Educational Histories of Newcomer Immigrant Youth: From Countries of Origin to the United States

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EDUCATIONAL HISTORIES OF NEWCOMER IMMIGRANT YOUTH:
FROM COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN TO THE UNITED STATES

by

JOANNA YIP

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2016
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Joanna Yip

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

September 7, 2016

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

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Joanna Yip

Advisor: Ofelia García

This dissertation details the educational histories and linguistic portraits of newcomer immigrant youth in their countries of origin, and provided accounts of their academic trajectories after arrival in the United States. The data provide evidence of poor quality instruction and educational environments in low-income sending countries. The study shows that prior schooling experiences in the country of origin have an impact on school readiness, the degree to which immigrant youth are prepared for education in secondary classrooms in the U.S. The dissertation also provides an analysis of how pre-migration education interacts with educational performance after immigration, leading to academic acceleration or stagnation. This research project demonstrates how educational institutions in the countries of origin and in the United States have systematically enacted symbolic violence, mediating and withholding linguistic and educational resources, as well as learning opportunities, from immigrant adolescents.
Acknowledgments

When Professor Jean Anyon passed away, I was in the middle of data collection for this dissertation. I had not even written a memo for her at the point it became clear that she was no longer well enough to actively work with students. It was devastating for me to lose my dissertation advisor, not only because I would lack her guidance for the most difficult part of completing my doctorate degree, but because Jean transformed the way I thought and wrote about the world. As one of her "orphaned" students, it was her spirit, her academic work and intellect, and the memories I had of her, that constantly pushed me to think about theory, and about educational equity and justice. As I completed this project, I continued to draw upon what she taught me after she passed away. I could not have started, nor could I have finished, this dissertation without her. I hope that her footprints are evident in the writing that follows, and that, as one of her students, I have channeled a bit of her work and ideas.

I want to thank Professor Ofelia García for graciously adopting me after Jean died. She has guided me to think critically about how young people learn language, and I have learned from her how important it is to champion and advocate for the rights of language-minority children. I thank her for patiently holding me accountable for finishing this work.

I also want to thank Professor Nicholas Michelli and Tatyana Kleyn for serving on the supervisory committee and for providing crucial feedback and guidance.

Without the support of Alexandra Anormaliza and Nedda de Castro, I would not have had the flexibility in my work schedule to complete the requirements for the Phd program at the Graduate Center.

I am indebted to my colleagues at the Graduate Center for reading and listening to me talk about my work: Carly Huelsenbeck, Jeremy Greenfield, Susan McCullough, Bisola Neil,
and Lisa Auslander.

Much of the thinking in this dissertation was informed and shaped by my experiences as a teacher and instructional coach working in the Internationals Network for Public Schools. My collaboration with the educators in those schools challenged me to think deeply about how to teach and serve newcomer immigrant youth. In particular, I want to thank Dariana Castro and Steve Watson who have encouraged me since the beginning of my graduate studies.

I thank my parents, Billy and Agnes Yip, for bearing with me all these years and for giving me the freedom and space to pursue yet another degree. Their patience and love for me knows no bounds and they were the very first newcomer immigrant youth I ever met.

I could not have made it through the last stretch of writing without my close friends: Jesse Mangan, Bethany Brown, Manni Lee, Melissa de Leon, Dennis Caindec, Symphony Chau, and Lynn Huang. They kept me accountable and supported me when I wanted to give up. I want to especially thank Dmitri Christopher, Carly Huelsenbeck, Collin Lawrence, and Jesse Mangan for helping me to proofread and copyedit.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge a few students who motivated me to write this dissertation. Their stories and the challenges they have endured as immigrant youth exemplify the reasons why I applied to graduate school and conducted this research project in the first place. These wonderful students are: Ali Mosaed, Ariel Hernandez, Lesly Manzanarez, Edgar Rojas, and Wensi Wu.
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Part I

Newcomer Immigrant Youth: A Study of Their Educational Histories
Chapter 1: Educational Histories of Immigrant Youth

Introduction

In 2015, I attended a teacher training hosted by the New York City Department of Education on identifying low literacy immigrant students with inconsistent formal education. In regards to enrollment and program placement for newcomer immigrant youth arriving in the United States for the first time, a district official explained that the most appropriate placement for a student when entering the school system from another country is at the grade level they last completed in their country of origin. The official remarked, “We do not stand in judgment of the educational systems of other countries,” and such a policy would ensure that immigrant youth are not held back unnecessarily.

Indeed, immigrant youth should maintain the course of their academic careers. Yet schools also need to consider a number of factors when enrolling immigrant students newly arrived from their countries of origin with varied learning needs. The enrollment policy is predicated on the assumption that education elsewhere is commensurate with that of the U.S. when, as I show in this dissertation, it is not. I stand in judgment of educational systems of other countries all the time because I am confronted with the task of educating foreign-born immigrant students who are often ill-prepared for schooling in America. When newcomer immigrant youth enroll in U.S. secondary schools, questions about their prior schooling become paramount. The need to scrutinize educational contexts in the countries of origin is inescapable for any educator that is responsible for what happens to immigrant youth after they arrive in the U.S. This dissertation shows how pre-migration learning opportunities have implications for their schooling in the U.S. Without information about a student’s prior schooling, educators cannot adequately design programs, instruction, or interventions that target the complex needs of
immigrant youth.

This research project explored what education and schooling is like in Bangladesh, West Africa, Yemen, and the Fujian province of China, from the retrospective vantage point of immigrant students reflecting on their educational experiences after having lived and studied in the U.S. In this dissertation, I compiled a set of comprehensive educational histories of immigrant youth, filtered through my perspective as their teacher, that provide crucial and relevant information about their schooling experiences in their countries of origin. The findings detail the conditions that shaped the educational experiences of newcomer immigrant youth during the time they lived as children in their countries of origin. The study surfaces a number of indicators and even red flags that educators in the U.S. can look for when determining the best possible educational program to serve their needs of newly arrived students. These histories are also useful to teachers and practitioners who seek to create human-centered interventions in educational settings. The students’ accounts of their educational histories present the complex needs of newcomers and provide clarity around strategies that can be leveraged to ensure their academic success. Rather than simply indict the educational systems of other countries, I will show how some home country contexts are doing a poor job of educating children due to macro-economic challenges, a lack of investment in education, and ineffective educational policies and practices. Consequently, the struggles that immigrant adolescents face in U.S. secondary schools are direct consequences of the educational opportunities they had access to prior to immigration.

**Newcomer Immigrant Youth in U.S. Secondary Schools**

The current and future migrant flow to the United States has created a demand for educational research that examines how well the education system is serving an increasingly
pluralistic immigrant population with a diversity of educational experiences. Immigrant children are relocating with their families to new destinations, and increasingly, from varied countries of origin (Marrow, 2009; Massey, 2008). At the same time, the population of foreign-born youth has also grown (Holdaway & Alba, 2009). Among them, immigrant youth arrive in the United States during the critical period of adolescent development and face a unique set of educational challenges (Mace-Matluck, 1998; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008). The proximity of their arrival to high school completion and to college entrance means that the linguistic, academic, and developmental needs of immigrant adolescents set them apart from other children of immigrants (Advocates for Children, 2010; Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010). In this dissertation, newcomer immigrant youth refer to first generation adolescents who immigrate to a host country “at the midway point of their educational trajectory,” typically in middle or high school (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010, pg 602). While newcomers are considered those who have spent less than 3 years in the United States, what is more important to note in this study is their duration of formal schooling in their country of origin and their age at arrival in proximity to their initial enrollment in high school.

In the brief period during middle and high school, newcomer immigrant youth are expected to adjust to American society, to learn and develop advanced literacy in English, to reach a sufficient level of college readiness, to achieve the same levels of performance as native-born counterparts, and to graduate from high school, no matter how ill-prepared they are for schooling in an advanced, knowledge-based economy (Short & Boyson, 2012; Suárez-Orazco, et al., 2008). They do “double the work” in a short amount of time to meet the linguistic, cognitive, and academic demands of secondary educational institutions and their accountability policies (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Often, their efforts are not rewarded and academic performance
declines when they cannot accelerate their learning quickly enough to meet the increasing academic and linguistic requirements of a rigorous high school curriculum (Stiefel, et al., 2010; Suárez-Orazco, et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Rhodes, & Milburn, 2009). High schools that serve immigrant adolescents must be extraordinary in their pedagogy and practice to avoid penalties for poor educational outcomes, which are measured by mandated accountability targets such as high school graduation rates, credit accumulation, and college readiness metrics (Bartlett & García, 2011; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2011).

Newcomer immigrant youth face unique challenges. Many are learning English and have varying levels of formal education. They often have low literacy in English, and some are also below grade-level in literacy in their home language. Among them are students who have significant gaps in their schooling and emerging literacy as a result (Advocates for Children, 2010; DeCapua, Smathers, Tang, Lixing, & Frank, 2007; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006; Short & Boyson, 2012). The past educational backgrounds of these students have not prepared them for academic studies in core content areas at the secondary level in an advanced education system. Short & Boyson provide a vivid description of the perfect storm of challenges that these students face:

Not only do these newcomers have to master complex course content, usually with incomplete background knowledge and little understanding of the way that US schools are structured and operate, but they have fewer years to master the English language […] time is critical. In addition, the secondary level newcomers are enrolling at an age beyond which literacy instruction is usually provided to students and most teachers are not prepared to teach initial components of literacy, like phonics and fluency […] Thus, these newcomers are performing double the work of native English speakers in the country’s
middle and high schools, and often without the benefit of academic literacy and grade-
level schooling in their first language to draw from. (2012, p. 2)

Furthermore, newcomer youth are contending with the socio-emotional transition to a new
culture, school community, and neighborhood (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010). Many of these students are reuniting with parents they have not seen for years and are dealing with a host of psychological barriers to learning (Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, Louie, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, Todorova, Louie, 2002; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, Suárez-Orozco, 2011).

**Educational Outcomes of Immigrant Adolescents**

Not surprisingly, the educational outcomes of newcomer immigrant youth in U.S. schools are disproportionately low. In New York City, where the participants in this study attended high school, 74.1% of high school English Language Learners (ELLs) are foreign-born, and a majority of them require specialized instructional strategies and institutional interventions that are not often recognized or understood by policy makers and practitioners alike (NYCDOE, 2009a). This subgroup’s 4-year high school graduation rate stands about 19 points behind the overall graduation rate in New York City (NYCDOE, 2009b). Some newcomer students, understanding the steep climb toward educational attainment before them, forego attending school in the U.S. altogether after their arrival (Fry, 2005; Holdaway & Alba, 2009; Martinez, 2009). If they persist past high school graduation, they often require extensive post-secondary remediation if they pursue higher education.

Empirical studies of immigrant children present mixed findings. In some studies, immigrant children reach relative parity with their American-born counterparts in educational success, and even demonstrate a pattern of super-achievement, overcoming seemingly
insurmountable challenges to outperform their peers (Kasinitz, 2008; Kasinitz, et al., 2008; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Schwartz & Stiefel, 2006; White & Glick, 2009). (These studies include American-born children of immigrants and do not disaggregate the educational outcomes of foreign-born immigrant youth.) Other studies show that while the children of immigrants experience educational mobility that surpasses their parents, they do not achieve parity with more advantaged populations in the U.S. (Holdaway & Alba, 2009; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Short & Boyson, 2012; Zhou, et al., 2008).

Studies that disaggregate subgroups of immigrant children by age at arrival reveal an “accelerated decline” in educational attainment, one that is more severe for some immigrant groups than others based on socioeconomic status and country of origin (Conger, Schwartz, & Steifel, 2008; Hirschman, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010; Zhou, et al., 2008). Even as newcomer adolescents put in double the work to pursue education, they paradoxically experience low performance in academic achievement based on GPA and test score data within a few years of coming to America (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2009; Zhou, et al., 2008). This downward trajectory is precipitous and dramatic, as the academic load in secondary schools becomes more demanding, and as the linguistic and content knowledge required grow increasingly out of reach (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2009).

**Existing Research on Newcomer Immigrant Adolescents**

The reasons behind these educational outcomes are varied. In the research literature, there is consensus that different variables lead to some immigrant students faring well, and many others managing poorly, with a marked difference in outcomes between immigrant groups. The predictive variables fall into the following categories: social class, social practices and
perceptions, educational opportunities, age at arrival, language and literacy development, and youth development factors.

Social Class

Most important of the characteristics and traits that impact educational trajectories are related to social class. Educational success is contingent on the students’ socio-economic status, parental levels of human capital, the educational selectivity of their parents, their economic integration into the context of reception, the political and economic contexts of their home countries, and immigration status (Conger, Schwartz, & Steifel, 2008; Feliciano, 2006; Filindra, et al., 2011; Kasinitz, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2011). Other variables that have been demonstrated to impact educational outcomes include number of years in the U.S., the level of English proficiency of family members, ethnicity and nativity (Conger, Schwartz, & Steifel, 2008; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, Yoshikawa, Teranishi, & Suárez-Orozco, M.M., 2011; White & Glick, 2009).

Social class differences and material conditions have significant relevance to the academic preparedness of immigrant adolescents to perform in educational contexts in the U.S. Socio-economic status determines access to consistent and quality educational opportunities and resources in their countries of origin. Because immigrants originate from different political economies, the varying social class advantages they bring to the U.S. play a role in the divergent educational outcomes of different immigrant groups (Foner, 2001; Kasinitz, et al., 2008; Rumbaut & Portes, 2001).
Social Practices & Perceptions

Studies have found a number of social practices and perceptions that play a role in educational success for immigrant children (Jia, et al., 2014). The use of social networks and social capital to acquire resources and information is crucial to educational attainment (Enriquez, 2011; Zhou, et al., 2008). Many familial and community expectations provide socio-emotional motivation to students that enable them to overcome incredible educational deficits – a dual frame of reference, family support, and a desire to realize their parents’ expectations of economic mobility (Enriquez, 2011; Louie, 2004; Smith, 2008; Zhou, et al., 2008). As well, the pull of employment opportunities for low-income immigrant families can, by necessity, trump education as a priority, leading to differences in academic performance (Hagelskamp, Suárez-Orozco, & Hughes, 2010). This is especially true of immigrant adolescents, who arrive in the U.S. old enough that the opportunity costs of pursuing education at an older age are significant compared to the benefits of immediate labor force participation (Stiefel, et al., 2010). Immigrant youth are more likely drawn to the labor market when they perceive education as an untenably challenging option for socio-economic advancement (ibid).

Educational Opportunities

Educational success for immigrant youth is also influenced by variables specific to learning opportunities and schooling processes. The role that quality and consistent schooling plays cannot be understated and will be examined in detail in this dissertation (Mace-Matluck, 1998). Children who had access to consistent and high-quality schooling in their countries of origin are much more likely to have developed a basic level of literacy before coming to the U.S. (ibid). As a result of continuous academic instruction, they are more likely to have disciplinary
knowledge they can tap when accessing high school content in the U.S. (ibid). Consistent schooling also inculcates an understanding of behaviors and practices used in academic settings. On the other hand, poor quality or disrupted pre-migration educational experiences means that many immigrant adolescents never developed mastery in a variety of subjects in preparation for a rigorous high school curriculum (ibid).

*Age at Arrival*

Teenage immigrants enter the U.S. education system around the mid-point of their academic trajectories, a critical factor for this subgroup. Immigration during this critical period of youth development, and precisely at the point at which the secondary curriculum places increasing literacy and content-knowledge demands on students, can lead to differences in academic pathways. While stages of adolescent development is often prescribed and normalized based on middle-class standards of age-appropriate academic performance and developmental benchmarks, Isabel Martinez theorizes that immigrant youth experience adolescence in ways that are characterized by labor force participation. Their adolescence is burdened by what are considered adult and domestic responsibilities because of low-income status (2009). Hence, their transition to adulthood is abbreviated, taking on independence in a way that is different for middle-class American-born high school students. Furthermore, such variations in developmental pathways are not taken into consideration in the K-12 curriculum, which is based on sequential and recursive learning progressions predicated on continued education in one place for American-born students.

Research on the children of immigrants typically lump the offspring of immigrant parents together, without disaggregating outcomes by age at arrival or by length of time spent in U.S.
schools. Such an oversight leads to misguided assumptions about the developmental trajectories of immigrant youth. This dissertation shows how immigrant youth do not follow conventional trajectories because of their pre-migration education and immigration experience.

Language & Literacy Development

A crucial factor in the educational trajectories of immigrant adolescents is the disruption in their language and literacy development brought on by the migration experience. Their linguistic repertoire in their home language is in an inchoate phase, still developing complex linguistic structures, especially those needed for advanced literacy. They are uprooted to live in a different country at a pivotal point of linguistic development.

Language acquisition theory has established that development in new languages is heavily influenced by fluency in a person’s primary language, a process that undergirds the language development of immigrant youth (Cummins, 1979b; Cummins, 1981b; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Menken & Kleyn, 2010; Monroy Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004). Teenage migrants need to have developed fluency in their primary language well enough in order to meaningfully transfer those linguistic resources to learning a new language (Bartlett & García, 2011; Cummins, 1979a; Cummins, 1981a; Monroy Ochoa & Cadiero-Kaplan, 2004).

Additionally, the ability to acquire a new language from natural communicative contexts is heavily influenced by the social context in which the language is used (Jia, et al., 2014). Teen immigrants must adjust to a foreign social context during this process.

Moreover, developing proficiency in English requires time, often much longer than immigrant students are allowed in secondary schools (Cummins, 1979a). Immigrant adolescents need time to develop familiarity with the linguistic schema and literacy practices used in English
language academic texts and contexts, such as those that appear on standardized exams and in complex academic tasks typically assigned in secondary schools (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). Given that one of the most important determinants of academic success and high school completion is English proficiency, it is essential that immigrant adolescents accelerate their language acquisition in order to graduate from high school in four years (Cummins, 1981b; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008). Yet, this demand for acceleration is incongruous with the natural development of language acquisition, which often exceeds the time that immigrant adolescents are allowed to remain enrolled in secondary schools (Bartlett & García, 2011).

The ability of newcomer immigrants to develop academic proficiency in English is highly dependent on their proficiency in their primary language (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Menken & Kleyn, 2010). Programs that utilize the students’ primary language lead to better outcomes (Bartlett & García, 2011). The interdependence hypothesis, or theory of linguistic transfer, theorizes that well-developed native literacy skills facilitate the process of acquiring literacy in another language, and that continued development of language leads to academic, linguistic, and cognitive advantages (Cummins, 1979b). Therefore, it is imperative for schools to utilize the primary language of the students to support their linguistic and academic development. Menken and Kleyn demonstrate, however, that in a subtractive schooling environment, this transfer of linguistic resources is impeded (2010). This process is complicated by threshold theory, the idea that a threshold of language proficiency must be reached in order for students to experience the linguistic and cognitive benefits of bilingualism (ibid). The fact that many of the students have not reached this threshold level because of the disruption of migration, or because of the poor quality of their prior schooling, means that students need additional time and support for the benefits of bilingualism to take effect.
Immigrant adolescents may not have all developed high levels of literacy in their primary languages because of the poor educational environments in their countries of origin (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007). As a result, newcomer students are often not prepared for a secondary school curriculum that utilizes complex academic language and texts, embedded in discipline-specific knowledge (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). Some teen immigrants never developed advanced literacy in their primary language because it is not used in formal educational settings. While the students are orally fluent, they may not have literacy skills in that language to transfer to developing literacy in a new language; indeed, some may even be learning to read for the first time in English (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

**Youth Development**

Furthermore, adolescence is a highly adaptive period of growth and transition, with socio-emotional challenges that are exacerbated by physical growth and changes in social contexts. What is already a tumultuous period of development becomes exponentially more challenging because of linguistic and academic barriers, the need to recreate a sense of belonging in a new country, and the challenge of managing a bicultural identity (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2011). Traumatizing experiences of migration can also disrupt this critical period of development with lasting effects (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2011). The educational experiences of teen migrants after they arrive in U.S. secondary schools are characterized by extreme frustration, and lead to high drop out rates (Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007; Stiefel, et al., 2010). The social stigma attached to having to catch up on basic skills while learning alongside their native-born peers in secondary classrooms creates both academic and psychological obstacles to learning (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2011). The drop-out rate for low literacy students
with inconsistent schooling, a subgroup that makes up 38% of all foreign-born students who drop-out from high school, is as high as 70% (Fry, 2005; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006). The daunting task of catching up in addition to mastering the secondary school curriculum, while they are learning a new and complex language is overwhelming (Advocates for Children, 2010; Mace-Matluck, 1998; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

These developmental processes are complicated by new cultural and social norms that shape the students’ experiences and behavior, reunification with estranged or separated family members, and negotiating their ethnic identity in a pluralistic society (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2011). These factors impact how fast students can accelerate content mastery, language proficiency, and academic performance (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2009). The reception and level of support immigrant adolescents receive in their new learning environments in America also contribute to educational outcomes (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008).

**The Need for Educational Histories of Immigrant Adolescents to Inform Educational Practice**

Despite the existing body of research, current studies of newcomer immigrant youth do not focus on access and quality of education in the countries of origin as a potentially significant factor influencing educational outcomes. The nature of and degree of impact that home country education has on achievement has not yet been clearly established in educational research. While this growing population of students tries to accelerate their learning of requisite academic skills in their race toward high school graduation, their possibility of success is dependent on their prior educational experiences in their countries of origin. This dissertation details what home country education is like for immigrant youth and explores the interaction between prior
schooling and education after immigration to the U.S.

My analysis of educational contexts in the countries of origin point to a number of salient features in the educational histories of immigrant youth. These include: the political economy of the countries of origin, whether immigrant youth had high-quality educational experiences in their primary school education, their development of literacy practices, and the interaction between their prior schooling with their academic performance after immigrating to the United States. I argue that the extent to which immigrant youth had access to quality and consistent educational experiences in their countries of origin is connected to educational achievement after arrival in the host country (Advocates for Children, 2010; Mace-Matluck, 1998).

This study utilizes in-depth interviews with emergent bilinguals to construct educational histories that paint a picture of the challenges they faced in education prior to arrival in the U.S. In my analysis, I detail the inadequacies of education systems that “pass for educational practice” in home country contexts, and how such inadequate education leads to later challenges after immigration. I outline the factors that contribute to school readiness, the degree of preparation that immigrant adolescents have for schooling in American. I show how educational contexts in the countries of origin have systematically withheld knowledge from children, and how over the course of their entire educational trajectory, immigrant adolescents experienced missed opportunities for learning that impacted their chances for educational success. In particular, I focus on literacy development and how the transfer of literacy practices from the country of origin to literacy in English is a significant component of academic acceleration.

The Impact of Current Educational Policies of Accountability on Immigrant Students

The educational histories of immigrant youth collected in this dissertation suggest that
there is a misalignment between the demands of educational accountability policies and the unique educational and developmental needs of immigrant adolescents. Schools that serve immigrant adolescents are compelled to speedily compensate for a childhood of poor or interrupted education, often a consequence of poverty and social class in their home countries (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008). Without adequate institutional support, such policies create conditions for educational collision, as schools and immigrant adolescents race to meet a mandate of acceleration.

Educational success, as defined by current accountability policies, is achievement that converges to a native-born, middle-class, English-speaking mean. Accountability policies in education apply the same set of academic standards to immigrant adolescents as they do to their native-born peers, but fail to provide adequate resources needed to reach those standards. Educational systems that assume material conditions and educational opportunities are the same for immigrant adolescents as for all other students ignore structural barriers, policies of discrimination, and an uneven distribution of resources that immigrant adolescents face (García, et al., 2008; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Koelsch, 2009; Lipman, 2004). This is especially true in urban school districts that serve large immigrant populations. Disregarding socio-economic status or linguistic proficiency, the implicit expectation of acceleration in educational policy requires schools serving these students to compensate for a childhood of poor or inconsistent education without providing the resources to do so (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006; Koelsch, 2009;).

Unable to grapple with complex cultural pluralities, educational policies today are unresponsive to the needs of emergent bilinguals (García & Kleifgen, 2010; Lipman, 2004). The demand to expedite the academic achievement of newcomer immigrant youth juxtaposed with
the challenges they face as students in secondary schools, signals the possibility of disaster, as
the needs of the immigrant students collide with a harsh education evaluation system (Advocates
for Children, 2010; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Short & Boyson, 2012).

Conclusion: Areas for Further Research

Without clarity on how pre-migration schooling and educational experiences impact
learning when immigrant adolescent arrive in the U.S., educators have little information with
which to design responsive instruction and interventions. This dissertation seeks to alleviate the
dearth of empirical research on this subject by analyzing how variations in funds of knowledge
produce a pattern of achievement in some cases and lead to poor educational outcomes in others.
This research project contributes to our understanding of the processes and contexts in the
countries of origin that produced the complex linguistic profiles and traits of immigrant
adolescents. Further research is needed to identify ways to mitigate the disruption of moving to a
new country, to examine how immigrant high school students draw on their funds of knowledge
after arriving in a foreign country, to study the impact of immigration on adolescent
development, and to determine what forms of remediation educational institutions need to
provide. The data in this dissertation will help educators design effective instruction and
programs. The educational histories give voice to the stories of immigrant adolescents, and
demonstrate the immense courage, resilience, and innovative strategies that they bring to
learning and living in a new land.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Educational research on immigrant youth in the past has focused on academic achievement and on identifying factors that impact those outcomes, such as language proficiency or the students’ interactions with educational institutions (Kieffer, 2011; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008; Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2010; White & Glick, 2009). The research design and theory utilized in this study broadens the scope of analysis to the political and economic contexts and educational systems of the countries of origin, as well as the learning experiences of immigrant youth over time from the countries of origin to the United States. I brought together critical social theory, and theories of language and literacy development in my analysis of the data I collected from newcomer immigrant youth about their pre-migration educational experiences. I also considered the political economy of the countries of origin in order to make connections between the macro- and micro-level contexts that shaped their educational experiences.

The Immigrant Bargain

The act of migration requires immigrants to make substantial sacrifices that they believe will be redeemed through the socioeconomic mobility of their children – this is called the immigrant bargain, a notion used to explain the educational success of the children of immigrants (Louie, 2012; Smith, 2005; Smith, 2008). For immigrants, education is the primary mechanism families rely on as a pathway to socioeconomic mobility. Inherent in this immigrant optimism is human capital theory, the notion that investments in education will reap both economic and social returns. The immigrant bargain encapsulates the relationship between the aspirations of immigrant families for their children’s eventual mobility and success and their children’s actual educational and economic achievements. It is a contract of sorts to redeem the
sacrifices made by immigrant parents (Louie, 2004; Louie, 2012; Smith, 2005; Smith, 2008).

Throughout American history, education was indeed a somewhat reliable strategy of mobility for immigrants (Foner, 2001). Yet this mechanism is compromised by current political and economic conditions and by recent public and educational policies (Fine, et al., 2007; Holdaway & Alba, 2009; Mishel, et al., 2009). A sense of political, economic, and social belonging for many post-1965 immigrants in the U.S. has remained elusive, and more so for some immigrant groups than others. However, immigrant optimism remains high, and it animates immigrant youth toward educational success (Kasinitz, 2008; Kasinitz, et al., 2008).

The immigrant bargain is typically conceptualized as a set of strategies utilized by immigrant children themselves, or through decisions made by immigrant families, to acquire forms of capital needed to advance in education (Smith, 2008). I argue and demonstrate in this dissertation that the immigrant bargain is ultimately structured and shaped by broader political and economic forces that originate in the home country, and that the possibility for fulfilling this familial contract shifts and changes as immigrants make their way to integrating into a new country. Class-based characteristics determine the extent to which immigrants can make good on this bargain, and the integration of immigrants into a host country is contingent on a set of socio-economic factors (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; White & Glick, 2009).

In particular, educational barriers threaten the ability of immigrant children to fulfill their parents' promise of mobility. A close examination of macro-economic and institutional challenges posed by educational systems is required. I will show in this dissertation how the immigrant bargain is undermined due to poor quality education in their countries of origin, especially in literacy, and how this impacts their education after immigrating to the U.S.
Habitus and Forms of Capital of Newcomer Immigrant Youth

To theorize about how education in the countries of origin informs the way immigrant youth interact with schooling experiences after immigration to a new country, I draw on Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1986). If habitus is a matrix of perceptions, actions, and implicit categories used to filter experiences and are structured by an individual's social class, then the habitus of immigrant youth encompasses the dispositions and habits produced by their experiences in their countries of origin, particularly educational experiences largely shaped by socio-economic conditions (Bourdieu, 1986). This includes language, culture, political identity, and academic skills shaped and structured by processes embedded in the social, cultural, political, and socio-economic contexts of their countries of origin.

Operating on a different set of rules, norms, and practices, immigrant students must reconcile the habitus of their childhood and country of origin with the expectations of the U.S. education system. The immigrant's educational habitus leads to specific ways in which teen migrants understand their immigration experience, their ability to absorb a new language in their youth, and the trajectory of their education and eventual integration in a host society. The habitus shaped by pre-migration experiences often collides with the educational habitus they need to excel in the U.S., resulting in a dissonant process that requires adjustment and transition. Through constructing educational histories, this dissertation uncovers what the habitus for newcomer immigrant youth consists of and what it might mean for education in the U.S.

Central to the education system’s role in assisting the integration of immigrant students in the host country is the transfer of what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital through schooling (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu theorizes that capital is power that mediates between the individual and society, and the guiding force in social interaction is the need to accumulate capital to
improve one’s life chances (ibid). As such, the transfer of different forms of capital reproduces class relations (ibid). Education, as a primary institution that transmits different forms of capital, is one key institution that manages how capital is accumulated and distributed in society. Yet, according to Bourdieu, because of the uneven distribution of economic capital in capitalist societies, economic capital is symbolically mediated through other forms of capital to mask economic domination (ibid). This mediation legitimates social stratification. In this research project, I examine how various forms of capital, namely linguistic capital and “funds of knowledge” used for academic purposes and needed for success and mobility in educational institutions, mediate the educational lives of the immigrant youth (Gonzalez, Wyman, & O’Connor, 2011). I surface how immigrant adolescents were victims of symbolic violence because their home country educational institutions withheld the necessary symbolic capital they would have required for academic success in America.

**Funds of Knowledge**

In formal educational settings, the embodied forms of cultural capital that immigrant students have at their disposal are their primary language and literacy knowledge, understanding of the immigrant enclaves’ social practices, and expertise in the culture and history of their home countries. Anthropologists of education have theorized that students utilize “funds of knowledge” located in the knowledge bases and practices found in their homes and communities (Gonzalez, Wyman, & O’Connor, 2011). These household and community resources, such as practices, routines, and everyday ways of being, inform educational practice and how students learn and construct knowledge in the classroom (ibid). They serve as resources for learning that educators can leverage to inform pedagogical and instructional design for immigrant youth.
In previous research, research on funds of knowledge has focused on funds utilized in local U.S. households and communities, but not in the countries of origin. In this dissertation, I expand the notion funds of knowledge, as it is applied to immigrant adolescents, to include the forms of capital and knowledge developed in their countries of origin. I utilize “funds of knowledge” to discuss forms of capital and practices that students develop through pre-migration experiences. Because of the transnational nature of their interaction with formal schooling, funds of knowledge is broadened to include geographic and temporal considerations from the country of origin and from past childhood experiences. For immigrant youth, local ethnic communities in the U.S. are not their sole point of reference because they bring knowledge and practices, and an understanding of social processes related to schooling, shaped by their experiences in their countries of origin as well. Hence, this use of “funds of knowledge” includes practices in families and local communities, but recognizes the need to include experiences and practices from the countries of origin for immigrant adolescents. These funds taken together, from their countries of origin to the U.S., result in immigrant advantages and “ethnic capital,” which may be particular to immigrant groups and can be leveraged in formal school settings (Rodriguez, 2009).

These funds of knowledge are shaped by the material resources found in the social contexts and political economies of the countries of origin. In this study, funds of knowledge also signal the transfer and use of symbolic capital, which is mediated and negotiated in academic settings and function within hegemonic structures in educational settings. In my data analysis, I discuss knowledge (or lack thereof) transmitted to students through their home country education system's curriculum and pedagogy, and what funds of knowledge become usable in their education in the U.S. Since these funds of knowledge form the basis of the
students’ educational habitus, they represent the material conditions, their access to educational resources, and the opportunities available in their countries of origin.

In the end, I demonstrate how poor schooling in their countries of origin or limited educational opportunities deplete and undermine the funds of knowledge students have ready at their disposal to utilize when they are expected to master the demands of an American curriculum that was designed for an English-speaking middle-class student population. Such analysis contributes to our understanding of the resources that students bring to their learning and suggests the ways in which social class and political economy produce funds of knowledge (or lack thereof) that complicate educational mobility immigrant youth.

What Symbolic Violence Means for Immigrant Adolescents

This leads to Bourdieu’s important notion of symbolic violence -- the imposition of a system of meanings that are structured according to the very forms of symbolic capital that legitimate the social class positions of the affluent and upper classes (Bourdieu, 1986). Symbolic capital affords legitimacy to its user by representing the abilities, intelligences, and work ethic that justify their membership in the upper classes (Bourdieu, 1986). In this system of meanings, immigrant youth may possess forms of capital which result from their cultural, national, and ethnic habitus, but which are not valued by mainstream American educational spaces. Immigrant youth are also likely disadvantaged in this system of meaning because they lack symbolic capital needed for success in American schools, which reproduces social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1986).

