employment discrimination (Cooray et al., 2018), language barrier challenges, and unfair labor treatment (Nkimbeng et al., 2020).

According to the MPI (2020), New York City hosts a sizable amount of the U.S. Ghanaian population. Because finding a good job is one of their reasons for emigrating (Atiso et al., 2018), a study of Ghanaians looking for employment in New York City may provide insight into their perceived challenges. Information about Ghanaian immigrants in the United States is limited in the literature, especially information about their job-search experiences. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City.

The key phenomena under study here were the challenges Ghanaians face as immigrants in their pursuit of employment. These challenges range from a lack of

acceptance in their community of residence to employment discrimination (Seaton et al., 2018). This review focuses on the findings of authors such as Atiso et al. (2018), Badwi et al. (2018), Coe (2020), and Goodman (2020), which relate specifically to the job-search challenges of Ghanaian immigrants.

This chapter covers the literature search strategy, work relating to the theoretical framework, and the meanings of key concepts. I used the search tools available to me to learn about the key concepts and variables of the study, and I used peer-reviewed sources from my area of study and from other fields related to this particular work as a way of ensuring its relevance. The theoretical framework is based on two theories: the learned helplessness theory and the concept of locus of control, which is part of social learning theory. This chapter covers the origins of these theories, how they helped to guide the study with respect to the variables, and how they have been applied in the psychology literature.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

To compile sources, I accessed multiple databases through the Walden University Library. Some of the databases that aligned with my topic of study were Sage Journals, APA PsycINFO, ScienceDirect, and Taylor and Francis Online. Keywords used in searching for information about Ghanaian immigrant communities in the United States in these databases, as well as in the EBSCOhost databases, were *immigrants*, *employment*, *job search*, *perceived discrimination*, *employment discrimination*, *language pressures*, *community climate*, and *Ghanaians*. The searches covered the last 5 years, but very few articles were related to my topic of study, and the results were not productive. Therefore,

I used Thoreau, a database search tool developed for the Walden University Library, for a broader knowledge search, and then used the PsycINFO database to narrow the search. This approach yielded a handful of articles related to this study.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

The theoretical foundations of this study are the learned helplessness theory (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019) and the concept of locus of control from social learning theory (Rotter, 1966).

The original theorists of learned helplessness were Overmier and Seligman (1967), who found that dogs exposed to uncontrollable and inescapable shocks later ceased trying to escape from the situation after the constraints were no longer present. In 1976, Seligman and Maier found that the unresponsive behavior of the dogs was due to the initial uncontrollability of the situation. When the dogs found themselves in the uncontrollable situation, they learned that their behavior (attempts to escape) and its outcomes were independent of each other; in other words, the behavior was fruitless. Seligman and Maier named this condition *learned helplessness*. Stated more generally, the motivational, cognitive, and emotional effects from being subjected to uncontrollable events lead to learned helplessness. This same motivational deficit experienced by the dogs is also found in humans when they find themselves in uncontrollable situations (Abramson et al., 1978); they give up hope because they are not motivated to keep trying. In our case, job seekers of any type may give up looking for a job if they repeatedly suffer vain attempts to accomplish something whose outcome is perceived to be beyond their control. One example of this is rejection due to employment discrimination.



However, the learned helplessness theory is only one dimension of the study; therefore, I used the concept of locus of control from social learning theory to help explore another dimension. In 1954, Julian B. Rotter created the concept of locus of control (Lopez-Garrido, 2020; Rotter, 1966), based on social learning theory and personality theory. According to Rotter (1966), people perceive themselves as having either internal or external control of their behavior. People with a high internal locus of control perceive themselves as having command over their behavior and its outcomes, while those with a high external locus of control perceive the environment as controlling the outcomes of their behavior, which means they see the outcomes as a function of chance or luck. In 1966, Rotter and James worked together, and James introduced the idea of *expectancy shifts* as part of the locus of control concept. *Expectancy shifts* are one's degree of dependency on present outcomes in determining one's notion of expected future outcomes for the same activity. The shifts are either typical or atypical. In a typical expectancy shift, whether an individual's action succeeds or fails, the person expects the same results every time the behavior is repeated. In an atypical expectancy shift, the success or failure of a behavior is perceived as being independent of future results. While typical expectancy shifts are associated with behavioral outcomes determined by skill and ability, atypical expectancy shifts are associated with outcomes determined by chance or luck.

This study is partly rooted in a reformulated theory of learned helplessness (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019). The original proposers of the learned helplessness theory investigated animals such as dogs, cats, rats, and mice, and later,

humans (Seligman & Maier, 1967). The theory originated in a study of two groups of animals (dogs) that were given electric shocks in a shuttle box, a box with two compartments that allows an experimental animal to move from one compartment to the other, often by crossing a small barrier. The dogs in the first group became agitated after being administered the first shock and accidentally discovered they could jump the barrier to the other side to escape further shocks. With subsequent shocks, the dogs would cross the barrier more quickly, until they became efficient at escaping and could eventually avoid the shocks altogether. The dogs in the second group were shocked but prevented from escaping; at first, they ran around but eventually stopped moving and lay down to accept the shocks. When the barrier no longer constrained them, these dogs still made no effort to escape the shocks. That is, they failed to learn to escape from the aversive stimuli, even when they could. The investigators attributed this failed response of the second group of dogs to the uncontrollable outcomes of their previous responses.

Maier and Seligman (1976) identified three types of plausible attributes for the response of the dogs to the uncontrollability of the situation: motivational, cognitive, and emotional. All three attributes apply to both animals and humans, so they fit well with this study, as the participants had motivational, cognitive, and emotional responses to the outcomes of the job-search processes. There is a motivation to see the results of an action taken. In the case of the dogs, as their attempts to escape failed to stop the shock, they lost their motivation to run because they learned that acting would yield no results in response to subsequent shocks (helplessness).

This theory was extended to humans, who behave in a similar way. For example, Hiroto and Seligman (1975) performed three experiments with college students, and all three yielded the same results as the experiments with the dogs. The three experiments were simultaneous and followed the same procedure but were done independently. There was a pretreatment stage and a testing stage. In the pretreatment phase, one group of students was subjected to escapable aversive noise, and a second group to inescapable aversive noise. A third group received no pretreatment. In the testing stage, all three groups could press a button to terminate the noise. The first and third groups of students escaped the noise readily by pressing the button to stop it, while the second group (pretreated with inescapable noise) did not. The results of this experiment were like those found with the dogs, demonstrating that helplessness can be learned by humans as well (Hiroto & Seligman, 1975). There is a motivational deficit in helplessness. In an aversive situation, inescapability, an external locus of control, and chance instructions (Hiroto, 1974) lead to the expectation that the outcome, in this case a bad one, will be independent of how one responds.

A shortfall of the theory of learned helplessness is its failure to distinguish among the differing capabilities individuals have for handling a situation (Abramson et al., 1978). The theory also fails to explain when helplessness is general and when it is specific. Employing social learning theory, Rotter (1966), in the context of locus of control (Abramson et al., 1978), divided the original concept of helplessness into universal helplessness and personal helplessness (Hiroto, 1974). *Universal helplessness* is a condition in which an individual learns helplessness and thinks everyone else is

helpless as well, whereas in a state of *personal helplessness*, an individual thinks they are the only one who is helpless, while others are not. Other authors, such as Alloy et al. (1984), also worked to incorporate locus of control into the reformulation. In the modified theory, an individual who attributes an uncontrollable event to a global cause behaves like someone with an external locus of control. These individuals are vulnerable. They see negative outcomes in many instances, and they are likely to generalize such outcomes to new situations that look like or unlike the original situation. On the other hand, when an individual attributes the negative outcome of an uncontrollable event to a specific cause, helplessness does not transfer to a new situation. People with internal locus of control attribute negative outcomes to specific causes, so they see a path to success against all odds.

Researchers have employed learned helplessness theory in diverse ways. For example, Klein et al. (1976) used the theory in their study of depression models. They identified parallels in symptoms, etiology, treatment, and prevention between depression and helplessness. They recognized that learned helplessness in individuals in uncontrollable situations might lead to depression. In addition, employing this theory, Elmslie and Sedo (1996) found that, as a result of discrimination, some jobseekers permanently neglected to seek certain jobs because they had repeatedly failed when trying to get those jobs in the past.

For this study, the theory of learned helplessness was used to help explain certain experiences of job seekers. Discrimination, including employment discrimination, comes in the form of power dynamics related to locus of control (Abramson et al., 1978).

Furthermore, individuals with internal locus of control have a different approach to seeking employment than those with external locus of control (Abramson et al., 1978). Therefore, in general, this theory can shed light on job-search experiences.

Furthermore, a job search has a chance of succeeding or failing. The failures and successes of job seekers invite the application of the learned helplessness theory combined with the locus of control concept. Some groups of job seekers may fail several times to secure a job and give up searching, while others may succeed because they take full responsibility for their actions and continue to try. For some who fail, their resilience can help them bounce back and put them on track for success. These characteristics hold true for immigrants as well (Bennett, 2020). Another factor, *bridging* or *bonding* through social networks to secure social capital, also plays a role. The use of social networks for job searching hinges on the character of the networks, such as the educational and employment status of the network members. In light of all this, this study employed the theory of learned helplessness and the concept of locus of control to analyze the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City.

Considering that the theoretical framework outlined above has advantages and disadvantages, this study focused on how learned helplessness might contribute to immigrants' job-search failures and used the concept of locus of control to help explain immigrants' job-search successes. According to the theory of learned helplessness, job seekers may stop looking for a job because they think their actions cannot overcome their seemingly inescapable situation of constant rejection, and the concept of internal locus of control can help to explain why there is hope for a job-search success story in the future.

## **Theoretical Application**

Recent studies by Caliendo et al. (2019), Cooper and Kuhn (2020), Innocenti and Golin (2022), Virick and McKee-Ryan (2018), Wanberg et al. (2020), and Witt and Gearin (2021) have separately applied the theory of learned helplessness and the concept of locus of control. There appears to be no other study in the literature that has integrated the two, which suggests a need for a study such as this.

Congregado et al. (2021) and Tayal and Paul (2021) used the term *discouraged workers* to describe job seekers who have stopped looking for jobs due to discrimination. Virick and McKee-Ryan (2018) employed the learned helplessness theory to explain why some job seekers gave up looking for jobs because of discrimination. Lennerlöf (2020) reformulated the original helplessness theory to include lowered self-esteem to explain that the young, first-time job seekers in the study experienced universal helplessness, while the adults seeking to return to employment experienced personal helplessness. For both these types of helplessness, the job seekers found themselves in uncontrollable situations and concluded that the outcomes were independent of their behavior, as is seen in both the original and reformulated forms of the learned helplessness theory. In the same vein, Witt and Gearin (2021) used the learned helplessness theory to explain why part-time adjunct teachers gave up on seeking improvements in their working conditions.

The concept of locus of control has been used to explain job-search experiences. Individuals with internal locus of control believe they have control over themselves and the environment. According to Cooper and Kuhn (2020) and Caliendo et al. (2019), these individuals put more effort into their job searches than their external locus-control

counterparts. For example, such individuals work against all odds when faced with a situation such as job discrimination. They may also improve their human capital, for instance, by furthering their education and learning new skills. Innocenti and Golin (2022) found that individuals with internal locus of control were more willing to train and learn new skills than those with external locus of control, for fear of being replaced by technology. Caliendo (2019) found that people with internal locus of control are more willing to shift across labor markets, and they do so more than those with external locus of control. In short, job seekers with internal locus of control stand a better chance of succeeding at a job search than those with external locus of control.

As evidenced above, the theory of learned helplessness and the concept of locus of control have been used in the past in studies that are related to job-search outcomes. Thus, the theory and concept seemed fitting for this study of Ghanaian immigrants seeking employment.

In sum, the learned helplessness theory posits that subjects learn that outcomes are independent of their behavior, so they give up (Maier & Seligman, 1976). This theory explains how some job seekers may stop looking, because some challenges may be beyond their control. The other side of the coin, where job seekers are successful at finding employment, is where the concept of locus of control comes into play. Locus of control, from social learning theory, can help to explain how and why some job seekers persist and succeed. They persistently search for employment largely because they feel they can improve their circumstances through their own effort, despite the odds against them.

However, although the research question aligns with existing theory, it faces a challenge regarding the limitations of these conceptual frameworks. The main research question applies generally to the job-search experience. It challenges the limitations of the learned helplessness theory, as the theory is useful only for explaining the failures of job seekers. On the other hand, the specificity of the Research Subquestions invites the participants to consider particular aspects of their experiences. Overall, this focus on the job-search experience, guided by theory, helped in the attempt to reach a deeper understanding of the concept.

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts**

This section (a) reviews and synthesizes studies related to the key concepts and the research questions and explains the rationale for selecting the concepts, (b) reviews studies related to the constructs of interest and the methods used here, and (c) describes ways researchers in the discipline have approached the problem and analyzes the strengths and weakness of their approaches. The topics under consideration include immigration, African immigrants, job seeking using social networks, immigrant employment, employment discrimination, and unfair labor practices.

#### **Immigration**

People travel across international boundaries for economic, political, and religious reasons (Bauböck, 2018). While some travel temporarily and return to their home country, others travel to settle permanently. Regardless of how they come, travelers often experience struggles finding work to earn a living. For example, Uda et al. (2019) studied the struggles of African immigrants in Southeast Queensland, Australia, and



found that they experience racial discrimination, which results in unemployment and underemployment. This finding was also reported in a study by Rosenblum (2016), where immigrants' skin color played a role in whether they gained employment, as well as in the amount of their wages. While light-skinned immigrants were called for interviews and offered jobs, dark-skinned immigrants were barely called for interviews at all. The same was true of levels of employment between light- and dark-skinned immigrants. Light-skinned immigrants could get a job when their qualifications barely met the requirements, while dark-skinned ones were mostly underemployed. Many other authors, including Rissing and Castilla (2014), documented similar findings. They found employment discrimination against immigrants in the United States, despite labor laws that prohibit such practices. Also, according to Kunovich (2017), there is anti-immigrant sentiment in Houston, Texas, due to economic competition. This sentiment is real and is pronounced in job markets where there is high unemployment and where educational requirements are low (i.e., where immigrants are seen to be more competitive). Due to this perceived economic competition with foreign-born workers, residents wish for a reduction in legal immigration levels. As if this perceived immigrant threat where jobs requiring low education were not enough, the findings of van Heerden and Ruedin (2019) suggested that the proportion of non-Western immigrants in the Netherlands seems generally to have brought about a negative attitude change towards immigrants.

### **African Immigrants**

According to Comola and Mendola (2015), it would be an egregious mistake to suppose there is homogeneity among immigrants; immigrant populations are, in fact,

heterogeneous. Notwithstanding this, Edvard et al. (2018) found that compared to the majority population, non-Western immigrants as a rule work in jobs for which they are overqualified; however, the over-qualification gap diminishes with time. For various reasons, Africans leaving their continent have diverse immigrant experiences. While many from Somalia and Sudan travel as refugees, Ghanaians and Nigerians do so voluntarily (Anderson, 2017). Nevertheless, regardless of their immigration status, refugee or voluntary, African immigrants use their social networks as a key resource in their job searches (Piercy & Lee, 2019; Rosenblum et al., 2016; Zaami, 2015).

### **Job Seeking Using Social Networks**

People work to earn an income and make a living. Wherever they happen to reside, they look for employment to fulfill an economic need. In their exploration of job seekers' networks of information sources, Piercy and Lee (2019) found a pattern in which job seekers segmented their network of information sources by social, formal, and online types. In general, online sources of job-seeking information were central to the network. Different seekers used one, two, or all three types of sources. While some consulted their social networks to find employment, others engaged in online searches. Still others searched for advertisements and job opportunities on company websites, and some used a combination of all three types of sources to varying degrees. Piercy and Lee held that while job seekers may benefit from a single type of information, if they use only one type, they lose the benefits of the others. In general, a concerted effort to use all three types will yield the most effective job search.

According to Goel and Lang (2019), social networks improve job seekers' chances of getting a job offer. These authors found that close social ties within social networks can generate job offers in many ways. However, the use of social ties in job searching has raised questions for many social science researchers (Goel & Lang, 2019). While some claim strong ties are better than weak ones, others hold strongly to the opposite view. Gee et al. (2017) have been part of the attempt to identify which type of social tie is most useful for finding a job, but their findings depart from those of previous researchers (Granovetter, 1973). They looked at how many times two people interacted within a year on Facebook and at how many mutual friends they had. Few interactions and few mutual friends were interpreted as indications of weak ties, and more interactions and more mutual friends as indications of strong ones. In support of Granovetter's (1973) theory on the productiveness of weak ties, the authors found that many job seekers found jobs through weak ties rather than strong ones, because they typically had more weak ties. Although strong ties are important to the job-search process, the combined effect of many weak ties made them the most important factor.

In line with this research, Horvath (2020) studied the impact of network homophily on labor market outcomes and found that two types of workers, low-skilled and high-skilled, enter the labor market through formal channels and through social contacts. The author found that there is an intermediate homophily that can minimize the unemployment rate of low-skilled workers and maximize their wages, but that the only way complete integration will maximize low-skilled workers' welfare is if it improves their productivity.

Like the native residents of every country, immigrants look for employment. Lomicka and Lord (2016) posited that social networks help immigrants to co-mingle with members of their host country and learn their hosts' cultural norms and language, and Goel and Lang (2019) likewise found that recent immigrants benefit from social networks in finding employment. As they often live close to each other, newly arrived immigrants also gain support, advice, and financial support from already established immigrants from their home country (Goel & Lang, 2019). When they settle themselves among compatriots, they learn the right places and people to go to for help.

### **Immigrant Employment**

Many researchers have observed that immigrants encounter obstacles to employment (Schuster et al., 2022; Ubalde & Alarcón, 2020; Uda et al., 2019). While some authors found immigrants to be challenged by unemployment and underemployment (Uda et al., 2019), others found them to be challenged by labor-market wage bias against immigrants (Rosenblum et al., 2016). Employment discrimination against immigrants across the world leaves much to be desired in terms of maintaining a just society. In a study in Norway, Friberg and Midtbøen (2018) identified employers' assumed perceptions about immigrants and examined how they placed immigrants in ethnic employment hierarchies. This echoes the idea of heterogeneity among immigrants put forth by Comola and Mendola (2015), in this case regarding the average level of education immigrants received in their home country.

Another attribute of immigrant heterogeneity is cultural proximity, part of the construct referred to as *cultural distance* (Kil et al., 2019). Kil et al. (2019) found that

many immigrants in Norway are culturally distant from native Norwegians and that the closer an immigrant group's culture was to that of the natives, the better the group was positioned to work with native Norwegians. Immigrants' date of arrival and length of stay were measures of their attachment to Norway; needless to say, immigrants who had stayed in Norway longer were more culturally attached than new arrivals. Another difference among immigrants identified by these authors was their immigration status. While some groups of immigrants were free to move in and out of the country, others could not do so because of their legal status. Comparing two different labor markets, associated with the hotel and fish processing industries, the authors explained that one immigrant ethnic group did well in the hotel industry, while another did well in the fish industry. The former worked well in hotels because they had more mobility, whereas the latter had no mobility. This is an example of the effects of heterogeneity on immigrant workers; it can determine their fate. Zaami (2015) concluded from a study of Ghanaian immigrant youths in Canada that social and spatial exclusion posed an employment challenge for immigrants, which amounted to employment discrimination against this population.

While discrimination is one of the challenges faced by immigrants in the employment process, other factors, such as skill devaluation (Ubalde & Alarcón, 2020), also come into play. For example, Carlsson et al. (2018) compared intensive job-search methods used by immigrants and natives in Norway. They found that the immigrants used all available methods when searching for jobs, especially informal searching. The authors also found that, on average, the immigrants used more varied and intensive

search methods than natives, such as more informal referrals from friends and relatives; however, the jobs they found paid lower wages. Bowlus et al. (2016) also conducted a study of immigrants and job-search practices. These authors noted that, over time, immigrants got better at job searching. In their study, unlike the natives' job searches, the job searches of the newly arrived immigrants did not yield meaningful results. However, the immigrants' results improved over time as they acquired the skills and experience they needed to get and keep a job. In contrast to the immigrants in the study by Carlsson et al. (2018), these immigrants were able to improve their job searching over time and use more formal and fewer informal approaches.

Using formal methods to find employment requires skill and education. In their study, Heisig et al. (2019) found that there was a high level of inequality in the job market in terms of the educational status of job seekers. The occupational status gap increases with education because highly educated applicants have a better chance of working in a high-paying job than less-educated ones. Also, as evidenced by Piercy and Lee (2019), highly educated job seekers use formal job-search methods. Taken together, the findings of Bowlus et al. (2016), Carlsson et al. (2018), and Piercy and Lee (2019) showed that immigrants must be highly educated to use more formal job-search methods and lessen their use of informal ones.

Network choice is also a factor in job-search outcomes. Chuatico and Haan (2020) found that while both bonding and bridging social ties are used by immigrants to find jobs, new immigrants with less human capital are more likely to use bonding rather than bridging, while the converse is true for new immigrants. Based on new immigrants'

levels of formal education, some can easily mingle with people outside their ethnic group because they have low language barriers and have access to more human capital. Others, because they lack the language skills of their destination country, can express themselves well only among their ethnic group and, consequently, accumulate less human capital. Bawdi et al. (2018) also found that it is beneficial for immigrants (Ghanaians in Sweden) to engage in bridging in social networks to arrive at positive job-search outcomes. For new immigrants, it helps to open up to the natives to learn the language, as well as the culture, of the destination country, so that they can overcome the challenges to acquiring relevant information and accessing formal jobs. However, for many reasons, newcomers are more comfortable mingling within their ethnic group (Klinthäll & Urban, 2016). For example, those who live in areas with a high concentration of immigrants can use informal ethnic contacts to find employment (Klinthäll & Urban, 2016). Kadarik et al. (2021) corroborated this in their contribution to the ethnic enclave discussion. They posited that living in an ethnic enclave leads to better employment opportunities. They observed that when immigrants arrive in their destination country, their place of residence will determine their employment outcomes. In places where the employment rate is high, new immigrants will experience a positive employment environment, provided that their ethnic compatriots are also employed. However, while their place of residence may have an abundance of employment opportunities, new immigrants will still struggle to find work if they find themselves at a huge cultural distance from the host culture.

Accessing and acquiring quality information can also be a challenge for immigrant job seekers. While libraries are reliable sources of information, some immigrants do not see their usefulness, so they resort to using informal networks to get information. Atiso et al. (2018) studied a segment of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States who used multiple sources of information but mostly relied on their personal networks and social media to fulfill their information needs. In the view of many scholars, immigrants who avoid formal sources of information and use informal referrals when they search for work may end up in low-paying jobs (Mabi et al., 2022; Shuva, 2020).

### **Employment Discrimination**

The work of Zwysen and Demireva (2020) and Zwysen et al. (2021) pointed to employment discrimination and unfair labor practices against immigrants. These researchers posited the view that ethnic minorities in a new country are disadvantaged in the employment process. For example, some immigrants take jobs against their will and become stuck in those jobs, simply because they think they cannot move into a job they prefer (Stengård et al., 2017). Integration challenges and struggles to adjust to the destination culture (Baran et al., 2018; Kyeremeh et al., 2021), as well as limited educational and job qualifications, also affect their job searches (Annen, 2019).

The theory of human capital concerns the intrinsic productive capabilities of human beings (Azatovna Galiakberova, 2019; Methot et al., 2018). These capabilities are associated with education, skills, and work experience. Araki (2020) explained the social and monetary returns of human capital: investing in people, such as providing them with



a higher formal education, is worthwhile because educated individuals can positively contribute to economic productivity. This sentiment is echoed by Ishchy (2020), who found that human capital actively contributes to a country's economic growth. In industrialized countries where the economic system invests meaningfully in human capital, economic growth is remarkable. The reverse is true for countries where the quality of human capital is low. On the job market, employers seek out and hire employees who have the right education, skills, and work experience (Bills, 1990).

Along these lines, Annen (2019) studied how immigrants who had acquired high educational qualifications outside Canada were able to use their education in successful job searches. Looking at the attributes of human capital, Annen considered years of education, years of work experience, and skills and found that, typically, job seekers with good human capital have positive labor market experiences, whereas job seekers with non-Western human capital have negative ones. The author also explored the use of Bourdieu's (1983) concepts of social and cultural capital to broaden human capital theory. According to these concepts, people leaving their country to work elsewhere are not able to fully transfer their cultural capital. This limited transfer affects immigrants from non-Western countries, both those with and those without skills. Also, the Western world is a huge society of trusted membership, and non-Western countries do not receive the same level of trust, so immigrants from these countries leave behind a great portion of their social capital. This limitation can also affect their job searching. In conclusion, Annen called for case studies to examine the transferability of human capital across national borders, particularly in Canada.

According to Ahmad (2020), people expect to see fairness in the employment process, meaning that similar work experiences and educational backgrounds should warrant similar employment opportunities. However, this fairness seems to be lacking in immigrants' pursuits of jobs. While immigrants may have qualifications like those of native job seekers, natives are often more favored than immigrants (Lancee, 2016; Zwysen & Demireva, 2020; Zwysen et al., 2021). Zwysen and Demireva (2020) found that immigrants and ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in respect to work and earnings in the United Kingdom. Lancee (2016) also found that immigrants must broaden their social network to include native-born friends in order to find a well-paying job. On this point, Chuatico and Haan (2020) distinguished *social bonding* from *social bridging* in social networks. In social bonding, immigrants stay within an enclave of their ethnic and cultural community, whereas in social bridging, minority immigrants reach beyond their ethnic group and across community boundaries to connect with the culture of the host country; they make friends within the native group and learn their culture. This is advantageous because immigrants learn from their native friends how to apply for jobs and prepare for interviews (Lancee, 2016). Hence, moving to a place of opportunity requires the immigrant to integrate (Horváth, 2020), as the natives know how to secure gainful employment; immigrants who are not within such networks struggle to be gainfully employed, and when they do secure a job, there is a wide wage gap (Ahmad, 2020). Other scholars, like Tesfai and Thomas (2020), have also found that there is a high amount of employment discrimination in the U.S. labor market, ranging from country-of-origin job discrimination to racial and gender job discrimination (Zwysen et al., 2021). In

South Africa, Fredericks and Yu (2018) revealed that employment discrimination against indigenous people remains serious and that perhaps improving the education and skills of such job seekers would improve their chances of overcoming discrimination. Overall, these types of discrimination are tantamount to unfair labor practices.

Veit and Thijsen (2021) reported a similar finding. They investigated how employers in five Western European countries responded to job applications from both minority and majority groups. Some minority group members (domestic-born) looked remarkably like the majority group members, while others (foreign-born) looked quite different from them. Their finding was consistent with taste-based discrimination theory; the employers were influenced by cultural distance, which resulted in elevated levels of discrimination against foreign-born minority job seekers. The study also found that the employment discrimination was primarily against foreign-born immigrants from African and Middle Eastern countries and that within the group of minority job candidates, discrimination increased with cultural distance from the West. In sum, immigrants from European countries were least discriminated against, compared to those from African or Middle Eastern countries, and native-born job candidates were more likely to get a call for a job interview than foreign-born job candidates.

### **Unfair Labor Practices**

*Unfair labor practices* are defined as actions of employers based on a double standard of treatment of employees, including prospective employees (National Labor Relation Act, 1934). Authors such as Ahmad (2020), Lewis (2021), and Sotshononda (2019) have found that unfair labor practices, both inside and outside the United States,

include practices related to job seekers' educational background, cultural background, work experience, language fluency, country of origin (Annen, 2019), and race. For example, Annen (2019) observed that non-Western immigrants who had acquired their highest education outside Canada had more negative job-search experiences than the Canadian-born job seekers from immigrant families who had been educated in Canada. Confurius et al. (2019) found a similar pattern of employment disparity between sub-Saharan African immigrants and Dutch citizens in the Netherlands. The authors argued that the cause of the disparities went beyond the theory of human capital and called for further studies into country of origin and ethnic concentration as possible targets of discrimination. Also, in regard to race, Rosenblum (2016) found that skin color alone could make a difference in whether one could secure a job and get better pay. Light-skinned individuals, regardless of their educational and cultural background, country of origin, and language fluency, received more consideration in the employment process than dark-skinned individuals.

Immigrants who are racial minorities also experience unfair labor market practices (McDonald et al., 2016; O'Connell, 2019). While their studies concentrated on different populations of migrants in general, McDonald et al. (2016) and O'Connell (2019) observed racial bias in employment and noted that, on the labor market, immigrants and racial minorities seem to have similar experiences. Racial minorities also encounter discrimination in job acquisition, promotion, and wages, unlike racial majority groups.

In the U.S. labor market, African immigrants who fall within a racial minority are more likely to suffer than immigrants from the racial majority (Song, 2020). In line with previous researchers, Rosenblum et al. (2016) noted that light-skinned immigrants find better jobs and get paid better wages than dark-skinned immigrants. While Sorrell et al. (2019) studied two separate aspects of immigration—the immigrant adoption process and the experiences of non-White immigrants—they found that non-White immigrants in the United States did not feel included in the majority White society and that Black native-born people identified as a racial minority group. Moreover, if native-born Blacks face employment challenges just because they belong to a racial minority group, it raises the question of what happens to Black immigrants with culturally different backgrounds who are also seen as members of a racial minority. Altogether, the work of Rosenblum et al. and Sorrell et al. included immigrants from Africa, Asia, China, and Latin America and left the researchers wondering whether, given the challenges, it was even worth it for racial minority immigrants to emigrate.

Immigration and racial issues, as they apply to employment processes, are not unique to the U.S. labor market. Outside the United States, immigrants who are in racial minority populations also suffer disadvantages regarding employment and wages (salaries). For example, Li and Heath (2020) studied the ethnic dynamics of unemployment in the United Kingdom. and found that Black Africans, Black Caribbeans, and Pakistani and Bangladeshi minorities faced a higher risk of unemployment than White majority workers. The story is similar in Australia, where Uda et al. (2019) observed sharp employment discrimination against African job seekers.

## Summary and Conclusion

This chapter covered studies that lie at the intersection of employment and immigration. More specifically, it highlighted work that has been done on employment discrimination and unfair labor practices as they relate to immigrants. Job seekers use formal or informal ways to secure employment, or they use both (Piercy & Lee, 2019). As social networks have been trending among job seekers as means of gaining employment (Gee et al., 2017; Goel & Lang, 2019; Hovart, 2020), Chuatico (2020) and Bawdi et al. (2018) have pointed to social bridging as a more beneficial approach to job seeking for immigrants than social bonding. Furthermore, closely associated with immigrants' experiences of employment are discrimination and unfair labor practices. Kunovich (2017), Rosenblum (2016), Uda et al. (2019), and van Heerden and Ruedin (2019) have all studied and reported on these challenges confronted by immigrants.

Against the backdrop of the struggles of immigrants, this study focused on African immigrants and, in particular, on Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City. There is an abundance of literature on immigrants from other sub-Saharan West African countries in the United States (Emeka, 2016; Flahaux & De Haas, 2016), but close to none about the Ghanaian immigrant population residing in New York City (Arthur, 2016).

From 2014 to 2018, there was an influx of Ghanaian immigrants into the United States. Coe (2020), Goodman (2020), the MPI (2020), and Williams-Forson (2014) have reported that Ghanaians emigrate because they experience a higher social status after they return home because of their country's economic and political transformation and

because they choose to pursue higher education and a better way of life. Goodman (2020) also found Ghanaian immigrants to be running away from poverty at home, which acted as a push factor for their emigration. Another known set of facts about immigrants is that they experience racial discrimination (Seaton et al., 2018), employment discrimination (Cooray et al., 2018), language barrier challenges, and unfair labor treatment (Nkimbeng et al., 2020). What is not known is the extent to which these challenges are part of the Ghanaian immigrant experience in New York City.

In their study of Ghanaian immigrants in Maryland, United States, Atiso et al. (2018) found that Ghanaians mostly avoid using libraries for information because library systems do not use their preferred language. Due to the language barrier, some Ghanaian immigrants in Maryland do not understand the employment laws, and they rely on poor-quality information to learn about job openings, such as word-of-mouth from their friends, church members, and others in their community. Similar findings emerged in a study by Badwi et al. (2018) of Ghanaian immigrants in Norway. The authors found that when the Ghanaian immigrants used their co-immigrant social network, the jobs they found were menial; they could only get professional and semi-professional jobs by using their Norwegian social network. Another challenge these authors found is that the Ghanaian immigrants did not understand Norwegian work practices, so employers in Norway are skeptical and see immigrants as a risk. Coe (2020) found challenges relating to the racial and social backgrounds of Ghanaian immigrants, who were denigrated in their workplaces.

In the literature, there is not much information about Ghanaian immigrants in the United States, much less information about their job-search efforts. As indicated above, New York City hosts a sizable proportion of the U.S. Ghanaian population (MPI, 2020). Hence, the current study helps to fill the gap of missing research on the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City.