One crucial form of embodied cultural capital used in the process of symbolic violence and domination through education is language and literacy. In their introduction to Voices of Authority, "Symbolic Domination, Education, and Linguistic Difference," Heller and Martin-
Jones show how linguistic difference exemplifies Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic domination (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001). They argue that, “Language is important as one way in which knowledge is constructed and displayed and as a resource that becomes important in and of itself as a means of gaining or controlling access to other resources” (2001, p. 3). As such, language is a crucial component in mechanisms that reproduce social inequality. Heller and Martin-Jones argue that linguistic difference is produced by broader inequality in society, reinforces social boundaries, and maintains relations of power (2001).

Educational institutions perpetuate and enact symbolic domination through the mediation of language and literacy as a form of symbolic capital, resulting in a system of domination and hegemony in society. Language minority students are subsumed within this hierarchical power structure in society because of their linguistic status and their access to linguistic rights is often denied. Examining educational systems through the lens of language and literacy, how those forms of capital are cultivated in young children, how linguistic resources are unevenly distributed, shows how linguistic difference is used to produce differential outcomes in society (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001)

Symbolic violence, then, is enacted through linguistic difference for language-minoritized peoples through controlling linguistic resources and the ways in which they are used (Bourdieu, 1991):

By exercising control over the value of linguistic resources, we argue, groups simultaneously regulate access to other resources (such as knowledge, friendship, or material goods) and legitimate the social order that permits them to do so by masking (that is, naturalizing) their ability to do so. Debates over linguistic norms and practices are, in the end, debates over controlling resources. (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001, p.2-3)
In this dissertation, I show the process of symbolic domination through language and literacy that begins with their educational experiences in the countries of origin and continues through their education in the U.S., when learning English and advanced literacy becomes the greatest source of linguistic difference for emergent bilinguals.

**The Problem of Banking Education – Symbolic Violence in Pre-migration Education**

The way in which symbolic violence and domination are operationalized in this dissertation is through the structures and practices utilized in the educational system, both in the countries of origin and in the U.S. I employ Paulo Freire's theory of "banking education" as an analytic to make sense of the educational experiences immigrant youth had access to (Freire, 1985). My data suggest that the funds of knowledge that immigrant adolescents carry with them when they cross the border are diminished by access to low-quality primary school education in their countries of origin.

In Paolo Freire's *The Politics of Education*, an oppressive process of education is described as *banking education* in which the learner has little agency and is not given the opportunity to develop or to apply a critical attitude and mindset to constructing knowledge (1985). This type of banking model of pedagogy subjugates the learner under a system of control:

Knowledge is an act of transference. Educators are the possessors of knowledge, whereas learners are "empty vessels" to be filled by the educators' deposits. Hence learners don't have to ask questions or offer any challenge, since their position cannot be other than to receive passively the knowledge their educators deposit.

If knowledge were static and consciousness empty, merely occupying a certain
space in the body, this kind of educational practice would be valid. But this is not the case. Knowledge is not something that's made and finished. And consciousness is an "intention" toward the world. (Freire, 1985, pg. 100)

As a result of banking education, learners fail to develop critical consciousness. Rather than a humanistic and liberating education that leads to active construction of knowledge and language, the learner is domesticated, "an empty receptacle," rendered passive and illiterate (Freire, 1985 p. 114). Such a dehumanizing process of education is detrimental because it eliminates "any opportunity for men and woman to perceive themselves as reflective, active beings, as creators and transformers of the world" (Freire, 1985, pg. 115).

Freire names a number of practices that constitute such dehumanizing banking model pedagogy, all of which are present in this research project’s data. Rather than "reflecting critically on the process of reading and writing itself, and on the profound significance of language" and creating ideas, the learner is instead engaged in "memorizing and repeating given syllables, words, and phrases" (Freire, 1985, pg. 49-50). The teacher who utilizes banking education employs an instructional approach that is "anti-dialogical," focusing on transmitting knowledge, rather than constructing knowledge together with students (Freire, 1985, pg. 55). In this dissertation, I show countless examples of banking education in the countries of origin, and explain the ramifications I believe this has for immigrant adolescents after they arrive in the U.S. In this way, home country educational institutions enact a form of symbolic violence on young people, whose educational rights to learning and academic development have been violated.

**Banking Model Pedagogy in Pre-Migration Literacy Education**

Banking model pedagogy has specific implications for newcomer immigrant youth
because of the primacy of language and literacy development. I use Freire's notion of banking education as it applies particularly to literacy education to trace their language and literacy development throughout their childhood, and the connections these experiences have to their academic performance in the U.S. In "banking education," literacy is "not comprehension of content but memorization. Instead of understanding the text, the challenge becomes its memorization and if readers can do this, they will have responded to the challenge" (Freire, 1985, pg. 2). The teaching of words is unrelated to meaning or void of connection to the world or to experience (Freire, 1985). The search for and creation of deeper meaning through language and text is denied to the learner as a part of the class project enacted by dominant classes through symbolic domination present in educational institutions.

In the practices used for literacy education, Freire discusses the "right to utter the word," the notion of the right to language and literacy (Freire, 1985). This right to words as a way of being agents in the world is crucial in the development of children, who need access to instruction that teaches them how to utilize language to create meaning. Such education, ultimately, also teaches them to critique their reality, leading to political education and transformation. In this way, literacy is emancipatory, leading to the appropriation of deeper meaning and also self-expression and action (Freire, 1985). Indeed, the right to language and literacy is "primordial" and "not the privilege of a few," "associated with the right of self-expression and world-expression, of creating and re-creating, of deciding and choosing and ultimately participating in society's historical process" (Freire, 1985, pg. 50). Teaching of literacy should "associate the learning of reading and writing with a creative act" (Freire, 1985, pg. 17). A learner, Freire says, "perceive[s] the close relationship between language-thought and reality in her or his own transformation, she or he will see the need for new forms of
comprehension and, also, expression" (1985, pg. 22).

Yet the data I present in this research project suggest that immigrant adolescents were systematically denied their rights to language and literacy in their countries of origin, and that the situation is only slightly improved when they arrive in the U.S. The implications of banking model literacy education are ultimately political: "Illiteracy is one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality. Illiteracy is not a strictly linguistic or exclusively pedagogical or methodological problem. It is political, as is the very literacy through which we try to overcome illiteracy" (Freire, 1985, pg. 10). Illiteracy is a product, then, of their rights to language and literacy having been denied, often a result of inequalities in the broader political economy.

Moreover, such “regressive literacy" is the product of reforms and changes in economic structures that manufacture a need for literacy among subalterns (Freire, 1985, pg. 13). In the Industrial era, the larger political economy made it necessary for peasants to develop literacy; in the 21st century, the knowledge economy has once again created a need for subalterns to develop advanced literacy. Literacy is once again a gatekeeper for the elite to preserve their dominance in the social and economic order. The resulting regressive literacy among newcomer immigrant youth, then, is a transnational class project involving learners moving from one particular economic structure to another, from the country of origin to the host society. When literacy education in the U.S. also reproduces inequalities in access to literacy education, compounding the effects of poor home country literacy education, newcomer immigrant youth experience regressive literacy.

**A Sociolinguistic Economy of Education for Newcomer Immigrant Youth**

In *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*, Jan Blommaert outlines the ways in which
migration has led to changes in the sociolinguistic landscape (2010). Newcomer immigrant youth are important to study when examining the sociolinguistic shifts that accompany migration because of their youth and age at migration, their ongoing development of multiple languages, their linguistic mobility as emergent bilinguals, and the role of education in the process of incorporating youth moving from low- and middle-income economies into advanced knowledge-based economies. Migration into affluent political economies leads to what I have come to think of as “regressive education,” whereby education in low-income countries is often rendered insufficient in light of educational demands in a high-income knowledge-based economy of a host country. Specifically, immigrant youth experience a shift in their need for, and use of, linguistic resources because of migration into a different sociolinguistic context, particularly in academic settings. As well, the urgency of literacy as a result of college and career readiness educational policies in U.S. secondary schools is a departure from the educational preparation they received in their countries of origin. Hence, their linguistic trajectories have been controlled, monitored, and structured by public schooling as a result of their social class position in the larger political economy of global migration (Blommaert, 2010).

In a global context, the superdiversity inherent in current global migration means that educational institutions, as the primary mediating institution vis-à-vis immigrant youth, are inadequate in their response to the linguistic complexity produced by global migration (Vertovec, 2007). Government agencies may have little interest in adopting educational policies and practices for students with complex multilingual repertoires. The educational histories in this dissertation, and the linguistic portraits of newcomer immigrant youth that follow, show that there is no one trajectory for language and literacy development, that linguistic profiles of emergent bilinguals are complex, changing, and contingent on access to learning opportunities.
This superdiversity presents inefficiencies in an educational system that is designed for white, middle-class monolingual children and youth who have lived in the United States since birth. Often, school systems are unable or unwilling to differentiate services and practices in response to superdiversity, creating an uneven distribution of access to resources, especially access to resources needed by children and adolescents for learning (Blommaert, 2010).

Hence, this dissertation taken as a whole presents a sociolinguistic economy of education for newcomer immigrant youth. I specify the ways in which the surrounding political economy, social, and institutional factors impact their access to linguistic resources, all of which conspire to create particular sociolinguistic challenges. In the early 21st century, migrant youth all over the world are finding that their current linguistic repertoires are incommensurate with the demands dictated by educational institutions in host countries. Standard varieties and advanced literacy in English is required in academic contexts and used in global commerce, typically skills acquired through formal learning, rather than through every day interactions. As such, the development of language and literacy within educational institutions for academic purposes is arguably both an important focus of education for language-minoritized youth, and simultaneously a source of increasing inequality. Blommaert explains that the use of language within superdiverse and global contexts is characterized by stratified distribution, where linguistic resources are deployed and considered valued in some contexts but not in others, and where some but not all linguistic resources facilitate mobility across contexts and social classes (Blommaert, 2010). In an advanced knowledge-economy such as the U.S., the development of proficiency and advanced literacy in English is considered a high-mobility resource mediated and often withheld within educational institutions (Blommaert, 2010).

This study identifies linguistic resources that are valued in U.S. secondary classrooms,
how literacy knowledge is unevenly and inconsistently distributed, even withheld, from immigrant adolescents, from their countries of origin to the U.S. I demonstrate how advanced literacy is required in secondary contexts but is also a source of stratification because of unequal distribution of learning opportunities. Such a sociolinguistic economy contributes to the research literature in language and superdiversity, specifically as it applies to language-minoritized adolescents (Blommaert & Rampton, 2011). These data suggest that the withholding of language and literacy resources, particularly those needed for developing multilingualism, is at times tacit censorship, and at other times, explicit dispossession of opportunities.

*Language and Literacy Education: The Transfer of Literacy Practices among Immigrant Youth*

Given the pervasiveness of banking model literacy education in low-income countries of origin, literacy instruction for newcomers in the U.S. becomes a project of remediation, but also an opportunity for acceleration. Effective literacy education could help immigrant students recover from the effects of banking model literacy education. In this dissertation, I utilize Jim Cummins's interdependence hypothesis to analyze the data I collected (Cummins, 1981b), and to unpack what the transfer of literacy knowledge means for emergent bilinguals who begin learning to read in new language in middle to late adolescence. I explore the impact of deprivation from high-quality instruction in language and literacy in their primary school education in their countries of origin.

Jim Cummins theorized that, given a common underlying proficiency, cross-linguistic transfer occurs given the appropriate sociolinguistic and educational contexts that facilitate transfer (Cummins, 1981b). Cummins qualifies the interdependence hypothesis by saying that,
“To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly.” (Cummins, 1981b, p. 29) For language-minoritized adolescents, the instruction in language and literacy education needs to be high quality, both prior to and after their immigration to the United States. Yet most newcomer immigrant youth are not exposed to effective instruction in either their country of origin or when they arrive in the U.S. Therefore, their proficiency in their home language may be insufficient to transfer to learning in English, especially given subtractive schooling practices utilized in public education (Barlett & García, 2011; García & Kleifgen, 2010). The nature of how the interdependence hypothesis plays out in development for immigrant youth who switch to learning to read in a new language in middle adolescence is one key goal of this research project. This dissertation suggests that the transfer of literacy practices, of literacy knowledge and linguistic resources for academic purposes, are contingent on the quality of home country literacy education.

Building on Freire's concepts of critical pedagogy, the counterpoint to banking model literacy education where multilingual learners are concerned is pedagogy that creates "translanguaging space" in classrooms (Wei, 2011). If we believe that translanguaging and the nurturing of multilingualism in educational settings is important, then ultimately, teachers need to create language ecologies in schools and translanguaging spaces in their classrooms that are responsive to the linguistic and learning needs of students who use a complex linguistic repertoire (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Kleifgen, 2010; Wei, 2011). Instructional strategies should teach students how to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire as an academic way of thinking. Such flexibility in linguistic pedagogy supports language-minoritized
adolescents not only to learn language but also to learn many other academic skills as well. Yet this project documents the fact that few emergent bilinguals had access to effective pedagogy and instruction that facilitated the development of multilingualism among immigrant youth.

**Connecting Political Economy to Home Country Educational Contexts**

I began this study with the assumption that the political economies of low- and middle-income countries would have significance for the quality of education available in the countries of origin. Based on information about home country educational contexts provided to me by participants in the study, I utilize what Jean Anyon calls an "alternative model of educational analysis" in which "the economic and political constraints and exclusions of capitalism as [are] relevant to what occurred in schools" (Anyon, 2011, pg. 2). Anyon was preoccupied with "how the failures of urban school reform can be understood through the lens of the political economy," a “neo-Marxist practice” that uses social class as an analytical lens (Anyon, 2011, pg. 5 and 17).

I use this heuristic in my analysis of home county educational contexts to show how the broader political economy was complicit in reproducing failures in their educational systems. While there were individual achievements, the macro-economy in the countries of origin created barriers to educational attainment. This dissertation surfaces numerous missed opportunities in their educational experiences given their political and economic structure. The data suggest that the low-achievement of immigrant youth is not only a consequence of subtractive schooling and a host of familial and in-school factors in the U.S., but is also a consequence of failed global economies in the countries of origin (Anyon, 2011; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008; Valenzuela, 1999). As such, this project adds to the ongoing assessment in left-of-center educational analysis.
that has long assumed an unwavering connection between social class and educational inequality (Anyon, 2011).

What “doing political economy” means, as Anyon called it, in the context of educational research on newcomer immigrant youth is to examine the ways in which home country educational contexts violated their rights to education as a public good. The notion of education as a human right is threatened by the failures of the broader macro-economy in low- and middle-income countries. Using the neo-Marxist tenet that “ideologies legitimating the power of the capitalist class permeate the educational institutions of society” (Anyon, 2011, pg. 13), my analysis of their home country education was animated by these questions:

• What capitalist ideologies are legitimated through the structures and practices of schooling in the countries of origin?
• In what ways does the workings of a capitalist system create economic and social inequality in the students’ educational experiences in the countries of origin?
• In what ways were the class positions of subalterns maintained by home country educational systems?
• What moves did immigrant families make in response to political and economic hegemony?
• What does learning in a hegemonic educational system in home country contexts mean for immigrant youth who immigrate to an advanced economy such as the United States?

To this end, the alternative analysis in this dissertation included studying a number of different connections between the macro-economy and the structures of schooling in the countries of origin, such as:
• to what degree home countries create profit-making alternatives to public education and the ways in which educational systems in the countries of origin were guided by free-market principles, creating unequal access to educational resources, and rendering quality education a scarce resource unattainable by families living in poverty;
• how poor quality education in the countries of origin was the result of economic stagnation in low- and middle-income countries;
• how immigrant families made strategic decisions in their attempt to change their social and class positions by improving access to educational opportunities for their children, both in their home countries and ultimately, by moving to America;

A neo-Marxist analysis attempts to show how obstacles in educational experiences are ultimately symptoms of a deeper structural malaise associated with late-capitalism and globalization. It highlights the role of social stratification and socioeconomic status as a primary determinant in educational success for immigrant youth, and it positions those symptoms within a capitalist context.

An important point to make in this analysis is that while much educational and sociological research emphasizes the importance of individual and parental socioeconomic status as predictors of educational outcomes, in this dissertation, the socioeconomic status of political economies at the country level appear to have held more significance. The overall impact of economic stagnation in the macro-economy created similar educational experiences across class lines in home country contexts (and I note where there are exceptions to this).
Conclusion: Institutional Barriers to Educational Success of Immigrant Adolescents

The social reproduction through education as an institution, which creates a sorting mechanism that determines winners and losers in a knowledge-based economy, is not exclusive to immigrant youth. Lipman (2004) has said:

Who has access to what knowledge is critical. Educational stratification and tiering of educational experiences and opportunities takes on new meaning in the present context. Knowledge has become far more definitive in shaping one’s life chances than in the past, when a high school diploma was sufficient to gain entry to a well-paying, stable job and sense of future. In the informational economy, knowledge is central, and one’s education is a key determinant of whether one will be a high-paid knowledge worker or part of the downgraded sector of labor. (p. 11)

Immigrant children are often heavily concentrated in urban schools, which are underfunded, ill-equipped, and lack the necessary resources and specialized services that immigrant students require based on their educational histories. Hence, differential access to high quality education becomes a clear mechanism that creates divergent pathways for students (Anyon, 1997; Lipman, 2004). A history of unequal schooling, then, has important consequences for immigrant adolescents.

Secondary schools need to be extraordinary in their practice if they hope to mitigate the consequences of inadequate pre-migration educational opportunities (Bartlett & García, 2011; Jaffé-Walter & Lee, 2011). The mandate to master a rigorous high school curriculum that builds on a sequential and continuous education of 12-13 years in U.S. schools within four years of high school is an unreasonable demand. Immigrant adolescents often fail to persist and complete a college degree, suggesting that the accumulation of human capital is an increasingly challenging
endeavor (Parrish, 2009). When educational systems fail to respond to the disparities inherent in social class differences, the limits to the notion of the immigrant bargain are exposed. The resulting social reproduction of class advantage through unequal schooling is complicit in the class project that perpetuates the marginalization of immigrants and demonstrates that educational policies and institutional practices constitute as institutional barriers to realization of the immigrant bargain.
Chapter 3: Research Design

Given the challenges that both immigrant youth and secondary schools face in producing optimal educational outcomes, I conducted a research project focused on the pre-migration educational experiences of immigrant youth and how those connect to their schooling in the U.S. Schooling in the countries of origin can vastly differ in pedagogy and structure from that of the U.S., resulting in variations in a student’s school readiness, persistence, and momentum after immigration (Bartlett & García, 2011; Fry, 2005; Rodriguez, 2009). This dissertation is an extended investigation into the students’ past educational histories prior to crossing the border, and the interaction of their pre-migration educational habitus with education in America. I gathered data on the learning environments and the participants’ accounts of their prior schooling in the countries of origin through in-depth interviews. This study provides descriptive data missing in the field of educational research regarding the education of immigrant students:

Descriptive studies have made valuable contributions to our understanding of the context in which language-minority children are educated, and of the issues raised by considering sociocultural factors in students' acquisition of literacy. This body of descriptive and exploratory work has been useful in providing an informed basis on which to develop theory. (Rueda, August, & Goldenberg, 2006, pg. 320)

This research project contributes to the research literature on immigrant adolescents by showing how pre-migration experiences have been shaped by political, economic, and social factors in their countries of origin, which set the pre-conditions for educational success in America.

Research Questions

Using these two research questions to guide me, I examined the factors, circumstances,
and resources surrounding the educational histories of immigrant students in their countries of origin:

a. What educational experiences and opportunities were (or were not) available to and utilized by newcomer immigrant youth prior to their arrival in the United States, and how were those shaped by the political economy of the home country?

b. How do the forms of capital and funds of knowledge that newcomer immigrant youth bring from their country of origin relate to their educational trajectories in the United States?

**Methodology**

The core of my study involved constructing a set of educational histories, in the way that doctors or psychiatrists might do to address the well-being of their patients. These educational histories are not diagnostic in nature per se, but establish a context to understand immigrant adolescents. Educational histories uncover the details that make up a student's educational past, providing information about the factors that impact educational outcomes.

In order to construct these educational histories, I employed the in-depth interview method in which my main role as researcher was to “invite” stories that will “constitute the empirical material” in the study (Chase, 2005). Irving Seidman states that the “heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth” (2006, p. 9). Studies and narratives of assimilation and educational outcomes often have a singular focus on high school graduation or drop out rates. In these narratives, the students’ own ideas about education are submerged. For this reason, I utilized in-depth interviews as my primary method of
data gathering to center the inquiry on the students’ interpretations of their experiences. Interviews allowed students to tell a story of their educational experiences, to speak back to those who made decisions and created policies on their behalf without their input. While seldom used in policy analysis, such subjective but crucial sources of data shed light on important questions in the field of educational research.

In constructing these educational histories, I operated under the notion that macro-level social structures can be described and understood by analyzing sets of autobiographies (Chase, 2005). In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills suggests connecting personal troubles to larger issues of public structure (1959). Susan Chase explains this dynamic by stating that, “Story tellers construct selves within specific institutional, organizational, discursive, and local cultural contexts” (2005, p. 216). Hence, by interviewing, constructing, and analyzing the educational histories of immigrant youth, I also demonstrate how the broader political economy mediates their biographies (Chase, 2005). I demonstrate how educational histories are interpreted in light of broader social structures, and how individual experiences contribute to our understanding of broad sociological patterns as well, such as educational attainment, immigration patterns, and social mobility.

My attempt to establish micro to macro linkages requires the deployment of Burawoy’s extended case method (1998). Although in-depth interviews were the source of data, I extended beyond the participants’ accounts by theorizing the relation between their individual experiences and the macro-level forces both in their countries of origin and in the U.S. I utilized student interviews to make sense of broader social and economic processes (Burawoy, 1998). While I would have loved to actually travel to the countries of origin for a truly multi-sited and extended place method, such a research design would require an entirely different methodology (Duneier,
2011). Burawoy states that this method allows the research to “compile situational knowledge into an account of social process because regimes of power structure situations into processes” (Burawoy, 1998, p.18). In this study, I compiled the situational knowledge from individual educational histories to examine how regimes of power in educational systems structured the schooling experiences of newcomer immigrant youth.

**Methods**

A. **Data Source: In-Depth Interviews with Newcomer Immigrant Youth**

The main method of data gathering involved conducting two-part interviews, usually at two different times and settings, with newcomer immigrant youth who recently graduated from high school. I used a modified version of Irving Seidman’s Three-Interview Series to structure the interviews (2006), using two interviews per participant instead of three. Each interview in the series was structured differently to elicit information needed to construct a comprehensive educational history. The first interview focused on the country of origin, and I utilized information from the first interview to inform follow-up questions in the second interview. In the second interview, I focused on the students’ experiences in America and provided participants an opportunity to reflect on their own educational trajectories and to theorize with me about the impact of their home country education on their academic careers. Most interviews were conducted at the Central Brooklyn International High School (a pseudonym), a familiar location to all participants because they attended high school there. A few were conducted at the Central Brooklyn public library at Grand Army Plaza or at the Cadman Plaza branch. The first interview lasted between 1.5-2.5 hours. The second interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours. I conducted
a third session with two participants in order to complete the interview protocol because my conversations with them were lengthier than average. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder, with audio files saved on my personal computers. I transcribed all interviews myself.

Recruitment for Participation in the Study

Graduation from high school was one criteria for selecting participants because it meant that the participants had been in the U.S. long enough to communicate in English, and that they passed three important educational crossroads: the New York State Regents Exams, graduated from high school, and applied to college. These criteria allowed me to study their academic challenges and construct the arch of their academic trajectories.

Participants had to have immigrated to the U.S. in early or middle adolescence. Students were recruited from China (Fujian), Bangladesh, Yemen, and West Africa. The fastest growing immigrant group in New York City public schools speaks Bengali, and among emergent bilinguals in high schools, francophone West Africans also make up a significant population (NYCDOE, 2009a). Fujianese students are the newest group of Chinese immigrants in New York City and have a somewhat different immigration history and class background compared to other Chinese-speaking immigrant groups. The research literature on immigrant students from Yemen is generally lacking; this dissertation only presents data from one Yemeni individual, so further research is needed.

The countries of origin represented in this study are low-income countries, with the exception of China. While China is no longer a low-income country, it is included in this study because of the unique socio-economic context of Fujian province, from which the most recent wave of immigrants from China hail. While Fujianese immigrants share much in common with
other immigrant groups, and certainly with other co-ethnic Chinese, the flow and features of Fujianese migration are distinct. They come from predominantly rural areas in Fujian Province, a region within China that was still relatively undeveloped in the early 1990s, when most of the participants in this study were born. The participants attended school and lived in Fujian during the earliest years of China’s post-Mao economic reforms that led to expansive economic development, just as China’s status in the global economy was beginning to change. While its sheer size contributes to its overall gross domestic product, the economic context of rural and underdeveloped areas in Fujian where the participants lived was comprised of many features similar to that of low-income countries.

To recruit participants, I messaged former students who I was acquainted with through my work as a teacher at Central Brooklyn International High School (CBIHS). Through email, Facebook, and text messages, I contacted students and identified those interested in participating in the study. I also recruited students when they returned to visit the high school. The sample is not representative of their demographic groups, and the analysis is not generalizable. Despite the lack of generalizability and a very convenient sample, the interviews still shed light on meaningful disparities that add to our understanding of newcomer immigrant youth (Duneier, 2011).

**Characteristics of Participants in the Study**

The participants in the study consisted of twenty-one individuals with the following demographic breakdown:
Table 1: Overview of Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>N=21</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By country</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10=Fujian, China</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5=Bangladesh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1=Ivory Coast</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1=Senegal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3=Guinea</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1=Yemen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8=Male</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13=Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Range, at the time of interview</td>
<td>18-23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Characteristics**

- All participants attended the Central Brooklyn International High School, a high school serving newcomer immigrant youth exclusively. Most were students in my class at some point in time during their education there.
- All but one of the participants was foreign-born. One participant was born in the United States but was "sent" back at the age of two to Senegal to live with his grandparents, and returned to America at the age of fourteen.

Because of the way I recruited participants for the study, all of the students in the study attended CBIHS. At the time I conducted the interviews, each of the participants had already graduated from high school. Most of the participants were students I worked with as an English teacher, advisor, or college counselor. As a result, I bring a very definitive lens to my analysis of what they reported to me, but there were also many shared understandings that a typical interviewer would not have had with their participants.

CBIHS is a small public high school in Brooklyn, designed to enroll emergent bilinguals exclusively. Students have to test low enough in English proficiency to be eligible to attend the school. While many school districts have newcomer schools, CBIHS follows pedagogical principles developed by the Internationals Network for Public Schools. This network has historically produced relatively impressive outcomes for this demographic (Fine, Stoudt, &
Futch, 2005). Whereas for the Class of 2011, New York State graduated 34% of their emergent bilinguals, the International schools graduated over half of their students, with 5th and 6th year graduation rates that reached as high as 77% (Fine, Stoudt, & Futch, 2005; Internationals Network for Public Schools, 2013; New York State Education Department, 2016).

In any given classroom at CBIHS, there were likely a dozen languages spoken among the students in attendance. The school recruits students from the diverse surrounding ethnic neighborhoods of Brooklyn, so students come from all over the world, making it one of the most diverse schools in the city, perhaps in the country, and one of two schools in New York City whose student demographics most closely reflected the city’s racial and socio-economic diversity (Snyder, 2016). All of the students were learning English as a new language, and many spoke at least one, often two or more other languages from their countries of origin. Such diversity was by design, and students reported appreciation for such a learning environment as new immigrants. While it was still often a difficult transition for a newly arrived student, newness to English was a unifying and comforting factor. Students felt more at ease learning in classrooms where other classmates had similar experiences and shared understandings as immigrant youth, and felt safer with other students from their country who spoke their language.

Coincidentally, all of the participants from China also attended the same middle school in Brooklyn, prior to attending CBIHS.
Table 2: Participants’ Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Grade level enrolled in, upon arriving in U.S.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Senegal</td>
<td>Aboubacar</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>Nassar</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivory Coast</td>
<td>Maimouna</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guinea</td>
<td>Moustapha</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hawa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mariama</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td>Priya</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Samia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jhumki</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shefa</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Puja</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fujian, China</td>
<td>Bo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vivian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ming Tao</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Xiao Lin</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jeffrey</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Si Ting</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yessy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Guo Jie</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B. Data Analysis

Using thematic analysis, I first coded for any and all themes from the interview transcripts, using the online software, Dedoose. I noticed common themes and categories of information that emerged, especially those that were related to social class (e.g., symbolic capital) and the political economy. I coded for themes that would establish interactions and parallels between the country of origin and the U.S. I also coded for themes that helped me to construct their educational histories chronologically from birth to post-secondary education. I paid attention to unanticipated themes that arose. I emphasized themes and anecdotes in which students made sense of their educational past and their agency in their own education.

I assembled all the data within categories and themes, partly chronologically and also by
categories related to political economy, language and literacy development, schooling, and immigration. I integrated the data together to form an analysis of the concepts, ideas, details, and findings for those categories and themes. I pieced the broader categories together into self-contained parts and chapters and organized them within an overarching coherent analytical structure, showing how the categories worked together to create the entire educational landscape of home country education for immigrant adolescents. As I revised the writing, I refined the actual conceptual understandings that I had inferred.

Using what Wendy Luttrell calls *good enough methods*, I named contradictions and surfaced problems and tensions that I saw implicit in the students’ educational histories (Luttrell, 2000). Where there were inconvenient patterns, I brought them into dialogue with other data not to prove a particular point, but to show complexity (Duneier, 2011). I also held the data against my own experience as a practitioner and teacher, and my prior knowledge of the participants, to determine when information was relevant or idiosyncratic. Lastly, where possible, I made connections between their constructed educational histories and broader global processes of migration, education, and economic policy. At times, the analytic moves I made resulted in uncovering opposing realities. My ultimate goal was to depict the students’ complex subjectivities, rather than establishing an authoritative representation of their stories, while documenting what was lost and gained in my analysis (Luttrell, 2000).

*C. Reflexivity*

I am both an insider and an outsider to this group that I will study. My parents emigrated from China, and they identify as 唐人街 (translated as Chinatown and refers to the Chinese diaspora). I was born and raised in New York City and my closest childhood friends were teen
immigrants from rural villages in Southern China. Seeing their educational opportunities and life chances diverge from my own because of social class differences led me to teach and research immigrant youth whose paths mirror those of my childhood friends.

I met and recruited all of the participants in this study through the personal connections I made with them as their English teacher, advisor, or college counselor at CBIHS. To the students, I am an adult, a teacher, a person they may trust but not necessarily see as their equal because of age and my role in their high school experience. The data analysis was filtered entirely through my lens as a public school teacher of newcomer immigrant youth. In this way, my position is more similar to that of a middle-class educated outsider, but I use my local knowledge as an educator of this population to identify themes and ideas that may have implications for instructional practice.

Furthermore, my analysis of their educational histories is entirely refracted through my lens of frustration developed as a result of my dissatisfaction or discontent with the injustices that I feel immigrant students face in public education today. I taught and worked with a significant number of immigrant youth who failed to graduate from high school and dropped out, but I also worked with ones who graduated successfully and yet continued to be far below the level they needed to be in terms of their advanced literacy skills. When I interviewed the participants and listened to their stories, I heard missed opportunities, examples and confirmations of what I, or their school, should have done to do better. I wrestled with my own assumptions and limitations in response to the data. I looked at the participants in my study for advice and words of wisdom for how to improve public education for immigrant youth.

During the interviews, I often discussed shared experiences I had with the participants in the past. This inserted bias, but also helped me to maintain intellectual honesty as well, to clarify
and alter my impressions of the past by adding information from the students' perspectives. Furthermore, while I never anticipated this, the participants had their own purpose for participating in the study. They wanted to reflect on their experiences, and three of them showed investment in the research process by coming prepared with outlined notes to share with me. When I showed my appreciation to Moustapha for doing the interview, he said, “I just like helping people. I came here from a different country. I got help from teachers and my friends also. So I feel like helping others is beneficial to you also. ‘Cause you got to learn” (Moustapha). Samia also saw her participation in the study as a way of helping immigrants:

I think that’s gonna help the school, getting to know what the needs are of immigrant students, and what we said, our experiences about what is interesting, what was helpful.

Hopefully they take it into that account and really do something about it.