This chapter discussed the research rationale and design, the role of the researcher, the methodology of the study, and issues concerning the trustworthiness of the research. It restated the research questions and the phenomenon under study, identified the research tradition, and provided a rationale for the use of this tradition. It also defined and explained my role as an observer, revealed any personal and professional relationships I might have had with participants, stated how research biases were managed, and discussed ethical issues that arose during the study. Regarding the method, it described the recruitment process for the sample population; explained the rationale behind the sampling strategy; stated the participant selection criteria; stated and rationalized the number of participants; explained exactly how I identified, contacted, and recruited the participants; described the sample size and saturation and their relationship; and identified the data collection instrument and its source, and established its capability to answer the research questions. The chapter also covered the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study, and the steps in the informed consent process and IRB review.



### Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City. It covered the job-search process, from how these immigrants learn about job openings to how they complete job applications and deal with job interviews, and it investigated whether they perceive discrimination in the job-search process. In this chapter, I explain the research design and rationale; my role as a researcher; the methodology and the instruments used; the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; the data analysis plan; and pertinent trustworthiness issues and ethical procedures. I conclude with a chapter summary.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The following research question guided the study: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process?

The Research Subquestions of this research question were as follows:

1. How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings?
2. What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications?
3. What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when preparing for job interviews?
4. How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experiences with the job-search process?
5. How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process?

6. What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process?

The central phenomena of this study are Ghanaian immigrants' experiences in their pursuit of a job.

The experiences of immigrants lend themselves to the tradition of interviewing in qualitative research. Semistructured interview questions worked well with the conceptual framework of this study, as such questions are mostly open-ended, and the participants had the freedom to express their thoughts in their own words (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Kallio et al. (2016) composed guidelines for semistructured interviews, which others have adopted successfully. They suggested five phases for researchers to follow: (a) identifying the prerequisites for using semi-structured interviews, (b) retrieving and using previous knowledge, (c) formulating a preliminary semistructured interview guide, (d) pilot-testing the guide, and (e) applying the completed guide.

Other researchers have used semistructured interviews in connection with job-search experiences. Bonaccio et al. (2014) employed them to investigate the role played by emotions in job searching and found that, depending on the level of the seekers' emotions and their degree of clarity about the type of job they were looking for, some seekers made firm decisions, while others drew hasty conclusions. Kito and Ueno (2016) used semistructured interviews to explore the mental health of participants experiencing unemployment while searching for a job. These prior uses of semistructured interviews to explore job-search experiences indicated that the method was suitable for the current study. Using the framework described above, I followed the phases for semistructured

interviews put forward by Kallio et al. (2016), in the context of exploring job-search experiences. The findings will also help this study contribute meaningfully to the literature by remedying the scarcity of information about Ghanaian immigrants.

For this study, I used IPA as part of the qualitative research design, which helped me develop an understanding of the research problem (Creswell, 2009). According to Creswell (2009), qualitative research is exploratory in nature and can be used to explore people's experiences of events through interviews and narratives. In addition, Burkholder et al. (2016) recommended the use of qualitative phenomenological research methods for listening to and understanding the perceptions of a study's participants. Because the participants in this study answered open-ended interview questions with subjective narrations, there were no quantifiable data; hence, a qualitative method was more suitable than a quantitative one. Also, I used a phenomenological design in preference to other designs because it can capture psychological meanings beyond words. For example, grounded theory was not suitable for this study because the scope of the study did not lend itself to producing a theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ethnography, based on observations of a cultural group, also did not fit, nor did narrative design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommended the ethnographic approach for the study of cultural groups. However, the participants in this study were individuals who shared their experiences; therefore, ethnography, which entails holistic observation and interviews with individuals that focus on their everyday experiences, was not the right fit. Also, although the authors suggested using the narrative and phenomenological approaches for studying individuals, the latter seemed the better option of the two

because it includes IPA. In sum, among the most common qualitative research design, IPA, as recommended by Alase (2017), was used for this study.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher, I conducted the interviews and listened, observed, and recorded the participants' responses. I had no supervisory role over the participants and limited myself to exclusively professional interactions for the purpose of data collection. I am a naturalized American, but a Ghanaian by birth, so my identity and immigration background posed a bias challenge, but I engaged in self-reflection to remain aware of the concept and phenomenon under study (Neubauer, 2019).

I have many Ghanaian acquaintances in my neighborhood; however, to avoid conflicts of interest, I decided not to use that population. Instead, I conducted the study outside my state of residence, so I could avoid social contact with the participants. I employed *epoche*, the process of putting aside bias and prejudgments to capture the meanings that the participants intend to share (Moustakas, 1994). This approach helped me comprehend what the participants were saying without framing it in terms of my own experiences. Also, because repeated contacts with participants could negatively impact the process, I allowed them to participate on only one occasion (the interview) and gave each one a 10-dollar gift card as compensation for their participation.

### **Methodology**

#### **Population**

A sizable number of Ghanaian immigrants reside in New York City (MPI, 2020). A sample of 20 members of this population, representative of the city, took part in the

study. According to Mason (2010), there is a strong likelihood of achieving a saturation of themes with a sample of this size. These participants were either looking for a job or already working full-time. I used criterion sampling to ensure that the participants met the study criteria (Creswell, 2014) and snowball sampling to recruit other participants who would be willing to share their experiences.

The criteria for participating in the study were as follows:

- The participants should have immigrated to the United States within the last 5 years.
- They should be looking for work or have found employment within the last 5 years.
- They must be at least 18 years or older.
- They must reside in New York City.

I printed flyers inviting participants to the study and posted them in churches, grocery stores, and places frequented by Ghanaians in New York City. A Google search for Ghanaians living in the city helped me identify places frequented by Ghanaians. I also Googled for Ghanaian churches and grocery stores. To initiate two-way communication, the flyers contained my contact information (e-mail address and phone number) and solicited the contact information of potential participants. To avoid sharing my e-mail address and phone number with strangers, I created a new e-mail account and set up a Google Voice number for the study. There were five questions on the recruitment flyer:

- Are you a Ghanaian immigrant who has immigrated within the last 5 years to the United States?

- Are you a resident of New York City?
- Are you at least 18 years or older?
- Are you currently looking for employment or have you recently found work within the last 5 years?
- Are you willing to participate in a study about Ghanaian immigrants?

Respondents who answered “yes” to all five questions qualified for the study. To avoid the possibility of fraud because of the dollar amount offered, I re-qualified prospective participants via phone, and while I had them on the phone, I set up a date for an interview.

### **Instrumentation**

I developed an interview protocol consisting of open-ended questions related to the research questions for participants to answer verbally (see Appendix A). Before beginning the interview, I asked the participants to verify that they met all the inclusion criteria and asked for demographic information about gender, age, and years spent in the United States, in order to better understand the sample. I conducted the interviews through the Zoom virtual meeting platform and, with the interviewees’ permission, recorded the sessions. I observed the participants’ body language for nonverbal expressions as they answered the interview questions. According to Tepper and Haase (1978), nonverbal cues supplement verbal expressions to convey a better message when people express their perceptions in social situations. Therefore, I took notes on significant body language as a supplement to the Zoom recordings and interview transcripts.

Semi-structured interview questions were appropriate for collecting the data needed for this study (Daykin et al., 2018). In a semistructured interview, participants have the freedom to respond with as much information as they feel comfortable sharing (Daykin et al., 2018). With open-ended questions, semi-structured interviews create opportunities for participants to go beyond simple responses; they can open up and give detailed descriptions of their experiences, which makes this technique an effective way to collect data.

### **Researcher-Developed Instruments**

I used a researcher-developed interview protocol guide (see Appendix A), which guided the direction of the interview. It ensured that I covered all relevant points (Hilton, 2015) and helped me brainstorm good questions related to the topic of study, decide the right order in which to ask them, and determine how to ask them (Taylor et al., 2016). Although I speak Twi fluently, I solicited the help of a professional translator, for fear that I would not be able to capture all the nuances and expressiveness of the participants' narratives and that there might be some loss of meaning. I wrote up the interview questions and possible follow-up questions in English and had them translated into Twi. Then I had another professional translator do a back-translation (i.e., translate the questions in Twi back into English). I compared the two English versions to see if they were the same. Then I moved forward with the original English version of the interview questions. I pilot-tested the open-ended interview questions on two participants on two occasions, so I could ascertain from the feedback whether the questions were worded appropriately and determine whether the resulting data would help to answer the research

questions. There are some considerations associated with pilot-testing an instrument. It requires extra time and resources, and it does not guarantee the success of the questions in the main study. Hence, I did not use the data from the pilot test in the data analysis. According to Creswell (2009), tests of content validity are used to ensure that the research procedures and results of a study are accurate. The interview protocol was developed from the research literature I reviewed (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; Kallio et al., 2016). I established content validity by following the interview protocol to ensure that the interview questions were in order and aligned with the research questions.

The central phenomena of the study were the experiences of a population in the process of searching for jobs. All the research questions were closely related to the participants' job-search experiences, and the same was true for the interview questions. Each question had the potential to yield a productive response relevant to the central phenomena.

After the interviews, I had a version of both the interview questions and the responses in English and another version translated into Twi. I invited the participants to read over the transcript of their interview, so that, if they wished, they could adjust their responses. The transcript was emailed to them, and they were given 1 week to respond. When I received their feedback, all the suggested revisions were made.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

I printed flyers inviting participants to the study. Then I conducted a Google search to locate sites in New York City frequented by Ghanaians, such as churches and grocery stores. I contacted those in charge and introduced myself as a doctoral student



from Walden University and was looking to conduct a study of the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City. When permission was granted, I worked with my contact at the location to determine where and how to post the flyers.

When a prospective participant contacted me, I verified their eligibility, and we made an appointment for the interview. I emailed a consent form to them with a specified response-by date, so they had ample time to read it before the interview and contact me with any questions. They were able to sign it electronically and return it to me. I shared my Zoom link with them, so they could do the interview online at their scheduled date and time.

The data consisted of (a) information on the participants' gender, age, and length of residence in the United States, (b) Zoom recordings of the online interviews, (c) transcripts of the interviews, and (d) the notes I took during the sessions. Zoom has a feature for recording sessions and encoding them as downloadable files (Veed Studio, 2022) and a closed-captioning feature with a setting for making an automatic transcription of a session.

The interviews lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Although the literature recommends 15 participants for data saturation, I solicited 20 to compensate for the possibility of dropouts. Also, I tried using the snowball technique, whereby current participants can refer additional participants to a study. Luckily, the approach was successful and I recruited 20 participants.

In debriefing participants, I restated the purpose of the study and its significance and informed them that their responses might be published in the scholarly literature on

immigrants, albeit without any breach of confidentiality. The participants were assigned numbers to avoid using any personal identifiers. Also, I electronically shared my transcripts with the participants so they could check them for accuracy. They had the option to receive a transcript by email, as well as an opportunity to discuss it with me through Zoom. This gave the participants and me a second chance to address any data the participants identified as unclear. There were no follow-up interviews. I also assured the participants that any information shared in response to the interview questions would be solely for the study and would be kept confidential.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

I set up a table (see Appendix B) to show how the interview questions were aligned with and addressed the research questions (Creswell, 2009). Because the data for this study involved videos of the interview sessions, transcripts of the interviews, and my observation notes, I checked for consistency among all the data and looked for patterns and themes. I used phrases from the participants' responses as codes, and from these codes, derived themes. I retained data that deviated from the rest (outliers) and reported them in the Results section, with explanations of how they contribute to the experiences of the immigrant population.

Another approach used in the data analysis was linear procedures (Green et al., 2007); that is, I did not wait to collect data from all the participants before the analysis. As one participant's data were collected, I analyzed them, writing memos before moving on to interview other participants. I used the memos to thin the data by winnowing out redundant and irrelevant information. Thus, when I scheduled the interviews, I spread out

the dates, so that before I moved on to the next participant, I would have time to reflect on the memos from the previous interview. During this process of linear and iterative data collection and analysis, I was able to connect the dots, so that by the time I finished interviewing all the participants, I had a clear understanding of the data and could more easily code it.

For the data analysis, I followed a five-step data plan. I began in Step 1 by reading over the Zoom transcripts several times until I had a good grasp of each participant's responses. Then I reconciled the notes I took during the session with the narratives I collected. The notes consisted of information on nonverbal expressions, such as body language, signs of emotion, and any physical actions relating to the phenomenon under study. I retained observational notes that did not support what a participant said for the analysis because discrepancies between observational notes and what a participant says can be informative (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018; Tepper & Haase, 1978); they can enhance one's understanding of subjects' perceptions of their experiences. However, notes with discrepancies that I could not make sense of one way or another, I dropped.

For Steps 2 to 5 of my data analysis plan, I used NVIVO software to organize and analyze the data. In Step 2, I imported the Zoom interview transcripts (data) into the software. In Step 3, I set up a coding table, which consisted of categories of words and short phrases that I created to label attributes, ideas, and qualities in the text. If an idea or attribute fit under another, it was coded as a subcategory. In Step 4, I used the coding table to do the coding. As I selected passages from the participants' responses in the imported transcripts and applied color-coded categories and subcategories, NVIVO

compiled and highlighted these categories and sub-categories and helped me to develop themes relating directly or indirectly to aspects of the phenomenon in question. The fifth step, analyzing the data, involved looking at how the themes fit with the theoretical and conceptual framework.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

Issues of trustworthiness are discussed in the following section under the headings of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

#### **Credibility**

According to Merriam (1998), the credibility of a study depends on how plausible the findings are. For this study, I employed triangulation to establish the accuracy of the data, using multiple data sources, such as verbal and non-verbal responses. Furthermore, I used *member checking*, whereby the participants verified the accuracy of the information in the transcripts. Also, when the same themes continued to arise and the data were saturated, credibility was considered established. That is, as different participants who had no knowledge of how others had answered the questions began to give the same or similar responses, it was a good indication that I was getting credible information. For example, after interviewing about 10 participants who had no knowledge of one another, who did not know how and when the others responded to the interview questions, and who all gave similar responses, I was confident that the interviewing process had been exhausted and that my findings were valid.

**Transferability**

Transferability refers to how capably the findings of a study can be transferred to other settings (Polit & Hungler, 1999). To establish trustworthiness and achieve transferability, I used rich descriptions of the findings. Also, I tested the interview questions in advance on two participants to ensure they could be applied to other subjects. As another way of enhancing transferability, I detailed all the steps taken in the study, so that the conclusions from this study can be applied in other settings, with other participants, and at other times (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008).

**Dependability**

The stability and consistency of a study make up its dependability (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019), which means if the study is replicated, the findings of both studies should be consistent. To establish dependability, I logged all the steps taken and left an audit trail, so that others can repeat the study and reach the same or similar conclusions. I provided full details on all the steps I took, so that any future researcher may use the raw data of the study, follow my steps, and arrive at the same conclusions that I did. Future research that follows my procedures faithfully and arrives at the same or similar conclusions will corroborate the dependability of the study.

**Confirmability**

Confirmability is the assurance that the findings are true representations of the participants and not of the researcher (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). To establish confirmability, I employed member checking so that the findings would be based on data confirmed by the participants and not on my perceptions as a researcher. In order not to

introduce my perceptions, I also employed reflexive journaling, whereby I took notes on my past experiences and on how they might shape my interpretations. I am a naturalized U.S. citizen who emigrated from Ghana. I worked in Ghana before migrating, so I understand the job-search experiences of immigrants because I experienced them myself. My cultural, occupational, educational, and job-search backgrounds may be similar to those of the participants in this study. Reflexive journaling served as a hedge against interpretations of data and findings influenced by my background and inclinations.

### **Ethical Procedures**

In the initial stage of a study, there must be agreement among the IRB, the researcher, and the participants to guard against ethical problems. According to Punch and Oancea (2014), as cited in Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative research is about collecting data from people about people. As recommended by Creswell and Creswell, before conducting my study, I used the American Psychological Association's Code of Ethics as my guide (American Psychological Association, 2017). Then I submitted a proposal to Walden's IRB, which was approved.

Creswell and Creswell (2014) have identified a few ethical concerns that arise in research studies, for instance, deceiving or exploiting participants, pressuring them to sign consent forms, and collecting harmful information. The authors also suggested ways to address these concerns. The participants in my study were Ghanaian immigrants. I informed them about the purpose of the study, namely, to better understand the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City. Because the participants were required to sign a consent form before being interviewed, I had to explain the

content of the form in as detailed as a way as possible, so they could grasp the content and ask questions when necessary. I notified the participants that their participation was understood to be voluntary and that they could end their participation at any time.

I was mindful of the delicate nature of the intimate and possibly harmful information that the participants might incidentally provide in the course of the interviews. I explained to the participants that if they shared any sensitive information, knowingly or otherwise, I would keep it confidential, unless it referred to serious illegal activity or an intention to harm others. To alert the participants to the risks of sharing sensitive information, I informed them during the consent form process of the potential consequences of self-incriminating disclosures (American Psychological Association, 2020). Also, it is unethical and disrespectful to collect data from participants and abruptly end an interview. Hence, before we parted, I invited and answered any questions the interviews had, and thanked them. Also, following the interview, I gave the participants a token of 10 dollars each to show my appreciation and respect for the time and effort they had spent providing data.

One week prior to a scheduled interview date, I checked to see whether the consent form had been completed, signed, and emailed back. If someone had not responded, I phoned and emailed them a reminder. I also called and emailed to encourage participants to ask for an explanation of any part of the form they did not fully understand.

During data collection for a research project, there may be manifestations of power imbalances (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In qualitative interviews, researchers

should recognize the stress participants may undergo when answering sensitive questions. I was guided by this realization and conscious of potential power imbalances. I began the interviews with very easy questions and moved from there to more difficult and sensitive ones. For example, I started interviews by asking how participants' days were going, asked about their work experience when in Ghana, and kept questions about discrimination for the later part. Furthermore, I adopted the viewpoint that the interviewing process is a moral inquiry to improve a human situation. I was careful, when interpreting the participants' answers, to consider their perspectives on their experiences, and that is why I encouraged them to verify the interview transcripts later.

It is unethical to share participants' personal data outside the sphere of research. To protect the participants' identities, during the coding process, I kept their personal data confidential by assigning numbers to them (e.g., P1, P2, and so forth; Creswell, 2009), and I assured them that only I would have access to the information they shared. Furthermore, I stored the data on a password-protected computer only I have access to and kept any papers in a locked file cabinet in a secure location. Also, I shared the data with my committee who, by virtue of their positions, are also required to keep any research information confidential. The same was communicated to participants before the interviews. I will save the data for at least 5 years before destroying them.

### **Summary**

Using the qualitative approach of IPA, I conducted semistructured interviews to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City to



gain knowledge about how they acquire information about jobs and about whether they perceive discrimination in the way they are treated.

IPA helped me develop an understanding of the research problem; as a qualitative research tradition, it can be used to explore people's experiences of events through interviews and narratives. As the researcher, I administered the interview questions and listened, observed, and recorded the participants' responses. My identity and immigration background posed a bias challenge, but I used self-reflection regarding the concept and phenomenon under study. I recruited 20 Ghanaian immigrants from New York City as participants and was able to attain saturation. All the methodological approaches employed may raise concerns about trustworthiness, so I worked on credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. To protect the participants and the data collected in the process, I followed all the ethical practices recommended by the American Psychological Association and the Walden IRB. The findings may provide insights for Ghanaian job seekers and their helpers.

The next chapter will present the results of the study and cover the setting, the demographics of the participants, the data collection and analysis, and the evidence for the trustworthiness of the method.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City. I used a qualitative phenomenological approach to conduct semistructured interviews in addressing the following main research question: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process?

The experiences of immigrants, including Ghanaian immigrants, align with the tradition of interviewing in phenomenological qualitative research. Semistructured interview questions work well with this conceptual framework, as the questions were open-ended, and participants had the freedom to express their thoughts in their own words (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach also helps researchers to understand participants' experiences in their natural settings (Creswell, 2009). In this chapter, I will provide information on data collection settings, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness to include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, and results of my findings.

### **Research Setting**

I used my residential home office as the research setting to interview 20 participants on Zoom. The interviews took place from August 15 to August 27, 2023. Participants received a consent form from my Walden email and all 20 participants replied with the expression "I consent" to the interview after they read the consent form. I conducted the interview using my personal computer with Zoom software installed on it. I audio-recorded all the interviews and used the transcription feature of NVivo to

transcribe from audio to text. I emailed participants' transcribed texts to them for member checking for accuracy. Eighteen out of the 20 participants reported back that the transcripts were correct. Two of them did not respond. Participants had the choice of being interviewed in either English or their native language, but they all opted for English. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes. At the time of the interview, no issues were reported or noted that impacted the experience of participants or the interpretation of the data.

### **Demographics**

The sample consisted of 20 Ghanaian immigrants residing in New York City. One participant did not specify their gender, age, years in the United States, and level of education at the time of the interview. Six participants were female and 13 were male. All participants were over the age of 18, ranging from 25 to 55 years and averaging 38; and had resided in the United States from 1 to 5 years. They were not acquainted with me or related with me. The participants' demographics are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1***Demographic Information*

Participant ID	Gender	Age	Years in the United States	Education level
P1	Male	51	5	Bachelor's degree
P2	Male	27	3	Bachelor's degree
P3	Female	40	3	Bachelor's degree
P4	Male	28	2	Bachelor's degree
P5	Male	40	5	Bachelor's degree
P7	Male	40	5	High school diploma
P8	Female	30	5	High school diploma
P9	Male	49	2	High school diploma
P10	Male	40	3	High school diploma
P11	Female	34	3	High school diploma
P12	Female	34	4	Bachelor's degree
P13	Male	55	3	Bachelor's degree
P14	Male	30	2	Bachelor's degree
P15	Male	25	1	Bachelor's degree
P16	Female	45	3	Bachelor's degree
P17	Male	33	4	Bachelor's degree
P18	Male	38	4	High school diploma
P19	Male	46	4	Bachelor's degree
P20	Female	49	4	Associate's degree

### **Data Collection**

I received permission to begin data collection from Walden University IRB (Approval No. 07-14-23-0293054). I posted invitation flyers in Ghanaian churches and grocery stores in New York City that Ghanaian immigrants frequent such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in Manhattan and Queens; St. Mary's Ghanaian Anglican Church in Bronx; Ghana United Methodist Church, Bronx; Ghanaian Church of Pentecost in Brooklyn; and Asafo Market, Bronx.

It took me 1 week of posting the invitation flyers at the above locations for participants to start calling and emailing me about the study. As they contacted me, I verified their qualification by the inclusion criteria. Sending them the consent form through email and they responded with the "I consent," I sent them my Zoom link. As planned earlier, I tested the interview questions with the first two participants, so their responses were not included in the study. The lesson learned from those two (nonstudy) participants was making sure I engaged participants well in follow-up questions.

I interviewed 20 participants within 12 days from August 15 to August 27, 2023. Each Zoom interview session took approximately 45 minutes for participants to answer the interview questions. I used the recording feature of Zoom, to record participants' voice, and later transcribed data into text using NVivo.

There were a few variations in the data collection as planned in Chapter 3. As the main questions did not include gender, age, and length of residence in the United States, I missed the collection of such data initially, so I called and emailed participants to provide me with that information after their interview Zoom sessions. Nineteen participants

responded to the demographic information requests. Participant 6 did not provide their demographic details.

### **Data Analysis**

I used five steps for the data analysis process. In Step 1, I reviewed participants' responses. To familiarize myself with the data collected, I read over participants' Zoom transcripts several times. Some responses were not clear, so I contacted those participants for clarification. I compared the notes I took about participants' nonverbal expressions (e.g., signs of emotions and facial expressions) with the data collected but did not identify any meaningful discrepancies. I also cleaned the data to make sure there was no identifiable information in the transcript. In Step 2, I imported data by uploading the transcript into NVivo. Again, I reviewed the transcript to make sure all data were captured accurately by the software and to get a clearer picture of what participants were telling me. In Step 3, I went through the data line by line and extracted relevant information, generated codes based on the information extracted and simultaneously created a list of the codes generated and their respective number of participants and relevant excerpts (see Appendix C). Step 4 involved grouping codes that were initially created under each of the six Research Subquestions to generate themes. In the categorization process, I examined each code to find patterns and similarities. Based on that, I put them into their various clusters and developed themes addressing each of the Research Subquestions. In all, I came up with 23 initial themes: six for Research Subquestion 1, four for Research Subquestion 2, four for Research Subquestion 3, two for

Research Subquestion 4, three for Research Subquestion 5, and four for Research Subquestion 6 (see Appendix D)

### **Research Subquestion 1**

Research Subquestion 1 was: How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings? Based on the responses participants gave and grouping the closeness of ideas related to ways they learn about job openings, six initial themes emerged. Some participants found a job through work study. This was a stand-alone code and was considered an initial theme. Another group of participants expressed learning about jobs through referrals and recommendations. Those codes also were used as another initial theme. A third initial theme, finding jobs without help, was developed using expressions participants shared that they found jobs without any help, searching for jobs online, and not getting help with job applications. Initial Theme 4 was having job related conversations with people. The codes used to develop this theme were discovering job opportunities through networks, learning about jobs through social gatherings, learning about jobs through face-face connections, learning about jobs through people with experience in the field, learning about jobs through family members, learning about jobs through friends, learning about jobs through phone conversations, and learning about jobs through social media. Learning about jobs through job fairs was Initial Theme 5, which emerged from the same code. And, as the name suggests, Initial Theme 6, learning about jobs through newspapers, emerged from its own stand-alone code.

## **Research Subquestion 2**

Research Subquestion 2 was: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications? To answer this question, I identified the codes that pertained to the experience of completing job applications and four initial themes emerged, namely (a) being proactive and strategic, (b) uncomfortable job-finding experiences, (c) familiarity with the job position, and (d) favorable job application experiences. From the codes seeking out advice for job applicants, applying for multiple jobs, and being able to read and write, the initial theme of being proactive and strategic emerged. Another initial theme, uncomfortable job-finding experiences, emerged from the following codes: being asked a lot of information, being frustrated while waiting, disappointment at not being offered the job, dislike for complicated questions, dislike for critical thinking questions, dislike for hard questions, dislike for job search competitions, dislike for job-unrelated questions, dislike for long applications, dislike for many documents, dislike for irrelevant questions, dislike for online questions, dislike for too many questions, dislike for too many pages, dislike for unnecessary questions, dislike for having to travel to apply, engaging in repetitive tasks, experience requirements, feeling anxious, feeling nervous, wasting energy, wasting time, nonsensical questions, not receiving application confirmation, not receiving calls for interviews, struggling with getting references, time-consuming, and understanding questions with difficulty.

The initial theme familiarity with the job position emerged from the code familiarity with the job position. Initial Theme 4, favorable job application experiences, originated from the following codes: getting help with resumes, having application forms



readily available, having confidence to get the job, hearing from employers after applying, applications with easy steps, open-ended questions, online applications, being asked normal questions, opportunities to show experience, opportunities to show interests, easy applications, nondiscriminatory jobs, being asked a reasonable number of questions, paper applications, questions about “me,” short applications, simple applications, straightforward job-related questions, understandable questions, comprehensible statement prompts, option to upload resume, inputting information at one’s own pace, being qualified for the job, and the prospect of more pay.

### **Research Subquestion 3**

Research Subquestion 3 was: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when preparing for a job interview? To answer this question, participants’ responses that shared their experiences when preparing for job interviews were clustered together into four initial themes: (a) having knowledge about the company and job, (b) looking presentable, (c) searching for interview content, and (d) engaging in meditation before interview. The codes finding out about job longevity, knowing what is in the job description, knowing what is on one’s resume, knowing the job requirements, arriving on time, researching the company, and gathering documents were clustered to form Initial Theme 1, having knowledge about the company and job. Also, from the codes interview preparation’s impact on job search outcomes and awareness of dress code, emerged Initial Theme 2, looking presentable. Initial Theme 3, searching for interview content, emerged from the following codes: getting help for interview, going online for interview ideas, knowing how to prepare for the interview, looking for possible interview

questions, practicing for the interview, relying on others' interviewing experience, using social media for the interview, using YouTube for interview ideas, and pulling from experience back home. Initial Theme 4, engaging in meditations before interview, emerged from these three codes: praying before the interview, getting relaxed, and meditating.

#### **Research Subquestion 4**

Research Subquestion 4 was: How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experience with the job-search process? Answering this question required the application of codes generated with ideas related to participants' use of the English language and their native language in job searches. Such codes yielded two initial themes: (a) competence with the English language and (b) applicants' language preference. Competence with the English language was developed from the code clarity in English language. The second initial theme, applicants' language preference, was developed from the codes preference for the English language and preference for one's native language.

#### **Research Subquestion 5**

Research Subquestion 5 was: How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process? The three initial themes that emerged based on participants' experiences with social networks in the job-search were (a) getting information from church platforms, (b) getting information through social media, and (c) participating in a family group. All three themes emerged from codes on their own. Each code also became a theme.

### **Research Subquestion 6**

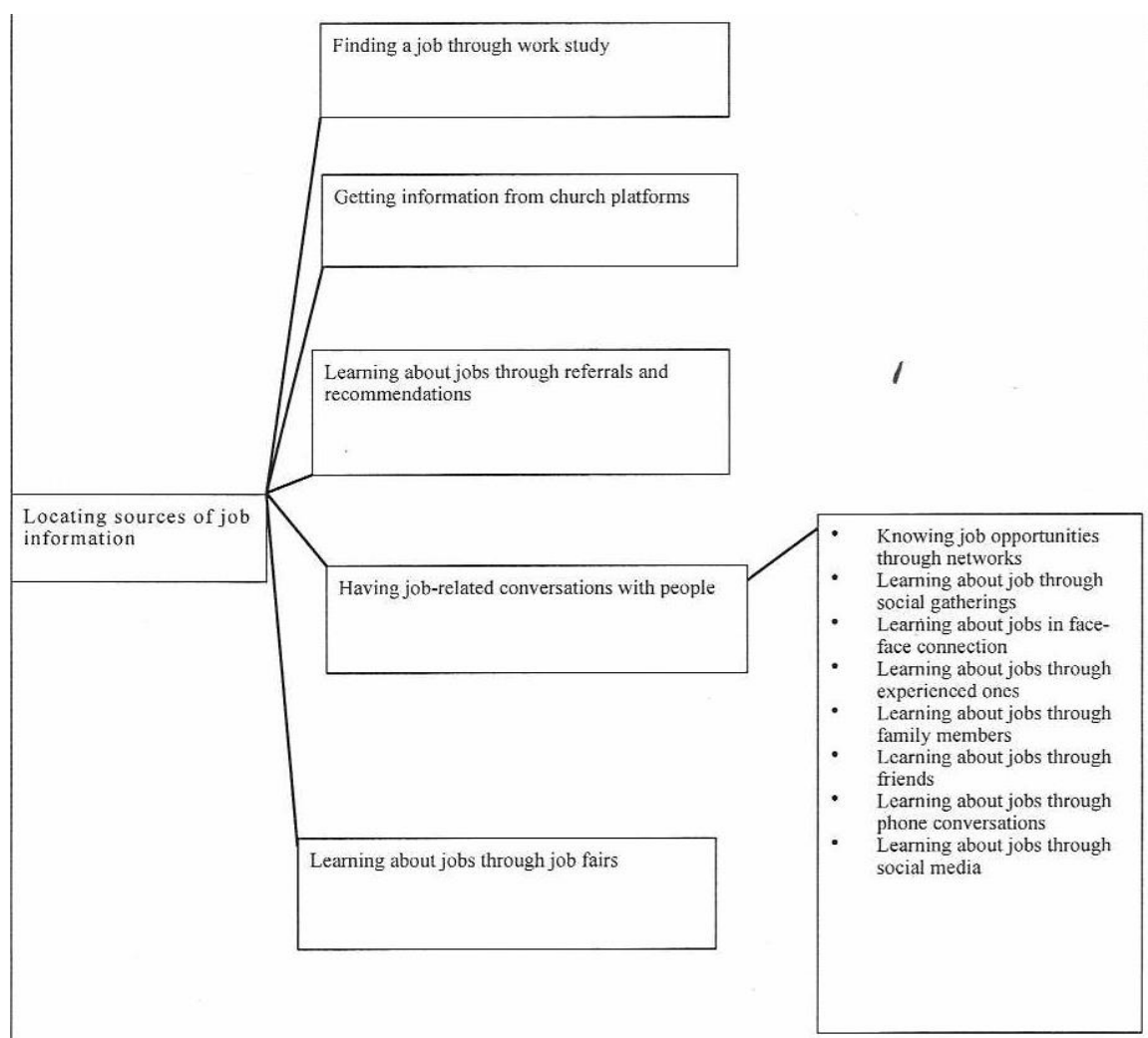
Research Subquestion 6 was: What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process? To answer Research Subquestion 6, participants' coded responses about various forms of unfair treatment in the job-search also yielded four initial themes: (a) areas of discrimination based on behavior, (b) discrimination based on country of origin, (c) discrimination based on identity, and (d) discrimination based on association. The codes ability, accent, disability, car driven, and experience yielded the first initial theme, areas of discrimination based on behavior theme. The second initial theme, discrimination based on country of origin, emerged from the codes others' discrimination experience, personal discrimination experience, encountering discrimination in job search, and discrimination based on place of origin. The third initial theme, discrimination based on identity, emerged from the codes age, gender, race, and ethnicity. The codes college type, education, job, place of living, place of origin, religion, cultural background, and prior relationships developed the fourth initial theme, discrimination based on association.