Shefa explained that she wanted me to use my research to prevent the struggles that she had when she came to the U.S.: “I really beg you to help them understand because English it’s very important. […] I have tons of work! But I want to help students! I want other student in college. I don’t want other students who struggle like me.” These comments, and others like these, affirmed that my research was important to students like them.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized to answer the research questions and to serve an analytical purpose in the following ways:
### Table 3. Organization of Dissertation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dissertation Section</th>
<th>Description of Dissertation Section</th>
<th>Research Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part I: Newcomer Immigrant Youth: A Study of Their Educational Histories (Chapters 1, 2, 3)</strong></td>
<td>This section outlines the statement of the problem addressed in this dissertation and the educational issues faced by newcomer immigrant youth. I present the goal of the dissertation, which was to elucidate the prior schooling of immigrant adolescents and show how it relates to school performance in the U.S. I also present the theoretical frameworks used for analysis, as well as the research design.</td>
<td>1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part II: Accounts of Past Educational Experiences from Immigrant Adolescents (Chapters 4, 5, 6)</strong></td>
<td>The chapters in this section all present data on the pre-migration educational experiences of immigrant adolescents in the countries of origin. Chapter 4 presents findings on the views of immigrant youth on the economic and political contexts in their countries of origin and on the inequities of their prior schooling. Chapter 5 details the structures, pedagogies and curricula of schools as experienced by immigrant youth in their countries of origin. Chapter 6 describes the linguistic and literacy practices and pedagogies that defined their pre-migration schooling experiences.</td>
<td>2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Part III: Schooling in a New Land (Chapters 7, 8, 9, 10)</strong></td>
<td>In these chapters, I explain the interaction between prior education in the countries of origin and schooling in the U.S. I describe their academic trajectories in U.S. schools and how these interact with the accounts described in Part II. I also analyze the effects of education in low-income countries on language and literacy development in American secondary schools and on college and career readiness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Limitations of the Study

The small sample size of this study means that findings are neither representative nor generalizable. Their educational histories are not indicative of their countries of origin, but are suggestive of possible factors to analyze in future studies. The sample also consists only of students who graduated from high school. In many instances, the educational histories I collected will sound familiar to educators who work with immigrant youth, and echo what I have been told by immigrant youth throughout my years of teaching emergent bilinguals. There were similar characteristics in common across contexts that I synthesize in my analysis. Where I surface
similarities and overarching patterns, I do so because 1) the commonalities help educators identify effective instructional practices, and 2) the factors in the countries of origin have analytical significance and warrant further exploration. To ascertain more precisely the correlation between specific factors in home country education and educational outcomes in the U.S. requires a different methodology not included in the research design of this study.

**Implications of the Study**

This dissertation is a study of how the successful integration of immigrant adolescents is impacted by broader political and economic forces prior to their arrival, and the lasting impact of class relations that exist outside of our borders. The project examines the challenges that immigrant adolescents face in realizing the immigrant bargains that are rooted, not in the immigrant’s own behaviors and attitudes alone, but in the political and economic factors of their country of origin. The study complicates underlying assumptions of the immigrant bargain as it applies to immigrant adolescents as a sub-group of immigrants, and who come from low-income regions in particular. The research project is intended to provide data and findings that are useful to educators and practitioners who work with immigrant adolescents. I hope the students’ accounts enable educators to imagine a more student-centered, humane, and responsive set of educational policies and practices that effectively address the needs of immigrant adolescents (Bartlett & García, 2011; Jaffe-Walter & Lee, 2011).
Part II
Accounts of Pre-migration Educational Experiences from Immigrant Adolescents
Chapter 4: A Political Economy of Education in Countries of Origin

As global migration moves people from poorer to more affluent economies, immigrant youth emigrate with their families from some of the poorest countries in the world to the U.S. in search of economic opportunity. Immigrants in the US come from low- and middle-income countries that are marginalized in the global economy, face economic stagnation and inequality, and are unable to provide sustainable and high quality educational services to their citizens. The governments of sending countries have historically transferred or “socialized” the cost of education to its citizens by requiring them to pay tuition and relying on the free market to provide the public access to educational services (Anyon, 2011). Hence, low educational achievement and academic failure among immigrant youth is often a result of poor schooling prior to their arrival in the US. School failures are a “logical consequence” of the global macro-economy (Anyon, 2011, pg 63). With rising economic inequality, "an unjust economy and policies through which it is maintained create barriers to educational success" (Anyon, 2011, pg. 64). Consequently, education plays a role in reinforcing social stratification (Anyon, 1997; Anyon, 2011; Ball, 2006; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Lipman, 2004). This dissertation shows that many challenges in serving immigrant youth can be traced back to home country economic contexts, and are directly connected to the social costs of global poverty.

While the political economy and educational systems of their countries of origin are complex, the participants’ accounts in this study depicted contexts that were unable to sustain effective or functional educational systems needed for a knowledge-based global economy. Educational institutions were undergirded by neoliberal, free-market macroeconomic policies, and relied heavily on privatized educational services. Schools were severely under-resourced, presumably due to lack of state investment. As a result of these challenges, immigrant youth
experienced unequal schooling and significant educational disparities in their countries of origin, including: 1) poor economic contexts, 2) variations in quality of education between urban and rural schools, 3) the effects of a neoliberal economy, and 4) the role of remittances in creating differential access to education. Opportunities for academic success were scarce resources and social stratification was an inherent feature of home country educational systems, where education was neither treated as a public good or a human right.

**Struggling Political and Economic Contexts in Countries of Origin**

Participants in the study reported numerous environmental and economic factors that made educational achievement challenging. It was clear that schooling in their countries of origin was characterized by a series of limitations:

- Limited economic development
- Lack of job opportunities
- Futility of education for social mobility
- Lack of security
- Limited formal education of parents and community
- Poor school facilities

**Limited Economic Development**

The broader political economy of sending countries was typically characterized by significant challenges to economic development, and plagued by a trifecta of complications: low levels of education, few job opportunities, and lack of effective policies for economic development. In Bangladesh, participants from rural areas grew up in villages with no indoor
plumbing. Frequent flooding, exacerbated by poor infrastructure, resulted in transportation problems and frequent school closures:

Even if you go to school, schools are like made out of wood or sometimes, a fence.

Because Bangladesh it’s flooded country, so when flood is there, you cannot go to school for about three month or something. So it’s basically, you have to stay home. (Priya).

In Mariama's hometown in Guinea, there were no paved roads, electricity was available on a "turn-turn" basis during particular hours, with neighborhoods alternating use of electricity on given days. With no indoor plumbing, each block had its own well that was turned on for use at designated times. Moustapha, also from Guinea, remembers doing homework by candlelight because of the inconsistent availability of electricity. Even in Dakar, a large urban center in Senegal, Abou recalled how flooding and the lack of infrastructure led to temporary displacement of many citizens during the flood season.

In China, participants in this study originated from rural or suburban areas in Fujian Province, a less economically developed region. Despite its recent and dramatic economic growth, in the 1990s, participants reported similar environmental and economic conditions. Ming Tao lived in a remote village with no paved roads and the nearest market where they could buy basic goods and supplies was a 30-minute walk away. Another participant, Jason, lived on a tiny coastal island in the South China Sea, where there was no running water or electricity and children had to relocate to the mainland in order to attend school.

*Lack of Job Opportunities*

The lack of job opportunities and economic stagnation was common among all sending countries and a major impetus for emigration. Regardless of where they lived, participants in the
study recalled a lack of job opportunities as a major economic problem. Jason described his hometown in Fujian, China this way:

The first half, it's like people where the village people live for on the back, it was all mountains, so like people in the village usually hunting the fish, the seafood. On the back yard, they can do whatever in the fields, like farming, farming the things, they don’t usually don’t trade to other place. Sometimes, just people coming from other place, they just buy our goat, so we make money. They buy our goat, whatever we make from the village, ‘cause we do farming. They have peanuts, they have vegetables […] no one can do anything except the farming and the hunting fish.

Because the local economy consisted of little more than small-scale farming and fishing, Fujianese immigrants had few opportunities for economic development. Another Fujianese youth, Bo, described a division of labor resulting from these economic circumstances:

People are just working from a farm, and the young men going to the city to work. Only old people farming…Young people going to city to make more money, so there’s only old man women and…not able to make enough money farming in the village. Women staying home, and young men going to the city. They want to make more money.

As a result of the lack of economic opportunities, most villagers left Fujian to find work either in large cities in China, or they went abroad.

In another sending country, Bangladesh, economic development was limited given the country’s low-income status in comparison to other countries in the global economy. Having long term difficulty in developing a strong manufacturing sector, Bangladesh largely operated under an agrarian system, with peasants and farmers struggling in rural economies, with some
landowners in significantly better socio-economic positions than the majority peasant population. Few worked in an industrial sector unless they lived in an urban area, as Priya said:

Mostly people...yeah, farms. And then lot of people do like a little shop, maybe only they sell little biscuits or tea. Tea store, little tea stalls. People are very poor there. Now, I think it’s improving. I don’t know about now, but when I was there, people are very lack of technologies and outside of the world. It’s completely, there is no way you can be educated in that village, something like that. [...] Because there’s no opportunity there. If you have land, you were better than most; most people are peasants, uneducated. And a smaller sector works in industrial and manufacturing.

These larger macro-economic contexts in each of the countries of origin created challenges to economic mobility and ultimately contributed to constraints that limited access to educational opportunities.

*Futility of Education for Social Mobility*

The broader political economy shaped the attitudes and expectations that newcomer immigrant youth had about the importance of education once they arrived in the US. In their countries of origin, participants reported feelings of uncertainty about the necessity and purpose of going to school. Hawa, from Conakry, Guinea, explains:

You don’t want to sit there and read a book, you see what happen, you see people working, they office. You want to be them. So you have to go to school. All that. Pushing you to go to school, other than back there, when you don’t see a lot of adult people working. And all the time telling you, even if you go to school, you’re not going to get a job. You’re not going to school. Why should I go to school for the rest of my life, and not
having a job at the end? All the disappointed people. We don’t have a lot of resource for school. We don’t have a lot of schools, many kids in one school.

Hawa felt that many high school students dropped out of school to join gangs, and few young people could find work. Moustapha and Mariama, both from Guinea, also reported knowing many people in their town who had university degrees but had trouble finding jobs. They believed that young people were not motivated to persist in education as a result.

Participants also reported their perception that attending school would not necessarily lead to mobility. Puja, from Bangladesh, felt that this reality impacted their motivation to attend school:

I have seen people, like higher educated people not having jobs in Bangladesh. I have seen people having their Masters and farming in their own land or like other people’s land, and I’m like, I was like, what’s the point of me getting an education? […] What’s the point me working so hard for an education when I’m not using it.

Notions of educational attainment and investments in education were often dictated by labor market demands and connected to broader economic factors in the participants’ countries of origin. In urban areas in Guinea or Senegal, even if completion of secondary school and higher levels of educational attainment may have been more common, education led to diminishing returns without job prospects. In China, attending college did bring returns to educational investment in the form of jobs and economic mobility, but college entrance was extraordinarily competitive. Hence, the nature of the relationship between education and the labor market differed depending on the economic context of the country of origin.

The participants’ gender also influenced their perceptions about schooling. Puja noted that, in Bangladesh, pursuing higher education was not a priority because she would have been
expected to marry, without the opportunity to pursue a career. Even with an advanced degree, it was unlikely that she would “do something in life” (Puja). In Bangladesh, “if I get married, my education would be useless. But here, I would be using my education for something. I have the choice of a career or being a housewife. That was my choice” (Puja). When she came to the U.S., her thinking changed when she realized that an advanced degree led to significant pay off, with practical and concrete returns on her educational investment. She could still be married and pursue a career that was meaningful and challenging.

Ultimately, access to schooling itself was not universal. In the rural area where Samia lived in Bangladesh, access to education was limited to those who could afford it:

The people who were around our age…Some people are working, and some people can’t afford, because we have to pay fees to go to school. Books and stuff. And some people are so poor that they can’t afford that, and they need to help their families, so some of these students who drop out the students even miss school because they are working or helping their families on the farm. (Samia)

In Yemen, Nassar believed that most children did not advance beyond middle school, and that even completing high school was rare.

Asked about the impact of the broader economy on their access to education, Nassar believed that the Yemeni government was intentionally disenfranchising its citizens of quality education. Nassar believed that the lack of jobs created a situation in which a lack of educational investment was endemic to the structure of its society: "there are no jobs, no factories, […] We don’t have no companies to work in" or "you have to do your own job." The local economy of the village where Nassar lived did not have the economic resources to support quality schools, and education was not considered a lever of economic development. Nassar believed this was an
example of a government’s active policy of "using power" to withhold resources from its citizens:

I think the government want it this way, so that people will just stay the way how they are, and they don’t want them to get even intelligent, ‘cause they gonna want question, and control the country. This is my idea, I think. Because if they want to get intelligence, they’re going to ask how, why, so they just want them to stay how they are. That’s it. I mean, also the government, if they want to college, they want to learn, and if they learn, they want a job.

Lack of Security

While there were significant variations across contexts, security issues were a significant feature in the home country for some participants. In some instances, safety concerns resulted from armed conflict or heightened terrorizing from gangs, but concerns also resulted from the insecurity of living in a poor country generally. Bengali participants reported that one reason they did not often return to Bangladesh after immigration to the U.S. was because of the threat of robbery and kidnapping faced by returning Americans, considered to be affluent after emigrating.

Moustapha recalled witnessing large-scale violent protests that took place in Conakry, Guinea when he lived there as a child. In one incident, curious to see what the protests were like, Moustapha snuck out of the house onto his street to watch. In the chaos, he witnessed a soldier shoot a civilian on the street. He never left his house during a protest again after that. Moustapha reflected on how such moments showed him the difference between the U.S. and Guinea, where he had to worry much more about security. Likewise, Maimouna remembered one particularly
difficult transition to a new government in the 1990s in the Ivory Coast, when the level of violence on the streets made it too dangerous to remain there. Tear gas was thrown into her home, and armed militias intimidated and shot at people on the streets in her neighborhood. Maimouna recalled “going on lock down” in her home during those times. With the increase in social turmoil, "everyone we knew went to their own home country" because the armed conflict in the Ivory Coast led to further displacement of people who migrated within the West African region itself (Maimouna).

In addition to political turmoil, the challenged economic systems led to general social unrest. Both in Guinea and in Senegal, the government-funded educational systems were unstable because teachers were not always paid on time, or paid only periodically, leading to frequent strikes. As a result, many families like Abou’s and Moustapha’s opted for private schools. These accounts study show how the combination of economic stagnation, lack of economic development, job opportunities, and educational investment, all led to limitations to the quality and access to educational opportunities.

Limited Formal Education of Parents and Community

Another aspect that limited access to educational opportunities and economic mobility is the socio-economic status and educational levels of the communities they came from. Among the participants, parental educational attainment did not appear to figure as significantly as family income in the quality of education participants received. Yet, the educational levels of the parents of the interviewees and their surrounding community members are indicative of their class positions within the broader political economy of their countries of origin.

The parents of most interviewees had limited formal education. Some parents did not go
to school at all, while most parents reached upper elementary or middle school. Nassar’s parents did not complete elementary school. Abou’s family had mixed educational levels: a few of his aunts and uncles attended college, while others only completed high school. Mariama’s immediate family and neighbors were mostly illiterate, and few adults she knew ever attended school.

Parents of Chinese participants in this study came of age during a time when many Chinese did not attend school because of political disruptions during the Cultural Revolution, an era plagued by desperate poverty and mass starvation. For some parents like Sharon’s, even fluency in Mandarin, the official and standard form of Chinese in China, was limited because they did not reach a primary school level of education. Liang & Guest found that only 50% of the parents of Fujianese students in their study had completed middle school in China, and only 5-6% of the parents had higher education, and that this level of educational attainment was disproportionately low in comparison to other segments of Asian Americans (2013). In Jason’s small rural town, many older villagers were illiterate and uneducated. He explained:

Not a lot of people knowing Chinese characters something. Chinese characters, they don’t know how to write, they don’t know how to read. For my dad’s generation, like in my grandparents, they know nothing. In my dad’s generation, like my grandparents usually send their child to the town to do like education, but I mean like, a lot of people are in the middle school level, not attend to high school or college. (Jason)

Students reported that at least half to a majority of the children they grew up with did not reach college and “went to work” instead, as Ming Tao from China reported: “Most people in that village, my classmates, they drop school at junior high, they start working. I ask them. They
say they can’t learn anymore, they just don’t want school, there’s nothing to do there, they have
to work.” Ming Tao also remembered how important and rare an event it was the first time a
young girl in his village scored high enough on the college entrance exam to be admitted to
university: “I remember when I was little, there was a girl who was attend college, and the whole
village was like shaking, they were like, wow! She was the first one in my village.” Given how
extremely competitive college entrance is in China, students did not always have the chance to
pursue higher education. Sharon explained:

There’s a test. 中考高考 [Chinese college entrance exam]. It’s really hard! So when we
choose school, it’s based on the final score. The school choose students based on the final
score. So it’s different level. Like first level, second level, third level. And then a lot of
students, we want to going to good school but it will be hard to get into good school.

(Sharon)

Infamously competitive, China’s 高考 gao kao system for admission into higher education has
resulted in mass emigration of China’s middle class to pursue educational opportunities abroad.

**Poor School Facilities**

Educational settings in the countries of origin often made aged public school buildings in
New York City look modern by comparison. Students from Bangladesh reported less than ideal
conditions in their physical learning environment: “We had everything but it wasn’t luxury or
something. It was ok. Bangladesh is not a very rich country. Even though it’s a private school,
but it was ok. Not too good, not too bad” (Shefa). In the rural village where Samia lived,
The school is just so small and not funded so well, teachers don’t get paid well. There’s
no bathroom. I guess there is, it’s just one bathroom for all the students, and another for
all the staff. So, that’s a lot of…there’s no cafeteria, these students bring their own food, there’s no elective. (Samia)

Her school had a tin roof, brick walls, fewer rooms than needed, and a dirt field. Nassar reported that elementary schools in Yemen were in extremely poor condition. There were not enough chairs for children to sit in, and classrooms often had a ceiling leak or a broken window.

While some students attended school in urban centers with better facilities, access to safe, clean, and an adequate physical learning environment may have been an exception rather than the norm for children in low-income countries. In China, overcrowding and long distances to nearby schools was less of a problem. Children could go home for lunch, and students reported having spaces utilized for different purposes, such as athletic fields, an auditorium for children's performances, and access to musical instruments and art supplies. Even so, one student from China mentioned that her elementary school was located in the same building as a morgue, and that students would pass by corpses in the entry way.

Unequal Schooling: Urban vs. Rural Disparities in Educational Opportunities and Resources

One crucial factor influencing the degree of access to quality education and variances in learning experiences is whether immigrant youth attended school in rural or urban areas in their countries of origin. Across contexts, the difference in the quality of education in cities compared to that of schools in rural areas was significant. When asked why educational disparities existed, students offered the urban or rural location of their schools as the primary determinant in one’s quality of education.

In home country educational contexts, rural schools suffered from a lack of educational investment resulting from the economic challenges inherent in the broader macro-economy. In
rural areas, access to a seat in a school alone was not always guaranteed. Students often walked long distances each morning to get to school because only a few schools serviced a relatively large geographic area: “Most of the students in the village come there, and there isn’t a lot of schools there. It covers a big area, where there’s a lot of people who live, which is one of the reason there are so many students” (Samia). In Sharon's village, there were not enough seats open in her local elementary school, so she could not even enroll in school until she was 8 or 9 years of age. In the interim, her family sent her to a private kindergarten for two years prior to starting elementary school. For Jason, born in a fishing village on a small island off the coast of Southern China in Fujian, his family relocated to the mainland so he could continue his primary school education since no school served the remote village in which he lived.

Since schools were dependent on student fees and tuition for funding, schools in rural areas with smaller populations could not possibly operate on the same funding levels as large urban schools serving larger populations with a larger budget to pay for resources. Rural schools suffered from a host of factors contributing to poorer quality education. They lacked sufficient space and material resources needed for learning. Students in rural schools reported having access to a narrower curriculum, without electives or supplementary and enrichment programs, especially in music or the arts, or any foreign language such as English.

The reason for a limited curriculum in rural schools had to do with lack of human capital. Sharon explained that teachers in her rural school were not well-trained or qualified, and that it was difficult to recruit college-educated teachers to teach in rural towns, where they would get paid less and the positions were less prestigious. In Yemen, Nassar reported that teacher shortages were common. His primary school did not have enough teachers for each grade level, so classes consisted of mixed grade levels. Similarly, in rural China, Ming Tao explained:
They don’t have enough people. For every teacher have to teach 2-3 classes, there’s 5 or 6 teachers at my school, and there’s like 6 class in my school. So probably like each class for a teacher. It is because all about resource, my school is poor! We don’t have that much people in school. They don’t have money to offer all those stuff.

Hence, the educational experiences of immigrant youth who grew up in rural areas in their countries of origin were characterized by a lack of resources and little investment in educational opportunities.

Urban schools, on the other hand, were assumed to be better funded, to serve a more affluent student population, to have better facilities, access to resources, materials, technology, and better academic and enrichment programs, and to employ teachers who took their education more seriously. In urban districts, students experienced a longer instructional day, which also meant a wider and possibly richer instructional program. Vivian explained:

Well, if it’s in the city, then of course it’s better than in the countryside. Those are not good. But if you’re in the city, you get to learn more things, like computers, and stuff. Which in the countryside, they do not have. And yeah...we have a really nice dance studio. That’s what I remember. Big one. I’m pretty sure that other places they do not have. So, I would say that was a very nice school.

Qualified teachers were also concentrated in urban areas. Xiao Lin from China reported that the teachers at the school she attended in the city of Lianjiang was better than those teaching in the school in her family’s village. In the city, the teachers focused on play, teaching children to communicate, to have fun and learn at the same time. She felt her education was more holistic, less focused on drill and kill memorization of content in the early childhood program she attended. Xiao Lin described the contrast she noticed between the two:
In there, it’s much fun! And our teacher teach us how to draw, how to sing. I also play keyboard. Before in village, I think it’s only two or three classes. But after I move to Lianjiang, there’s a big kindergarten. So there’s many classes, I think. And…it’s like America. So, during the lunch time, you eat in school. And sleep in school. And teachers teach us like how to draw. I also play keyboard. Yeah, it’s much fun compared to village.

Even in China, where universal compulsory education is supposedly available to all children, educational inequality was intensified through urban and rural differences. The competition between schools was pervasive, so the difference between rural and urban schools was even starker.

The most good school are in Fuzhou. Fuzhou is...has the most popular school. If I, for example, Lianjiang, there’s middle school and high school. Called 一中. It’s the very…一中 is the best school. If you study at Lianjiang when you were child, you study the elementary school. If you want to get into the 一中, it’s more easy than you start your elementary school in village. Because you have the higher grade. And most smart people and they get…and also rich people...they try to help their kids to get better education. So if you study in village, then it’s unfair to have the same exam. The one like, if you study in village, your grade will be lower than the one you study in the Lianjiang. Then if you want to go to the high school, 一中, then you have to study like, you have to become the top one in your school. So it’s very hard. So most of our parents want their kids to study in Lianjiang. (Xiao Lin)

Overall, home country educational systems were characterized by extreme social stratification and educational disparities. The participants’ explanations demonstrate how access to
educational opportunities was differentiated, based on a host of socio-economic factors.

That access to quality education was not uniform was evident to the participants, who described the educational disparities and stratification they observed and presumed were normal. Sharon told me, “the city student is different from the village student.” The class-based differences in access to education were apparent in both Bangladesh and in China. Samia, speaking about Bangladesh, said:

Everywhere in Bangladesh. I mean, it is very different compared to a school in Dhaka, which is the capital, obviously. There’s difference where rich people go versus people who live in the countryside. But, pretty much that is basically looks, unless you go to a very good private school, pay a lot of money in the capital. Then, it would be different.

The disparity between urban and rural areas gave families the impetus to make strategic choices about where they lived so that their children might have access to a better education. A number of participants reported switching schools multiple times, sometimes relocating to different towns or cities, in order to attend better schools. It is hard to say what effect this had on their educational experiences, but it is possible that it made immigrant youth accustomed to disruption in their education. Ultimately, emigration was the ultimate strategic choice in the search for quality education.

Comparisons between Urban and Rural Education: Priya’s Story

Priya’s account is instructive because she experienced education in vastly different contexts in Bangladesh, in a rural village and in Bangladesh’s largest city, Dhaka. Though she was born and raised in a rural village, Priya’s family moved to the capital of Bangladesh, and their economic situation improved after relocating because of the city’s greater opportunities for
financial investment. The discrepancy between the quality of schooling she received in Dhaka versus in her village was so great that she had significant trouble adjusting when she switched between systems.

When she began school in Dhaka, she realized that she “didn’t learn anything in the village” (Priya). Her new classmates in Dhaka were more prepared, well ahead of her. With some effort and with the help of a tutor, Priya eventually caught up to her peers in class. Priya reported that her schooling in Dhaka was high-quality. She had a long instructional day, schooling was more formal with clear structures and rules, and the campus included both a primary and secondary school with a large student body. As a result of the time she spent in Dhaka, Priya feels that she had a good educational foundation. Even though her elementary school in the village was quite poor, the time that she spent in a Dhaka school afforded her funds of knowledge that she might not have developed had she remained in the village.

After a number of years living and attending school in Dhaka, Priya and her family returned to her natal village at her father’s request. Because of the strong foundation she developed in Dhaka, Priya was well advanced beyond most of the students in the village high school, so much so that she spent very little time studying or paying attention in school. Priya skipped classes often, showed up mostly for exams, and still got high marks. Priya developed a competitive advantage simply because she attended school in an urban setting with a more advanced curriculum:

I went to school in Dhaka already, so I was little advanced. Compared to in the village, I was advanced. So I was always the captain of the class, from 6-7th grade, I was always the captain. Things they teach, I was already knew those stuff. Compared to other students, I saw them struggling with…just the way I struggled in Dhaka. Because I didn’t know any
of the stuff but the other kids were advanced [in Dhaka]. But when I got back to the village, because I was little advanced, it was easier for me to pass the classes. But I saw my cousins, because…it wasn’t easy. Getting 33 was hard for them.

Ultimately, Priya wishes that she had remained in Dhaka during the time she lived in Bangladesh. She felt that the disparities between rural and urban education had an impact on immigrants: from her perspective, immigrants who originated from urban areas were better prepared for the transition to the U.S. When they arrived in the US, they performed better academically in comparison to those who came from the village. The other accounts in this dissertation suggest that Priya may be right.

**The Effects of a Neoliberal Economy**

An important concept in “doing political economy” in education through a neo-Marxist critique is to identify ways in which the cost of what should be a public good is "socialized," how the burden of public goods is shifted to the shoulders of ordinary citizens even as income inequality widens (Anyon, 2011). As governments abdicate their responsibility to preserve public resources, the economic structure creates conditions under which the cost and investment in education in home country contexts are privatized or socialized. Priya explained in her own terms, “Bangladesh is so poor! Government can’t even provide for themselves, how they will provide for the country?”

Using Harvey's notion of “accumulation by dispossession," a neo-Marxist analysis suggests that privatization of education and other neoliberal mechanisms are significant because they withhold education from children who should have access to schooling as a human right (Anyon, 2011; Harvey, 2005). Profits accrued through the privatization of educational services
are indicators of free market principles. As the education sector becomes a source of profit in low- and middle-income countries, the cost of education, supposedly a public good, is borne by ordinary citizens, rather than carried by the state or by sectors that control capitalist production (Anyon, 2011). Jean Anyon argued that advanced capitalist economic structures in a globalized economy fuel activities of privatization in education, causing an increasing number of people to be barred from access to economic mobility and opportunity (Anyon, 2011). These economic processes "dispossessed the public - and particularly its vulnerable populations - of needed services" such as education (Anyon, 2011, pg. 88).

In the following section, I show how the neoliberal lack of investment in education is an indication of accumulation by dispossession at work in home country educational contexts, dispossessing children of their fundamental right to education. I describe the components of a supplemental educational industrial complex and the pervasive use of privatized educational services. In response to such realities in a neoliberal economy, immigrant families use immigration and remittances to circumvent existing economic structures to access education for their children.

**Overall Costs of Education**

In the countries of origin, the cost of education was passed onto to the public through charging tuition and school fees, so access to education was directly impacted by socio-economic status and income. The overall cost of education is typically made up of tuition, school fees, the cost of materials, books, school supplies, food, and school uniforms. Students from Bangladesh reported a scheme where textbooks and school supplies were paid for by the government up until Class 5. Even so, families typically picked up the tab for schooling, even as textbooks and
supplies presumably rose in cost as students increased with age and entered secondary school.

Priya explained:

We have textbooks for every classes. In high school, we actually have to buy books. Even though it was government school, they only provide books until 5th grade. So I had to buy books and then I had to buy Galaxy notes.

At the public school she attended in rural Bangladesh, Samia said,

We didn’t have a lot of resources at our school that I knew, for sure. Nothing was for free. We had to pay fees, every year upon admission to a newer grade. […] All the things we get, on our own, the books, supplies, everything. School is really not well funded, teachers get paid [low wages].

Vivian remembered that, in China, “some kids parents’ cannot afford to go to like the public regular daycare or like in elementary school. Then they would send them to [another school],” rather than one that was government-run. As well, Jason believed that a third of the children in his village in Fujian did not attend elementary school at all because their parents could not afford to pay tuition and school fees.

While the cost of education rose as students reached higher grade-levels, the opportunity costs related to schooling also increased. Between the rising cost of education, the fierce competition to access higher levels of education, and the investment of time and resources needed for college entrance, a majority of the participants in the study presumed that they would not have reached the same level of education had they not immigrated to the United States. Puja mentioned that university tuition would have been prohibitive for her family, even though she was considered upper middle class by the standards of her home country.
Dispossession through Privatization in Home Country Educational Systems

The participants’ descriptions suggest that low- and middle-income countries have a strong private sector in the educational system, compensating for the lack of resources in state-run schools. The perception that private education was superior to state-run schools was almost universal among participants. Priya put it this way: "Only people who are wealthy will go to private. My two siblings, the youngest one, they both went to private." She believes her younger siblings, who attended private schools, had access to resources that she did not in the state-run school she attended, such as computer classes, English instruction, and a wider curriculum with subject areas in history and government. When her family moved to Dhaka, they attended a private school, where the quality of education was even better.

Participants noted that families relied on private schools because state-run schools were unstable, with teacher strikes and school shutdowns as common occurrences. State-run schools were often overcrowded, sometimes extremely so. When I asked Mariama about the difference between private and government-funded schools in Guinea, she said that private schools were of higher quality, students received more attention and help from teachers, the facilities were better, with smaller class sizes. State-run schools were characterized by a stark difference in the quality of the teaching and higher incidents of corruption.

While some families simply could not afford to attend school, much less a private school, those who had family members working abroad and sending home remittances could send their children to private schools. Social class was a significant determinant in accessing educational resources, leading to differentiated educational opportunity and social stratification. Ultimately, the unequal distribution of quality education in the countries of origin was a direct consequence
of the state’s inability to allocate financial resources to its educational systems given the constraints in their macro-economy.

Supplemental Education Industrial Complex

The educational contexts in the countries of origin all featured some form of privatized educational service that was used almost universally. This supplemental education industrial complex paralleled the education provided through regular schooling and was created not only to meet the demands that resulted from a lack of investment in education, but also for profit-generating purposes. Explicit practices were used in the countries of origin to create demand for supplemental educational services and for the production of educational goods that led to differential access to quality education.

The supplemental education industry produced and sold educational materials, such as universally-used textbooks that families were required to purchase. Participants reported the common practice of purchasing materials that contained answers to questions on standardized exams, and it was generally acknowledged that students used the materials to secure passing marks. Teachers might even require answers to questions that could only be found in a particular set of published materials, or recommend students to purchase specific materials that were costlier than others. Students purchased materials required for regular classroom instruction, but were also encouraged to purchase supplemental materials recommended by teachers for each subject. Priya describes the way in which these materials were used:

For all of the notes, they elaborated more in details and everything than the textbook.

Textbook is just give the reading, and because when you have questions, that’s when you…some of the question, we get stuck and we don’t know how to find them from the
textbook. So on the notes, they tell you how they find it, and how you can find it from the textbook. And then, they elaborate it really well. They explain the answer. They give you the answer so maybe you can just memorize that one. But if you still don’t understand the answer, because sometimes here too, when it’s English, we know English, but still we are reading but we don’t understand what is it. But when you break it into parts that’s when you can get it. So they do that too in the notes.

In other instances, the supplemental education industry held market share in the education sector to fill demands created by shortcomings in the actual education system. Parents paid for supplemental classes because they believed their children could not learn effectively in overcrowded classrooms. Participants regularly turned to private tutoring for assistance because they were left insufficiently prepared through their regular schooling. In fact, students from Bangladesh reported that teachers intentionally controlled the material they covered in class, limiting the pace and number of topics they taught, in order to offer the content instead during supplemental tutoring sessions outside of the school day. Fearing that their children would be inadequately prepared for exams, families paid additional fees so that their children could be taught the full curriculum. Priya describes this parallel education system:

Some teachers, what they do, they don’t really teach you everything in the class because they tell you that if you go to tutoring, they will have their other private tutoring, you have to pay them. So they will make you understand more. So some people, some teachers used a trick that they don’t teach everything in the class [...] Because teachers didn’t used to teach you everything in the class, so they used to tell you that if you want to learn, if you want to pass my class, you have to take what you call, tutoring. Basic
tutoring outside of the class and he will teach you there. But we have to pay them. And only if you take tutoring for his class. They used to write everything on the board for answers, but some of the questions, if it’s 15 marks or 20 marks, he used to only give only a little paper to those kids who went to his tutoring. If you didn’t go, you wouldn’t know the answer. It was…cheating! The whole system is!

The supplemental education industrial complex in the countries of origin ensured that families not only bore the cost of their children’s regular education, but also paid additional fees to compensate for the shortcomings of the educational system.

_Tutoring: A Pillar of the Supplemental Education Industrial Complex_

Private tutoring is a feature of many educational systems, and is often utilized across class lines in varied socio-economic situations to further learning for children. What is notable is how prominent tutoring was in the participant's educational experiences in their countries of origin, and how central it was in the supplemental education industrial complex. Almost every participant paid for additional tutoring in excess of the instructional program they received at school. Tutoring was a critical component in a child’s academic performance: “People who cannot afford tutoring, eventually, they fail” (Priya). As well, because teachers were paid poorly, especially in rural areas, they used tutoring to generate supplemental income from tutoring fees. Shefa said of her teacher in Bangladesh: “They have to pay him! If somebody, they wants to make some extra money. Everybody like that. He has family, he has to take care of the other things, so he want to make extra money.”

Private tutoring occurred in a few different forms. Students attended tutoring classes offered by a teacher from their school, either before or after normal school hours. For example,
in the 6th grade, Jhumki from Bangladesh went to extra math tutoring classes offered before her regular schedule with her math teacher because she was having trouble with word problems. For a fee, Abou went to his teacher’s house after school to get homework help, along with other students. In advanced grades, when academic content increased in difficulty, Abou paid for extra tutoring from his teachers just so he could keep up with the curriculum taught in school.

Families also hired private tutors to provide one-on-one instruction in their home. Puja's family hired a tutor to review the material that was taught in school with her, to keep her on track with homework assignments, to help her learn new content ahead of time and content that was not covered in school but that would be assessed on exams. Shefa also had multiple private tutors to help her with her homework if she made mistakes, to help her solve homework problems, or to make sure she maintained an adequate level of academic performance in school.

Other families utilized tutoring to compete at the highest levels. Some students attended supplemental educational services through formal programs. In Bangladesh, this was called the coaching center, “like a second school” that provided programs in the evening, typically from 6-8pm (Jhumki). Jhumki began going to the coaching center in the 8th grade, where she would take different classes that were taught by university students. She took classes in Bangla or English, or whatever classes they wanted to supplement the regular curriculum:

It’s just like repolishing, they repolish it there. To be just better, it’s just like extra support class. Coaching center, and also because I was at a girl’s school, coaching center was girls and boys together, so tend to go there, oh, we’re going to talk about this, that. I wasn’t into it, but I met so many friends there. I would go.

Private tutoring supported her classroom performance in school, whereas the coaching center offered an entirely separate academic program outside of the regular school day. In China,
supplemental academic programs were designed for children who were chosen to participate in academic competitions and extra-curricular programs that were highly structured and formal, geared toward students' academic strengths and interests.

Tutoring was also utilized to help children adjust to changes in their educational experiences and performance, especially when their regular educational experience in school did not meet their learning needs. For example, Maimouna's family paid for a private tutor to work with her after school because she was significantly behind other students and was left back twice. The tutor reviewed what she was supposed to learn in class that day and provided support for her to catch up. However, when the tutor raised the fees for his service, her father could no longer afford for Maimouna to continue receiving the extra help.

Similarly, when Hawa's academic performance declined after spending two years in a state-run school and she returned to a high-quality private school, her family hired a private tutor to work with her every day after school at home until she caught up. The tutor cost the same amount as school tuition, so it was expensive for her family. The tutor helped Hawa review lessons from the day, teach her how to write, do math problems assigned for homework, and correct her grammar. Within a year, Hawa reached the top 5 ranking in her class. Hawa’s family invested in an after-school tutor for most of the duration of her primary school experience to provide additional support so that she could maintain academic excellence.

For many families, the investment in supplemental educational services was costly. Even for Jhumki, whose family was solidly middle class in Bangladesh and paid not only for tutoring but also for the coaching center on top of the high cost of attending a highly competitive state-run school in Dhaka, it was clear that the cost of tutoring was not insignificant. When Jhumki had to decide on the academic track she would pursue in high school in Bangladesh, her father
dissuaded her from math or science because the added expenses she would have needed for tutoring in those subject areas would have been prohibitive. Additional tutoring created access to educational opportunities typically denied to many children in their countries of origin, and the participants in the study could afford tutoring largely due to remittances, a strategy I describe in detail later in this chapter. In that sense, the supplemental educational industrial complex contributed to the intensification of social stratification in home country contexts within the educational systems.

Corruption in Home Country Educational Contexts

Aside from structural influences resulting from political and economic instability, or lack of economic development, participants also named corruption as an endemic problem and underlying feature of their education. The participants’ accounts suggest that corruption had concrete implications for the children’s learning in those contexts. While educational systems of low-income countries mimicked the structures of schooling that are commonplace to education systems globally, such as high-stakes examinations and stringent requirements for academic promotion, the actual practices related to schooling and learning were far removed from any objectives related to child development or learning.

As is the case in many school systems, high-stakes examinations were used as a control mechanism to determine the quality of a school, to assess the effectiveness of teachers, to promote students from one grade to the next, to determine passage of a course, and to rank students in their academic performance. Passing marks on mid- and end-of year standardized exams in designated subject areas and grade levels determined academic promotion and acquiring credits. Yet, corruption in the school systems incentivized problematic behaviors and
practices. Students purchased answers to exams ahead of time, parents paid teachers off so that their children would pass an exam or be promoted to the next grade. Nassar said it was common and easy for students to buy exam copies from someone who administered the test, and to study all the answers in preparation for the exam on the next day.

Mariama recalled that the culture of corruption was prevalent more so in the state-run school she attended, in comparison to private schools. She recalled teachers who passed students or gave them higher marks based on whether the students followed their orders, including demands to do domestic work for them. She felt that the teachers "didn’t really care" and that they did not take their responsibility as teachers seriously. This was a stark difference compared to the private school she attended, where she had positive relationships with teachers. Mariama said, "It's all about money" in the state-run school.

The prevalence of corruption was also more common in rural than in urban schools. When comparing corruption in her village school to her private school education in Dhaka, Priya reported that bribing teachers for grades was not a common practice in the city. Yet, in the village school she attended, teachers were actively complicit in helping students to cheat:

I remember that some times, during the test, they used to write on the board, what was the answer, and cheating the answers during the final exams something. So it was really weird, I don’t know why they used to do it […] I think because they wanted to pass the test. Yeah, or maybe they wanted their school to be a little better ranking, something, I don’t know. […] everybody knew that that school was the worst school ever. That’s what I heard from everyone. […] they write on the board during the exams, and there was no way you would learn things, kids already know they will pass it anyway. And even if you don’t go to school, it doesn’t matter. As long as if you pass the test.
Another student reported that the emphasis on passing the tests was related to whether or not the government would keep a school open, if they wanted to hire new teachers, or whether the students' academic performance would be impacted. As a result, the teachers wrote down answers to exam questions on the board, resulting in very little learning.

Ultimately, corruption in the school systems led to negative effects on learning. Priya says that she passed her exams because she learned how to copy and memorize answers written on the board, not because she knew the answers to the questions on the exam. This influenced her perceptions about learning and about going to school: “I never was curious to learn things because I already knew it will be on the board during the exam” (Priya). Because she knew someone would give her answers, she did not have "any curiosity or any pressure on me that I have to learn” (Priya). In this way, the countries of origin may have utilized the trappings of an educational system such as a testing system, yet, the prevalent corruption and cheating suggests that education systems did not prioritize authentic learning.

The Role of Remittances in Differential Access to Education

Given the pervasive corruption, social stratification, and inequality inherent in home country educational contexts, immigrant families utilized immigration as strategy for mobility and, specifically, to provide educational opportunities for their children. Wage differentials between the U.S. and their countries of origin made it possible for immigrant parents to send remittances while working abroad that provided economic stability and mobility for family members who remained behind. This finding supports the analysis that remittances from immigrants play a significant role in the global economy in macro-economic terms (Pew Research Center, 2014). As Priya said, “When you are in America, back there [in home country],
you are little rich. You have money.” Remittances allowed Priya’s family to significantly increase their land holdings in Bangladesh, as a result of the hard-earned money Priya’s father made through a construction business in Brooklyn, NY. Years after immigrating to America, Priya’s father accumulated capital for his family to invest in opening their own small businesses in Bangladesh. As a result, Priya’s family was considered relatively wealthy and well-respected in her village.

The data in this study suggest that remittances played a major role in providing substantially better access to education for the children of immigrants while they lived in their countries of origin. Remittances enabled immigrant families to afford higher quality private schools, to access supplemental educational services, and to ensure consistent schooling for their children. Abou believes that, had his mother not been working in America and sending regular remittances, he would not have had the financial means to consistently attend a private school while growing up in Senegal. The quality of his education would have been compromised if he had to attend a government-funded school, where school shutdowns from teacher strikes were common. In the private schools he attended, students outperformed students from government-funded schools on final exams administered to all children in elementary school. In Mariama’s case, when it became clear to Mariama's family that the overcrowded state-run school had ineffective teachers, negatively impacting her learning, they could afford to transfer her to a better private school because of her parents’ remittances.

In China, family income is a significant predictor of school enrollment and progress, and a correlation exists between income and wealth of Chinese families and the access they had to quality schools (Fong, 2004; Liu, 2004). The impact of economic resources on educational opportunities was particularly significant as it related to residential registration, which
determined which school districts children attended (ibid). For families in China, the stratification in access to quality education was codified through the *hukou* policy, or household registration, that established residential permits for Chinese citizens (ibid). Families who could afford to do so would pay to change their *hukou* to a better district, or pay additional fees to attend schools outside of their residential registration. Remittances enabled some families to pay double the tuition amount so their children could attend higher quality schools in large cities different from their registered *hukou*, like Chang Le or Fuzhou, rather than schools in their native rural villages.

In fact, it was a common practice among Fujianese families with family members who immigrated abroad to transfer their children to better educational settings when they could afford to. For example, when her father immigrated to the U.S., Xiao Lin moved from the village where she was born to Lianjiang, a larger city, in order to attend schools that had a great reputation. Using remittances, Xiao Lin’s family paid double the regular tuition to attend a school in Lianjiang without a Lianjiang *hukou*. Similarly, after a significant increase in income due to her father’s immigration to the U.S., Sharon’s family applied to change her *hukou* so that she could attend a better school in the provincial capital of Fuzhou, but had to pay extra fees while awaiting the change in her residential status.

For Jason, remittances made it possible for him to attend a competitive and prestigious private boarding school, which would have been out of his family’s reach otherwise:

Because my dad was in the United States, I think they just can pay this tuition, so I think – because my mom was like doesn’t read and has no education, I mean she can’t teach me that many things. So she just think it is better for me to send, also in China, they so care about the males like in my family. My dad think that I am get better education, so
they sent me to a private school in China, which I take two years on middle school. Jr. high. And a private school, so I sleep there, in school. Something like boarding school, cuz my dad wants me to go to a good school. I mean, it is good school because we pay a lot of money for that.

Jason’s private boarding school employed highly trained teachers, and the academic coursework was extremely rigorous and fast-paced. By the time he finished two years of junior high at his school in China, he was advanced in academic skills and content knowledge. Not surprisingly, Jason is one of the few newcomer immigrant youth I taught that enrolled directly in a selective and competitive 4-year university straight out of high school, a rare occurrence among immigrant youth that immigrate to the US during middle adolescence.

Consequently, immigration had a direct positive impact on the education of the participants in this study, even while they still lived in their countries of origin, and enabled families to access middle-class educational opportunities. These conversions of economic capital, accrued and made possible through immigration, were out of reach for most rural families. The role of remittances cannot be understated in creating differential access to educational opportunities in home country contexts.

*Differential Access and the Importance of Remittances: Hawa’s Story*

A few participants in this study reported significant changes in their access to schooling as a result of changes in their parents’ economic situation while they worked in America. These changes included transferring from private to state-run schools, or the other way around, depending on the availability of remittances. Hawa’s story shows how such economic changes abroad can impact schooling experiences for immigrant youth, and demonstrates the stark
inequalities in educational opportunities available in home country contexts.

When she first started attending school in Conakry, Guinea, Hawa’s family could only afford the tuition at a state-run school. After both of her parents emigrated and their financial situation improved, their remittances increased. They subsequently were able to send both Hawa and her older sister to attend a reputable private school, called the Bill Clinton School, founded by a wealthy Guinean. Hawa's private school was considered expensive in Conakry, and her family would not have been able to afford it, if not for the comparatively higher wages her parents made in the U.S.

At the Bill Clinton School, Hawa reported having access to regular after school tutoring, extracurricular activities, sports teams and clubs. Hawa recalled attending field trips to the zoo and other educational locations. The school provided supplies and students were given their own books to use and bring home, instead of having to share textbooks among classmates. The school offered a broader curriculum and a longer instructional day than state-run schools. According to Hawa, the school's teachers were more attentive and often stayed behind to help her. The pedagogy was also different, “not doing the same thing all over the same thing. You get to move around.” (Hawa) She remembers doing group work, experiments, and other authentic learning experiences, such as dissecting a frog. Hawa believes that her private school experience was an exception, far superior to what most people in Conakry had access to.

Unfortunately, at one point, Hawa’s father lost his job in New York and had trouble finding work. Without remittances, the family was unable to afford the more expensive private school that Hawa had been attending. They transferred her to a state-run school for two years. The transition was difficult for Hawa, who switched from a class of 25 to a class of 100 children, with one teacher for two different grade levels. Hawa struggled to pay attention in the crowded
room, which she described as "like a market." Children at the school bullied her and stole her food, the teachers were harsh and used corporal punishment on students often. The state-run school also had only four hours of instruction, instead of the eight at her former private school. Hawa explained, “You go there, you don’t learn nothing. Kid is bullying you, teachers is beating you up. I don’t like it” (Hawa).

Hawa skipped school a lot during those two years at the state-run school because she felt less engaged and motivated. She stayed at home, or at her aunt’s house, and watched TV while her family was at work. She reported missing entire weeks of school at a time. She returned to school only when a teacher from her school, who happened to also live across the street from her, informed her family that she had been skipping school. Hawa believes this led to her academic decline. Her grades dropped, she fell behind, and she could not pass the final exams at the end of 2nd grade. The experience also changed the way she felt about school: "I used to love school so much" (Hawa).

Fortunately, once her father was able to find stable employment again, her family enrolled her in a very high-quality private school that helped her to eventually catch up. Her family’s economic situation improved when her father opened his own mechanic shop in New York. Hawa's story demonstrates how immigrant families make parenting and educational decisions for their children and that a primary motivation for immigration is the search for access to educational opportunities. Her story is a reminder of disparities in educational contexts and how remittances through immigration can make a significant difference in securing educational opportunities for immigrant youth.
Conclusion

When learning about the pre-migration experiences of immigrant youth, educators and researchers often want to know the country of origin, the language(s) they speak, or when they arrived in the U.S. They may focus on student behaviors, culture, or language. The analytical power of "doing political economy" in educational research uses the broader macroeconomic context to inform our understanding of educational challenges. In this chapter, I analyzed the educational experiences of immigrant youth through a discussion of the political economy in which their access to education was embedded. I described how educational opportunities in low- and middle-income sending countries were limited by barriers that resulted from existing economic structures. I demonstrated how immigrant youth faced highly unequal distribution of educational resources that disproportionately disadvantaged poor working class uneducated families, creating substantial challenges to their access to formal education as a strategy for mobility. Depending on the context of their countries of origin, immigrant youth faced differential access to economic resources and educational opportunities. By situating our understanding of the educational performance and outcomes of newcomer immigrant youth within a political and economic context, I show how educational experiences are structured by the broader macro-economy, and how such analytical work extends our quest for solutions to educational problems outside of schools themselves.
Chapter 5: Structures of Schooling and Educational Practices in Countries of Origin

While political and economic contexts shaped the overall access to education that immigrant adolescents had in their countries of origin, it is also crucial to examine the actual structures and practices of schooling that made up their educational experiences prior to arrival in the U.S. Through my in-depth interviews, students provided recollections of their schooling experiences, they described their classrooms, the textbooks they used, their teachers, their daily school schedule, their interactions with other students, and their extra-curricular activities. They provided details about the curriculum, the content of their lessons, the teaching practices used in their schools, and what they enjoyed and did not enjoy about school. They provided reflections and analysis of the quality of their home country education, the impact their schooling experiences had on their learning overtime, and interpreted their educational experiences in light of the differences they experienced in schooling in the U.S. Hence, their educational histories are situated in their understanding of how well-prepared they were for "learning in a new land" (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2008). While each participant had unique anecdotes and details from a wide variety of experiences in vastly different cultural contexts, there were some patterns and cross-cutting themes which I document in this chapter.

Similar to descriptive reviews that teachers use to analyze student performance, the educational histories that I culled from these interviews are valuable to practitioners who work with newcomer immigrant youth. Information about prior schooling is deeply informative; it helps educators develop a holistic and human-centered analysis of students’ learning needs, to see them as people with a wealth of life experiences prior to coming to a host country, and to better understand their socio-emotional needs. While it is time-consuming to create in-depth educational histories, this chapter shows what information can be collected and analyzed, and
highlights which questions and factors are illuminating. The educational histories in this particular chapter offer insight into a student’s academic behaviors and how they adjust to a new learning environment, based on information about their prior schooling. They show behaviors and attitudes towards learning that students developed since childhood in their countries of origin, identify causes for concern when necessary, and provide baseline data regarding the students’ level of academic development upon arrival in the US. These data suggest various factors that impact school-readiness, the preparedness of immigrant youth for schooling in the U.S. given their prior schooling in their countries of origin.

**Structures of Schooling**

On the surface, the structures of schooling in the countries of origin were consistent with schooling in many contexts. In school, they sang songs, they learned how to color and write letters and words. They had naptime. They learned history, geography, math, and grammar. Yet, a detailed examination reveals significant variations in the quality of resources and practices used in educational settings, especially in comparison to schooling in the US.

**Schooling Routines and Schedules**

Most participants attended schools within walking distance from their home. Two students attended boarding schools. Two other students reported attending schools that were an hour's walk away from their homes because no public or school transportation system existed. Children traveled to and from school on their own with other children in their neighborhood. In their countries of origin, immigrant youth had significantly more time spent unsupervised by adults compared to children in the U.S. When students arrived at school in the morning, they
reported singing their country’s national anthem or lining up next to the national flag, where they did morning exercises or other physical activities.

The participants noted differences in schooling practices and rules they were accustomed to compared to their encounter with schooling in the U.S. For example, Priya recalled her surprise when she realized that lunch in America was provided to students:

You had to brought your own lunch. School in Bangladesh, they never provide lunch. It was so… I was so shocked that here, when I got here, and I was like, oh, my gosh, it’s free food! Yeah. It was something like really big change or something to me, I don’t know. I found it really fascinating that we are getting free food and we have to, back then we had to spend lot of money for food and everything.

Students also recalled following strict dress codes, wearing school uniforms, and having their fingernails and hair assessed for cleanliness on a routine basis.

One significant structure of schooling that varied in different contexts was the number of hours of instruction during a normal school day. The students recalled taking lessons in the morning, with a long break for lunch so that students could return home to eat and to do homework. Children returned to school in the afternoon for additional classes, or for a review of the morning’s lessons. The length of the instructional day varied by context. Nassar reported only attending school for a few hours each day in Yemen, and Samia recalled only four hours of school at her elementary school in rural Bangladesh. Yet, in other contexts, typically in urban or accelerated academic programs, some students reported exceptionally long hours spent in school or participating in educational activities.

Longer instructional days were associated with access to a broader range of educational opportunities. Extended instructional hours supplemented the core instructional program with
tutoring, study sessions, extra-curricula classes, or preparation for academic competitions. For example, despite already attending a prestigious urban school in Chittagong, Bangladesh, Jhumki went to “cram schools” at a coaching center every day after school late into the evening hours in order to supplement the instruction she received in school so that she’d be better prepared for competitive college entrance exams. As well, the instructional day in China lasted for most of the day, with long hours dedicated to homework, and advanced academic work after school for the most selective and competitive schools. Jason described his packed academic schedule at a competitive boarding school that he attended for junior high in Fujian:

They start reading at 6:55am in the morning. And, they have like afterschool. I mean, in China, they start class at 6:55 and it ends at like 11:15 or something, you have like two hours lunch break, or whatever, take a break or rest, you can go home, you can stay in school, you can go wherever you want. So they start afternoon school at 2pm, and it ends at like 5 something, we usually go to dinner, then we take like 2 hours break, and we have wan zi shi, we call wan zi shi. It’s called like school in the afternoon. Usually, school doesn’t do that, but my school did that, so we the after school start at like 6pm till 9pm, like we usually the teacher was there, you doing your homework, readings, if you have questions to ask teachers, then you go to bed at 9:30 or something, and then you wake up another day, that’s my two years life [in middle school].

While Jason attended a particularly competitive school, the highly structured and scheduled school day was not unusual for most children who attended school in China. A few participants reported being exhausted from school. Vivian said: "Most of the time I’m studying. I have to sleep at 8pm at night because I have to wake up at 6am in the morning. But I’m always
late for school. I try to be…but I’m always late. I’m tired!” Similarly, Sharon reported that the workload was intense even in primary school because she would get lengthy homework assignments for each subject area every day:

The teacher, maybe it’s teacher is teaching a lot in the class, so we need to memorize a lot! Every single day […] In China, we have a lot of pressures. We need to finish this in order to…the teacher check the homework tomorrow.

Classroom Structures

The notion of tracking students' attendance was not necessarily an assumed practice in all school systems. Participants reported little accountability if they missed school, especially in rural areas or in schools where the class sizes were very large. As young children, they were largely unsupervised and a number of participants reported skipping school to stay home, watch television, or to go play with other children in the middle of the day, without their families or neighbors noticing. Some students skipped school because they could already anticipate what would be taught in school and preferred to review and memorize the textbooks on their own. Puja expressed that it was unnecessary to attend school because her personal tutor was even more effective in teaching her than attending school lessons.

Students were also organized into classes in different ways, depending on context. All participants reported that they remained in the same classroom and teachers moved when periods or subject areas switched, the opposite of schooling practices in American schools. Nassar reported that his classes in Yemen were mixed-grade classrooms because there were not enough classrooms or teachers for every grade level. A few participants reported learning in classrooms of between 60-100 children, even in the early grades, with each student being assigned a number
to keep track of all the children. Most participants reported being in classrooms with about 30 or so children. A few participants noted that "boys sit in the front, girls in the back," and that classrooms were mixed gender in the lower grades in primary school, but were sex segregated in secondary school.

*Punishment and Behavior Management*

Almost all participants described a large degree of social control and strict codes of conduct in their school setting. Teachers were considered strict and penalized students for missing or being late to class, or for missing homework and assignments. They described punishment for small infractions, such as doing assignments incorrectly, or being removed from class for not following instructions. Mariama remembers seeing classmates beaten for not standing up to greet the teacher upon their arrival to the classroom. To manage such social control, Mariama recalls intentionally crying and feigning distress to avoid further punishment.

Stress and fear were used as motivators for behavioral management. Samia explained that students were punished if they did not attend class, or if they missed assignments:

They have the stick. And they would beat you up. It’s real and still there, and there were incidents when students would get fever from the torture. It’s a rule that the Bangladesh education and society, they decided it, but it’s not a good thing […] Sometimes, there were incidents where, they might even keep you outside and look at the sun, stare at the sun, many forms of torture.

Similarly, Jhumki described how shame was utilized as a repercussion for poor behavior:

Either you sit or you stand at your seat, or you go in front of the class, and hold your ear, and that’s just embarrassing. Or some days, she would, we used to sit in a chair and
benches and a table. She would make us stand up on the benches and hold our ears. It was so embarrassing.

Priya had a similar experience:

They used to hit us on our hand [with the chalkboard duster] and then make us like get on top of the bench. And then...stand in front of the school. It was so bad! I used to do it every day and I didn’t like school at all!

Corporal punishment was also used as a pedagogical device to incentivize learning. Abou describes the learning in Senegal in this way:

Like for my history, the teacher would write 2-3 pages and we have to copy down. The next day, at the nighttime, you gonna have to memorize the 2 pages, and then the next day, the teacher gonna choose like a random class to say the passage. And if you don’t know it, you get beaten up.

As well, Samia explained how corporal punishment was used alongside assessment practices: “Even if you don’t know an answer to something! So, if you didn’t know the answer, that would be another reason for them to hit you.” Maimouna reported that if a student could not recall the definition of a vocabulary word, the teachers would "put you on the wall" where students had to hold their ears, or sit on the floor. Jhumki and Shefa both described being picked on by the teacher to answer questions about a reading that was assigned for homework, and seeing other students beaten with a stick by the teacher, or told to hold their ears, because they did not know the answers to the questions and did not understand the assigned reading. Not surprisingly, this kind of treatment was approved by the larger society: "Your parents, they won’t actually won’t even care, whether the teacher beat you or not. They don’t care, because the parents are the ones
who are like, yeah, if she or he doesn’t do good, make sure you beat them” (Maimouna).

Some students felt that the atmosphere of social control was excessive and unnecessary, creating a climate of fear and generating unpleasant feelings toward school. Yet, some students also felt that the control was a mechanism of "tough love," that teachers were mean, but they motivated them to learn and to be disciplined in completing their assignments. Some students even attributed this kind of teaching to the academic discipline they developed as children. While students expressed dislike for punishments, the imposed discipline led to focus, retention, and accuracy in their understanding of what they were asked to learn in school. This contradictory message was articulated often.

Such practices in schooling can shape the perceptions that immigrant adolescents have of schooling and of teachers. Shefa recalled how she did not have positive relationships with any of her teachers in elementary school. She was scared of them, worried about being punished, and did not want to talk to teachers:

Because I didn’t finish my homework, one day. And my teacher came, and say, why didn’t you finish your homework? You supposed to do, since you have a tutor. And I said, I was sick, I couldn’t finish it, even though I have a tutor. He said, I don’t care. And he beat me. (Shefa)

Shefa ended up not attending school for three whole days after this event. Reflecting on her interactions with teachers, she said, “Actually, Bangladesh teachers, they’re nasty! They’re crazy. They abuse the students if they don’t do their homework.” For Mariama, the social control bordered on abuse. She reported that some teachers would “use the student as a servant, they would tell you to come to their house and do my laundry, help me to cook” (Mariama).
Passing for Educational Practice: Pedagogy & Instruction

In addition to differences in structures of schooling, under closer examination, we also see that there are significant differences in pedagogy and instructional methods used in home country educational contexts. I now turn to specific ways in which students experienced schooling and what "funds of knowledge" they acquired in their countries of origin. I detail specific instructional practices that may be salient in the educational histories of newcomer immigrant youth.

Banking Model Pedagogy

While there are differences in pedagogy and instruction across contexts, all participants described learning under what is understood by many educators as Paolo Freire's "banking model" of education (1985). Learning was based on knowledge transmission, regurgitation, memorization, and accuracy. Whether it was West Africa, Bangladesh, Yemen, or China, participants described banking model teaching in similar ways, with teachers going through a set of motions that passed for teaching and educational practice.

Participants in the study reported that teachers primarily delivered instruction relying on direct transmission, mimicry, and recall, practices that are not linked to authentic student learning. Teachers would read from a predetermined set of books, students would copy the information and recite it. Teachers would write on a classroom blackboard, students would copy what was written and memorize it. They also copied questions from the board, and wrote their own answers to the questions. "They use the blackboard a lot," said Maimouna.

Teachers conducted lectures on a topic, and students would take notes. Teachers might read aloud from a textbook, using some pictures to explain. They might ask questions based on
what they presented, and students would respond. The teacher might emphasize the meaning of a passage by asking students to read aloud an excerpt and explaining the meaning or significance of a selected portion of text. Instruction was heavily teacher-driven, with students only participating passively, and often out of fear. In Yemen, Nassar said that his schooling experiences required little active participation on his part. When students wrote in their notebooks, it was either copied, or for dictation. There was very little original writing.

Memorization as Learning

Using banking model pedagogy, memorization was a pervasive component of their learning experiences and used as the primary method for learning. Priya explained:

We used to write over and over and over until we get that. […] We didn’t have like, they don’t have a lot of materials to make you understand how to do math or something. But they used to tell us that, how many birds you see there, or something like that, and how many books. I think that’s how I started learning how to count.

Asked how he managed routines for memorization, Nassar said, "Keep read, read, read, over and over again. I keep reading it." Students reported having to memorize entire pages and sections of textbooks, having to recite it, or being asked questions from assigned sections to assess their understanding. Abou recalled going home after school to memorize passages he copied from his teacher, and "at night time, you just sit with the notebook and read it over and over and over and over until you know it. And before I go to sleep, I go read it to my grandma and I would test myself." Abou says that the teacher would ask comprehension questions the next day, so that the point was not just to memorize but to also understand. Yet, the method of internalization was not focused on meaning, and only a substitute for true learning.
There were many instances in which students reported memorization alone being the sole objective. Even if a student wanted to construct their own understanding, they were not always encouraged to do so. Priya adds: "You cannot make up your own story or just say it in your own words. So it was really hard for us. It was for us to, ok, just read, you don’t have to understand it.” This alienation from meaning and understanding may have been especially meaningless for students who did not comprehend what they were reciting.

Such banking model teaching has significant implications for learning and assessment. Jhumki was accustomed to reciting passages verbatim, or writing out a passage word for word. She would achieve a perfect score on an assignment even if she did not understand it because she could rewrite an entire passage perfectly: “If you remember what you studied, you just literally copy and paste it. Copy it onto your memory, and paste it on your paper. That’s how you do it. And it’s like not really helpful” (Jhumki). Such processes were not necessarily connected to meaning, which has various implications for development. Hawa explained how it was hard to learn through the process of memorizing:

Sometime, it don’t help to memorize. Like I can memorize words, but when I see them written, I don’t know what is it. So I don’t know what is it. […] I don’t always understand it. I just memorize it because I have to memorize it. I don’t know what is it mean.

On assessments, students memorized passages to rewrite on the day of the exam, and memorized answers to multiple-choice questions, as if regurgitation was a stand-in for representing their knowledge. Jhumki described the exams and testing as:

Open up your brain and let me see it…We would use to memorize blocks of texts and
you know, just puke it on the examination. Vomit, just vomit the words on the paper. All you have to do, write word by word, each word, even though you don’t understand, you spell it, you write it, and you’ll get points, and you pass.

Puja had a similar experience and remarked, "Education in Bangladesh means memorize, memorize, memorize. You have to memorize every single thing. The whole text we have to memorize."

_Cold Call: On Demand Assessments_

Cold calling was a common assessment of learning during lessons, a practice assumed to be intellectually rigorous when in fact it offered limited benefits for learning. Students were often asked to recite memorized passages on demand, in front of the class, or to write out what they memorized on the spot. A teacher might put up a math problem on the board and call students up to the board to do it in front of the class. The public learning, however, seemed more stress-inducing than creating an environment of healthy risk-taking. Hawa remembers the first hour of class consisted of each student going around and repeating the lesson they memorized the night before, or reciting randomly selected excerpts from their textbooks. Students would have to "say the letters, tell them the story, exactly the same thing" (Hawa). Mariama remembers that her teachers delivered information verbally and expected students to repeat the information without looking at their notes. As well, teachers dictated passages from a book, and tested students on the accuracy and spelling after they wrote down what was read.

So ingrained were such practices in their educational experience that a few students came to believe that they were academically demanding and offered positive benefits to such a method of learning. For Abou, dictation provided an assessment of his mastery of what he learned: "I
want to see how much I know, do I really know it or not, what do I need to improve, and what I’m good at, and what I’m not good at.” Similarly, Mariama described this type of instruction as "natural learning":

“Everything has to come from your head, you just have to read a lot and memorize. It’s all natural learning. Because when you learning something naturally, and when you have something to learning from, that’s really different. You know, naturally, it’s like you must be really intelligent to learn naturally. And here, you have tools to guide you, and I feel like over here, to a student who started school here, they would not be able to go there. It’s going to be so hard. It’s all about natural. It’s all about like all in you. It’s like naturally reveals to you, and you have to contain the information also naturally.

Indeed, with no help from technology or a computer, students spent time repeating information, preparing for cold calling and reciting information at a moment's notice by the teacher. Yet, this “natural learning” was ultimately a feature of a pedagogical model that expected students to figure out how to access knowledge and meaning on their own without teacher-guided scaffolding or intervention - a “You're on Your Own” model of teaching and learning.

“*You’re On Your Own*” Pedagogy

Participants expressed that teachers would not normally provide additional support, unless it was requested of them through tutoring services. Rather than monitoring students' understanding or adjusting classroom instruction in response to students’ learning needs, teachers provided no academic intervention and expected students to find alternative methods for learning on their own. Samia explained,

There’s no one coming in and sitting down and asking the situation, what’s going on,
what do you need help with, do you want me to explain you this? I don’t think they make an effort to bring the students who are in the back upward, or try. There’s no assistance to help to bring the students upward.

Similarly, in Jhumki’s words, “it’s our own responsibility to teach ourselves or not to teach ourselves. And like fail and suffer, or go to the private, private tutoring.”

In China, the teaching practices favored those who could absorb academic content independently through standard methods of teaching. Anyone who needed alternative support had to secure such help on their own. Jeffrey describes this process:

For some students, they will understand because the way the teachers teaching. They not, it’s not requirement for every student to understand. They were start to asking questions. Like, why do you think, why author writing this way. What do you think about it? They do that with all the students, but they don’t…because not all the students are going to get it, so they don’t force you to understand. There’s like different levels of understanding. Once you get to this level, you good, you ok to pass the test, and everything. They might ask you for your understanding of the paragraph, but they will not force you to came up with some [deeper] meaning.