To address the main research question (What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process?), the 23 initial themes from all the Research Subquestions were further examined and categorized to form themes. All 23 initial themes were grouped into four larger themes, namely, locating sources of job information, being proactive and strategic, applying for jobs with clear job descriptions, and experiencing uncomfortable and discriminatory circumstances (see Appendix E). The initial themes that yielded locating sources of job information (see

Figure 1) were finding a job through work-study, getting information from church platforms, having job-related conversations with people, learning about jobs through job fairs, and learning about jobs through referrals and recommendations. Figure 1 illustrates how this theme was developed from the initial themes and codes generated from the data.

**Figure 1**

*Locating Sources of Job Information*

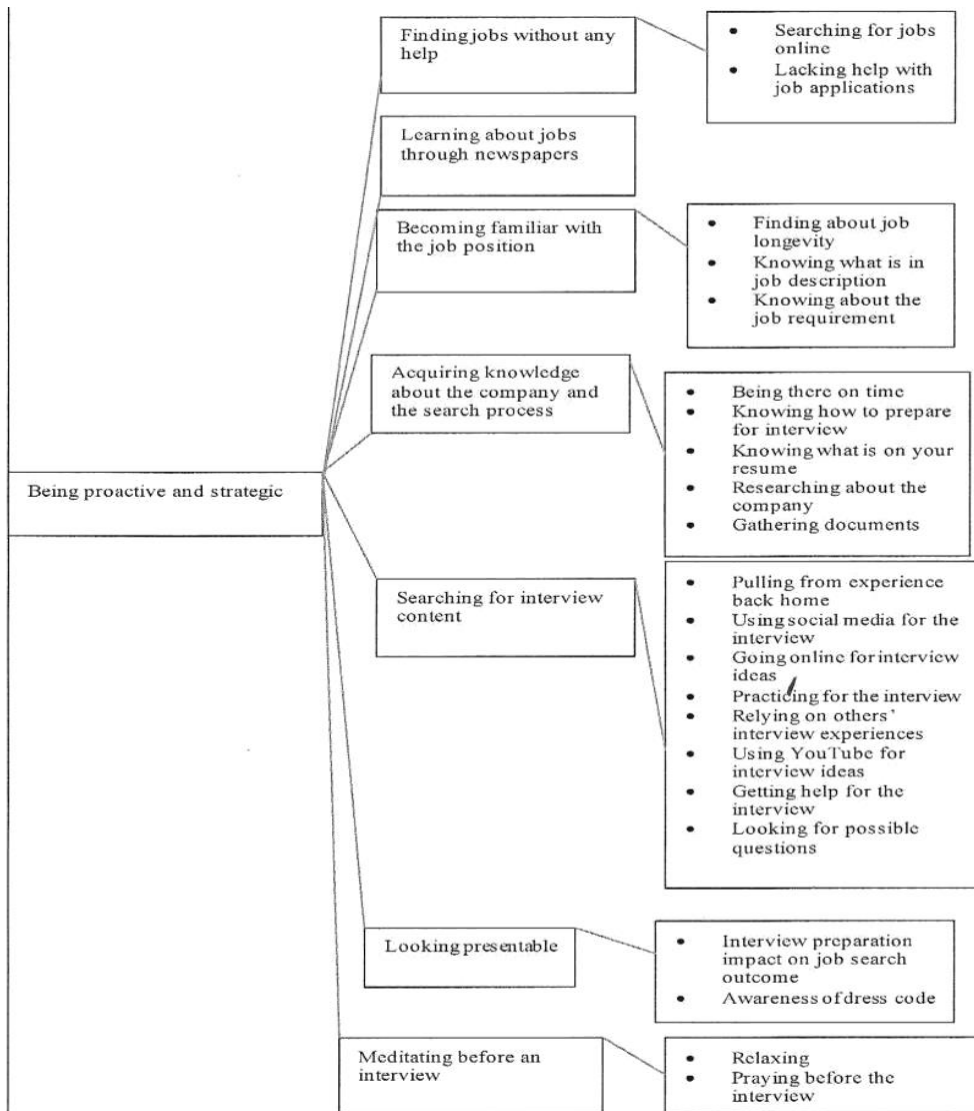


Also, the initial themes finding jobs without any help, learning about jobs through newspapers, becoming familiar with the job position, acquiring knowledge about company and the job search process, searching for interview content, looking presentable, and meditating before an interview yielded the theme, being proactive and strategic.

Figure 2 shows the development of this theme from the codes and initial themes.

**Figure 2**

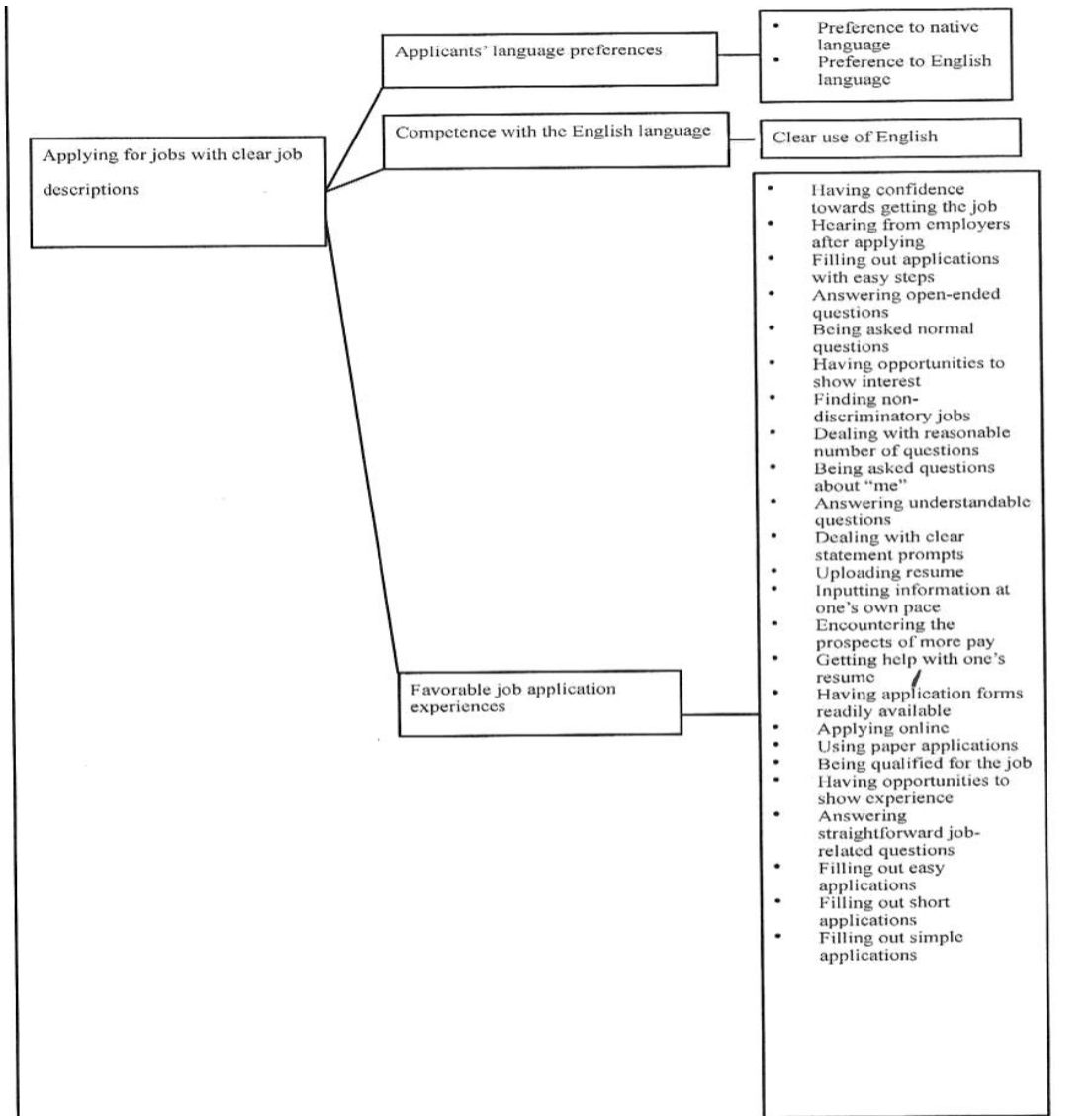
*Being Proactive and Strategic*



The next theme, applying for jobs with clear job descriptions also emerged from the initial themes, applicants' language preferences, competence with the English language, and favorable job application experiences. Figure 3 shows the development of this theme from the codes and initial themes identified in the data.

**Figure 3**

*Applying for Jobs with Clear Job Descriptions*

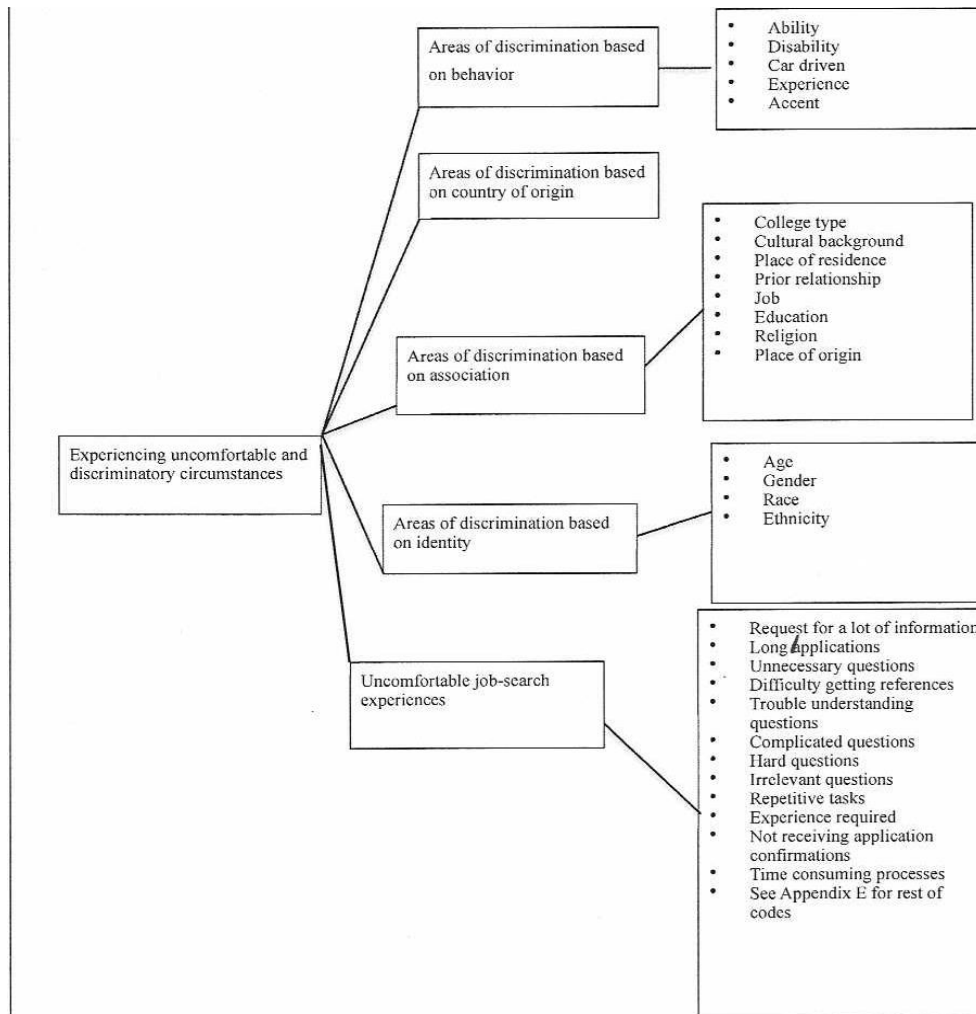


The fourth theme, experiencing uncomfortable and discriminatory circumstances, also emerged from the following initial themes: areas of discrimination based on behavior, areas of discrimination based on country of origin, areas of discrimination based on association, areas of discrimination based on identity, and uncomfortable job

finding experiences. The codes and initial themes that led to the development of this theme are shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4**

*Experiencing Uncomfortable and Discriminatory Circumstances*



In the step five of the data analysis, I critically examined the themes generated and the components of the framework. Specifically, I compared both the themes and framework exploring patterns, commonalities and differences between them.



Within the conceptual framework of this study, the learned helplessness theory is mostly used to explore job seekers' failures. On the other hand, the locus of control concept is mostly used to explore job seekers' successes. To balance exploring job seekers' failures and successes, both learned helplessness theory and locus of control concept were used where the direction was not clear. Theme 1, locating sources of job information, has a neutral connotation, so both were employed. Theme 2, being proactive and strategic, has more positive connotation, so the locus of control concept was employed. Theme 3, applying for jobs with clear job descriptions has a more positive connotation, so the locus of control concept was employed. Lastly, the learned helplessness theory was employed for the theme of experiencing uncomfortable and discriminatory circumstances, as it has a more negative connotation. This step helped in determining, between learned helplessness theory and locus of control concept, which one takes precedence over the other in exploring the themes. I reversed course by employing learned helplessness theory for positive connotations and locus of control concept for negative connotational themes. This approach is explained in more details in Chapter 5.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

In Chapter 3, I outlined a framework in addressing the issue of trustworthiness under credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Here, I discuss how I implemented the plan. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative studies are held to different standards than quantitative studies in terms of validity and reliability. Validity, in qualitative studies, is the assurance that a researcher constantly checks for the accuracy

of information gathered and that all procedures to findings are well documented. On the other hand, reliability is an approach to consistency irrespective of the researcher and the topic of study.

### **Credibility**

The credibility of a study depends on how plausible the findings are (Shenton, 2004). In the data collection process, I used *member checking* for participants to verify the accuracy of the information in the transcripts. To ensure credibility, after the participants' voice recordings were transcribed, I emailed the transcripts to participants for them to check if their information was captured as they said it. All participants except two responded that their information was as given. The two participants did not reply to the email. With the majority of participants reporting back that the transcripts are correct, I felt certain of credibility.

In Chapter 3, I planned on taking notes to capture nonverbal expressions, but participants' responses did not prompt for any note-taking action.

### **Transferability**

According to Polit and Hungler (1999), transferability refers to how capably the findings of a study can be transferred to other settings. It is a measure of the external validity of the study's findings. Although findings of this study, as is characteristic of qualitative studies, are difficult to generalize and transfer to other settings, they can be entry points for other researchers to keep developing the topic.

I gave sufficient details and descriptions of the steps I took in arriving at the results. For example, I explained in detail how codes were developed into initial themes;

and how the initial themes became the main themes. As I made sure to cover all participants' data, I included as many of their words and phrases as possible, leaving just a few statements for me to make sense of during coding. This process was necessary because some statements required a second thought. I checked with participants for accuracy of the sense I made for the codes before using them.

Also, I tested the interview questions on two participants; that built my confidence level in using the questions with the study participants. As these two participants were not part of the study, their data were not included in the data analysis.

### **Dependability**

According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2019), dependability of a study resides in its stability and consistency. In this sense, dependability means if the study is replicated, the findings of both studies must be consistent.

For this study, I provided my dissertation chair with documented plans for review, as in the invitation flyer for recruitment as well as interview transcripts. Also, all changes in data collection were well documented, as evidenced at the beginning of this chapter.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to ensuring that the results of a study accurately reflect participants' perspectives rather than being influenced by the researcher's interpretations or biases (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). To ensure confirmability, I employed member checking for findings to be based on data confirmed by the participants and not on my perceptions. I also employed reflexive journaling, as I have lived such experiences as an immigrant from Ghana. Since my cultural, occupational, educational, and job-search

backgrounds may be similar to those of the participants of this study, I used reflexive journaling as a hedge against interpretations of data and findings.

## **Results**

The purpose of this section of the chapter is to identify findings through the Research Subquestions that are relevant to the main research question: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process? The data analysis of lived experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in their job search in New York City revealed four themes: (a) locating sources of job information, (b) being proactive and strategic, (c) applying for jobs with clear job descriptions, (d) experiencing uncomfortable and discriminatory circumstances, and 20 subthemes. The themes are described within the constructs of participants' responses to Research Subquestions in the subsections that follow.