This “You’re on Your Own” pedagogy, where school systems in countries of origin operate on the premise of merit-based achievement and individual responsibility, may have significant implications for learning and development. Because children were ranked by performance on class grades and exam marks, such a learning environment led to immense pressure: “If you don’t study, you’ll fall behind, and nobody would know you, everybody would look down on you, she’s a dummy, she’s at the end. Nobody cares” (Jhumki).

As a result, families often sought academic support elsewhere, and as I’ve demonstrated
in Chapter 4, this was often by design: "The teacher would never break down the text. Like, never. If you don’t understand, go to the private teaching time, or go to the coaching center, which I used to do" (Jhumki). Shefa and other participants also reported that teachers deliberately refused to help students so that they would be forced to hire tutors. Shefa believed that teachers used this system to supplement their income because they were paid so little: “Here, if you don’t understand, you go back and you ask them questions. In Bangladesh, they don’t like to answer questions. They want you to get a tutor! So parents will come, can you tutor, so they can make money” (Shefa).

It was easy to fall behind in schools that were under-resourced and could not provide sufficient attention to individual students. At the state-run school that Mariama attended, there were close to 100 children in the classroom: “If you are really slow, and you want to be helped, they may just give up on you.” In a way, such merit-based education was utilized for the sake of efficiency in populous contexts such as China, where class sizes are large by Western standards. Vivian said that her primary school classes had 50 children, not uncommon for a larger township in China. Bo and Ming Tao's primary school had fewer children since they were located in small villages. Sharon explained the consequences in such a learning environment: “The teachers cannot always, still teacher cannot always, like, take over all the students. Even I have a problem, the teacher cannot one by one saying, oh, you got problem, go over the things.”

*Teachers*

Few students reported having strong relationships with their teachers, or called their teachers role models. The participants generally felt that the teachers were not invested in developing relationships with students because it was not customary. Teachers assumed that if
they were not strict enough, that students would get out of hand. The students' descriptions of their teachers were often of stern, even abusive, adults whose main goal was to control students’ behavior. Samia said:

Strict voice, always making sure, we just kind of have to know, otherwise, they’re always yelling at each other. It’s not a friendly environment, to be honest!! Here, it’s like, the teachers are asking nicely, they wouldn’t necessarily be totally mean to you. They might bark at you sometimes, and say, you’re not doing your work. But there, it’s like totally, very mean. Just barking at the students, or just snapping at the students, or something like that. When they are writing or teaching the lesson, loud voice.

Priya felt that her teachers were mean and incompetent and teachers rarely had conversations with her as a student:

It was really strict. Teachers used to put the stick, the one they use to beat us, they used to put it on the oil, when you put it in the oil and the water, it makes it more, it hurts you more. That’s so mean! And it’s legal for them to do! And teachers used to say bad, not bad words, but mean things! And used to make fun of you if you don’t know.

In some instances, the teachers were blatantly incompetent or corrupt. Priya says that her teachers in the village school were “bad” because they used to sleep during class, and they did not manage unruly students. Jhumki describes:

Some teachers, some days teachers would come, just sit on their chair, some teacher would not even sit on the chair, some teachers would sit on the table. Teachers had their own table inside the classroom. They would read their own storybook, and we would just talk in class. [...] Like if the teacher is not in a mood, she would just give us free time. She
would just sit down. One day in high school, I was in 6th grade, the teacher came, she was the English teacher, and she was not in the mood. She didn’t sit on the table or the chair, she sat on the table instead of sitting on the chair, and she crossed her leg, like this. She was reading her own storybook, and we were just talking in class. And our 6th grade A section class was 115 girls, or 125 girls. And then all of a sudden, our headmaster came, and she saw her doing that. And she got in trouble! Because she wasn’t teaching the class!

The hierarchical nature and the social distance between teachers and students meant that teachers were not necessarily invested or incentivized to prioritize their students’ true learning: “Teachers in Bangladesh are not, they don’t really encourage you to learn new things. They don’t give you extra hour help. If you want to get extra hour, you have to pay. And then they don’t teach you what you should do. They don’t encourage you,” says Priya.

Participants also believed that their teachers were usually ill-trained and not equipped to teach, that teachers themselves did not have a solid education and so were not capable of teaching children effectively. They also knew their teachers were paid extremely low wages. Priya asked, “Primary school teachers, they don’t get too much pay, they don’t work too hard. They don’t get, seriously, they don’t get that much. If you don’t get paid, why would you do well and work so hard on it.”

While a banking model of education was pervasive in home country educational settings, it was the primary mechanism through which the larger capitalist structure maintained symbolic domination. It is through such inadequate pedagogy and instructional methods that educational institutions withhold knowledge from subaltern populations, and ensure hegemonic power over those who require alternative methods of instruction to develop academic knowledge. As such,
these practices of social control, recitation, memorization, cold calling, and merit-based achievement are what I call “passing for educational practice.” Rather than true learning and understanding, such banking model practices engaged students in superficial means of knowledge transmission. While some exceptional children can develop advanced forms of cultural capital in spite of this system of teaching and learning, most will not. The consequences of banking model education in the countries of origin for newcomer immigrant youth surfaces as educational challenges when the students transition to advanced academic work in secondary schools in the U.S. I now turn to a crucial feature in the development of forms of cultural capital in academic settings: content-area knowledge and curriculum.

**Content Area Instruction in the Countries of Origin**

Because of the supremacy of content area knowledge and disciplinary literacy in secondary educational contexts, I examined the development of content knowledge that newcomer immigrant youth had access to in their countries of origin. In this section, I discuss content area instruction in mathematics, science, and history or the equivalent of Social Studies. (Because of the overwhelming importance of language and literacy in student achievement when they arrive in the U.S., I have dedicated a separate section in Chapter 6 focused on the influence of home country literacy education on language and literacy development for immigrant adolescents.) Priya encapsulates the importance of content area instruction when she said:

> When I was in Bangladesh, I never knew there was a world like this. I actually was never imagine, because I don’t know about those things. *If you don’t know, how can you imagine?* You can’t even picture it in your brain! In my history class, it was only for Bangladesh, India, Pakistan. Our whole life, learning about those stuff.
For immigrant adolescents, the extent of content area-knowledge has significant implications for their ability to access academic content in secondary schools after immigrating to the U.S. Often, even if students have not yet developed sufficient English language proficiency, they can continue developing content-area knowledge if they had a strong foundation in the subject areas. Students utilize such “funds of knowledge” in academic disciplines to make sense of new content they are learning, as well as to comprehend academic texts they read within specific disciplines.

Yet, in their countries of origin, content-area instruction was limiting both because of inadequate pedagogical practices and the narrowness of the curriculum. In some instances, immigrant youth had content-area instruction that exceeded that which what was taught in US schools in the corresponding grade levels, many experienced limited content area instruction. Even students who considered their education to be high-quality in their countries of origin realized that they were behind in content-area knowledge when they arrived in the U.S.

Mathematics

Mathematics education in the countries of origin was, not surprisingly, characterized by the banking model of teaching. Math teachers followed a relatively scripted sequence for the math curriculum, dictated by standardized textbooks, and students learned arithmetic through repetition and practice. In Hawa's words, she had to "do everything in my head." Teachers would write problems on the board for students, and students would answer them at their seats. Students would be called to the blackboard to solve a math problem in front of the whole class. They would be tested repeatedly. The teacher might explain a question and describe the answer to the class, or explain the steps needed to solve a problem if the students did not know the answer. Teachers provided variations of the same types of problems for practice. Hawa recalled her math
lessons: “The math, they expect you to learn on your own. They don’t really show you a lot, a lot of examples. They just give it to you. They show you one example, and then, here, do it.”

A common practice reported by students was copying math problems from the board while teachers explained the answers. Students recalled using marbles for counting, memorizing and reciting multiplication tables, and repeated copying of multiplication tables in their notebooks. Students practiced solving problems in their notebooks, in a workbook, or on the board, both in class and for homework. Hawa described reading a word problem and "changing it from French to math language." Moustapha recalls learning how to check his work using particular procedures for problem solving. Overall, students were held accountable for procedural accuracy, but not for mathematical reasoning.

As a result, a number of students felt that their math education in their home country was utterly inadequate. A few students only had exposure to arithmetic in their country of origin. Nassar said that his highest level of math knowledge when he left Yemen for the U.S. included basic arithmetic, and some exposure to algebraic equations. Mariama described it this way: “I regret the fact that in our school, we used to copy on the board like math. I will tell you the truth, I don’t really never learned math.” The students lamented that the banking model of math education they experienced did not equip them with concepts of numeracy needed to do more advanced math. Mariama remembers only learning basic arithmetic in Guinea, so that by the time she arrived in the U.S. at the age of 14, she was unable to keep up with her math classes in high school. It is not uncommon to hear math teachers who work with immigrant adolescents to report that their students lack basic numeracy skills needed to access advanced level topics in algebra and geometry.

Students who reported not experiencing struggles with math when they arrived in the
U.S. were those who already had exposure to algebra, trigonometry, and geometry in their country of origin. Upper primary and middle school students in China and Bangladesh were exposed to higher levels of math at younger ages and grade levels, and the pace of mathematics education in those countries was accelerated in comparison to the U.S. Shefa had exposure to algebra and trigonometry in part because she completed the equivalent of middle school in Bangladesh before coming to the U.S., as opposed to other students who may have left their country of origin during the upper primary school grades. Shefa explained that while the instruction was focused on repetition and practice, the complexity of math content increased as she moved up the grades. When she arrived in the U.S., the level of math she was able to do independently was comparable, if not surpassing, what she needed to complete assignments in her high school math classes. Similarly, because Jhumki had completed secondary school in Bangladesh before immigrating to America, she had taken courses in accounting. As a result, the math content in her 9th grade math class in America was completely a review for her.

As well, because Abou had exposure to advanced coursework in mathematics in Senegal, he excelled in math when he arrived in the U.S., even as he barely scraped by in other content areas: "I still haven’t seen the math that I took in there, I still haven’t seen anything in here." The math curriculum in his home country exceeded what was taught in America, so he spent after school hours studying more advanced topics with his math teacher. In sum, access and exposure to an accelerated math curriculum prior to their arrival meant that some immigrant youth had developed competencies that exceeded math standards for high school students in the U.S. In fact, some students' math education so exceeded the pace of curriculum in American that they claimed not to have learned any new math between the time they left their country of origin and when they began college. The differences in mathematics performance between immigrant youth
coming from different countries may very likely be explained by variations in home country math instruction.

Science

While it is more universally predictable which mathematical topics might have been covered in elementary school, there was no consistency across home country contexts as to which science topics were covered, and to what depth. This suggests that science education may not have been prioritized, and that there were fewer resources available dedicated to the teaching of science, including a lack of teachers trained to do so. Participants reported a range of access to science education, from no exposure at all to basic topics in biology and environmental science. When students did have exposure to science content, it was typically limited to human anatomy and ecology. A few students reported learning about the periodic table of elements, but not much more chemistry content beyond that.

Like other subjects, when science was offered as a subject area, teachers utilized banking model instructional methods, with the teacher writing information on the blackboard or lecturing. Students memorized science content from a textbook. Nassar says that he remembers lessons about different ecosystems and the human body, but that he did not do anything resembling a scientific experiment, "just learn it, that's it". Only a few participants reported access to hands-on-experiences through which they had exposure to the scientific method. Abou says he remembers a few activities where he had to develop a hypothesis and observe a plant's growth over time. Priya reported some exposure to skills related to general observation, but not in scientific inquiry:

We had like one science book, but all the science in one book, chemistry and then
physics, and then, uh, living environment. Everything in one big fat textbook. For science, we actually had labs too. But it’s not very advanced. They did have some microscopes and then beakers, those little things, they had. They actually had those. So, we used to maybe do like drawing a figure. . So we have to draw parts of the human or the organs. We had to draw and label those things, cells and everything. Not only human body, we actually did lot of animals.

The time at which students left their countries of origin may be correlated to the amount of exposure they had to science content prior to arrival in the U.S. For those who immigrated at the end of primary school, or at the start of middle school in their country, their background knowledge was limited. Those who continued education into secondary school may have had more exposure to a range of hard sciences such as chemistry and physics. Jhumki, who completed secondary school in Bangladesh, recalled studying more advanced science topics such as "diffusion, photosynthesis, electro-gel phoresis and technical stuff.”

Consequently, science teachers who work with immigrant adolescents often have to catch students up on content that most other students have learned over a span of 5-7 years in primary school. Before teachers in the U.S. can begin teaching advanced science topics typical to a high school curriculum, they need to support immigrant youth in developing fundamental concepts in the sciences. As a result, few immigrant adolescents are prepared for college-level courses in the sciences, effectively barring many emergent bilinguals from STEM majors in college due to their lack of preparedness.
History & Social Studies

For the most part, history classes and/or what might be considered Social Studies in their countries of origin were limited to topics relevant to their local context. In primary grades, children learned local and regional geography and history connected to their own city, neighborhood, culture, or country. Typically, students were not exposed to topics in global history until middle school. If students learned about the history of countries other than their own, it was often of countries within their geographic region. For example, Guinean students had a cursory survey of the history of West African nations and their respective independence movements from European colonizers. Because schooling in West Africa contained remnants of its post-colonial education system, students often learned French and imperial history as well.

Similarly, Nassar briefly studied the history of Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries in the region. Her remembers learning “something about Islam, back in the days” but does not remember studying the content in any detail. He does remember having some exposure to basic geographical facts about Middle Eastern countries, the U.S., and Europe. Puja remembers learning the history of the war for independence in Pakistan, and the history of the Central Asian region under British rule. Chinese students reported learning the history of Chinese dynasties infused into their literature classes.

In general, most social studies or history instruction was done through memorization and direct teaching, with some explanations through illustrations or examples. Students reported that the primary method of learning content in their history classes emphasized memorization, direct teaching and transmission of information: "For us, history was the hardest thing to memorize because all these years, and the names, and places names, and everything. They used to go by year, something I think. We had a book, we had a textbook. [...] We used to memorize
everything” (Priya). Students reported a lot of copying from the blackboard, memorizing textbook pages, dates, and events. In fact, some students reported that they did not have access to textbooks at all, or had to share them because the school did not have enough resources. In a few rare cases, such as that of Abou in Senegal, students reported teachers using role-playing to convey information. Moustapha recalled enjoying the way history was taught in Guinea when the instruction utilized narrative and story-telling as a method of teaching. He remembers the teachers lecturing on historical events in the form of a story, at times dramatizing their accounts.

The interviews with students also suggest that while pedagogy matters, the actual breadth, content, and pace of subject-area curriculum also matter. While Moustapha experienced the same banking model of education as others, he had exposure to learning a large body of historical information, including Guinean history, regional West African history, the history World Wars I and II, the French revolution, French history, and post-colonial history of independence in Africa. His background knowledge in global history was vastly broader than most students I interviewed and this provided him a competitive advantage. He easily transferred his content-area knowledge to learning Social Studies in high school in the United States. This suggests that pure exposure in the home language to content knowledge could go a long way for immigrant youth in developing mastery in specific disciplines.

As a result of the banking model of education used in history classes, students were not taught how to process, assess, or evaluate historical information. I found few students who could step outside of what they learned in their education to provide any kind of analysis of the content they memorized. In fact, few students could discuss their country's history in much detail. Priya says that she does not "remember anything exactly." She continues:

Teachers don’t allow you to ask questions because they are very strict or maybe some
teachers get offended by students’ questions. So some teachers don’t allow you. And then, yeah… that was one of our classes. The social studies class. My teacher, he was very like, conservative maybe. He didn’t allow us ask questions or anything.

As in any country, the study of history was shaped by politics and ideology, and a few participants described the propaganda they recalled seeing in their textbooks and instructional methods that suppressed critical thinking about their country’s history.

In China, the curriculum was heavily controlled for political reasons. Participants reported reading and memorizing large swaths of literature that Bo described as "brainwash":

They only tell you what’s good about China, they didn’t tell you anything bad you know? You just have to read the story over and over and over. Like the good story about China, only the good thing, not the bad thing. Some are about Chinese history.

In many ways Bo may have only arrived at this conclusion as a result of having left China and being partly educated in the U.S. Yet, it is clear from the content of the texts that students read as early as primary school, that a partial function of the national curriculum in China was indoctrination in Communist ideology and revisionist Sino-centric history. Vivian shares:

A lot of them are very Communist passage. Like Mao, he went to the mountain, and he did this, he was a great leader! Something like that. You have to memorize a whole passage. And later on, they will have the question goes, so what does this passage express? What does this passage tell you? What’s the moral behind that? Oh, you already told me what the moral is! So I just, you know, write it down! […]When you go to middle school, yeah, then you start Confucius and stuff. But when you’re in elementary school, those are those passages we learn about Stalin childhood as well. Stalin’s childhood. He’s a Russian leader. We learn about Marx’s childhood as well.
The presence of Communist era content and history in the curriculum is an overt part of China's agenda to transmit particular ideology, in service of the Chinese government’s political agenda. Ming Tao explains:

In China, we teach to hate the Japanese. The Mao is good. In my education, it’s not that much but I remember in that age, I remember what my father was saying when he was little, and he said that Mao is everything in China. You can’t even cross the, for example, my father learned…and he learned how to answer, he just write Mao’s name on it, and the teacher can’t mark wrong there!

Chinese students often did not learn of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, nor did they understand the travesties that occurred during the Cultural Revolution, until they studied that history in New York City public schools.

Curriculum in the Country of Origin: Scope, Sequence, and Pacing

On the surface, the overall curriculum of the home countries does not look too different from that of any other country, covering basic academic subjects, and over time, leading to advanced study in topics. Yet, when we look in detail, we see curriculum in the countries of origin that "pass for education." In this next section, I surface some disparities from primary to secondary school, and outline the ways in which the level of education reached in their home country immediately prior to immigration may be a significant factor in school readiness. The curriculum in the country of origin may have an impact on the funds of knowledge immigrant adolescents bring with them that can be leveraged in secondary schools in the U.S.
Primary School

Students in all contexts spent their early years learning social skills, how to count, and the basic building blocks of their linguistic system for literacy. For Chinese students, they learned *pin yin* and stroke order for characters. For West African students, they learned the French alphabet and its sounds. Priya's earliest memories of school included basic acculturation into schooling: “You don’t have any book there, you go there, not even cut stuff, you just like, they teach you how to sit, notebook, only like memorizing something, how to say that. One to ten, how to count them, something like that. And, it’s a year process to do that, and then the second year, they teach you how to read something before getting into first grade.” Participants in the study had access to basic subject areas common in primary school - math, language or literacy, physical education, and history or social studies. Participants reported that they learned little in elementary school besides reading, writing, and arithmetic.

In particular, students who lived in rural areas seemed to have the least exposure to an adequate or broad curriculum, perhaps because fewer teachers were trained in teaching multiple subject areas. The best schools covered a broad range of topics that students would need later to build content knowledge. Students read in different genres; they learned basic concepts in a wider range of disciplines, such as economics, science, and geography. Rarely did students speak of arts classes, and when they did, they were mostly referring to crafts, as opposed to formal training in the arts. Only students who went to highly competitive schools, the best in their districts or regions, reported having the opportunity to formally learn drawing, or how to play a musical instrument. These were students who attended schools in large cities. Among all participants, Chinese students were much likelier than participants from other countries to report taking art, dance, and music classes in the younger grades. Participants from Bangladesh told me
that these classes were rarely available and that even when they were, there were few real
materials and no real instructor.

*Secondary School*

Reaching middle school in the country of origin may be significant for immigrant youth
for a number of reasons that impact school readiness. The rate of children continuing through
secondary education in low-income countries is not as high as it is in developed countries
(UNESCO, 2015). In Bangladesh, the attendance ratio in secondary schools is only 45%, and the
literacy rate among young adults ages 15-24 is 79% (ibid). In Guinea, the educational outcomes
are even worse with the attendance ratio in secondary school only 31% and the literacy rate for
the same group also 31% (ibid). If a student in Bangladesh or Guinea made it to secondary
school without dropping out, they were likely to 1) have the financial means to continue
education past primary school, and their families could manage the opportunity costs required to
send those children to school as opposed to work, and 2) had the academic and literacy skills to
pass their classes and examinations.

Secondary school level curriculum in the countries of origin typically added English
classes, additional courses in science compared what was offered in primary school, and a
broader history curriculum that covered global history. Furthermore, the types of academic tasks
and performance level increased in rigor and complexity in secondary school. Hence, the higher
the grade level that students completed in their home country, the more likely that immigrant
adolescents developed the requisite literacy and content-area knowledge needed for secondary
education after immigration. Indeed, a handful of participants in this study attended high school
and advanced into the higher grades in their country of origin. For example, Jhumki completed
high school in Bangladesh before immigrating to the US. She had already selected an academic major and had completed the requisite coursework in accounting, entrepreneurial business, and business management for a high school business diploma. It is no surprise, then, that Jhumki performed at the same level as even her native-born peers by the time she graduated from high school, for the second time, in the United States.

To be clear, this does not mean that students who come to US at an older age are necessarily less challenged in comparison to their peers who arrive at a younger age. Yet, reaching a secondary school level education in the country of origin may be an indication that students have transferrable funds of knowledge in the content areas. The extent to which attainment of secondary school education in the country of origin is a factor in school readiness needs to be better understood.

Koranic Education

For immigrant youth coming from Muslim countries, Koranic education was commonplace in their educational experience. It was either provided formally through their school’s curriculum through a religion class, or students participated in Koranic studies before or after the regular school day, at a local mosque, or with an imam in the privacy of their own home. Koran lessons took place a few times a week for some, but daily for others.

Many students reported learning how to read and memorize the Koran, but not understanding the meaning. The main purpose was to recite Koranic passages, to decode the text, and to memorize it. Teachers would teach students to read the words aloud and to recite passages. Mariama says her Koranic education involved a lot of copying of assigned excerpts from the Koran: “I was just learning the basic of how to pray, and then the Koran, because that’s
the main thing. You don’t have to know it, as long as you know how to read it” (Mariama).

Similarly, Nassar describes Koranic studies class as, “Most of the time, you have to memorize a lot of stuff, like the Koran you have to memorize everywhere.” He would be assigned sections of the Koran to memorize, and the next day, he would have to recite "from the head" (Nassar).

Because most students did not necessarily understand its meaning in Arabic, teachers explained the meaning in their home language, in Fulani or in Bengali. No student reported being able to comprehend meaning without the explanation of a teacher.

Along with Koranic education, a few students like Puja also took a religion class as well, where she learned the practices and rules of Islam, such as having to go on the *hajj* to Mecca once in your lifetime, and paying the mandatory amount to the mosque if you have money to do so. She also learned about other religions, and different topics in religious studies such as the role of prophets.

In her Koranic education with an imam, Samia learned the rules, common practices and customs of Islam, the etiquette and manners used in the Muslim faith, and common expressions in Arabic often used in Muslim rituals. She learned the procedures for Islamic rituals, such as how to "clean properly before you are praying" (Samia). In time, Samia actually grew quite cynical of this practice: “It’s considered a holy language. It’s where the prophet was, blah, blah blah. And I’m like, well you’re only making more work for yourself, and you don’t even know what it is saying” (Samia). When asked if they continued Koranic study in the U.S., the students reported that they did not, and that they actually forgot how to read the religious text because they were no longer in the habit of doing so. Samia explained: “Since I haven’t read it, I forgot how to read it. And when I was reading it, I only knew how to read it. I didn’t understand what the meaning was.”
In many ways, the prevalence of Koranic study in their country of origin meant that their understanding of what it means to learn to read was shaped by this particular experience (Street, 1997). The immigrant youth were accustomed to learning to read in a new language without understanding the meaning. While this may have had a lot of benefits and transfer for their understanding of how to track print, break down sound and symbol correspondence, and the executive functioning needed to fluently read in a new language, it does little for advanced literacy, where the primary purpose is meaning making.

**Conclusion: Symbolic Violence and Education in the Countries of Origin**

The data presented in these detailed accounts of home country educational experiences suggest that banking model education was utilized in a number of different contexts. The educational histories of immigrant youth are complex and multi-faceted, they vary by context and access to resources, and they can be taken into account to understand their academic performance after arrival in the U.S. Most students were not provided with the ideal quality of primary school education that would ensure academic success in the U.S. These educational histories show that the foundation from which immigrant youth draw their funds of knowledge - their school readiness - is precarious and less than secure. As such, home country educational settings were vehicles for symbolic violence, withholding requisite knowledge, skills, and academic content in the disciplines, and denying children their right to education. Consequently, immigrant adolescents often lack the funds of knowledge and cultural capital they need to access new learning in secondary schools in an advanced knowledge-based economy such as the U.S.
Chapter 6:

Linguistic and Literacy Habitus of Immigrant Youth:

A Sociolinguistic Economy

Linguistic Portraits of Immigrant Youth

In the same way that I have constructed educational histories, I have also pieced together linguistic portraits of immigrant adolescents because language and literacy development is central to their educational achievement (Busch, 2012). Since my interviews focused on their experiences with language and literacy within classroom and formal educational settings, I analyzed their accounts and perceptions within the language ecology of their home country educational environment, as well as the type of literacy education utilized in that ecology (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). In these linguistic portraits, I present “what meaning speakers attach to their linguistic resources, their language practices, and their language attitudes in particular, and what significant lived experiences underpin these constructs of meaning” particularly in educational settings (Busch, 2012, p. 519). In fact, these educational histories provide more than just a portrait because they trace experiences with language and schooling over time, “eliciting explanations regarding language practices, resources, and attitudes” (Busch, 2012, p. 511). Furthermore, their portraits are “subject to changes which involve both biographical discontinuities (through migration, for example) and sociopolitical reconfigurations (e.g. the establishing of boundaries)” (Busch, 2012, p. 520).

The linguistic portraits collected in this dissertation detail what experiences and resources contributed to language and literacy development for immigrant adolescents, and what factors shaped their identities as literate people. I gathered information on their emotions, feelings, and
experiences related to learning language (Busch, 2012). I asked language-minoritized adolescents about their linguistic repertoires, their personal process of learning language both in their country of origin and in the U.S., to “map” their language and literacy development in school and elsewhere (Busch, 2012). Their literacy histories inform the way we understand their transfer of home language and literacy funds of knowledge to learning to read in English.

In these linguistic portraits, the students’ experiences with language are characterized by conflict, repression, and struggle. The data show various language ideologies embedded in the educational settings that impacted their language learning. Their accounts reveal learning environments that encouraged passive use of language, imposed upon them by teachers or policies. They suggest that the linguistic and literacy skills immigrant youth developed in the countries of origin are insufficient for developing advanced literacy skills in high school and beyond. These linguistic portraits present accounts of banking model literacy education and the withholding of literacy knowledge from the primary grades into the upper grades, with implications for the development of advanced literacy skills in a new language. Yet, the participants also describe their strategies for learning language when provided support, or strategies they used to work around constraints in their linguistic ecology. These data show how language-minoritized youth deployed linguistic resources and literacy practices and how they were denied learning opportunities, both in their country of origin and in the U.S.

These linguistic histories bring together the varied experiences, factors, ideologies, and perceptions about language that comprise the linguistic habitus of language-minority adolescents (Bourdieu, 1991). Language and literacy are forms of cultural, embodied, and symbolic capital shaped by one’s social class position. Literacy practices are contingent and structured by one’s access to linguistic resources often withheld as a result of one’s class position (Bourdieu, 1991;
Busch, 2012). The linguistic habitus of immigrant adolescents surfaces the ways in which educational contexts have suppressed and withheld linguistic resources from children. Their linguistic habitus demonstrates the hegemony forces within educational institutions that mediate the language and literacy development of language-minority adolescents. Language ideologies that are inherent in the practices and policies utilized in educational settings contribute to the construction of their linguistic habitus. These data show how educational institutions enact symbolic violence by withholding linguistic resources.

**Language and Literacy Development in Language-Minoritized Children**

To provide context for the findings in these linguistic histories, it is necessary to first review the empirical research on language and literacy development because the data in this chapter support the finding that "literacy outcomes are more likely to be the result of home (and school) language and literacy learning opportunities, irrespective of immigration circumstances” (Goldenberg, Rueda, & August, 2006, p. 274). This dissertation suggests that the language and literacy learning opportunities available and utilized in the countries of origin play a role for reading development in immigrant adolescents. While there is little empirical research on the relationship between prior literacy education and its role in developing advanced literacy in English in the U.S., experts in literacy of language-minority students believe this link is significant:

Some language-minority students may begin acquiring literacy for the first time in the upper grades because of poor and interrupted schooling in their home country; others who immigrate when they are older may have acquired first-language literacy in their home country, but begin acquiring second-language literacy skills in the upper grades.
Unfortunately, because of the dearth of longitudinal studies examining the instruction of language-minority students, there is little information about how best to provide instruction in early precursor skills that develop concurrently with the skills or subsequent to them. (August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 357)

To begin filling in this research gap, the following linguistic portraits provide detailed descriptions of individual differences in literacy development, and illuminate the processes and intricacies of literacy education in the countries of origin. These data further our understanding of the interaction between literacy education in the country of origin and literacy development after immigration to the U.S.

*Learning to Read*

Comparatively few studies exist that focus on literacy development among adolescent language-minoritized children, but educators can infer similar factors that impact literacy development for immigrant youth based on research in literacy in general. Early development of literacy skills leads to greater literacy development later on in life, which is known as the Matthew Effect in reading development (Lesaux & Geva, 2006; Stanovich, 1986). Children who develop requisite foundational skills in literacy such as sound-symbol correspondence, concepts of print, decoding, and phonological skills are more likely to accrue increasingly advanced literacy skills. While existing research that shows the importance of foundational literacy skills for emergent bilinguals is based primarily on studies conducted on young children in primary grades, these linguistic histories help us understand the impact of poor reading development for older emergent bilinguals who immigrate to a new country in mid- to late adolescence (August & Shanahan, 2006). Further research is needed to understand reading development in immigrant
adolescents, whose linguistic histories differ from other students.

In theory, children learn foundational literacy skills in primary school, in conjunction with meaning-based practices using developmentally appropriate content. Children also develop the working memory and automaticity needed for decoding, reading fluency, and comprehension, through a neural process developed over years of exposure to opportunities to practice reading, presumably during their primary school education (August & Shanahan, 2006). Over time and typically early in child development, young readers internalize foundational reading processes that work together in the brain to form the reading circuit. By the time they reach middle school, the instructional focus in literacy is on scaffolding students’ reading of increasingly complex texts, the skills needed for analysis and interpretation, and how to use texts as resources for learning content in academic disciplines. Adolescents are taught to improve meaning-based literacy practices and apply their understanding of text structures and concepts to analyzing academic texts. By middle school, children in any country should also theoretically begin producing original writing by synthesizing multiple ideas into multi-paragraph compositions or narratives. Ideally, language-minority adolescents should develop this threshold level of reading and writing competencies, or “reading readiness,” by the time they complete primary school in their countries of origin (August & Shanahan, 2006).

**Literacy Development and Transfer of Literacy Practices in Language-Minority Adolescents**

The foundational reading processes developed as young readers in the countries of origin can transfer when immigrant adolescents apply their previously acquired literacy knowledge to learning to read in English after arriving in the U.S. The early development of literacy skills at the foundational level in a primary language can have an impact on the continued literacy
development in a new language at later stages of reading (Kieffer, 2011; Slama; 2012; Stanovich, 1986). Jim Cummins theorized that, "transfer will occur from Lx to Ly or from Ly to Lx if the sociolinguistic and educational context is conducive to, or supports, such transfer" (Cummins, 1981, p 29). Cummins qualifies this interdependence hypothesis by saying that, “To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly” (Cummins, 1981, p 29). That is, transfer of literacy knowledge or practices is not guaranteed or automatic.

Ultimately, continued literacy development for immigrant adolescents after leaving their countries of origin, such that they can complete high school requirements and pursue higher education in the U.S., is predicated on particular conditions: already developed proficiency in home language literacy, high quality literacy experiences starting in early childhood, a sufficient level of background knowledge and conceptual understandings in academic content areas, and a formed and mature reading circuit in the brain. The quality of instruction and learning opportunities that emergent bilinguals had exposure to prior to coming to the U.S. has important implications for their reading and school readiness (August & Shanahan, 2006). I now turn to describing in detail the language ecologies present in the educational settings in their countries of origin that shaped their linguistic habitus and literacy practices.

**Multilingualism Begins in Countries of Origin**

Multilingualism in the countries of origin is the first salient feature in the linguistic portraits of immigrant adolescents. The notion of "home language" or “native language” often used in educational settings is in fact somewhat misleading, as participants in this study were
likely already multilingual as children prior to immigrating to the U.S.

In China, a few distinct features of language and literacy education contributed to the formation of a multilingual environment. Students spoke Fuzhounese or their regional language with their family, but learned Mandarin as the standard language of school and country. Chinese children who grew up in rural areas were more likely to be fluent in the languages spoken by their parents and grandparents, in comparison to children in urban areas where Mandarin was more pervasive due to the mix of ethnicities. Sharon recalled in school, "they always reminding all the students, we need to speak Mandarin in school, no Fujianese whatever thing is.” Jason even recalled students at his school being forced to wear a sign that, translated into English, said, "Please refrain from speaking in Fuzhounese." In addition, Fujianese students learned Cantonese through popular media in China as well, which became useful when they arrived in Sunset Park, Brooklyn and interacted with immigrants from other regions of China.