### **Locating Sources of Job Information**

Research Subquestion 1 (How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings?) solicited for the various means participants learn about job openings. People seek and find information from many sources, formal and informal. One source the participants used is people they interacted with on a regular or irregular basis, such as family and nonfamily members, online and offline acquaintances, and church and nonchurch members. These are all informal means of learning about job openings. Others also used the formal means like going online to the company's website to search and apply. All 20 participants discussed having job-related conversations with others to learn about opportunities, including conversations in their social networks, which they used in

several ways. Others also used the formal means. Participant 14 felt strong about using his bachelor's degree in computer science to find a job. He stated,

I have more wider options of getting the job than somebody who has a lower level of education as me. . . . I can get a job from an employer always looking for a bachelor's degree in computer science who is looking for a web developer who is looking for a computer programmer.

Participant 5 also used both formal and informal means to learn about job openings and shared,

I use LinkedIn the most. Yeah. I'm into cybersecurity. So, what I do is anyone I see on LinkedIn that is cybersecurity related, I try to connect to that person. I'm also on Facebook. And then indeed. I use Indeed a lot. And then ZipRecruiter. I started ZipRecruiter before LinkedIn and indeed.

The participants used their social networks on social media, where they learned about jobs by engaging in job-related conversations. All 20 participants shared engaging in job-related conversations, and 115 references to the theme. Participant 12 said,

I ask questions like, 'Do you know of any job openings? I'm looking for a job. Let me know if you hear anything. Can you be of such help? Can I use you as a reference or something?

Participant 16 also shared,

I have heard about job openings through conversations on the telephone, you run into somebody in a shop or a grocery shop or anywhere the bus stop, or a train

station, you get into a conversation and it goes there. ... That person, sometimes if they have any openings, they can tell you about it.

Participant 4 used a similar approach, with the notion that the more people in a conversation, the more ideas for a job search. He stated,

Through the media, you get to know more ideas about a job because you get to connect with different people because each person has different ideas. So, you get to connect. And you get to know or have more idea about the job.

These participants engaged in conversations in person and online, as in the use of social media.

Although churches are mainly for religious worship, they also serve as an integral part of people's social network and can be a rich source of information. Five participants shared getting information from their church platform and there were 7 references in the codes. Participant 14 noted, "With my church I need to be present at church every Sunday for me to listen to the job opportunities that will be shared there. There is always a section on the church agenda when they announce job opportunities."

This participant does not want to miss going to church on Sundays because he not only worships there but has the additional motivation of learning about job opportunities. The same idea was expressed by participant 17, who stated,

In our church, most of the time when they're doing the announcements, if any company is looking for people, some of the church members will mention that they are hiring there. We make the announcement, we give the website and the location, and people can go and fill out an application for a job.

This participant also understands that going to church can provide him with job-seeking opportunities.

Participant 9 used work study to look for a job. He observed, “I went to school. So, I got a job through work study. After that, I got hired.” He added:

the school I went through [verified] that I was qualified for work study. So the department that sent me got interested in me based on my hard working.

Participant 12 found a job through a job fair. He talked to people at bus stops and train stations and searched online; he finally attended a job fair that landed him his current job.

Other participants, in addition to having job-related conversations, used formal means to learn about jobs.

In sum, the participants found out about jobs through job-related conversations within their social networks in a formal, informal, or both means. They asked questions and engaged in activities that would yield job-finding information. All 20 participants spoke of using their social networks to learn about jobs, and they had all found jobs using this approach.

### **Being Proactive and Strategic**

Some participants made statements that indicated they were proactive and strategic in their job quests. People work to meet their economic needs, so they see job searching as a proactive process. Being proactive and strategic involves a leave-no-stone-unturned approach, whereby people search for jobs in different places by employing different means. The participants pursued jobs both inside and outside their networks,

used both online and offline sources of job information, and looked for multiple jobs at the same time. While responses to Research Subquestion 1 above applied for this theme, participants' responses to Research Subquestion 2 (What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications?) also added to this theme.

Thirteen participants observed that they searched for and found jobs without the help of other people. While some of those participants searched online, others resorted to learning about jobs through newspapers as well. One participant also expressed the need to familiarize oneself with the job position. For example, participant 8 said, "I always do things on my own. I don't depend on anybody to tell me there is a job here, so, you have to go there. No, I do everything on my own." She continued, "I do my own research online, call the agency and then do my own thing. I prefer doing my own thing than somebody introducing me to it."

This participant was under the impression that information provided by others is sometimes not accurate. She mentioned an instance when she drove over an hour based on job information someone had given her, only to end up being told to come back another time. She considered that a waste of time, and since then, she prefers to search for her own information. In the same vein, participant 18 felt the need to be independent because he doesn't know many people in the city; he said, "It's because I don't know many people here, so I just search it through the internet and also with newspapers too."

He believes that he can search online on his own and supplement the information he finds with job offers he sees in the newspapers. Finding job information this way is



possible because, according to him, he completed high school and can read and understand simple instructions written in English.

Others, too, like Participant 11, expressed concerns about familiarizing themselves with the job, stating that, “It is better [if] you are familiar with the job you are applying for so that anything concerning about the job then you know it.”

Moreover, some direct responses to Research Subquestion 2 included statements from participants 7 and 3. For example, Participant 7 stated,

You have to search through multiple jobs and then make application throughout. Maybe you might get 1 or 2 jobs and then you finally decide to pick the one that you like the most. So, you don't have to settle for one. You can just sign up for multiple jobs and then wait on the ones that will call you. So that is one of the things I like about filling job applications here in the U.S.

Also, Participant 3 shared,

I was a teacher back in Ghana, reading wasn't all that difficult for me. And so, I was able to read. So filling application was not that difficult for me. The process is fun and easy task for me. What I like about it was you go to the organization and they have employment forms readily available for you to fill in. In Ghana, you would write a big application letter, but you would hardly get the job. The readily available application forms here makes it easy.

Responses to Research Subquestions 3,4, and 5 also contributed to the theme of being proactive and strategic, as seen in the following participants' positions on the questions.

Responding to the Research Subquestion 3 (What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when preparing for a job interview?), Participant 7 said,

I just go online and maybe watch videos on jobs interviews. And sometimes my friends or the people I know who are already employed, I ask them about how the interview went. The questions, the kind of questions they asked them. And then I compare to the ones that I'm preparing for. I'll just make a list of questions that are obvious and expecting them to ask me. So, I ask those that are already employed so they give me the feedback and the questions they asked them. And then I also make my own research about some of the possible questions that they might ask me. Then I also watch YouTube videos.

For Research Subquestion 4 (How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experience with the job-search process?), participant 1, who holds a bachelor's degree and has lived in the United States for 5 years, said, "I was using English as my formal way of education. So, I have developed a better control of the language to use it for job applications. So, I prefer English."

Participant 3 also stated, "I usually go by the English language because I'm educated and I can read and write in English . . . Even though I use English language, I do have an accent and that sometimes easily create a lot of problems."

Contrarily to participants 1 and 3 above, participants 4 and 19 would have wished to use their native language, although they can speak the English language. For example, participant 4 who is 28 years old, holds a bachelor's degree and has been in the U.S for two years shared,

When filling job applications in your language, you get to write and express in what you really want them to understand. I wish I could do in my own language. I prefer using my own language. Because when you use your own language, you get to understand what you are talking about, and then you get to explain yourself really good for the interviewer to know what you are trying to say.

Participant 19 shared a similar sentiment that “If I meet the person or the interviewer and they understand my language, I’ll be gladly use my native language.”

Participants also responded to Research Subquestion 5 (How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants’ job-search process?) in diverse ways within the theme, being proactive and strategic. Participant 14 said,

I connect with my friends on social media specifically on WhatsApp. We have a WhatsApp group where occasionally my friends talk about job opportunities, where we discuss about a specific job opening, and I use social media in search for job, specifically on social media with my friends.

Participant 4 again shared,

Through the media, you get to know more ideas about a job because you get to connect with different people because each person got different ideas. So, you get to connect. And you get to know or have more idea about the job.

The participants prepared themselves for their job interviews. They (14 participants) searched for information on interview content and on how to make themselves presentable (one participant) and meditated (one participant) before going to interviews. Some participants relied on their interview experiences from back home.

Others used information from their social media platforms. They also searched on YouTube for interview ideas and advice from others and for how to rehearse for an interview. In addition, the participants expressed an awareness of dress codes for looking presentable at an interview. Lastly, they (one participant each) engaged in meditation before interviews by relaxing and praying.

Participant 13 talked about job security with regards to job steadiness and good pay, saying that:

There are some jobs that you can apply [for] today and they can hire you in the next hour. But that job may not have a future for you. You are looking for a steady job, a job that can pay you good. That can help you to survive and cater for your family.

This participant explained that he has extended family members he supports back home in Ghana; his job security is a lifeline for them. As a result, he cannot afford to be jobless for a single day. The same sentiments were shared by participant 19, who wanted to be sure to be in the right place with the right job. Participant 19 said:

I make more research about the company because that is where you want to be. That is where you want to work. And I look for their mission and vision statement, so that I can give my ideas towards their mission and vision statement.

Participant 6 shared a similar idea: “I do some researches. Then I read more about that particular position and the company itself.”

Participant 17 highlighted the importance of knowledge about the job as an asset in the job interview, saying, “You need to have knowledge about that job. So, when they ask you questions, you can answer.” Participant 2 also noted that:

When you go for interview, you have to know at least the position you are applying for. You have to have enough information before you go because you qualify for that position.

All these statements indicate that the participants made conscious and concerted efforts to succeed in the job search process.

Participants 14, 15, 18, 4, and 12 searched for information that would help them perform well in their job interviews. Participant 14 said, “I prepare myself for the interview because I know the kind of job that I applied for and the kind of a job that I accepted to do.”

Participant 15, who has lived in the United States for 1 year and holds a bachelor’s degree, also explained:

Before you go for a job interview, you familiarize yourself with some questions. How they may ask and what they may ask at the job interview. So at least I breast myself with certain questions, certain knowledge, especially about the job. I can’t just go to a job interview without knowing anything about it.

Participant 18 reported, “I search online for more ideas about what people say when they attend interviews.” In the same manner, participant 3 said, “I go to YouTube and then listen to or watch videos on how to conduct yourself during job interviews,” and

concluded by noting, “I also practice a mini job interview. Trying to see how best I will perform and comport myself during the interview.”

Participant 4 thought that how one dresses for an interview can have an impact on the results: “Because sometimes if you don’t dress nice, they might deny your application. So you have to look presentable.” Dressing nice and looking presentable means wearing ironed clothes, a tucked-in shirt, pants, a tie, and polished shoes, or as they put it simply, a suit. Participants 12 and 18 believed in meditating before an interview. Respectively, they stated, “First, I would pray” and “I also make sure to relax.” They believed that meditation could improve their chances of being successful at a job interview.

All the actions people take in looking for a job must be purposeful. All the participants who are mentioned here remarked on what it takes to be purposeful. They did not use one, but multiple ways to find a job. Many applied for multiple jobs simultaneously. In preparing for job interviews, they also used multiple means to get information. All these actions were taken to improve their chances of getting hired, and almost all the participants had found their current or past jobs by being proactive and strategic. They realized a job was crucial to meeting their economic needs, so they could not afford to leave any stone unturned.

### **Applying for Jobs With Clear Job Descriptions**

Participants 1, 3, 4, and 19’s responses to Research Subquestion 4, as discussed above, are also built into the theme, applying for jobs with clear job descriptions. The participants’ language preferences and competence with the English language were

determinants of how clear the job descriptions were for the jobs they were seeking. These factors also determined the favorability (or lack thereof) of the application process results. All 20 participants shared their language preferences, and their favorable job applications experiences, and none of the participants mentioned English language was an impediment to their job-search process.

Jobs come with duties for potential workers. To be successful working these jobs, potential workers need to understand what these duties entail. The participants' language competence affected their ability to understand descriptions of job requirements. They expressed this in their language preferences in regard to jobs and job interviews.

Although participant 4 understood the English language, he preferred doing applications and interviewing in his native language, so he could have a clear understanding of his job duties. He observed, "When you use your own language, you get to understand what you are talking about, and then you get to explain yourself really good for the interviewer to know what you are trying to say."

Participant 6 shared a similar idea: "I think I'm more versatile in my native language. I'm more fluent." This participant also preferred their native language, so they could follow conversations and understand the job requirements. In all, seven participants preferred using their native language for the job-search process.

Eighteen participants, on the other hand, expressed a preference for the English language as a means of comfortably understanding job descriptions. On this subject, participant 1 said, "I was using English as my formal way of education. So, I have

developed a better control of the language to use it for job applications. So, I prefer English.”

Participant 1 understood that he was in a foreign land, so he preferred learning the English language to arrive at a clear understanding of his job duties. He tied success at understanding job duties in the United States to the understanding of spoken and written English. Participant 10 expressed the same preference, “I prefer using the English language. Because English is the general language that most people speak in the U.S. It’s not everyone that understands my language.”

He went on to explain that those who want to use their native language in the United States do not have the right mindset, because when they bring their native language to the workplace, no one will understand them, and because English is what majority of people in the United States use, he thinks he should also use it. The next two participants shared this sentiment. Participant 5 has been in the country for five years and holds a bachelor’s degree said, “English is going to be the common language that everybody is going to speak over here. So, I prefer being interviewed in English.” Participant 6 saw the use of English as normal practice for clarifying the duties of the positions he applied for. Participant 6 stated, “Most of the time the language in English is normal.” Their use of the word *normal* suggests that tackling instructions in English, as well as speaking the English language, should not be seen as an extraordinary task. The participant thinks that everyone who is looking to work in the country should be able to handle that.



Many participants showed preferences for easy, short, and simple applications. For example, participant 14 stated, “when the questions on the applications are easy. They are not difficult to answer” and concluded that “when the questions are easy, I’m able to answer the questions very well.” Participant 2’s response agreed with this, “And then when the application is very short and straightforward, if they are not asking you for too much information, it makes it easier for you to fill [out] the application.” When asked what they like most about job applications, participant 18 responded, “If the questions are simple questions ... it allows you to express yourself well.”

The success or failure of the job application process depends on the job seeker’s understanding of the job description. If the understanding is clear, they have a better chance of doing well in the job interview, as well as doing well on the job. Failure is likely if the understanding is not clear. As job descriptions are given in English, it means job seekers must have the right mindset regarding their language preferences and become competent with the English language. Also, as job seekers strive for favorable job application experiences, they must adopt the right mindset toward the content of the application materials.

### **Experiencing Uncomfortable and Discriminatory Circumstances**

Not all the experiences shared by the participants were favorable; they also had some unfavorable experiences and perceived discrimination to talk about. Nine participants experienced discrimination based on their behavior, 11 faced discrimination based on their country of origin, 16 experienced discrimination based on association, 17

faced discrimination based on identity, and 19 encountered uncomfortable job finding experiences.

Discrimination is an experience of unfair treatment in many shapes and forms. It is an uncomfortable experience; however, there are many uncomfortable experiences that are not discriminatory in nature. Some people feel discomfort but describe their experiences independent of discrimination; others tie their uncomfortable experiences to discrimination based on their perceptions. The participants expressed themselves in both ways. Some felt discriminated against based on their abilities, disabilities, or experiences; the cars they drove; or their accents. According to participant 1, he was denied a job because of his accents. He stated, “Based on your accents, which I have experienced.” And concluded that:

And then I have been discriminated against based on accent, because in America, I can't see everybody, but some people think that once you have an accent, you are not properly educated and you can't speak good English, but English is not accent.

Participant 1's conclusion is a direct response to the Research Subquestion 6, What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process? The same notion was shared by participant 8, a high school diploma holder and been in the U.S for five years, who commented:

Your accent too becomes a [source of] discrimination as well, because maybe you couldn't express yourself very well and somebody over there will be able to say

and express themselves well and they will be taking the job and that will be a loss to you.

Participant 8 experienced being discriminated against because of their accent, in favor of another job seeker who was able to articulate better.

The participants talked about discrimination, even if not prompted, so it was advisable to pay attention to their understanding of their experience. Asked what he perceived as discrimination, participant 6 stated, "I know in terms of your education, in terms of experience, and in terms of ability." They believe the education they received in Ghana was on a par with the equivalent education in the United States. The participant completed a degree in education in Ghana and started teaching there before relocating to this country. Upon settling here, they could not use their teaching certificate from Ghana to find a teaching job here in the United States. This participant thinks that it is not fair for them to use their credentials here, and it is not fair for them to further their education before they can do the thing they are already qualified to do. Others have been discriminated against based on their country of origin, as expressed by participant 14, who explained, "When I moved into the United States, I went to look for a job. But because of my accent and my country of origin, I was not given that job."