In addition to Bengali, participants from Bangladesh also had exposure to and general knowledge of Hindi, and even Urdu. Priya developed receptive knowledge of Hindi through Indian media. Samia learned enough Hindi through television to understand and communicate orally without translation, since "my whole life I have been watching Hindi movies,” even though she could not write in the language.

Given the colonial history in the region, West African immigrant youth often have some working knowledge of at least 2-3 languages before they learn English. Hawa reported that she often used Fulani and French interchangeably, particularly among the younger generation. My coworkers and I used to speak in admiration of the West African multilingual brain because of the extraordinary pace with which some students could adeptly develop oral proficiency in new languages, likely a consequence of the linguistic ecology in their countries of origin.
Given the multilingualism present in their countries of origin, immigrant youth often utilized primarily one language at home, and learned to read and write in another language in formal education settings. In China, the medium of instruction was always Mandarin, but students used both Mandarin and a regional language with their families. In West Africa, students spoke languages such as Susu, Fulani, Mandinka, or Wolof, which are more often used orally than in print. (In fact, some of my former students were shocked to learn that a written system had been developed for Fulani because they had never seen it in written form before). These students utilized French in school because of the region’s colonial history. Maimouna reported that she utilized Dioula with other families that lived in her neighborhood in Ivory Coast, Bisa with her family from Burkina Faso, and French in school. Mariama used Susu in the neighborhood where she lived in Guinea, but her family was Fulani speaking, and she learned to read in French at school. Abou describes the translanguaging that he was accustomed to in his Senegalese education:

They speak in Wolof, but they teach French. They speak in Wolof, but they will say it in French so you understand it. If you went to high school, you’re not allowed to talk in Wolof, you have to talk in French.

He says that both Wolof and French were used in elementary school, but typically "in the house, nobody speaks to you in French; French is only spoken in school so that’s where you learn it" (Abou).

To complicate their linguistic portraits, immigrant youth also had varying degrees of real and perceived fluency with different languages from their countries of origin. Mariama described the common practice of “mixing” languages in Guinea, where “there is a lot of different kinds of Fulani”: 
Some Fulani is really hard and some Fulani is mixed with French. Like me, I’m bad.

cannot speak Fulani without mixing French or English. It takes me 25 minutes just to
figure out what to say, just in Fulani, without mixing no French, no English. (Mariama)

With a rich and complex linguistic repertoire, translanguaging was inherent in Mariama’s
language use. Similarly, Abou developed receptive skills in Fulani at home with his grandparents
in Senegal, but used Wolof in public, and French in schools. Even so, Abou does not feel “native
like” in his proficiency in Wolof. For French, he feels comfortable with his ability to read, but
does not feel he is a fluent speaker, and does not feel comfortable writing in French.

An important layer of superdiversity in the multilingualism of immigrant youth is that
immigrants coming from the same sending country do not always speak the same language
(Vertovec, 2007). Unable to contend with multilingualism, school districts often fail to
acknowledge that these variations exist, with unintended instructional consequences. I found that
Fujianese students who only spoke Fujianese or Mandarin were at times placed in Chinese-
English bilingual classrooms where the teacher used Cantonese as the medium of instruction. A
few Chinese students reported to me that they improved their Fujianese, the language of their
families but not of school, after immigration because they encountered a greater number of
people who utilized Fujianese on a daily basis in the immigrant enclave where they lived in New
York. Indeed, one of my greatest pleasures teaching newcomer Chinese youth was that I
improved my Mandarin, and my Fujianese students learned Cantonese from me. As a result,
students increased their access to a multilingual ecology when they came to the U.S., not only
because they came into contact and socialized with people from other countries, but because they
socialized with co-ethnics from their own countries that used other languages.

In another example, teachers placed students from Bangladesh in the same groups to
provide language support for one another, even when, unbeknownst to them, the students did not speak the same kind of Bangla and could barely understand one another. Jhumki explains:

Like I would tell her stuff, she would understand, but when she, when it was her turn to tell me, I wouldn’t understand what she was saying. [...] because I spoke the pure standard Bangla. She would understand it because everybody understands it. But when she spoke back to me, she spoke in a different dialect. [...] She’s from different district, and each district has its own sets of language, different dialect I would say. And I would speak Chittagong to her, but she’s from a different place. Like me, Mesbah, Parvez, we were like same city, we would understand each other fluently.

The Bengali variety used in rural areas was not the same as what was used in urban areas, or in formal academic settings. When I asked Priya to describe what the differences were, Priya compared it to Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion* (a play by George Bernard Shaw that she had read when she was a student in my English class) and how the Bengali she learned in the village signaled a lower social class status: “because I was from village, my accent and my language was different. So I didn’t know how to speak better Bengali.” Priya had to adjust to a different form of Bengali used in academic texts and in common social settings when she moved to Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh.

Ultimately, the question of which is one's "home language" often leads to a deeper more interesting story about a students' linguistic repertoire, and how they utilize their linguistic repertoire in life and also in an educational space. These data contribute to our understanding of their linguistic portraits that can inform teacher practice in the U.S. Immigrant youth may have multiple home languages, and variations in their usage of multiple languages. They are often immersed in, and accustomed to, multilingual environments more so than their American
teachers are, and multi-faceted linguistic repertoires are standard in their human experience. As a result, they have particular understandings that can be leveraged related to meta-linguistic awareness, contrastive analysis of different language systems, translanguaging practices, and also a familiarity with multilingualism. The fact that schools in America do not mirror or appreciate such superdiversity may be somewhat curious to them.

**Passing as Literacy: Literacy Education in Countries of Origin**

Given the importance of language and literacy development on educational outcomes, I asked participants about their literacy education, how literacy instruction in their country of origin differed from the U.S., and what connections prior literacy education might have with their development of literacy in English. Like the pedagogy in other areas of their schooling, literacy education in the countries of origin utilized banking model literacy education. The data in this study raise questions about whether banking model literacy education leads to unintended results when students have to later develop advanced literacy in a new language after immigrating to the U.S.

**Learning Code-based Skills**

Not unlikely schools everywhere, participants recalled learning what primary school-aged children typically learn, the fundamental components of reading, and code-based skills needed to read and write in the language of their country, beginning with letters or characters, words, and short sentences. As students advanced, they accumulated vocabulary, became fluent in their language’s syntax, and began to read short texts. In Guinea, Hawa remembers copying letters from the board in a lined notebook, and she also had a small chalkboard to copy words on. In
Bangladesh, literacy education was comprised of two separate programs, one focused on reading and literature study, and the other on grammar and writing. In all contexts, there was a dedicated class for reading, writing, and grammar. As students moved through grade levels, text complexity changed in difficulty and length, and the volume of texts they had to read and memorize increased. By middle school, Shefa recalls having to memorize a large volume of texts and write about what she memorized each day.

Instruction in code-based skills may vary depending on the features of the linguistic system itself. Each language has its own unique components, possibly leading to teaching language in a particular sequence to young children. For example, in China, children spent hours and hours after school in the early grades writing characters in a grid, copying characters over and over, repeating stroke after stroke. There is a certain element of automaticity needed to recall quickly the sound and meaning of characters in order to start reading simple texts. Hence, children learned pinyin, the Romanized system of standard Chinese, in the early stages of language learning in pre-school, alongside learning basic stroke order and radicals for characters. Learning pinyin allowed students to take up pronunciation of words and look up words in the dictionary. Jason explained it to me in this way:

They teach you pinyin, how to pronounce, because we use the pinyin to pronounce. Once you know how to pronounce, they teach you how to write the characters, about, they separate the characters into different parts, each part, so they teach you, hen, shu, pian, na, whatever at the beginning. Once you know all the components, then they help, like they teach you how to put those components together, and how the character’s name. And they tell you the meanings. They have like four sounds (den1, den2, den3, den4) the four tones. And they have like, whatever called another thing. Yeah, that’s pretty much, the
characters are really similar as like English, but they have something on the top. I think like, at the beginning of class, the teacher just write out the *pinyin*, everything. Then we just following her, he speaks whatever things, and we just follow out, something like: First, we need to learn the character like, *a, oh, uh, i, wu yu*, how to pronounce those vowels first, then we need to learn *pinyin* first, then we combine those *pinyin*, like p-a for *pa*, so the teacher will show us how to pronounce it, so we just follow him. They give us a book like a book that has a lot of characters on it, so we just like for our homework, we just write the characters ten times per night, so we just write it, write it, write it, and they do test like every week, I think about the characters at the beginning. Something like that.

In this way, students developed mastery of sound-to-symbol correspondence in *pinyin* and in Chinese simultaneously, integrating linguistic information from two different systems in the course of language development in early childhood,

*Vocabulary Words*

Participants in primary grades spent a lot of time learning words, how to say them, what they meant, how basic units are combined together to form words or characters. Participants reported that word learning was primarily a process of memorization, rather than deepening lexical knowledge. Nassar remembered how difficult it was to memorize a large volume of vocabulary words assigned by the teacher each day. The teacher would write vocabulary words on the chalk board, explain its meaning, tell students to write down words or to write sentences with the words. In addition to memorizing large volumes of unfamiliar words, students also had to memorize texts that included unfamiliar vocabulary. Since their interaction with text was primarily through memorization, there was little emphasis on learning the meaning of words, or
how to make sense of texts by examining unfamiliar words. Shefa recalled that she had trouble knowing the meaning of all the words in the readings she had to memorize for homework, so she struggled to comprehend its meaning. Her tutor gave her words to memorize and that apparently improved her reading comprehension. These data suggest that their prior literacy education, and the underlying the theory of reading development and comprehension, assumed that students could make meaning from a text after they had memorized a large quantity of individual words.

Maimouna's description of her interaction with print as a child was often focused on words, trying to remember them, and not knowing what they meant. She remembers being asked to recall words and definitions and having trouble memorizing new words, a central experience that defined her understanding of literacy. Instead of discussing her interactions with text at the comprehension level, instead of talking about the meaning she made out of texts, she recalled that most of her experiences with text were preoccupied with and struggling at the word-level. Maimouna and Shefa’s descriptions of their struggles with vocabulary both lead me to question what reading difficulties students in that situation might have later. It is not clear whether students who have not learned how to independently deepen lexical knowledge when interacting with a text in their home language will struggle to do so in a new language, and in secondary school contexts using academic texts.

Access to Limited Text Types

Participants recalled reading poems, short stories, articles about their country’s political and historical figures, and narrative texts from iconic literary figures in their language. They also read texts that outlined cultural and social norms in their society. All of these texts were found in textbooks, pre-selected and excerpted in length. Students reported that they did not often read, or
even have access to, full-length chapter books or novels. Since so many of the texts they read were excerpted and they did not have access to a range of texts, their exposure to reading with prolonged stamina and extended durations of time was limited. Samia said:

   I never had that experience, I can clearly say that. I’ve never in my life read a novel or a story in Bengali. It was a lot more like small, like a, you could say like a textbook, it’s really not like a textbook. It’s very picture-based book of poems and small stories. So they’re not like long stories like Harry Potter or others. It’s just very short, tiny.

Puja reported that she did not have access to chapter books or novels in the village where she lived. There was no library, nor did her mother purchase storybooks for her to read, and schools did not provide books for students to read independently. The range of text types available was limited to those used in school which were content-related and informational: “there were stories but those stories was just like content-based, not like fun to read” (Puja).

Memorization as Reading

   Even after students learned foundational code-based skills for reading, it appears that the students’ learning experiences did not emphasize what is needed most in addition to mastery of code-based skills: meaning-based literacy practices. Using banking model literacy education, memorization was the key mechanism to teach reading and comprehension. The main purpose for reading that students were given was to just memorize a text. Students memorized poems and excerpts from textbooks during class time and were assigned passages to memorize for homework. Moustapha reported that teachers would write passages on the board, and students would read aloud the passages and memorize them. Other participants also reported directly reading aloud what was written on the board by the teacher, or memorizing what they copied into
their notebooks from the board. Mariama had to copy specific excerpts from a textbook identified by the teacher and then memorize those excerpts after copying. Hence, the students’ interactions with text did not involve meaning-based practices.

Banking model literacy education is predicated on the assumption that, by internalizing the text itself, meaning would be absorbed and transferred from the text to the learner through direct transmission (Freire, 1985). Because memorization was assumed to be an equivalent substitute for comprehension and meaning-making, students were not given varied or authentic purposes for reading texts. The students’ relationship to reading as a process did not always involve comprehension, as Priya explains:

Homework is like you have to maybe memorize from here to some point. And then when we go back home, at night, we are like sometimes it’s like, it’s kind of for me, it was reading Arabic because even though I read, but I don’t know what I’m reading. Even though that was in Bangla. I read, I memorized things, but I never actually spend, like, thought that what could that be mean or something. Only knew that I have to memorize it, and that’s it.

Similarly, Nassar described reading as a process that was divorced from meaning:

We don’t even have to use it in our life some of the stuff we learned. […] It’s just stuff to keep you busy […] Like poems? We don’t have to memorize the poems, what are you gonna do with it?! You take it sometimes 2-3 days to memorize it.

In this way, he invested a lot of cognitive energy and time into memorizing poems that seemed to have no instructional value. Besides memorizing texts, students were asked to answer questions about vocabulary words in the text, comprehension questions about the text, fill-in-the-blank exercises and worksheets based on readings. Where there was an emphasis on deriving meaning
from a text, students were mainly summarizing, restating the text, and most significantly, they were expected to comprehend and interpret as a direct result of memorizing. Shefa said: “You have to read, they will give you a book, you have to read and then you have to explain to your classmates and teachers.”

Even in China, where the literacy rate is significantly higher than other contexts in this study, the pedagogy used in literacy education relied on memorization as a method of reading, summed up in Vivian's words here:

You have to memorize those passages. Word for word. One by one. So you cannot miss a word, or you cannot skip a word. So it has to be like that. And you have to know what is the comma, where is the period. So it’s very hard. But comes to the final, this is the big portion of the final. So out of that passage, they will take out a word, as a new vocabulary or something. And so you have to place the word, write the word in, fill in the word to make the sentence complete. But that word has to be from that passage, it’s the exact word! So you have to remember that.

The reliance on memorization and on-demand regurgitation of texts was central to teaching and learning. It is important to note that rote memorization is an efficient way to take up linguistic features in the early stages of language development in Chinese because of its ideographic system. However, development of advanced literacy ultimately requires meaning-based practices.

It was more likely that students had exposure to meaning-based literacy practices if they completed upper grades in primary or middle school. At that point, students were expected to have mastered foundational reading skills, and could now use text as a resource for learning, to “read to learn.” In those situations, students were expected to do more application of their
understanding, or engage in analysis, such as in Priya’s Bengali literature class:

All you have to do is read a passage, or something. Then you have to write what you read in the passage. And then compare maybe to yourself, or someone you know. And then vocabularies, they give you just some of the vocabularies, and you have to come up with synonyms or make a sentence out of it. And then write maybe they will give you an author name and you have to write a poem of him. From his collections.

Yet, the participants’ general assessment was that they did much less meaning-based work with texts in their countries of origin in comparison to what they were required to do when they arrived in U.S. secondary schools. Puja does not recall reading texts and writing in response to the text: “We didn’t do that kind of stuff. We didn’t comprehend.” Even when students were asked to analyze texts, Shefa recalled that the analysis itself was already pre-determined and provided to students: “In Bangladesh, you don’t analyze. Basically, in the book, they describe everything, and analyze already. And you just have to memorize” (Shefa).

As a result, even meaning-based literacy practices in their prior literacy education lacked the kind of higher-order comprehension skills required for advanced literacy in the U.S. While it is true that certain advanced literacy practices are not yet developed in primary school age children, higher-order thinking is not unreasonable at an appropriate level, even for young children. The rote memorization and the idea of reading as direct transfer of language and ideas shaped what immigrant youth understood about the meaning and purpose of reading, and what it means to be a literate person. Those understandings and perceptions about literacy developed through their prior literacy education may have implications for their development of advanced literacy needed for secondary settings in the U.S., when they learn to read in a new language. Banking model literacy education may also be related to reading difficulties and lower home
language literacy levels that certain emergent bilinguals experience because they were unable to internalize foundational literacy skills in their home language through transmission alone.

**Writing as Copying and Memorization**

The banking model of literacy education was also utilized for the teaching of writing. Writing was seen mostly as a process in which students copied rather than produced texts to demonstrate understanding. Writing was not used for expression of complex thinking, but as an assessment of accurate internalization of text and information. Nassar recalls that writing assignments in Yemen consisted of copying stories from the textbook multiple times. He reported copying for hours after school to make sure that his penmanship was neat and exact.

Students copied from the blackboard or from textbooks for the purpose of memorizing the text, not to communicate ideas. Jhumki explains,

> It was just all writing. Everything…Bangladeshi education system, all you have to do is memorize everything and then just vomit on the paper. That’s all you have to do. And I was really bad at memorizing stuff, I would just remember the key words, and then I would just make it up.

Students memorized essays and paragraphs from the textbook and rewrote them verbatim on tests and exams. At times, rather than straight up regurgitation, students would summarize the essays they memorized or write about the content of essays they memorized. Shefa reported that writing assignments involved little to no analysis or inference:

> Mostly it’s memorization. We have to memorize every day. For example, here is the essay, and I have to memorize every line. If it’s 1000 lines, then I have to memorize 1000 lines. **Exactly. Same words.** Same sentence, everything. Then you write out the lines
exactly the same lines. Not my own idea. We have to. Whatever in the book.

Students also purchased compiled collections of model student essays to mimic writing techniques, the idioms used, and to utilize the format and organization in their own essays. Another common practice was to purchase materials that provided answers to assignments. Jeffrey explained:

Because the text book that the teachers give us, they have a lot of practice in there. And the cheating book, you can buy one and they have the answer to those practice questions. And the answer is just perfect answers. The answer came out of the same person that they wrote the book and that’s how they…but teacher knows, when you using them, because they can tell the level is different.

Writing: Accuracy, Over Meaning

Writing instruction was also heavily focused on accuracy and presentation, rather than meaning. Jhumki explained:

You have to write like 5 pages, and there is no typing. You have to write it. And it has to be neat in order to get the full number, like out of 10, it has to be neat, no double writing, or crossing out.

Students were often concerned about teachers marking their papers for grammatical errors. Hawa says that she was "bad at grammar" in French because her teachers pointed out many mistakes in her writing and she was required to rewrite and correct her assignments based on her teachers’ feedback. Teachers were strict about grammar and mechanics and students would lose points in their grade if they did not write "correctly" or made errors. In fact, the emphasis on mechanical
accuracy and presentation is logical when writing tasks required little production of original thinking from students themselves.

Priya felt that she did not develop strong academic language and formal writing skills in Bengali because she found the language difficult and complicated, and also because her teachers focused on accuracy:

Grammar in Bengali, it was so hard. I still can’t really read Bengali grammar very well. I just know Bengali, but I don’t know how to use the grammatic part of Bengali very well. It was very hard. . . . . Memorize it and then write it. But you have to have spellings and everything right. Cuz they deduct your points if you get wrong spelling. And the spelling is so hard. Some of the words, I can’t even say it. They are so hard. I can’t even imagine writing them. I actually….my mom, she still helps me with Bengali words. I think it’s….when you are really good at your own language, you can be great at different languages. That’s what I felt, so I had a really bad experience with my own language.

That’s why I feel like…now it’s harder for me to catch up with foreign language.

In Bangladesh, students took an entire separate section or course dedicated to grammar and writing. Even so, the course was not intended to teach students skills in writing for communication or expression.

Writing: Limited Purposes

Students typically reported that writing tasks they were assigned emphasized repeating information internalized through memorization. Shefa remembers that the essays she wrote in middle school were not about argumentation:

Basically they give you topics. They say, go to page #52, and read 52 to 68, you have to
memorize that, and then go back to school and write about whatever I would memorize from the book. They also gonna ask us questions based on the memorization. To see if I understand.

While Puja was given topics to provide her own opinions or commentary on texts that she read, the assignments still did not feel authentic:

Whatever I memorized, just write it. How we do original writing - that’s what I learned here. That’s what I was so glad that I was here and I was learning. My original writing in Bangladesh, nobody do their original writing […] We don’t write. We don’t write.

Writing was limited to such forms of production. Having few opportunities to engage in meaningful writing tasks informed the students’ understanding of the purpose for writing, as well as their mastery over skills needed to produce original texts later in secondary school. Puja explained:

In Bangladesh, they’d ask us – for example, write a letter to your friend, right? So, I would like – kids in my class- they had their book, right? And then their book have, we do have letter to your friends, or to like your aunt or your uncle. So they have to string - to memorize that letter and write that letter. Um. In the exam. So that letter is written. But for me, like I remember, I was asked to memorize a letter, and I was able to read it and understand it– and I was like – this is not true about me. The things it was saying, it’s not true. It doesn’t go with your own life. Writing letter to my friend, or writing letter to my aunt – whatever I write on that essay – it doesn’t go with my own life.[..] It’s not true about my life. So I wanna do something true about my life. Y’know, I love my aunt, and then I’m gonna write a letter to my aunt. [..] Just memorize the letter and then match it
with your own life. But being able to actually think, and use whatever existing in your life, and apply that and write the letter, we didn’t learn to do that.

Without an authentic purpose for writing, or without writing tasks where students had to express complex thinking, literacy education in the countries of origin was limiting.

Depending on the educational context, there were wide variations in expectations for the level of complexity in writing that students were expected to produce. Throughout primary school, and into his first year in a middle school in Yemen, Nassar had to write "just a few sentences," never an essay or a structured paragraph. Students in other school settings, on the other hand, were expected to write full essays by middle school. Even so, the expectations for the quality and complexity of the writing that students produced were not high. If students were assigned writing tasks in which they had to generate original ideas for a composition, they were expected to do so without the help of a teacher:

The teachers don’t tell you everything. [...] We did, actually, lot of reading and writing.

But, I always write like, I never went too deep. Like coming up with maybe deep analysis or something. I always wrote what just on top of my mind, something like that. I didn’t really go. I don’t know why. Maybe I don’t know why. Maybe because I didn’t have… Teachers don’t really encourage you.

The fact that students had such limited learning experiences with writing, focused on a narrow set of literacy skills, is significant for educators to understand because of the level of complex writing students are expected to do in secondary schools in the U.S. The data suggest that many immigrant youth are learning basic writing skills and how to produce original writing often for the very first time when they arrive in the U.S. With little exposure to the writing instruction needed to produce expository writing, those literacy skills are not available for transfer from the
home language when they learn to write essays in English.

**Exceptions to Banking Model Literacy Education**

Students who described a more robust literacy education typically attended what were considered more selective schools, or higher quality schools in large cities. While the teaching still utilized banking model pedagogy, a few students reported having access to a broader range of literacy experiences. Moustapha reported reading entire books in French, as opposed to just reading from a textbook, and had exposure to reading different text types, such as poems and songs, fiction, and thus, a more varied literary diet. Priya reported that, unlike her school in the village, her Bengali literature class in Dhaka focused on literary analysis and she read books by different authors, learned about the authors’ lives, and read famous Bengali writers, poets, and novelists.

In comparatively better schools, students reported extensive writing assignments, where they learned how to develop the organization of essays, utilized the writing process for publication, and were exposed to a wider variety of writing tasks that required synthesizing ideas and original writing. At the private school she attended, Hawa recalls doing book reports, essays, recounting the details of a story, and writing answers to questions based on a reading. These assignments were typically short paragraphs about assigned topics. Priya even remembers being excited about some creative writing assignments where,

- We have to make our own stories. Tell the stories to them, or maybe we get a theme.
- Let’s say the theme was love and we have to write 2-3 pages story about love. So I think it was great idea because we have to process a little bit, to come up with some stories, make up stories or something. So it was kind of, they taught us how to think and write at
the same time.

In the upper grades, Jhumki recalled essay assignments that required synthesizing and analyzing information through original writing:

They would give you two sentences, and you have to emphasize on it, like what does it mean, and you have to write a good amount of, good, good a very well-written paragraph. Like what does that mean, you have to say, whichever side you choose, you have to give a strong logic.

Compared to other contexts, Chinese schooling appeared to provide students with access to higher quality literacy education. What set literacy education apart in China was the degree to which students generated original writing, and had exposure to complex academic texts at a young age. Whereas other immigrant youth reported doing minimal original writing, with some participants not recalling ever even writing an original paragraph in their home language, Chinese students were assigned prolific amounts of writing, both of copying, semi-copying, and original writing. Students were expected from a young age to construct original writing and were given performance tasks to do so on a daily basis.

Chinese literacy education still relied on banking model pedagogy, such as on-demand memorization in writing. Vivian explains:

And then comes to like literature, comes to the test, you do a lot of memorization. Like final test, you have to memorize a whole book, a whole semester, you have to memorize everything. They will pick a passage, you have to memorize all the passages, they’ll pick a passage, and they’ll say, fill in the blank. And so you have to remember what to fill in the blank.
Yet, even in the lower grades, children in China were given simple but authentic writing tasks. Students were assigned diary entries, to "write what happened today, what you saw, anything you want to write about, you have to write a diary" (Xiao Lin). They were assigned essays on topics such as, "Things I Remember" or "My Family."

The writing demands grew progressively harder, but relatively early, and students were expected to write multi-paragraph compositions by the end of primary school. Xiao Lin recalls:

They will give you a topic, then you have to write the essay. Before like from Grade 1, they teach us words. And then sentence, and then how to combine different sentence to a paragraph. And then how to combine all the paragraph into an essay. Like start from Grade 1 get more harder, harder. I remember like during Grade 5 or 6. My math teacher ask us to write a essay about math, about what you learn in math class. So it’s also an essay one per week. So not only in Mandarin class, we have to write an essay, but in Math class, we also have to write an essay.

Vivian remembers taking a Chinese essay class starting in the 2nd grade where she learned the craft and structure of expository writing:

Essay class means they teach you the techniques of how to write essays. So you write essays, two essays in a week. Or like...long essays, basically. The topic they gave you. Let’s stay this topic is write about a person, talk about a person. So you write someone like a biography or something for person, why is this person so important to you. And sometimes they giving pictures, make up a story but now it’s not just three to four lines. You have to write a whole story about this picture! And you have competitions, you now. If you do good in writing class, they will send you to the big city just to have an essay competitions for this grade.]They would give you passages. Let’s say this passage, this
person did this, what’s good about it? What’s not good about it? What’s wrong with them? What’s not wrong with them? You know. So you may learn from those. And from the practice that you do, and then the teacher will correct it. Give it back and then you have to look at it, and then you revise it and give it back.

Exposure to English

While it often seems like immigrant youth are learning English for the first time, interviews with immigrant adolescents in this study revealed that exposure to English instruction prior to immigration to the U.S. was not uncommon. English language instruction may be increasingly common globally because of its importance in global commerce. At the time that my participants were living in China, English instruction was an elective subject area, but now, approximately 15 years later, English instruction begins almost at the beginning of a child’s schooling in China and is a part of the core instructional program. Indeed, affluent private schools in many countries, even in relatively low-income countries, may utilize English either concurrently or as the medium of instruction, for children who attend elite schools. Moreover, even without access to formal English instruction in school, immigrant adolescents often invested in preparing for their immigration by taking English classes or using different methods to learn English. A few families enrolled their children in English classes for adults, others bought English language books and materials. For a year prior to immigrating, Priya stopped attending school because her family was awaiting the immigration paperwork to be processed. During that time, she and her cousins tried memorizing English words at home, and listening to CDs from an English program called RapidEx. They tested each other on English words.

Participants in the study reported starting English classes in secondary school, and a
handful reported doing so in primary school. Typically, the English classes took place once per week, for short periods of time in some contexts, but for regularly scheduled periods in other contexts. A handful of participants educated in higher quality schools had consistent, regularly scheduled English language instruction within a few years of beginning formal schooling at quite a young age. Even so, students presented themselves as learning English for the first time when they arrived in U.S. schools for a number of reasons.

For most participants, their exposure to English instruction was poor quality, inconsistent, and irregular. Like all other types of instruction, English classes were conducted using the banking model of teaching. Instruction mainly focused on the English alphabet and sounds, numbers, and basic words and phrases for conversation. Typically, teachers used a scripted curriculum in an English textbook. Subsequently, students reported still feeling like they were learning English for the first time when they arrived in the U.S.

Those who had formal English language instruction consistently throughout their schooling since childhood attended schools that could afford trained instructors and provide a broad enough curriculum to include English as a core subject area. Their prior exposure to English allowed them to somewhat maneuver through their new learning environment in the U.S. With some translation, they could follow lessons in an English medium classroom more easily in comparison to other newcomers. They remembered recognizing vocabulary words and utilized the code-based skills they previously learned in English after arriving in America.

For example, Priya spent some time learning English before she came to the U.S., so she understood some vocabulary used in the print materials in English. She had to adjust to differences in accent and pronunciation upon arriving in Brooklyn, but drew upon the linguistic schema she developed as a result of consistent English language instruction in Bangladesh.
Jhumki also learned the English alphabet, how to combine words into small phrases, read simple books and paragraphs in English, and some understanding of English grammar. Puja remembers learning how to write basic sentences in English, reading and memorizing poetry in English, and doing vocabulary exercises. Teachers gave her Bengali passages to translate into English, and from English to Bengali. The translated passages were in an answer key in the textbooks, so students might just memorize the translations instead of actually trying to translate on their own. Jhumki recalled writing entire pages in English, but she was not able to use English for communication. Hawa's exposure to English included learning the differences in the sounds between French and English, a skill she used to notice cognates and when the pronunciation did not always match the written form. This developed her metalinguistic awareness and linguistic knowledge, which she transferred and applied to her learning of English after immigration.

Since their English instruction was not always effective, the participants did not feel prepared for learning English in American schools. Shefa did not feel that the English she learned in Bangladesh was usable, despite having taken English classes for many years. That is, what she learned was not relevant to the context in which she was learning in the U.S. The English instruction primarily focused on reading proficiency, but did not develop oral proficiency. Despite taking English classes regularly for at least six years in secondary school in Bangladesh, when Jhumki arrived in New York, “On July 31, 2008, I just knew three words: Good morning, Thank you, and Sorry. Those were the three words I knew in English.” She had little practice in speaking and listening, or how to use English for communicative purposes. Jhumki explained the banking model of English instruction in Bangladesh:

Because we don’t know how to say it. We never practice in class. Like I could write cow has two legs, or four legs. One tail. And we would write bigger, so the page fills, and you
would copy it from somebody else. Like when you copy, you don’t use your brain, you just copy. Whatever I wrote, it doesn’t make sense. Whatever word I would come to my mind, I would just write it, even if the grammar is wrong. We just never put any attention in English.

When she completed assignments, the teacher focused on how many pages she wrote, not on the content of the writing. “You can literally just write anything on the paper, and all they wanted was the thickness of the paper, like how many pages did you write. And they wouldn’t like go through and read it” (Jhumki).

Ultimately, the exposure to English instruction had differential effects for students. Abou reported that his English classes were taught by teachers who had varying levels of proficiency in English. The curriculum focused on learning the alphabet, basic words and phrases, but the content was often decontextualized. As a result, he did not feel that anything he learned in English class "stuck." Prior instruction in English did not always have a significant impact on their readiness for schooling in the U.S. Despite learning English in China since primary school, Bo struggled with basic phonological skills in English well into his first years of community college in the US:

It’s very difficult when you learn Mandarin, 言文 (yu wen), and at the same time, these two are different. Because you learn 言文 when you’re in first grade, so you know basic stuff on it. But when you start English in 3rd grade, it’s a new language you can learn, but you still have to learn the Chinese. But if you getting pay more attention on it, so you know more than when you were in first grade, right? And another language coming in, you’re not going to remember it. You’re just going to forget it. Even English class, teacher I think use Mandarin. Like, basic communication, she use the Mandarin but only
the word, she say it in English. And how students going to remember that?!

Similarly, by the end of the 12th grade, I recollect Shefa’s writing to be rather difficult to comprehend, despite her prolonged exposure to English classes in primary and middle school in Bangladesh. Shefa felt that she was not able to communicate verbally when she came to the U.S., but that she was able to read a little in English. Such information suggests that early reading and improved language assessments to understand a student’s knowledge of the English language would be useful for educators so that they can be strategic in how to accelerate English language development. Currently, few educators go back and uncover this sort of information and assume that all “beginners” are alike, when in fact their experiences with English proficiency even before arrival are quite varied.

Prior Literacy Education: Implications for School Readiness

These educational histories and linguistic portraits of language-minoritized adolescents provide the context and background information needed to holistically understand their learning needs. They reveal their experiences with literacy education in the countries of origin, which inform the kind of responsive instruction educators in the U.S. can design for immigrant youth who need to make the quick transition to advanced literacy in a new language. The data suggest that literacy education in the countries of origin left a lot to be desired, and that immigrant youth may very likely be arriving in the US without the requisite literacy skills and practices they need to engage in complex grade-level academic work in high school in multiple content-areas. The interaction between the knowledge immigrant youth have available to leverage upon arrival in a new country is what I call “school readiness,” the degree to which immigrant adolescents have developed the requisite funds of knowledge necessary for secondary education after immigration.
While we see that many students transfer their home language literacy knowledge with the right instructional support, many do not. We do not currently know the percentage of language-minority children who have the requisite literacy skills in their home language, appropriate and consistent with literacy development for their age group, at the time of their arrival to the U.S. The data in this dissertation suggest that the educational contexts in which immigrant adolescents first learned to read were not necessarily conducive to advanced literacy development.