This participant experienced two types of discrimination at the same time, based on accent and country of origin. People speak with an accent based on where they were raised and educated, and for that matter, on where they learned to speak the language. This participant felt it was egregiously wrong to be discriminated against based on his country of origin in addition to his accent.

Others talked about discrimination based on various types of association. They talked about their college type, cultural background, place of residence, tribe, job, religion, place of origin, and prior relationships as the basis for discrimination.

Participant 16 said, “We are discriminated against by our country of origin.” Participant 12 stated:

I went for a job interview and I believe because I did not have much experience in this country – I have lots of experience from back home. But they felt that I was not qualified for the job based on that. So, I believe, and they did not explain that was the reason, which I thought was unfair.

Also, age, gender, and racial identity were pointed out as discriminatory factors by many participants. Participant 1, who was second to the oldest among the participants (51 years), has been in the United States for 5 years and holds a bachelor’s degree said:

I have experienced discrimination about my age, where I have been told that they don’t think I would be able to fit in a population, like the current people they have working over there because of my age. So obviously what they are saying is I’m older and, all the people working there are fresh from school and all that, and younger.

Participant 2 also said, “You are not getting the job because of either your color or your age or your gender,” and sharing his experience at a job fair, participant 11 said:

I was the only black person that I went to that job fair. But they didn’t allow me to participate. I think the discrimination was because of my color.

Participant 14 also noted that, “because of your skin color you are not given what you think you deserve. Or, I think racial discrimination is about limiting a privilege of a person because of his or her skin color.”

Many participants talked about uncomfortable experiences when they were looking for jobs. When they were asked to share their job-search experiences, some participants expressed their dislike for long applications; unnecessary, complicated, and irrelevant questions; and repetitive tasks. They also did not like being asked for a lot of information. They struggled to get references, experienced challenges with job requirements, and sometimes did not receive application confirmations.

Participant 17 did not like long applications. Participant 4 also stated that, “One that is long, it takes a lot of time. It is stressful and it also wastes your time.” Participant 14 expressed a dislike for unnecessary questions such as “a question that will be asked me about my past address . . . questions about my family, my siblings.” In the same vein, participant 5 said, “Some of their questions are not related to the job” and concluded that “telling [a] story about yourself, it has nothing to do with the job in question.” Some participants described challenges getting references for job applications, as they did not know many people in the United States. Participant 3 complained that:

what I like least is finding a personal reference because we don't have much experience over here. . . . And you meet a lot of people by here, [but] they don't know you much, so getting them to be your reference was a little bit difficult.

The participants' descriptions of uncomfortable and discriminatory experiences illustrate the struggles that they endured to persist in their search for a job or to quit

looking for one. Many participants faced very uncomfortable challenges, to the verge of almost quitting, but all were successful at finding jobs despite these experiences.

### **Summary**

This chapter covered the results of the data analysis for this study. Semistructured interviews were conducted with 20 Ghanaian immigrants in New York City concerning their job-search process. The main research question for this study was “What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process?” This question was broken down into the following six Research Subquestions: How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings? What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications? What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when preparing for job interviews? How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants’ experience with the job-search process? How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants’ job-search process? What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants’ job-search process?

Patterns identified in the participants’ responses led to the creation of initial themes that were developed into larger (main) themes, which were (a) discovering sources of job information, (b) being proactive and strategic, (c) applying for jobs with clear job descriptions, and (d) having uncomfortable and discriminatory experiences.

All the participants contributed their experiences, beliefs, perceptions, and understandings of learning about job openings, completing job applications, and preparing for job interviews, along with their perceptions of the impact of language, the use of social networks, and discrimination in the job-search process.

The results of this study will be discussed and interpreted in chapter 5. This discussion will cover how the themes answered the research questions in light of the learned helplessness theory (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019) and the concept of locus of control from social learning theory (Rotter, 1966). Also, the implications, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions are provided in chapter 5.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Many Ghanaians have traveled to the United States, for diverse reasons (Coe, 2020; Goodman, 2020). Some challenges they face as immigrants range from a lack of acceptance in their community of residence to employment discrimination (Seaton et al., 2018). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City. This chapter contains the interpretation of the study's findings regarding a main research question and six Research Subquestions: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process? How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings? What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications? What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when preparing for job interviews? How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experiences with the job-search process? How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process? What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process?

The results concern the experiences of 20 Ghanaian immigrants in New York City with the job-search processes. The five-step analysis of the semistructured interview data yielded four themes relating to aspects of Ghanaian immigrants' experiences in their job searches in New York City: (a) locating sources of job information, (b) being proactive and strategic, (c) applying for jobs with clear job descriptions, and (d) experiencing uncomfortable and discriminatory circumstances. In this chapter, these themes (findings) are discussed in conjunction with the literature reviewed in Chapter 2.



## **Interpretation of the Findings**

This section discusses the findings as they relate to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and to the theoretical framework. The discussion is structured according to the four themes.

### **Locating Sources of Job Information**

The participants' job searches involved searching for job information in many ways. The participants mentioned having job-related conversations with people to learn about job openings. In previous research, Atiso et al. (2018) found that because participants could not get information in their native language at the libraries, they mostly neglected libraries as sources of information and instead used information they got from people in their communities, such as friends and church members, to learn about job openings. Another study (Badwi et al., 2018) also found that the participants used their social network of fellow immigrants to get job information but that this practice led them to acquire menial jobs.

In the current study, all 20 participants reported that they had had job-related conversations with people in their communities to learn about job openings. This finding was consistent with the previous literature. Whereas the participants in the Atiso et al. (2018) study had a language-barrier problem, the participants in the current study faced no such challenge in the information-getting stage. Some only mentioned a preference for their native language in the job application and interview stages; none of the participants specified the language they used when looking for information. Given this, and because Atiso et al.'s findings were related to searching for information in the English language, it

was presumed that the participants in my study were comfortable with any language (i.e., their native language or English) when they had those conversations.

Further research has also shown that job seekers use different types of information sources to improve their chances of finding a job (Piercy & Lee, 2019), which is consistent with the practices of the participants in this study, who used their social media networks and in-person conversations (offline) when looking for information about jobs.

### **Being Proactive and Strategic**

All 20 participants took various forms of action when job searching, which shows that they were proactive and strategic. For example, 18 participants mentioned having acquired knowledge about the company and the job before applying, so there would not be any surprises during an interview. Likewise, 13 participants chose to look for jobs without help from anyone else, as information gotten from others might not be accurate or reliable. This finding is intriguing, but it is not supported by previous research that found job seekers using people in their social networks to learn about job openings (Goel & Lang, 2019). Also, contrary to the current study's findings, other researchers found that African immigrants used their social networks as a key resource in their job searches (Piercy & Lee, 2019; Rosenblum et al., 2016; Zaami, 2015). Another finding of this study that was not found in previous research is that the participants searched for possible interview content in their job search processes.

Opinions are divided among previous researchers on job seekers' use of their social networks to find jobs. While some researchers see strong ties as being helpful for job seekers, others see a network of weak ties as the better alternative (Gee et al., 2017;

Granovetter, 1973). Although the use of social networks for job searching was prominent in the current study, there was not a stark contrast in the type of social ties the participants used, yet they mainly used strong ties, as they did not have many people within their networks outside of their fellow immigrants.

Being proactive and strategic means job seekers employ many different ways to find a job. For example, among the Ghanaian immigrants Atiso et al. (2018) studied, the authors found that the participants used multiple sources of information to find jobs, especially their personal networks and social media. In the current study, the participants saw the need to use multiple ways of searching to improve their chances of landing a job sooner. Participants used face-to-face conversations, church meetings, WhatsApp, Facebook, telephone calls, and YouTube to learn about the full range of job-search processes, from searching for job openings to completing applications and interviewing.

In a previous study, Bowlus et al. (2016) found that immigrants improved their job searching methods over time, such that those who had been in the destination country longer were more successful in their job searches than newly arrived immigrants. The reason for this improvement was related to a finding of Carlsson et al. (2018), which was that established immigrants used more formal and fewer informal approaches. In the current study, on the other hand, the participants mentioned only that they confronted some language barriers when they first arrived but outgrew them over time.

### **Applying For Jobs With Clear Job Descriptions**

Some researchers have found that immigrant job seekers encounter obstacles like unemployment and underemployment (Udah et al., 2019). Zaami (2015) found social and

spatial exclusion to be an employment challenge faced by Ghanaian immigrant youths in Canada. The participants in this study did not talk about these experiences, although they did talk about applying for positions with clear job descriptions.

The Ghanaian participants noted their preference for applying for jobs whose duties were clearly stated. Jobs like these made them confident about being hired, because the application process made sense to them. They completed such job applications with good details about themselves. When called in for an interview, they felt well prepared and performed well. Eighteen participants shared their preference for job descriptions written in English. All 20 participants described job application experiences that were favorable to them, from the application stage to the hiring stage, when the job descriptions were clear and free of ambiguities.

### **Experiencing Uncomfortable and Discriminatory Circumstances**

Researchers have found that ethnic minorities in a new country are disadvantaged in the employment process (Zwysen & Demireva, 2020; Zwysen et al., 2021). The findings support the idea that employment discrimination and unfair labor practices affect immigrants. Employers seek to hire potential workers with the right human, social, and cultural capital to get maximum productivity from their workers. Researchers have found that, typically, job seekers with non-Western human capital and low social and cultural capital in the United States have negative labor market experiences (Annen, 2019; Azatovna Galiakberova, 2019; Method et al., 2018).

Findings from the current study support what previous researchers have found. For example, some participants were turned away from a job fair because of their race.

Some did not get a job offer because of their accent. Others were discriminated against because of their country of origin. For still others, their educational credentials were not sufficient to get them the job; they had to further their education, although the same credentials qualified them to work in the same capacity in their home country.

Participants perceived that as discrimination against them.

### **Findings and Theoretical Framework**

This study is rooted in the learned helplessness theory (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019) and the concept of locus of control from social learning theory (Rotter, 1966). According to the learned helplessness theory (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019), when humans find themselves in an uncontrollable situation (Abramson et al., 1978), they give up hope because they are not motivated to keep trying. In this study of Ghanaian immigrants' job-search experiences, the learned helplessness theory could be applied, as an individual searching for a job might give up searching after many unsuccessful attempts. The motivation deficit would cause them to quit searching (see Virick & McKee-Ryan, 2018).

Other researchers (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019) have used the learned helplessness theory to explain how discrimination can lead to job seekers' giving up their searches (Virick & McKee-Ryan, 2018; Witt & Gearin, 2021). Whereas Virick and McKee-Ryan (2018) employed the learned helplessness theory to explain why some job seekers gave up looking for jobs because of discrimination, Witt and Gearin (2021) used it to explain why part-time adjunct teachers gave up on seeking improvements in their working conditions. The findings of the current study run counter to previous research.

Although the participants experienced several types of discrimination, and although some were on the verge of quitting their searching, no participant gave up. They all persisted and eventually found jobs despite the discriminatory challenges they encountered.

Although learned helplessness may apply in some cases, none of the participants of the current study seems to have learned to be helpless, as defined by the theory.

The current study also employed the locus of control concept from social learning theory (Lopez-Garrido, 2020; Rotter, 1966) to analyze the participants' job-search experiences. According to the concept, people perceive themselves as having either internal or external control over their behavior and its outcomes. People with a high internal locus of control perceive themselves as being in control, while those with a high external locus of control perceive the environment as controlling the outcomes of their behavior, which means they see the outcomes as a function of chance or luck. This concept was used to explain why the participants in the current study did not give up but persisted at finding a job and succeeded. Researchers have used the resilience feature of the locus of control concept to explain how job seekers (including immigrants) who once failed in their searches bounced back and got on track for success (Bennett, 2020; Caliendo, 2019; Innocenti & Golin, 2022). As with the current study's participants, researchers found that some job seekers were motivated to find a job against all odds. This finding was consistent with the locus of control concept, which holds that some individuals will not be deterred by multiple failures. In the current study, the participants often did not find a job in their first attempt, but because their motivation to find work was strong, the failure did not warrant giving up. All the participants were successful at

finding a job. Although they could not state as much, they behaved as though they had internal locus of control and could shape their own fate, despite obstacles. Previous researchers have used the helplessness theory (Seligman & Maier, 1967; Wynn, 2019) and the locus of control concept (Rotter, 1966) separately, but they have not to date been used in combination. The current study is the only one believed to employ this combination in its theoretical framework in order to explain why some job seekers give up after repeated failures while others persist in the job-search process and eventually succeed. Neither theory was challenged, but no indication of the first was found.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has limitations regarding trustworthiness. Volunteering to participate in the study was not a guarantee that participants were truthful and honest in their responses. The participants' years of residence in the United States were also taken at their word, as there was no way of verifying their statements. Another limitation was possible researcher bias. In an attempt to minimize the risk in this regard, I employed bracketing to exclude my personal opinions and perceptions. Also, the sample consisted of only 20 participants, so the findings cannot be transferred and generalized to another group of people in the same or different settings.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the literature review, findings, and limitations of this study, a few recommendations can be made. There is not an abundance of information about Ghanaian immigrants in the literature, which prolonged the search efforts for the review. This study adds to the scant body of studies. Future researchers are encouraged to delve deeply to

provide more information about the Ghanaian immigrant population in the United States. For the findings to be transferred and generalized to a broader population, researchers are encouraged to take a quantitative approach to the study of a similar Ghanaian immigrant population; a larger sample could be used to cover a broader setting, and stronger conclusions could be drawn from the findings. Another recommendation is that researchers who are not themselves immigrants or immigrants from Ghana and who are therefore free of research bias based on this particular country of origin should replicate the study.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study contain practical implications for individuals, as well as for promoting positive social change. At the individual level, the study offers Ghanaian immigrants' valuable insights that can help them to succeed in their job-search efforts. Also, the findings will enrich the existing Ghanaian immigration literature by offering a deeper and broader understanding of the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants. Furthermore, future researchers may use this study as an entry point into further research or as contributing material.

Within the research community, other researchers may be inspired by the findings from this study to expand on some of the topics addressed here. For example, the topic of discrimination can be studied beyond the scope of Ghanaian immigrants, which will provide insights into discrimination against other immigrants. An awareness of immigrants' experience of discrimination, I claim, can open a window of opportunity to curb discrimination.



## **Conclusion**

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in their job-search process in New York City. The participants shared their experiences and perceptions in searching for jobs. The study delved into their experiences learning about job openings, filling out job applications, and preparing for and attending job interviews, with regard to their successes and failures in the process.

Ghanaian immigrants in New York City rely heavily on obtaining informal information from their social network to learn about job openings. They prefer short job applications and easy-to-understand directions in English. They also use any resources available to them within their social network, ranging from consulting those who have experience with a job to using YouTube videos to prepare for job interviews. They experience employment discrimination because of their country of origin, race, and accent, but they defy all odds to find work.

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## Appendix A: Sample Interview Protocol

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Thank you for participating in this study. I am exploring the job-search experiences of Ghanaian immigrants in New York City. I have prepared a number of questions that I would like to ask you today. As we go through the questions, I ask that you answer them as honestly and completely as possible. Feel free to stop me if you need clarification of any of the questions or if you have any other questions. All information exchanged between you, the participant, and me, the researcher, will be held strictly confidential. Your responses will be recorded and saved. No identifying information will be included in the file with the responses to the questions. Also, if you wish not to participate, you can indicate this at any time before the conclusion of the session.

Introduction and warm-up: How are you doing today? We can proceed if you are ready.

Interview Question 1a: Before immigrating to the U.S., were you employed?

If yes, how did you find that employment?

If no, why weren't you employed?

Interview Question 1b: Are you currently looking for employment?

If yes, explain how you are looking.

If no (because you have found one), explain how found one.

Interview Question 2a: What do you like most about filling job applications? Explain why?

Interview Question 2b: What do you like least about filling job applications? Explain why?

Interview Question 2c: What else do you want to share about filling job applications? Explain

Interview Question 2d: What was your level of education before permanently moving to the U.S.?

Interview Question 2e: What is your current level of education?

Interview Question 2f: Do you think education level contribute to your job-search? Explain why.

Interview Question 3: How do (did) you prepare for job interviews?

Interview Question 4a: When looking for a job, do (did) you prefer using your native language (Twi) for filling the application? Why?

Interview Question 4b: When looking for a job, do (did) you prefer using your native language (Twi) for the interview? Why?

Interview Question 5a: Do (did) you get help from anyone when looking for employment?

If Yes, explain how.

If No, explain why.

Interview Question 5b: How do (did) you connect with people in your network to learn about job opportunities?

Interview Question 6a: What do you consider as discrimination? Why?

Interview Question 6b: Have you encountered any discrimination during your job search in the U.S.?

If yes, explain how.