These linguistic portraits show that immigrant youth had limited exposure when they were young children to the experiences with reading needed to develop advanced literacy skills, with potential consequences for their literacy development over time as emergent bilinguals. Poor early childhood education may result in reading troubles that impede quick development of advanced literacy in a new language. Students with inconsistent or interrupted formal education, or poor literacy education in their countries of origin, may have reached middle adolescence without having internalized the foundational literacy skills needed to even decode fluently in their first language. While students who struggle with literacy at foundational levels in their home language are relatively few in number, they are disproportionately represented among emergent bilinguals (Klein & Martohardjono, 2006). For students with low literacy in their home language, teacher-directed intervention and explicit instruction in code-based foundational literacy skills may be required (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006).

Even adolescents who have higher home language literacy may continue requiring explicit instruction in skills needed for literacy in secondary school settings, and in how to leverage their first language for using text as a resource for learning in a new language. While prior literacy education may have provided opportunities for immigrant adolescents to practice reading as young children, the lack of instruction in developing active reading skills may have
differential impact on executive functioning, fluency, and comprehension required for secondary and post-secondary literacy. In fact, many language-minoritized youth may be learning advanced literacy skills in comprehension for the first time when they immigrate to the U.S.

The development of the reading circuit for emergent bilinguals may in fact differ in some ways from general reading development because of the interaction between home language literacy and reading in a new language. In order to connect the pieces of the reading circuit in multiple languages, children need multiple exposures to rich and meaningful literacy experiences that forge synaptic connections, over time, so that their brains become efficient in reading and can apply literacy skills to all of the languages in their repertoire. If immigrant adolescents do not yet have the reading circuit in place at the time of immigration, and switch to building literacy skills in a language they do not fully understand, what impact does that have? This may be one of the disruptive effects immigration has on adolescent development and learning, and one reason why teaching emergent bilinguals how to develop advanced literacy is often a more complex task than teaching reading to a monolingual child.

The literacy challenges for newcomer immigrant youth are compounded by the timing of their immigration, which occurs during a crucial switch in literacy development, the transition from learning to read in primary school to reading to learn in middle school. As well, individual variables such as background knowledge and motivation can influence literacy development (Lesaux & Geva, 2006). For older adolescents, learning to read can feel infantilizing, influencing their motivation and socio-emotional stance toward learning to read. Understanding the perceptions and experiences that immigrant youth had with literacy in their country of origin may further our understanding of their literacy performance. The data in this study suggest that immigrant youth have linguistic portraits that are often more complex than educators realize, and
that educators must pay attention to their funds of knowledge in order to develop responsive interventions after the students arrive in the U.S.

*The Right to Language and Literacy: Symbolic Domination and Linguistic Hegemony*

The reading difficulties that educators encounter among immigrant youth are evidence of the symbolic domination and linguistic hegemony inherent in home country educational contexts. The stratification and unequal distribution of resources in those educational systems resulted in ineffective literacy education. Illiteracy, after all, is very much a political and economic problem, and not just an instructional one (Freire, 1985). The linguistic portraits in this dissertation provide accounts of symbolic domination and linguistic hegemony enacted in educational institutions in multiple countries of origin. Differential access to educational opportunities and resources prior to their immigration, and banking model literacy education, have resulted in linguistic difference for language-minority adolescents.

As I will demonstrate in Part III of this dissertation, after they immigrate to the U.S., immigrant youth lag behind their American-born counterparts in graduation rates, college readiness indicators, and performance on literacy assessments, and English language proficiency. There are many reasons why immigrant youth struggle to perform at the same levels on academic achievement measures (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008). A major predictor of graduation and achievement for immigrant youth is literacy, the ability to read and write with grade-level complex texts and content in English. Over time and in the aggregate, we see that immigrant adolescents make progress as they learn English and advance in grade-levels, but their performance in language and literacy for academic purposes never quite converges to match their American-born peers (Kieffer, 2011; Slama; 2012). In order to succeed in the current knowledge economy, emergent bilinguals need to use complex texts as resources for learning content,
develop content-knowledge, participate in the processes and procedures needed for career development, understand immigration laws that impact their status in the U.S., and complete academic work in higher education, all of which require advanced literacy skills. Yet, language-minority adolescents in American schools continue to be disenfranchised of their rights to language when secondary schools withhold learning opportunities and literacy knowledge needed to meet high school graduation requirements and for post-secondary education. In many ways, language-minority adolescents are twice-minoritized because they have been deprived of resources needed to develop advanced literacy in any of the languages in their linguistic repertoire.

Ultimately, schools in all contexts are sites of struggle over linguistic resources, and immigrant youth must battle out the intricacies of their language, culture, and identity in ways that no other bilingual people do because of their age, the timing of their immigration, and the policies in American secondary classrooms. Immigrant youth need adequate access to learning multiple languages, but this access is limited especially in urban schools. Subsequently, language-minority adolescents are often in contestation and negotiation over their rights as young people to language and literacy, and ultimately, their right to learn. They are resilient, but schools should do better in creating spaces for immigrant youth to use language and literacy as a practice for learning. Teachers and students alike negotiate these encounters where languages meet and come into contact, and it is the responsibility of educators to leverage students’ linguistic resources in educational spaces. Given the complex literacy profiles of immigrant adolescents, educational policies and resources should be utilized for the development of their multilingual capacities. Yet, educational institutions have often limited children’s rights and access to language and literacy development, resulting in linguistic hegemony and stratification.
of linguistic resources (Heller & Martin-Jones, 2001). In Part III, I demonstrate how linguistic resources have been withheld from language-minority children in the United States as well.
PART III
Schooling In a New Land: Promises and Compromises
Chapter 7: Failure to Launch: Literacy Troubles for Immigrant Youth in U.S. Secondary Schools

Immigrant youth who are school-ready bring sufficient funds of knowledge from their home country education that allow them to perform at high levels in secondary classrooms in the United States. With appropriate support, they often learn how to speak English in a short amount of time and reach a level of academic performance that may even match American-born children. In fact, they may do even better than their U.S.-born peers (NYCDOE, 2009b). It is not unreasonable to expect that school-ready immigrant youth meet high school graduation requirements in a timely manner, if they are provided with instruction that targets their learning needs.

Yet the data in this study suggest that immigrant youth may not arrive school-ready when they enroll in American schools. They may not have adequately developed advanced literacy skills appropriate to their age and stage of youth development and requisites for academic work in a secondary setting. I have come across no study that examines the home language literacy of newly arrived immigrant youth at arrival or that determine how many incoming newcomers are below grade-level in home language literacy. It is not clear from the research literature how extensive the problem of below grade-level literacy is among immigrant adolescents. A few existing empirical studies suggest that a significant number of students coming from low- and middle-income countries may not yet have mastered prerequisite skills for reading, creating significant barriers that hinder academic performance and development of advanced literacy required for secondary settings (August & Shanahan, 2006; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006; Short & Fitzsimmons, 2007).

In this chapter, I discuss the possible connection that school readiness and literacy have
to academic challenges that immigrant adolescents face after they arrive in the U.S. (in other words, the interaction between their education in the countries of origin with the ensuing processes of learning, transition, and continued development of literacy after immigration). I show how previous literacy education and the resulting literacy knowledge of immigrant youth relate to academic performance after immigrant youth arrive in America. The data suggest that secondary schools in the U.S. contribute to stagnation in academic performance and literacy development that continue years after arrival (Kieffer, 2011; Slama, 2012). While there are anecdotes of many small victories along the way, in the aggregate, the data suggest that current efforts in U.S. secondary schools are insufficient to surmount the barriers that underlie the students’ literacy and academic challenges.

The “Wait and See” Approach: The Beginnings of Academic Troubles for Immigrant Youth

Prior to the point at which newcomer immigrant youth could access comprehensible input in their secondary classrooms in the U.S., students in the study reported that they were given few tools to participate meaningfully in their new learning environments in the U.S. Not yet able to understand or to respond in English, the students spent time doing assignments that had no meaning for them -- they did not comprehend the assignments, nor were they given directions for how to complete them. Instead of doing his homework, Nassar copied stories from English books to improve his penmanship. This is not insignificant for Arabic-speaking students who need to make the transition to writing the Roman alphabet, which has both a different orthography and text directionality compared to Arabic. It may take up to a year to get used to the physicality of writing the English alphabet for some students. Yet copying English texts was not an efficient use of his time, and no one guided him or provided him with a more meaningful task through
which he could develop language or content knowledge.

Similarly, Hawa’s coping strategy to get through assignments she did not understand was, "I copy everything!" As a strategy of last resort, she copied books that were given to her; she copied the board; and she copied homework and notes from other students because she could not comprehend or access the assignments that were given to her. Given the literacy practices they were accustomed to in their countries of origin, students were not necessarily able to independently utilize translanguaging practices that would have aided them in accessing content and materials in a high school classroom where English was the medium of instruction. The students required not immersion in English language and content alone, but also required explicit scaffolding and intervention from a teacher.

Explicit guidance during that initial period for newcomers proved to be crucial to help newcomers acclimate and to quickly develop what reading teachers like to call “islands of certainty,” basic fundamental language and concepts that students can use to accrue increasing knowledge and language in the academic setting and materials around them. Instead of providing a heavy dose of support immediately upon arrival, or an early intervention program to accelerate literacy development in English, secondary schools often used a “wait and see” approach to, dependent on immersion alone to have an effect on accelerated learning for immigrant students. The participants accounts suggest that this “wait and see” approach results in academic blackout, a period during which students learn very little language or content because secondary school settings are unresponsive to their developmental needs in language, literacy, and academic content. While students do indeed learn naturally through immersion in secondary school classrooms, the inadequacy of their home country education places certain students at a disadvantage under such an approach. Until students have reached a threshold level of oral
proficiency and comprehension in English, it is almost impossible for them to access content, texts, materials, or speech that is not in their home language without explicit intervention from a teacher and from peers. Getting students to that tipping point quickly is a strategic move for educators, and should be used to accelerate academic performance. Until that tipping point, newcomers can gain exposure to behaviors, culture, and norms utilized in secondary classrooms in the U.S., but they are not actually learning the content or language they need for academic acceleration.

_new Demands for Reading, New Troubles for Learning_

In addition to learning English, students encountered new literacy demands they were unfamiliar with in their prior schooling. In American secondary schools, students are expected to independently read for information; they need stamina to read over time; they are asked to read multiple texts in different disciplines over the course of a day; they must synthesize information from their readings in a short amount of time. For newcomer immigrant youth, the adjustment to such advanced literacy required new literacy practices, as Samia explained:

I think they pushed us to read and write a lot. Teachers obviously asked us, whether we had a book to read, a small book, which I never had in elementary school [in Bangladesh]. I never read a book, like a novel. So they started making us read novels, and write what plot, what things meant, have a vocabulary sheet. Something like that. Find words that we didn’t know. They made us write, doesn’t matter whether or not we had anything right or wrong, which I don’t think I had in elementary school. We really started writing real stuff. We started having grades based on what we did well or not, like on our papers, we got As. And I really liked it, cuz I did well out of the three classes. And my
determination started growing because I was doing well in that class. I know that I would never do well in a regular class.

That initial period of learning to read in English was easier for students with higher-level home language literacy skills. In the early stages, Jhumki presented as a "beginner" in English proficiency, and never participated in class or spoke in English. Yet because she completed high school in Bangladesh, her home language literacy skills (and school readiness, generally) were far advanced in comparison to other students. She knew how to use text as a resource for learning in content-area classes, and she had familiarity with concepts in various subjects, even if she did not feel comfortable speaking in English yet. Thus, she utilized print to help her make sense of the learning environment even when other input was incomprehensible or linguistic resources were unavailable. This made her experience as a newcomer qualitatively different from a student who did not bring those skills from their funds of knowledge to learning American classrooms.

Advanced Literacy Skills in Secondary School Settings

Even though they may not have learned this skill in their home country, students were also expected to independently monitor their own reading comprehension. Priya remembers learning from her 9th grade English teacher how to select books that were at a comfortable reading level. She learned to test whether a book had too many or too few words she did not know as a gauge for whether a book was too hard for her to read independently. Priya recalled, I didn’t know that strategy. I didn’t know you can actually figure out your level, like what’s your level. I had no idea about those. All we had Bengali book back there. So I think that really helped me. After I heard that, I always would go through book and read
the book. If I don’t know a lot of words, I won’t keep the book, I don’t want to waste my time. I know I will not like it. Maybe I will just read it, but I will not like it. So I always go with easier book.

In this way, Priya learned an important skill while still developing literacy skills in a new language.

In addition to the volume and the practice of independent reading, other aspects of literacy in secondary education created significant challenges. Samia recalled how difficult it was to learn language used in academic settings: "The wordings were hard; I didn’t know what each of those words meant. They were using real words that were in the book.” The idea of “real words” was a signal that there was language Samia needed to learn, but that was not used in everyday interaction. Ultimately, students had to make a shift to meaning-based skills for literacy. They were asked to analyze literacy devices in a text, something completely foreign to Priya. In Bangladesh, Priya had not previously encountered the need to actively make inferences, or to synthesize information from multiple sources to develop an understanding of a concept.

As a result, many immigrant youth “fake it ‘till they make it” and mask their reading struggles by writing and producing work that may demonstrate enough knowledge so that teachers believe they understand texts they are reading. This is a phenomenon not isolated to immigrant youth. Without effective assessment practices, immigrant youth are constantly slipping under the radar in this manner, faking reading behaviors and inadvertently getting by because many high school teachers are not trained to recognize reading difficulties, and especially not those of students whose primary language is not English. For some immigrant adolescents, their difficulties are severe enough that they are simply unable to mask their struggles. For immigrant youth with low literacy in their home language, such literacy demands
are extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible, to surmount without strategic and substantive intervention, particularly at the beginning of their schooling in the U.S. (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006). Such students are at a high risk for illiteracy and drop-out (Fry, 2005).

Language and Literacy in Secondary Education: Why Content Area Instruction Matters

A significant component in supporting advanced literacy in secondary settings is the students' development of content knowledge, and the skills required for academic inquiry within specific disciplines, often utilizing printed text as an anchor for learning. My interviews with immigrant youth corroborated the fact that the learning of content is integrated with learning language and literacy, and that the development of both is required and not mutually exclusive. Depending on their school readiness (or lack thereof), immigrant youth struggled with literacy in part because of their lack of preparedness in the content areas.

Some students felt that they struggled in content area classes primarily because they needed to learn English. They may have learned the content in their home language, but did not know how to express their understandings in English: "You remember the history, but you only remember it in Bengali," Priya said. Students who had adequate content area instruction in their countries of origin found that the content was not necessarily new. Jhumki explained this in the following manner:

Because of the language, the work was hard. But not really…the work wasn’t that much hard, just because I didn’t know how to say it, or I didn’t know the language, because of that I thought it was hard, the reading and writing.

When Jhumki arrived in America, she focused on learning the language to express the content
knowledge she already knew. Because her teachers at CBIHS used visuals, she conferred often with students who shared her primary language, and the materials and texts triggered her background knowledge, it was possible for her to follow along. CBIHS also provided Jhumki with multiple ways to express and communicate, other than using writing in English.

In that setting, Jhumki transferred funds of knowledge that she learned in her country in terms of literacy, content, and academic ways of thinking. What she needed help with was to learn productive skills in the new language:

I totally understood the concept, but I just did not know how to say it in English. So math was easy, cuz math is the same. It doesn’t need a language, because math is a language itself. Science, I knew what the teacher was saying, I just didn’t know how to say it. English was hard, especially with the teacher kept pushing me. Social studies, it was with Ms. Suzannah, teaching us about maps and geography. And country names are the same names [in Bengali]. Africa is Africa, a continent. I knew the country names. It wasn’t that bad. Social science wasn’t that hard. Science was like, just because I didn’t know how to say it, but I totally got the concept. Math was easy. And then, just the English. I was like, no I don’t like this. (Jhumki)

Jhumki could still meaningfully participate in classroom learning activities as a result of her content knowledge:

When we did our project, I used to stay quiet, and I would do the work. I was just not talk, but I would do whatever work was assigned to me. ‘Cause I knew how to do them, I just didn’t know how to tell them.

Even so, the immigrant youth in this study always had some period of adjustment. Samia
explained that math was confusing at first because her teachers taught her how to do arithmetic in a different way, and she had to get used to writing numbers and mathematical equations in a different form. For students who were not exposed to the content in their prior education, the adjustment was even more difficult to manage. Because the content was new and was provided in a language that they did not understand, they struggled to learn. When asked what she remembered from her content area classes before she could understand English, Samia said, "I don’t know what I learned to be honest, I don’t remember.” This academic blackout means that students can rarely learn content meaningfully without access to the language.

Furthermore, adolescents cannot develop language efficiently and meaningfully when it is divorced from content. For language-minoritized adolescents in particular, leveraging home language as a resource for learning is insufficient when students are not also simultaneously developing conceptual understandings. In high school settings, the need for content knowledge cannot be overlooked as a source of academic difficulty for immigrant youth. What this means for literacy is that even students with relatively high levels of home language literacy have gaps in their conceptual understanding because of their prior schooling. Hence, they have not developed content knowledge needed to inform their reading of academic texts. Missing background knowledge renders many academic texts even more demanding than the linguistic complexity of the texts alone does. As a result, when they arrived in the U.S., some immigrant youth, lacked content knowledge in different subject areas, had to learn discipline-specific skills, background information, language and literacy, and new cognitive processes related to academic inquiry, all at the same time.

In many secondary settings in the United States, high school teachers are not be trained to teach content to immigrant youth who may have significant gaps in their background knowledge,
nor are they trained to teach content and language and literacy in integrated ways. The students’ accounts suggest that many emergent bilinguals can do a lot of content learning without having a lot of access to English, and they can learn English as they learn the content. The strategy around integrating language and content instruction is crucial for academic acceleration. If schools only teach language without grade-level content, students will not know enough content to perform well on exit assessments required for high school graduation. If students are taught only content, they will not develop the literacy skills they need to perform well on those same content-based assessments. To further complicate things, foreign-born immigrant youth have fewer years to reach that level of academic proficiency. Hence, educators need to consider the structural design of their curriculum, how they integrate mandated periods of language intervention for English learners with content-area instruction, and how content area teachers can provide universally designed instruction that also scaffolds for language and literacy. Without this full-court press, we will continue to see abysmal academic performance among newcomer immigrant youth.

The Role of the Home Language

An important process in immigrant students’ transition to schooling and literacy in the U.S. is the expansion of their linguistic repertoire and changes in their relationship to their primary language(s). The students’ understanding of their emergent multilingualism began in their countries of origin, where they often lived in complex and linguistically diverse environments. Like many younger West Africans, Hawa discussed how young people growing up in urban areas in Guinea spoke a mixture of French and Fulani. She wished that she had learned to speak Fulani in the way that her extended family in rural areas used the language. This was a result of the subtractive schooling context of a postcolonial society:
I feel like I want to learn more of my native language because I’m using it.[…]

Everything I speak is like half French half Fulani. [Her cousins] speak the real one […]

Everything they speak, they don’t mix French inside. But me, whenever I speak, the
words I put is French. […]it’s not fair for me […] they don’t speak those languages I
speak, and I feel out, I’m not part of them. We have totally different belief. […]they
know more about the culture than me. It’s like when we come to music, I don’t listen to
Fulani music. I don’t used to dress African clothes when I was back home. […] the
Fulani I use at home and the Fulani that I used outside the neighborhood is different.

Because of the Fulani that my grandma and grandpa speak I take that tone. (Hawa)

This linguistic dexterity, developed early in their childhood, continued after the students arrived
in the U.S. Similarly, Moustapha recalled the pleasure he took in mixing Fulani, French, and
English with his classmates after he immigrated to Brooklyn, adding to his linguistic repertoire.

On the other hand, Hawa also felt that she did not have the opportunity to develop
French, the language in which she first learned to read and identifies with school. “We used to
only speak it at school. But outside of school, I would avoid it, I wouldn’t speak French, I only
speak Fulani.” (Hawa) After immigrating, Hawa no longer had access to resources needed to
develop French, and she feels that her handle and fluency in French is tenuous. She wished that
she had developed a higher level of proficiency when she was in Guinea before she immigrated,
so that she would not have “lost her French.” Similarly, Mariama experienced problems in
advancing her literacy in French, the language in which she first learned to read, and it was
important to her to retain the French that she did know:

Of course, I could still read and write French, but I have my problems, and I can speak it
too, but not like the way I speak it in English. But I still understand, and I will write. This
is why when I still talk to my friends back home, they so surprised that I know how to write in French. They like, how old were you when you left here? I started in 6th grade. It is a point of pride that she could retain her French even after having left Guinea. So, we see that students already had a complex relationship with language in their childhood.

Not surprisingly, the younger the students left the country, the less literate they were in their home language. Samia immigrated when she was only in the 5th grade, so she never developed advanced literacy in Bengali:

[Chuckle] Well, I don’t know how to write in Bengali too well. I know how to write my name, I know some stuff, I can write some stuff, but I forgot a lot. I haven’t practiced it. So, I forgot a lot, but it’s not like completely diminished. So I understand when people, what people say, I can respond back to them, that’s totally fine. It’s just the writing part. On the other hand, because Jhumki completed high school in Bangladesh before coming to the U.S., her literacy in Bengali was advanced. She continued reading in Bengali after she arrived in the U.S., so much so that her father hid the Bengali books in their home because he wanted her to read in English.

Many emergent bilinguals feel that their language development in their home language was disrupted and prematurely cut too short. Shefa explained that while she is fluent in Bengali, she feels that she would have difficulties using and understanding Bengali in a professional setting, or among college educated Bengalis. She said, "If they ask me questions, I don't think so I could answer their questions" (Shefa). Similarly, Priya explains it this way:

I can’t really write Bengali any more. I know how to write it, but lot of spelling and everything, I don’t actually remember now. It’s bad, I know! The rules were so difficult! And then we had like 49 alphabet. It was….here, the vowels are only like 5, right? And
then the consonants. So its total 26, right? But for us, we had like consonants, 49. And then we had vowels...I don’t remember how many. Like 19 or something. And to make the sound of those stuff, we had to make little lines, or we had to make some symbols. We had to use to make the sound of the word. It was so…Bengali is really hard, I guess!

As well, Puja realized that her fluency with Bengali changed when she took a college-level exam, which used formal academic Bengali, to place out of foreign-language requirements. I was like, oh my god, I never like, I did learn it in my uh, Bengali grammar class, but I never used it and it was so long ago. I didn’t forget – I was able to read, I was able to answer in that language. But it’s like, it doesn’t come like that [finger snap].

Puja also recognized her limited Bengali literacy when she compared her reading ability to that of her husband, who completed an advanced degree in Bangladesh and is presumably highly literate in Bengali.

I’m able to read Bengali and make sense of it, but I read really slow. Like, my husband, he tried to read the newspaper in Bengali, and I’m trying to read with him – he’s just like, keep on, y’know, keep going and I’m like, wait, it’s taking forever, so I read slowly to make sense of it. And then, there are things that actually I don’t understand. Like, I’ll ask my husband what does that mean, or go to my dad like I don’t understand, can you explain? So I think right now my level of Bengali is not - I can do it, speak it fluently and read it, but in terms of making sense – it’s not as strong. […] the book that my husband sent me. And I was trying to read and I’m like, I don’t understand anything from this book. I don’t understand. I couldn’t read it. I mean, I was trying, I worked really hard to read a couple pages, and then I read it, the books I read one page, then how you
read the follow-up, you have to- you don’t know what happened, and then some connections. So I’m like, I am able to read and make sense of it, like what really happened sense of it, but by the time I get to next page, I forget.

As it is for many multilingual people, the students in this study held feelings of loss, but they also developed great pride in being multilingual. When given the opportunity, they expressed their pleasure in being able to use and learn their home language. Chinese students often switched to using Chinese during my interviews with them. In my experience, Francophone West Africans and Haitians loved participating in the French after-school class offered at CBIHS. When Jhumki first arrived in Brooklyn, she lived with her younger American-born cousins whose primary language was English, so they had an opportunity to exchange: “The deal between my cousins and me was like, at night, when we sleep, you’re going to teach us Bangla, and I’ll teach you English. It’s just heartwarming.” When Jhumki could not read the texts she was given in her high school classes in English, she went home to her 2nd grade cousins for help. Jhumki also participated in a college prep extracurricular program where most of the other high school students were monolingual American-born students. Jhumki shared with me another example of her bilingual pride:

They used to say, I just wish I spoke so many language just like you. They said, I wish that I live in any other place besides America. Like, you have all those experiences and we don’t. It’s not, I know it’s good, but I know it sounds fascinating to you guys, but it’s not really that fancy. And they’re like, why not?!? I Tell me about it, tell me about it, tell me more.
Complex Multilingual Educational Settings

Another change in their linguistic environment after immigrating to the U.S. was their entry into multilingual educational settings, not all of which were conducive to developing their English nor their home language. Because of limited availability of bilingual teachers who could teach using multiple varieties of Chinese in a Chinese-English bilingual middle school program that all of the Chinese students in the study were enrolled in, a few students reported having a bilingual Cantonese-English teacher teaching a class of students who needed Mandarin as the medium of instruction. On the other hand, the Cantonese bilingual classes could not staff the program with enough Cantonese-English teachers for all the content areas. Students reported that some classes had a Cantonese teacher working with a group of students comprised of Cantonese, Fujianese, and Mandarin students. While they could all read Chinese print, these languages are mutually unintelligible. When the teacher tried to use her limited Mandarin, students struggled to understand. As a result, they felt that they did not learn much in middle school.

One unintended consequence is that students also reported developing some knowledge of languages other than English or their home language. At CBIHS, participants were programmed into classes with students representing over a dozen different countries, and picked up knowledge of other languages as a result. One former student of mine from Togo, without any formal instruction, was capable of having a basic conversation with his Dominican friends in Spanish by the time he graduated from high school.

For Chinese students, because they transitioned to predominantly utilizing Mandarin after they enrolled in school in China, they had fewer opportunities to practice the dialect of their family's natal villages. Bo found it humorous that he utilized Fujianese in his middle school in Sunset Park more so than he did while living in Fujian. Jeffrey explained it this way:
I improved my *Fujianese* definitely! Just so much. There’s Fujianese there. I forgot how to speak Fujianese when I was in China. Because my grandparents understand Mandarin, too. But they talk Fujianese. I understand like when people talk to me in Fujianese, but I just can’t say it. It’s hard. It’s hard for me to finish the sentence, but I can definitely say one or two words. There are so many Fujianese students in there! And it’s all teenagers, so when teenagers want to play, they don’t want to study… that force me to learn Fujianese again.

As well, rather than improving her Mandarin or learning English in middle school, one student reported to me that she, "really just learning *台山話* (Taishanese) that year,” another southern Chinese variety that no one in her family spoke but that she picked up from students in the bilingual class she attended. Students in the bilingual classroom also developed exposure to both simplified and traditional Chinese because of their teachers, whereas they had only learned the simplified form in China. However, such development of multilingualism was serendipitous, neither intentional nor structured by the school, and students did not develop fluency.

**Conclusion: Implications for Literacy Education for Newcomer Immigrant Youth**

Given the complex language and literacy needs of immigrant youth, secondary schools in the U.S. are in need of an improved instructional approach for literacy education for language-minoritized adolescents. By understanding the pre-migration literacy education of immigrant youth, educators can more accurately diagnose learning needs, accelerate literacy development, and avoid placing immigrant youth in programs that are not aligned to their learning needs. Given the Matthew Effect, where strong foundational literacy begets accelerated literacy development, and weak foundational literacy begets more challenges for already struggling
readers, researchers and educators hoping to improve literacy outcomes for emergent bilinguals must examine literacy development as a trajectory (Stanovich, 1986), a point I make in Chapter 10. It is important to examine important points in the course of literacy development that present particular challenges to immigrant youth (Kieffer, 2011; Slama; 2012).

The accounts from students’ educational histories suggest that early literacy intervention systems in secondary schools in response to students’ learning needs are necessary, and may stall or prevent drop out among students with low literacy. In theory, as August and Shanahan have said, “instruction for students who are literate in their first language could be more targeted, emphasizing those skills not yet obtained through the first language while paying less attention to easily transferable skills already mastered” (2006, p. 357). Hence, assessing home language literacy and school readiness of immigrant youth at arrival helps educators to identify what appropriate interventions are needed, based on their knowledge of a student’s literacy education, their skills in their home language, and experiences that may have an impact on literacy development. As well,

Teaching English-language learners strategies (for decoding or comprehension) can be effective, but it should be combined with concerted efforts to build students’ facility in English. The reason is that strategies of various types are unlikely to help students who do not have the requisite language proficiency to comprehend the text. (August & Shanahan, 2006, p. 35).

That is, instruction cannot withhold knowledge around the foundational aspects of language and reading when it is needed. Particularly for students who are found to have below-developmentally-appropriate levels of literacy in their home language, instruction in foundational reading skills may also be needed to continue developing their literacy (Decapua &
Marshall, 2010; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006). Yet for the purpose of acceleration, literacy instruction cannot merely focused on code-based and mechanical skills alone and must be integrated with grade-level content as well. The accounts in this chapter also point to the need for educational settings that support development of home language and multilingual ecologies, as well as learning environments that utilize in-depth knowledge of students’ linguistic profiles to shape program and instructional design.

However, such dynamic instructional responsiveness to the needs of emergent bilinguals is often unheard of in secondary schools. Such deep knowledge of students' literacy education prior to coming to the U.S. is rarely utilized, nor do educators currently know how to utilize information about home language literacy levels. Access to effective literacy instruction is not readily available, and secondary teachers who work with immigrant adolescents are not often trained in providing literacy support. As such, the battle over linguistic resources is quite evident in U.S. public schools. These linguistic portraits and educational histories speak to the ways in which the struggle over language and literacy plays out in individual students’ lives.
Chapter 8: Things Fall Apart: College-Readiness and Post-Secondary Literacy for Immigrant Youth

Post-Secondary Academic Trajectories of Newcomer Immigrant Youth

While students from CBIHS had relative success graduating in comparison to New York State’s average graduation rate for immigrant youth as a subgroup, it is not clear how many of the students who attended met college-ready indicators at the time of graduation, how many enrolled in college, and among those, how many required remediation. The 4-year graduation rate at CBIHS never exceeded 70% between 2007 and 2015. The 2012 Where Are They Now? Report for this school revealed that, in 2009, only 7% of the students who graduated were deemed “college ready” based on reading and math assessments, 78% of the students who enrolled in college attended 2-year rather than 4-year institutions, and only 53% did not require remediation in reading and writing (NYCDOE, 2012). The Independent Budget Office found, in their analysis of English language learners in New York City who graduated in the Class of 2009, that only 13.8% were considered college ready for both English and Math (Domanico, 2012).

A Tale of Two Students: Shefa and Samia

These data are corroborated by the individual accounts from students of their post-secondary academic experiences. Two students, Shefa and Samia, represent common differences and struggles in post-secondary academic performance among newcomer immigrant youth. Both Shefa and Samia are from Bangladesh with somewhat contrasting home country educational histories. Shefa attended private schools in an urban setting but struggled tremendously when she
arrived in the United States and continued to do so well into her post-secondary experience.

Samia, on the other hand, attended a rural school in Bangladesh and became one of a few academic “rockstars” at CBIHS, surpassing most of her peers on most academic measures such as GPA, grades for assignments, and exam marks. Samia ended up attending a 4-year college immediately after high school, rare for newcomer immigrant youth, and went on to win a full college scholarship. Later, she received a research fellowship as an undergraduate. Their trajectories show the role that American schooling plays in their academic trajectories, even if children had poor quality education in their countries of origin. Shefa ostensibly should have performed better academically, but did not because of her interaction with schooling in the U.S. and leftover effects of her home country education.

I first met Shefa when she was a 12th grader in my English class in 2007. That year, Shefa met basic high school requirements by barely passing the New York State Regents exams in all four subject areas. Yet, it was clear from her classwork that she was wholly ill-prepared for the kind of literacy she needed in academic disciplines even at a community college. I remember Shefa as one of those students I felt most concerned about. After four years of high school, her ability to comprehend grade-level texts and write cohesive and coherent expository essays in English was still limited. Years after she graduated when I interviewed her, it was clear my concerns were not unfounded. Shefa needed 1.5 years of remedial English, the equivalent of 3 semesters, until she finally passed. She took two semesters of remedial math, and then placed out of it after taking the placement exam. Shefa described the situation in this way:

When I graduate, I wasn’t ready at all for college. I wasn’t. I wasn’t. I think, you know, if I had more research to teach English to new students. Newcomer. So then they can be different. Like you know, give them some, for example, get a Bengali teacher or
somebody. Work with the students. Check how they are doing, everyone check how they are doing, if they need any help. Give them test every week. What level they are? Then, they can get extra class. And they get easy homework or you know, 5th grade or 4th grade level, even though it’s easy. I don’t care. I want to learn. I don’t care what other people say. And it gonna make me have more support.

Shefa felt that her high school education did not prepare her for college, and that what she needed in high school was a program that would do more to accelerate her English proficiency, help her develop advanced literacy, and give her exposure and access to a broader curriculum. In fact, Shefa told me that she agreed to be interviewed by me in part because she wanted to communicate the message to educators that immigrant youth need a lot more support, and that even a school that had historically positive outcomes with immigrant youth did not provide an adequate education for that purpose.