I appreciate your time spent answering these questions. I will transcribe the interviews and email you a copy of the transcript within two weeks, so you can review and make any corrections. Thank you!

## Appendix B: Sample Data Analysis Matrix

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

	RQ: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants living in New York City with the job-search process?
<p>IQ1a: Before immigrating to the U.S., were you employed? If yes, how did you find that employment? If no, why weren't you employed?</p> <p>IQ1b: Are you currently looking for employment? If yes, explain how you are looking. If no (because you have found one), explain how you found one.</p>	<p>Sub-Question 1: How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings? A previous work experience suggest knowledge about job search. They may use their previous knowledge for the job-search process. They may use same or different job-search approach. Why same/different?</p> <p>Formal- Newspapers, employment agencies, Internet, company websites</p> <p>Informal- social media platform like tweeter, Facebook, WhatsApp, tik-tok, friends, co-workers, community neighbors, church members etc</p> <p>Both Formal: From informal to formal or vice versa</p>
<p>IQ2a: What do you like most about filling job applications? Explain why?</p> <p>IQ2b: What do you like least about filling job applications? Explain why?</p> <p>IQ2c: What else do you want to share about filling job applications? Explain</p> <p>IQ2d: What was your level of education before permanently moving to the U.S.?</p> <p>IQ2e: What is your current level of education?</p>	<p>Sub-Question 2: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants while completing job applications?</p> <p>Education levels are indicators of:</p> <p>Job opportunities</p> <p>Job types</p> <p>Income levels</p> <p>Job-search approach: formal, informal, or both</p>

<p>IQ2f: Do you think education level contribute to your job-search? Explain why.</p>	
<p>IQ3: How do (did) you prepare for job interviews?</p>	<p>Sub-Question 3: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants preparing for job interviews? Levels of preparation indicate how they perform at the interview which also translates into (not) getting the job.</p>
<p>IQ4a: When looking for a job, do (did) you prefer using your native language (Twi) for filling the application? Why? IQ4b: When looking for a job, do (did) you prefer using your native language (Twi) for the interview? Why?</p>	<p>Sub-Question 4: How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experiences with the job-search process? The difficult levels indicate the ease with which they understand the application process, as in the language proficiency (reading, writing, speaking, etc), and information to provide on the application</p>
<p>IQ5a: Do (did) you get help from anyone when looking for employment? If Yes, explain how. If No, explain why. IQ5b: How do (did) you connect with people in your network to learn about job opportunities?</p>	<p>Sub-Question 5: How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process? Informal- social media platform like tweeter, Facebook, WhatsApp, tik-tok, friends, co-workers, community neighbors, church members etc The way people connect with others can give an idea about how they can hear about jobs openings and how they can apply for such jobs. In-person, or online, as in social media network. The reasons for connecting to certain people may be job related, religious, social interactions, get or give help from others, etc</p>
<p>IQ6a: What do you consider as discrimination? Why? IQ6b: Have you encountered any discrimination during your job search in the U.S.? If yes, explain how.</p>	<p>Sub-Question 6: What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process? Perceptions On the grounds of comparing: - Educational levels - Place of origin - Previous (past and recent) work experiences - Race - Taste or merit-based discriminations</p>

## Appendix C: Code List

Codes	Number of Participants	Number of excerpts extracted
Finding a job through work study	1	2
Getting information from church platforms	5	7
Knowing job opportunities through networks	17	35
Learning about job through social gatherings	3	4
Learning about jobs in face-face connection	8	14
Learning about jobs through experienced ones	2	2
Learning about jobs through family members	2	5
Learning about jobs through friends	13	20
Learning about jobs through phone conversations	4	7
Learning about jobs through social media	16	28
Learning about jobs through job fairs	1	1
Finding employment through recommendations	3	8
Learning about jobs through referrals	6	10
Searching for jobs online	10	14
Not getting help with job application	4	9
Learning about jobs through newspapers	1	2
Familiarity with the job position	1	2
Finding about job longevity	1	2
Being there on time	2	2
Knowing how to prepare for interview	2	4

Knowing what is on resume	2	2
Knowing what is in job description	4	6
Knowing about the job requirement	7	8
Researching about the company	7	14
Pulling back from home experience	1	1
Using social media for the interview	1	3
Going online for interview ideas	2	2
Practicing for the interview	2	2
Relying on others interview experiences	2	2
Using YouTube for interview ideas	4	5
Getting help for the interview	5	6
Looking for possible questions	6	7
Interview preparation impact on job search	1	1
Awareness of dress code	11	24
Getting relaxed	1	1
Praying before the interview	2	2
Preference to native language	7	12
Preference to English language	18	41
Clarity in English language	1	1
Having confidence to get the job	1	1
Hearing from employers after application	1	1
Likening for easy steps applications	1	1

Likening for open-ended questions	1	1
Normal questions	1	1
Opportunity to show interest	1	2
Preference for non-discriminatory jobs	1	1
Preference for not too many questions	1	2
Preference for questions about me	1	1
Preference for understandable questions	1	1
Preference for statement prompts	1	1
Preferred uploading resume	1	2
Putting in information at own pace	1	1
The prospects of more pay	1	2
Getting help with resume	2	4
Having applications forms readily available	2	2
Likening online applications	2	2
Preference for paper applications	2	2
Qualification for the job	2	2
Opportunity to show experience	3	3
Preference for straightforward job-related questions	3	3
Preference for easy applications	5	7
Preference for short applications	6	6
Preference for simple applications	6	11
Ability discrimination	1	1



Disability discrimination	1	1
Discrimination by car driven	1	1
Experience discrimination	1	1
Accent discrimination role in job search	8	11
Discrimination based on country of origin	11	19
College type discrimination	1	1
Cultural background discrimination	1	1
Place of living discrimination	1	1
Prior relationship discrimination	1	1
Ethnicity discrimination	1	2
Job discrimination	2	2
Educational discrimination	3	3
Religious discrimination	3	3
Place of origin discrimination	9	14
Age discrimination role in job search	4	6
Gender discrimination role in job search	4	4
Racial discrimination role in job search	17	26
Being asked a lot of information	5	6
Dislike for long applications	3	4
Dislike for too many pages	3	7
Dislike for unnecessary questions	3	5
Struggles with getting references	3	7

Understanding questions with difficulty	3	5
Dislike for complicated questions	2	2
Dislike for hard questions	2	2
Dislike for job unrelated questions	2	3
Engaging in repetitive tasks	2	3
Experience requirement challenges	2	6
Not receiving application confirmations	2	2
Time consuming	2	2
Being frustrated while waiting	1	1
Disappointments for not offered the job	1	1
Dislike for critical thinking questions	1	1
Dislike for job search competitions	1	1
Dislike for many documents	1	1
Dislike for non-relevant questions	2	4
Dislike for online applications	1	1
Dislike for too many questions	1	1
Disliked traveling experience for application	1	1
Feeling of anxiety	1	2
Feeling of nervousness	1	4
Feeling of wasted energy	1	1
Non-sense making questions	1	2
Not receiving calls for interviews	1	1

## Appendix D: Codes Grouping

## Research Subquestion 1: How do Ghanaian immigrants learn about job openings?

Initial Theme 1: Finding a job through work study	Initial Theme 2: Learning about jobs through referrals and recommendations	Initial Theme 3: Finding jobs without help	Initial Theme 4: Having job related conversations with people	Initial Theme 5: Learning about jobs through job fairs	Initial Theme 6: Learning about jobs through newspapers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding a job through work study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding employment through recommendations</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through referrals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding jobs without any help</li> <li>• Searching for jobs online</li> <li>• Not getting help with job applications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discovering job opportunities through networks</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through social gatherings</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through face-face connection</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through people with experience in the field</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through family members</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through friends</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through phone conversations</li> <li>• Learning about jobs through social media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning about jobs through job fairs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning about jobs through newspapers</li> </ul>

Research Subquestion 2: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when completing job applications?

Initial Theme 1: Being proactive and strategic	Initial Theme 2: Uncomfortable job-finding experiences	Initial Theme 3: Familiarity with the job position	Initial Theme 4: Favorable job application experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking out advice for job applicants</li> <li>• Applying for multiple jobs</li> <li>• Being able to read and write</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being asked a lot of information</li> <li>• Being frustrated while waiting</li> <li>• Disappointment at not being offered the job</li> <li>• Dislike for complicated questions</li> <li>• Dislike for critical thinking questions</li> <li>• Dislike for hard questions</li> <li>• Dislike for job-search competitions</li> <li>• Dislike for job-unrelated questions</li> <li>• Dislike for long applications</li> <li>• Dislike for many documents</li> <li>• Dislike for irrelevant questions</li> <li>• Dislike for online applications</li> <li>• Dislike for too many questions</li> <li>• Dislike for too many pages</li> <li>• Dislike for unnecessary questions</li> <li>• Dislike for having to travel to apply</li> <li>• Engaging in repetitive tasks</li> <li>• Experience requirements</li> <li>• Feeling anxious</li> <li>• Feeling nervous</li> <li>• Wasting energy</li> <li>• Wasting time</li> <li>• Nonsensical questions</li> <li>• Not receiving application confirmation</li> <li>• Not receiving calls for interviews</li> <li>• Struggling with getting references</li> <li>• Time-consuming</li> <li>• Understanding questions with difficulty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Familiarity with the job position</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting help with résumés</li> <li>• Having application forms readily available</li> <li>• Having the confidence to get the job</li> <li>• Hearing from employers after applying</li> <li>• Applications with easy steps applications</li> <li>• Open-ended questions</li> <li>• Online applications</li> <li>• Being asked normal questions</li> <li>• Opportunities to show experience</li> <li>• Opportunities to show interest</li> <li>• Easy applications</li> <li>• Non-discriminatory jobs</li> <li>• Being asked a reasonable number of questions</li> <li>• Paper applications</li> <li>• Questions about “me”</li> <li>• Short applications</li> <li>• Simple applications</li> <li>• Straightforward job-related questions</li> <li>• Understandable questions</li> <li>• Comprehensible statement prompts</li> <li>• Option to upload a résumé</li> <li>• Inputting information at one’s own pace</li> <li>• Being qualified for the job</li> <li>• The prospect of more pay</li> </ul>

Research Subquestion 3: What are the experiences of Ghanaian immigrants when preparing for a job interview?

Initial Theme 1: Having knowledge about the company and job	Initial Theme 2: Looking presentable	Initial Theme 3: Searching for interview content	Initial Theme 4: Engaging in meditation before interview
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finding out about job longevity</li> <li>• Knowing what is in the job description</li> <li>• Knowing what is on one's résumé</li> <li>• Knowing the job requirements</li> <li>• Arriving on time</li> <li>• Researching the company</li> <li>• Gathering documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview preparations impact on job search outcomes</li> <li>• Awareness of dress code</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Getting help for the interview</li> <li>• Going online for interview ideas</li> <li>• Knowing how to prepare for the interview</li> <li>• Looking for possible questions</li> <li>• Practicing for the interview</li> <li>• Relying on others' interviewing experiences</li> <li>• Using social media for the interview</li> <li>• Using YouTube for interview ideas</li> <li>• Pulling from experience back home</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Praying before the interview</li> <li>• Getting relaxed</li> <li>• Meditating</li> </ul>

Research Subquestion 4: How does language impact Ghanaian immigrants' experiences with the job-search process?

Initial Theme 1: Competence with the English language	Initial Theme 2: Applicants' language preference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarity in English language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preference for the English language</li> <li>• Preference for one's native language</li> </ul>

Research Subquestion 5: How do social networks contribute to Ghanaian immigrants' job-search process?

Initial Theme 1: Getting information from church platforms	Initial Theme 2: Getting information through social media	Initial Theme 3: Participating in a family group

### Research Subquestion 6: What is the role of perceived discrimination in Ghanaian

immigrants' job-search process?

Initial Theme 1: Areas of discrimination based on behavior	Initial Theme 2: Discrimination based on country of origin	Initial Theme 3: discrimination based on identity	Initial Theme 4: Discrimination based on association
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability</li> <li>• Accent</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Car driven</li> <li>• Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Others' discrimination experience</li> <li>• Personal discrimination experience</li> <li>• Encountering discrimination in job searches</li> <li>• Discrimination based on place of origin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Race</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College type</li> <li>• Education</li> <li>• Job</li> <li>• Place of living</li> <li>• Place of origin</li> <li>• Religion</li> <li>• Cultural background</li> <li>• Prior relationships</li> </ul>

### Others: Other Observations

Theme 1: Contribution of education to job search	Theme 2: Employment status before immigrating	Theme 3: Job-search strategy used in Ghana
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contribution of education to job search experience</li> <li>• Education level</li> <li>• Current education level</li> <li>• Education level before immigrating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment status before immigrating</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job search strategy used in Ghana</li> </ul>

## Appendix E: Emerged Themes

Themes	Initial Themes	Codes	Number of Participants	References in the Data	
Locating sources of job information	Finding a job through work study	Finding a job through work study	1	2	
	Getting information from church platforms	Getting information from church platforms	5	7	
	Having job-related conversations with people	Knowing job opportunities through networks	Knowing job opportunities through networks	20	115
		Learning about job through social gatherings	Learning about job through social gatherings		
		Learning about jobs in face-face connection	Learning about jobs in face-face connection		
		Learning about jobs through experienced ones	Learning about jobs through experienced ones		
		Learning about jobs through family members	Learning about jobs through family members		
		Learning about jobs through friends	Learning about jobs through friends		
		Learning about jobs through phone conversations	Learning about jobs through phone conversations		
	Learning about jobs through social media	Learning about jobs through social media			
Learning about jobs through job fairs	Learning about jobs through job fairs	1	1		
Learning about jobs through referrals and recommendations	Finding employment through recommendations	Finding employment through recommendations	8	18	
	Learning about jobs through referrals	Learning about jobs through referrals			
Being proactive and strategic	Finding jobs without any help	Searching for jobs online	13	36	
		Lacking help with job applications			Lacking help with job applications
	Learning about jobs through newspapers	Learning about jobs through newspapers	1	2	

	Becoming familiar with the job position	Becoming familiar with the job position	1	2
		Finding about job longevity	18	89
		Knowing what is in job description		
		Knowing about the job requirement		
	Acquiring knowledge about company and the search process	Being there on time		
		Knowing how to prepare for interview		
		Knowing what is on your resume		
		Researching about the company		
		Gathering documents		
	Searching for interview content	Pulling from experience back home	14	28
		Using social media for the interview		
		Going online for interview ideas		
		Practicing for the interview		
		Relying on others' interview experiences		
		Using YouTube for interview ideas		
		Getting help for the interview		
		Looking for possible questions		
	Looking presentable	Interview preparation impact on job search outcome	1	1
		Awareness of dress code		
	Meditating before an interview	Relaxing	2	2
		Praying before the interview		



Applying for jobs with clear job descriptions	Applicants' language preferences	Preference for native language	20	53
		Preference for the English language		
	Competence with the English language	Clear use of English	1	1
	Favorable job application experiences	Having confidence towards getting the job	20	60
		Hearing from employers after applying		
		Filling out applications with easy steps		
		Answering open-ended questions		
		Being asked normal questions		
		Having opportunities to show interest		
		Finding non-discriminatory jobs		
		Dealing with reasonable number of questions		
		Being asked questions about "me"		
		Answering understandable questions		
		Dealing with clear statement prompts		
		Uploading resumes		
	Inputting in information at one's own pace			
	Encountering the prospect of more pay			
	Getting help with one's resume			
	Having application forms readily available			
	Applying online			

		Using paper applications Being qualified for the job Having opportunities to show experience Answering straightforward job-related questions Filling out easy applications Filling out short applications Filling out simple applications		
Experiencing uncomfortable and discriminatory circumstances	Areas of discrimination based on behavior	Ability	9	15
		Disability		
		Car driven		
		Experience		
	Areas of discrimination based on country of origin	Accent	11	19
		Discrimination based on country of origin		
	Areas of discrimination based on association	College type	16	28
		Cultural background		
		Place of residence		
		Prior relationship		
		Job		
		Education		
Religion				
Place of origin				
Areas of discrimination based on identity	Age	17	36	
	Gender			
	Race			
	Ethnicity			

	Uncomfortable job finding experiences	Request for a lot of information Long applications Unnecessary questions Difficulty getting references Trouble understanding questions Complicated questions Hard questions Irrelevant questions Repetitive tasks Experience required Not receiving application confirmations Time-consuming processes Being frustrated while waiting Disappointments for not offered the job Critical thinking questions Job search competitions Too many documents Online applications Traveling experience for application Feeling of anxiety Feeling of nervousness Feeling of wasted energy Non-sense making questions Not receiving calls for interviews	19	76
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