Shefa had a self-reported “horrible experience” during her first year at Kingsborough Community College, a 2-year community college in the City University of New York. She did not always get the academic help she needed; even when she asked for assistance, she felt she was treated “like garbage” and found no one willing to provide additional tutoring:

When I started at Kingsborough, you know when you go to college, professor, they don’t care. They give you work. If you understand it, if you want to get a good grade, study work, hard. Even though you don’t do your homework, they don’t care. I remember when I took psychology. Introduction to psychology. I don’t know. There is a lot of vocabulary words. In psychology. It’s like learning a new language. I was lost.

While she later entered an opportunity program at Kingsborough that provided additional tutoring and mentoring, Shefa's experience is instructive because a majority of newcomer
immigrant youth who continue onto higher education, at least in New York City, do so in community colleges. What enabled Shefa to eventually succeed was her own sheer persistence and resilience. Despite her need for intensive remediation, Shefa’s discipline and attention to her school-work is unmatched by most students I have worked with.

Even students who were admitted into selective colleges were not prepared. Samia exemplifies the trajectories of newcomer immigrant youth who did extremely well in high school, who accelerated academically in unexpected ways, and also struggled when they arrived in college. Unlike Shefa, Samia had a stellar academic transcript in high school, she was always considered an advanced student in comparison to her peers. Yet, when she got to college, she found herself doing very poorly. She took a chemistry class in her first year and barely passed. It was a shock. Even though I studied the book, I studied the book over and over and over, and maybe that’s the stupid thing I did. I studied the book. Because I didn’t know how to study the correct way. What I should have done, now that I know, is look at the pictures. If the professor say, ok, read your notes carefully, because what I write, and remember what I did in class, know that for the exam. If he’s writing stuff down, know those stuff. Don’t just read everything in the book because you’re not going to remember it. So I didn’t know this, so I obviously did bad on it. It took me couple of times, sitting down with my friends, asking them, ok, how do you study for the class, and looking at them, and seeing how they study, and slowly getting the grasp. I did better and better in that class, I ended up getting a B in that class. So, that was a relief that I did. But for a period, it was miserable. That class was horrible, and when a student like me who was never afraid in high school of participating in class, and in psychology class, because I was afraid I wasn’t knowing the material because it was so much, I was like, oh, my god,
I hope he doesn’t pick me! The next semester kept getting better and better. But the first semester. . .

Samia realized that she had not learned the requisite skills she needed for how to study in college, and she had limited exposure to the disciplinary knowledge.

As well, the type of instruction she was accustomed to in high school differed from what she needed in a more traditional college setting. Samia described:

So if I see the other students, when I ask them, how do you study in high school. They get lectures, they literally read from books, they probably got like a project once or twice. But [in my] high school, all we did was projects! Even though it was nice to do it sometimes, but because I was so used to it, […] when I jumped into a situation where I had to know all this stuff, and the teacher wasn’t there to guide me of what I need to study to be a good student, I was lost. And I had to read the material more than twice to get the hang of that material because I don’t know the words, I had to look it up, or I didn’t know the material, I couldn’t understand. So it took me time to develop that same stuff that my classmate would know.

When asked what they thought they needed in high school to be better prepared for the academic demands of college, students generally spoke of a broader curriculum, language and literacy acceleration, and social preparation. Like Samia, Puja also told me that she wished that CBIHS had given her access to a more rigorous curriculum particularly in science subjects because the physics and chemistry curriculum that she had in 11th and 12th grade were too basic.

Ultimately, while she loved her experience at CBIHS, Samia still felt there were missed opportunities for her to develop the competencies she needed for college:

The only problem that actually frustrated me the most, is that they weren’t teaching us
stuff that we actually need to focus the most when we go to college, is that English part. Because we will need to write papers, we will need to read textbooks, we will be learning big words that we don’t know what it means. Many kids like projects, but they are shocked when we go to college, because college is all about lectures. So, I wish they had that transition, because they know, by then, we know enough English. By then, we’ve had enough experience with projects.

I do not agree with Samia that a more traditional form of pedagogy would have served her or her classmates well. However, both Shefa and Samia’s sentiments cannot be dismissed. If even a “superstar” student like Samia had trouble handling post-secondary work, how much more challenging and even out of reach is higher education for less academically skilled immigrants?

*The Precariousness of College Readiness for Immigrant Youth*

Even the Chinese immigrant youth in this study who had a stellar education in China expressed difficulties in catching up on advanced literacy in English and content area knowledge in preparation for post-secondary education. Concerns about their lack of academic preparation and limited English proficiency were evident and salient in each interview. Because 8 out of the 10 Chinese students in this study attended a bilingual program in middle school, and then attended an international high school that isolated them from mainstream American born classmates, college was the *first time* these students attended classes with other students who had “native-like” proficiency in English. Despite their relative school readiness, some Chinese students ultimately fared just as well as other immigrant youth I know who were less school-ready and had poorer quality schooling. Despite having a solid primary school education in China, Bo had to take remedial classes in both reading and/or writing in college and eventually
dropped out of college with plans to do a vocational program back in China.

*Post-Secondary Literacy: Reading Troubles Come to a Head*

The major challenge and reason for this academic stagnation among immigrant youth has to do largely with their development of advanced literacy skills in English. Given the changes in their linguistic repertoire, and the bumpy transition to academic literacy in English, the road in preparation for post-secondary literacy for language-minoritized adolescents is varied and complex. If elementary school is about learning to read, and secondary school is about reading to learn, then college literacy is about reading to synthesize knowledge across genres and bodies of work, and reading to construct new knowledge. It is a steep learning curve for all students, but an even steeper one for immigrant youth who are just getting used to reading in a new language. Ultimately, every participant mentioned having struggles with literacy, regardless of their academic foundation or performance in high school. The data presented in this next section suggest that, regardless of the students’ funds of knowledge in literacy and school readiness at the time of arrival to the U.S., secondary schools failed to adequately remediate and accelerate literacy development in English for newcomers.

All of the participants reported not feeling prepared for the volume and complexity of reading and writing demanded of them in college. They were provided little support in reading, and they felt unprepared for the cognitive overload, the adjustment in stamina, practices, and identities as readers needed for post-secondary literacy. Students who may have gotten through four years of high school using coping strategies for their poor literacy were confronted with new demands in reading when they reached college. While Abou would read and take some notes in the past to help him answer questions, in college he had to process a large volume of text within
a time frame that was unrealistic for a struggling reader. His pace of reading was not commensurate with the pace needed to complete assignments, and he admitted that he lacked stamina for reading. He was accustomed to short texts that were read over long periods of time, in chunks, and that were heavily scaffolded by teachers. Hence, Abou’s struggles can be in part attributed to not having access to effective instruction.

I know this because I taught him in my English class and collaborated for years with a team of teachers who found accelerating literacy for immigrant youth like Abou to be a confounding project. While Abou encountered bite-sized texts in my class, the intensity of the literacy demands he faced in college created serious obstacles not only to reading course texts, but also to the level of analysis and synthesizing required of him, all without instructional support from a professor. Abou realized that assigned readings were the main method of instruction in higher education, and that his professors covered only a fraction of the material during class lectures and seminars. Abou had to adjust to being responsible for learning content independently without an instructor, and it was a rude awakening.

Furthermore, post-secondary literacy was challenging even for the most advanced of students I encountered at CBIHS. Jhumki faced significant literacy challenges even though she essentially did high school twice, once in Bangladesh and once in America. Despite her advanced literacy in Bengali and her accelerated development in English literacy, she told me:

The students are in 12th grade, they should be exposed to those types of writing, reading and writing. Reading 80 pages with this hard English. It’s not fun. I locked myself in my room, and I tried to study. I could not go for more than 5 pages. I’m sorry. I just, I was just, it was just so hard to follow. We read so many books. I can’t even tell you how many books we read. So many books, so many chapters, so many pages. It was hard
because you had to read 40 pages and you had to do a post on-line. And you get an evaluation for that. And we used to write a lot. Imagine four classes, 80 pages reading, you’d be dead. (Jhumki)

Even Jhumki did not have the stamina to keep up with the volume of reading in multiple classes, nor adequate time to process the readings and writing assignments at once.

While Chinese immigrant youth in this study had strong home language skills to transfer to reading in English (arguably more so than students coming from lower-income economies, or from rural areas), when they were challenged with advanced academic texts in various disciplines, they struggled in similar ways as other students.

I don’t understand what the teacher is saying, but I can’t read it. Even when I translate it, I can’t. I don’t know what…but they just make you stuck. Because I just can’t pass the remedial class. Like the words. Those words are very hard, you don’t use it in your life, like normal life. Like SAT words something like that. You never use it. How you gonna…you cannot study it? […] For writing, I learned some grammar, and I never learned grammar. And for reading, I just like better than before. But still feel like it’s difficult. And you staying in front of computer, that’s the passage, a lot of passages, six passages think, and then answer questions. But those words are hard. Make you feel sleepy. Most of the time I just guessing the word. Some people they lucky to get pass because they guessing the right one. (Bo)

A number of Chinese students may have "beat the system" by utilizing their content knowledge and strong test-taking skills developed back in their country of origin to get through standardized exams, but they may not necessarily have developed the requisite advanced literacy skills needed for post-secondary literacy while in secondary school.
Another student from China who demonstrated advanced proficiency in both Chinese and English (she majored in Chinese in college), had strong academic skills and content knowledge in high school, still struggled with post-secondary literacy. As a 12th grader in my class, Vivian was a good writer, an analytical thinker, and her oral proficiency and accuracy in English was far more developed than most of her peers. Yet she struggled with college reading:

Reading was very slow. I’m still slow on reading! I’m better than before because I start reading a lot, but still very slow! Comes to like college content and stuff, I read very very slowly. Sometimes I read it twice, sometimes I read it three times. I have to get it, you now. Very very slow ready. That’s why a book will take me days, just to read. Even though the words is very simple, but like after you read one sentence, you have to go back. Read it again. Oh, that’s what they’re talking about. Then move on. Reading still very slow. Writing, the grammar is still messed up. Haha. Better than before. Still a lot of grammar problems. So someone always have to look over my essays, my writing, my papers. (Vivian)

These anecdotes support the findings in what is possibly the only study to date of Fujianese youth and their experiences in higher education ever conducted, in which one-third of the participants were newcomer immigrant youth like the students in my study. In this study, Liang and Guest found that proficiency in English was ranked as the top source of stress (2013). As a result, the students made strategic decisions to major in disciplines that relied less heavily on language proficiency (Liang & Guest, 2013). They found that the students had lower high school grade point averages, particularly in the areas requiring verbal skills, English, and linguistically demanding courses. Even so, their math and science performance was not much better and they had low SAT scores, all indicators of “college readiness” (Liang & Guest, 2013).
While literacy is a common challenge for immigrant adolescents in general, such outcomes for immigrant youth who are in fact school-ready at arrival in the U.S. signal that secondary schools are ultimately producing academic drag, even for highly-skilled immigrant students. That is, secondary schools in America have, by design, stymied the academic trajectories of language-minoritized adolescents. For a majority of immigrant youth, even remedial courses at community colleges, where the literacy demands were presumably less demanding than college-credit course work, presented challenges. Students reported that their grades suffered in courses that were the most text-heavy and complex in literacy demands. Subsequently, many immigrant youth have opted to major in subject areas that have lighter literacy demands, such as math, nursing, and accounting. Priya recalled what a relief it was when she finally found multi-media arts as a major that did not require a lot of math or reading. Her grades improved significantly when she took courses in that discipline. Such strategic decisions based on their perceived language competency, selecting courses, and majoring in disciplines that require less demanding linguistic proficiency, are not uncommon (Liang & Guest, 2013).

Interestingly, many of the students do say that they felt relatively prepared for college writing. Abou felt that a lot of college writing was similar to the kind of writing tasks he had to produce for high school portfolio assessments in each subject area. The participants all lamented that they did not feel proficient in English grammar, presumably because they were penalized for written accuracy in college in a way that they were not in high school. Yet, they ultimately felt that high school prepared them for expository writing. The main difference was the volume of writing they were asked to do, their professors’ preoccupation with grammatical accuracy, and the need to use complex academic vocabulary. The authentic performance-based assessments and the project-based curriculum at CBIHS (signature components of the pedagogy in
International high schools) appears to have been extremely effective in preparing them for advanced writing demands.

**Conclusion**

The stakes for not developing advanced literacy needed for college-level academic work are quite high. A large majority of students graduating from New York City public high schools require remediation when they attend college, and one might infer that the situation for English language learners is dire in comparison. Students who have significantly low literacy in their home language are the most at risk for illiteracy because of the limited home language literacy skills they have to transfer to complex reading in a new language (DeCapua & Marshall, 2010; Klein & Martohardjono, 2006). While I worked as a college counselor at CBIHS, a majority of the immigrant students who graduated from that school were only eligible for community college because they required remediation in literacy. In my interview with Shefa, she exhorted:

> I really beg you to help them understand because English it’s very important. English is the key for college. If they don’t know how to read and write…Reading and writing is very important, VERY important. It’s the key to going to college. A lot of students struggle. When I took class with a lot of students, remedial students, a lot of students, they gave up. They said, I cannot take it anymore

While she exhibited extraordinary resilience, most students in her situation may drop out of college. The struggles that Shefa and other immigrant adolescents face are a culminating result of poor quality education in their countries of origin, compounded by insufficient literacy education in secondary schools in the U.S.

The data I present in this particular chapter express my greatest concern as an educator
that works with newcomer immigrant youth. In part because getting students to high school graduation is already such a difficult challenge, to be confronted with the fact that immigrant adolescents face increasing and equally daunting academic trajectories in college but lack adequate support can be disheartening. I hope that the educational histories that I have collected in this dissertation provide insight into how secondary schools in the United States can improve literacy education and the high school experience for immigrant youth, so that they can pursue post-secondary education and succeed if that is the path they wish to take.
Chapter 9: Apples to Oranges:

Pre-Migration Education and the Interaction with U.S. Schooling

The educational histories in this dissertation suggest that comparing home country education to that of the U.S. is like comparing apples to oranges. While both educational systems are not aligned, the curricula and educational contexts in the countries of origin play a significant role in the school readiness of immigrant youth in preparation for education in an advanced knowledge-based economy in the US. In this chapter, I speculate on how education in the countries of origin leads to cracks in the foundation for immigrant adolescents and results in regressive literacy and education because prior schooling does not provide the requisite funds of knowledge they need for schooling in the U.S.

Comparing Curricula: Pacing, Intensity, Adequacy, and Equivalency

In addition to variations in the quality or the content of the curriculum in their countries of origin, participants experienced a range in terms of the pacing and intensity of the academic work, with possible implications for their school readiness after arrival in the U.S. Given the intensive cognitive load placed on students to memorize content through banking model pedagogy, students often expressed that it was "too much work." Students were challenged by the copious amounts of text they had to memorize in multiple subject areas, and had trouble balancing their homework assignments with the time they wanted to play. In Senegal, Abou was accustomed to doing homework for 3-4 hours after school and staying in school for a long instructional day. By the time he got to high school in Senegal, he took a relatively robust course load in a range of different subject areas. The workload was significant, even if the homework was repetitive and solely focused on memorization.
Yet, students who appeared to have had the least adequate education had the opposite problem. In other instances, students had access to such a narrow curriculum that they were utterly ill-prepared for all the content based learning they were expected to do when they entered high school in the United States. In Yemen, Nassar complained that they were in school for only a few hours a day, and that they were rarely assigned homework after school. He also reported frequent school closings, which further diminished the instructional time. As a result, he did not feel he had an adequate primary education, and certainly not one that prepared him for academic work in the United States in a new language. Similarly, Maimouna’s prior education consisted entirely of literacy in French and math, with little content in other subject areas. Such a narrow curriculum is highly problematic because of the importance of exposure to content knowledge, as I have demonstrated. Such cracks in the foundation meant that some students were learning various content area topics for the first time when they arrived in secondary schools in the U.S.

Students who had exposure to a broad curriculum transferred their content knowledge from their prior education to support their learning of English and to accelerate their academic performance in the disciplines. Their comparatively greater exposure to content knowledge, a faster pace in the curriculum, and exposure to more advanced topics and skills in earlier grades may have impacted their school readiness. In math and science, Puja was familiar with the content when she arrived in the U.S. because her home country curriculum had already covered it, and she had a private tutor that covered advanced topics with her as well. Even though some content, such as American history, was new for her, Puja had an easier time accessing the course material in a secondary classroom in the U.S. because she had already had exposure to the content and certain ways of thinking within academic disciplines.

Participants reported that the pace of the curriculum in China in particular moved very
fast. Teachers were pressured to keep up with a rapid pace, moved to a new topic regardless of whether students demonstrated mastery, and crammed in numerous topics at once. By the end of elementary school, children were already exposed to advanced writing, and those in middle school were required to write multi-paragraph compositions on a number of topics. With the exception of those who went to extremely excellent schools in other contexts, this seems to be a departure from the kind of writing that students from other countries reported doing. By the end of primary school, students were expected to write essays, learned algebra, geometry and English. While this was clearly not an inoculation against later academic challenges, it meant that most students coming from China were in fact more school-ready than students from educational contexts with a less rigorous academic curriculum.

For some students, an advanced curriculum in the country of origin meant that the content in the American curriculum was in fact remedial for them. Even with language barriers, immigrant youth advanced in their school readiness were not necessarily intellectually engaged where conceptual understanding was concerned. Puja contrasts her experience this way:

Education here … they don’t give, like, teachers don’t give students enough materials to study. I had to study a lot [in Bangladesh]. There are times when I had exam, and I wake up like 2 in the morning to study. This cover a lot of materials in Bangladesh. And then they introduce stuff really early on, in like – like there are things I learn in Bangladesh school that students probably didn’t see in like, until their middle school.

Priya reported a similar experience: “We had higher math back there than we had in 9th grade here. Because we already did geometry, trigonometry, those stuff back home.” (Priya) This was especially true for some Bengali and Chinese students in the area of mathematics.

In my experience working with students from almost two dozen countries and various
regions of the world, students who had access to an accelerated curriculum compared to what was provided in the US were exceptions, not the rule. More often, participants felt that the curriculum in their country of origin was not equivalent and more limited relative to that of the U.S. Samia described the disruption this way:

I don’t really remember learning a lot back home, because the classes were only 4 hours long. I just don’t remember learning as much as I had in my life in the United States.

Compared to the amount of information that they taught, I don’t think I had that at home.

(Samia)

There are substantial differences in the pace and intensity of curriculum used in national educational systems in different countries, and this should be taken into account when educators consider the funds of knowledge that students bring with them from their pre-migration education.

**Funds of Knowledge: Transferring Forms of Capital and School Readiness**

In my interviews with participants, I asked participants to tell me what prepared them for schooling in the U.S., and what knowledge and skills they felt they brought with them from their countries of origin. These funds of knowledge presumably play a role in setting students up either for failure or success (González, Wyman, & O'Connor, 2011). While I privilege literacy skills, cultural capital, academic thinking and knowledge, and psychological well-being as factors that help students successfully transition to U.S. secondary classrooms, the participants constructed their own notions of what they considered transferrable or usable funds of knowledge.
**Positive Effects of Banking Model Education**

While participants in the study generally felt that their past schooling did little to prepare them for the U.S., a few students believed the banking model of teaching afforded some advantages. The strict structures and routines for learning gave students clear parameters for learning. Puja felt the accountability placed on her to independently learn course content, to complete assignments, supplemented by reinforcement from a private tutor, provided her consistency and discipline:

That was a structure that I had. Even since I was young, I was working on the routine, so after coming here, my dad couldn’t afford to get me private tutoring, but I had that repeated routine and structure that I can follow through. Even now if I don’t have routine, if I don’t have structure, I couldn’t function. I need structure that I can follow, otherwise I go crazy now. So that was a structure I went through and I still have. Here, students they don’t…after they go home, they don’t study. But back in my country, during especially exams, they would study until late.

Similarly, Hawa also felt that the culture of compliance with school regulations was an important factor that helped her focus and aided her academic performance because she was "taking my work serious.” The rigid learning environment in Guinea instilled in her the idea that attending school was an important thing to do:

Not being absent from school. I know what was the consequences of…I used to pay, so being absent is not like helping me at all. I’m losing. It’s not like the school is losing, I’m losing. I know it’s public, but somebody is paying for that money, is paying for us. I used that so I’ve been here for four years, I’ve only been twice absent. I all the time come to school. (Hawa)
**Strong Foundational Skills**

Furthermore, for some students, banking model education laid down the base for strong foundational skills. The executive functioning needed to memorize, to retain and review large quantities of information, was useful. Abou believed that the intense memorization he had to do for multiple subject areas and his exposure to a wide range of content areas allowed him to transfer those study skills to retaining and reviewing new information when he arrived in the U.S. He had previously developed note-taking skills, he could distinguish between concepts he understood and those he had not yet mastered, and determine what was essential to internalize.

Puja felt similarly about the lasting effects of memorization and how those cognitive skills helped her to learn English:

I hated memorization but memorization skills really helps. There are words that I know and I use and I understood but when it comes to using it in a new language, it wasn’t able to come. To apply it. So I had to continuously think and then apply it over and over for it to be natural.

Yet the students could only leverage the results of their banking model education to a limited degree. Jhumki says that the emphasis on memorization did not prepare her for the kind of creative learning she transitioned to in the U.S. that was based on experience and higher-order thinking: “In Bangladesh, most of the time, all you have to do is memorize stuff. And here, you don’t memorize. It’s like more technical and creative” (Jhumki). Banking model education did not prepare her for her high school’s pedagogy, which required students to apply knowledge and to develop critical thinking. Jhumki could no longer rely on memorizing for questions:

It was hard to get it on the first place. All I did back home, all I did was memorizing. But
here, you do more analytical stuff, and I had hard time with it at first. But when I got the gist of it, I thought, it’s not hard. If I know what the content is talking about, I can really analyze it, I don’t have to memorize everything that the paper says.

A departure from her education in Bangladesh, she had to learn new ways of thinking and knowing, and new processes to understand concepts.

*Respect for Authority, Compliance, and Negotiation with Teachers*

Participants in the study expressed that they developed compliance and discipline under a culture of social control in their countries of origin, which they believe became an asset after immigration. Hawa learned to be respectful to teachers:

Being respectful to a teacher, not talking back to a teacher or anything. Not talk back. Or not saying shut up to teacher, I cannot say that for sure. He just say something to me, and I don’t agree with it, I’m just gonna say ok, and go with it. I will never go against teacher or anything. I believe they giving you knowledge, you should have listen to them. You have to listen to them if you want to [inaudible] So that, I bring it with me.

Similarly, Puja names it as a skill:

One of the biggest things, respecting elders. Listening to elders. […] So that’s what happened here. Even though there are times when I felt a teacher is wrong, it’s okay, y’know, I’ll just follow whatever you think. So I think it’s a skill.

Shefa felt her upbringing prepared her to interact with others in a new academic setting:

In Bangladesh, they prepare students how to study, how to respect teachers, in here it’s compared to when I was 15, people said I’m very mature. How I interact with people. We respect a lot our professor, teacher, elder peoples. Even though professor teacher they do
something wrong, we don’t have no right to say, to speak out, or to complain the teacher or anybody.

Ultimately, their habituation to social control in a school setting and compliance became an advantage in the less hierarchical society in America. Their prior socialization instilled an attitude toward schooling that their educational habitus after arriving in the US:

My motivation for education started off back home. It’s what motivated, the time I remember being a child and by being exposed to an environment where poverty was common, corruption was common. People were sick, people’s health was…that type of environment motivated me to become a professional, health care professional. And that in return, motivated me to be educated, to go further in my education. So the core, or the seed of the tree, started back home. And that kind of watered the plant to grow. Basically, the seed, the core of everything, started back home, the motivation piece. And then, the knowledge, the tree the leaves the branches, all the knowledge, I was getting as I was learning stuff in the United States. And it’s kind of growing and growing until I reach the top. (Samia)

In this way, immigrant youth conceptualized their socialization skills, their ability to navigate corrupt educational settings, and at times oppressive and tightly controlled learning environments, as transferrable funds of knowledge that they used to navigate new social dynamics and, at times, equally oppressive learning environments in America.

**From Country of Origin to the United States: Comparing Educational Settings**

Regardless of the quality of the participants’ prior education, all participants adjusted to a
new schooling system in the U.S., managing and negotiating new expectations. Not all immigrant youth respond to the transition in the same way, but all of them realign their behaviors, their identities as learners, and their understandings of schooling. Often this is done without real help or support, without explicit guidance or naming of the ways in which they will experience contrast in their new experiences at school. The students often used a dual frame of reference to discuss differences in their schooling, in relationships with teachers, the curriculum, the method of teaching, and how learning is constructed as a process in different settings.

The Role of Teachers in Academic Trajectories

Many participants described a stark difference in what they perceived to be the role of the teacher. Teachers in their countries of origin rarely provided extra support or extended instruction when students did not understand the material they were learning. They were unavailable outside of class to help, unless they were paid for their services to do so. Their primary role was delivery of content, not to monitor and support learning. The social distance between student and teacher in the countries of origin meant that learning was facilitated in a different way. Jhumki said:

It would be better if the teachers were more careful, more caring. Like you teachers in here. They would break down, they would actually teach the class. I wish the teachers would actually teach the class, instead of just coming in and reading their story books [in Bangladesh].

In certain contexts like Bangladesh, the withholding of content and knowledge was a regular practice precisely because of the way in which the shadow educational system operated and stood to benefit from dispossessing students of knowledge that was necessary for their learning.
In this way, teachers were crucial actors in an oppressive system of education.

In contrast, students felt that they developed relationships, even close bonds, with teachers in America, and that these strong relationships recreated a sense of collectivism that provided feelings of safety and security. Maimouna told me,

I think the teachers [in the US] really helped me a lot! When I was home [in Ivory Coast], it was just different, I was just working by myself. I would say it wasn’t the teachers that helped me a lot more than, you know me trying by myself. […] They feel like if they get close to you, you won’t take anything serious.

Maimouna appreciated the relationships that she developed with a few of her teachers, one of which eventually turned into a sustained mentoring relationship that has lasted to the present, years beyond Maimouna’s time as a student at CBIHS.

*From Banking Model to Constructivist Pedagogy*

Another major difference was a much more constructivist way of learning. Accustomed to banking model teaching, students realized that learning processes were not structured that way in the United States. Puja reported that the teaching in Bangladesh was through lecturing, in comparison to the more hands-on learning in America. Puja explained that teachers did not explain the content in detail and expected students to internalize the information independently:

All you have to do is memorize, so when it comes to comprehending the information you learned, it’s not there. I have the information in my head from memorizing it, but if you ask me questions if you ask me to comprehend on it, I don’t have that skill. And that’s the skills I got here [in the US]. Now I ask so many questions, so that’s a skill.

Comprehending is a skill that carries over time, and that is not done in Bangladesh.
Teachers have to be trained for that. The teachers teach in a different way.

Students also shifted their understanding of what rigorous academic work entailed. Some students had to adjust to instruction that felt less rigorous to them, precisely because the instructional method required so little memorization, a marked difference from their prior experience. Abou explained:

But the teacher wasn’t telling us to do any memorizing. So I was wondering why. I thought I wasn’t going to learn anything from this. The work [in Senegal] was hard. My mind have to think of doing the work, memorization was hard [...] because the way you have to focus and concentrate, and do your work, that was the most difficult part. ‘Cause you can’t just come and just, like how I used to do it here, just read it and then answer like it just comes to me. And I could just slide. Back there, I didn’t do that.

Other students realized the benefits of making the shift from learning as memorizing, to learning as thinking and constructing knowledge. Moustapha said, "You know, how the teachers go deep. It’s one thing I won’t ever forget. Deeper! If you answer generally, the teacher will push you to go even deeper. That’s what I remember [from high school].”

Students were also held accountable for their learning in different ways. In their countries of origin, students were asked to recall information as the primary method of assessing learning. Yet students realized that they had to utilize, apply, and evaluate the information they learned in the U.S. This was reflected in how assessments were used to hold students accountable for learning. Priya said:

Because there, the only thing you need to do is show up for the exam. You’re not going to fail if you don’t hand in a project like here. We don’t actually have any projects there.
Projects that is due on maybe, due at the end of the month. Nothing like that. All you have to do is, if you are…We have three terms of exams. If you don’t pass the 3rd term, if you fail, you fail. If you pass, then you will go to the next level.

Abou also recalled that teachers in the U.S. found ways to check for understanding, they were concerned with whether a student absorbed the information, and would adjust instruction if they did not. In Senegal, it was the students' responsibility to ensure their own understanding.

At CBIHS, where the pedagogy and learning was much more experiential and inquiry-based by design, participants in the study noted the difference in the system of standardized examinations they were so accustomed to and the portfolio assessments they encountered in their American high school. Moustapha told me that he wished he had portfolio assessments in Guinea because it requires students to orally explain their knowledge and emphasized inquiry as a part of the learning process. Jhumki noted that CBIHS offered experiences that supported their academic learning:

In here, we would go to field trips based on concentrated in class. We go to field trips, we would have a piece of paper, we would have to learn something and focus on that. Field trip would be focused on our classes. But we never had field trips in class, back home. Never. They would say, you come here to study, not to have fun. That’s their thing.

Come here to study, not to have fun. So that’s different.

Similarly, Puja described how experiential learning was effective in developing her content-knowledge. She remembers going to the Botanic Garden for a field trip to learn about specific plant species and ecosystems. She reported that such trips facilitated her learning of both language and content and helped her to concretize the abstract concepts she was learning in class. Puja believed that she received the best of both systems from her prior education and from the
U.S. Her education in Bangladesh supported her development of foundational skills, resulting in automaticity and fluency, but the education system in America required her to apply knowledge and to translate information into concrete applications, make connections, and analyze. As a result, she developed skills and competencies in different ways.

Lastly, students contrasted the teacher-driven instruction in their countries of origin with the highly collaborative instruction at CBIHS. Puja said,

In Bangladesh, you never have group work. Never, ever. You never have any projects to do. All you do is read textbooks. And then the teacher just say a few, have lecture in the class, and then you don’t have any resources, like computer back there.

Similarly, Priya described her experience: “We never had a group, […] It’s individual. People, all the kids are so jealous, they don’t want to show you what they learn. Nobody shares their…always competing with each other.”

_Dual Frame of Reference_

Students in this study had mixed feelings about which education system they felt was more effective. There was a general consensus among participants that the American system insisted that students analyze and synthesize, rather than memorize, information. They had access and exposure to more complex content, and that ultimately, education led to more opportunities in a way that was not possible in their countries of origin. They appreciated the kind of support and relationships they developed with teachers, and the alternative ways of learning that was highly collaborative in their American high school. They liked that they switched to an education system in which they had to learn English.

Yet, the students had a range of feelings about which system helped them to learn better.
Shefa was adamant that the American education was not disciplined enough:

I don’t like American education system. I think it’s too easy…Now I know, I think it’s too easy for students. High school, elementary school, middle school, they don’t prepare students for college. I saw lot of students when they came to college, they don’t have no idea about college! They don’t know how to study, they don’t know how to interact with, they are not. They are 20, 24! They still act like they are 13 or 14 years old!

Shefa was not alone in her feelings about the perceived looseness of American schooling. Puja said:

As soon as I started school here, I was just like, I felt like I wasn’t doing any thing and I was doing well. And I was like, to be honest, I was like, American education is BS. When I started school here, I felt like American education is BS. Because I felt like they don’t give any structure to the kids. So like, even though at home, I didn’t like the always structure that was imposed on me – I hated it – when I got here.

Puja expressed these feelings in her interview, but I also remember Puja articulating these very same thoughts when she was a 12th grade student in my class.

Other students felt that the strict manner in which teachers engaged students to participate in schooling provided extrinsic motivation that helped students to regulate their academic behavior, leading to positive outcomes. Abou explained:

It’s kind of strict, but at the same time it’s really useful. Because if you don’t do your work, you get punished. So if you don’t want to be punished, that means you know you gonna have to study, and then you do better. I think the pressure, most of the student over there, back there, the reason they do good is because of the fear.
According to a few participants, the banking model of education was beneficial because of the resulting development of foundational skills. Puja felt that the focus on memorizing in elementary school in Bangladesh was effective because it aided her working memory, fluency, accuracy, and automaticity of basic skills. This is not unimportant given the need to accelerate learning so that immigrant youth can access grade-level academic work that stretches their analytical thinking in high school.

You have to memorize. I was able to use whatever I knew to solve the word problem. I was able to use the skill, like, this is how you read the question, this is how you solve the problem. Use the skill to solve the problem. So I was using my memorization to solve the problem. Still now, there are math problems that I am able to read and understand but I’m not able to solve it. But in elementary school, I would read the problem able to solve it, without being understanding it. […]In a sense yeah, it helped me. It’s helping me now. I mean, even though I hated it, but it was a foundation. (Puja)

Puja found value in developing foundational skills, and recognized that when knowledge was readily accessible through memorization, it freed her up to do more advanced thinking.

In contrast, other students felt that the intense pressure and social control applied by teachers in their countries of origin made learning difficult. Maimouna told me, "African schooling is very hard.” When I pressed her, she told me that schooling in America was easier because teachers provided support: "That’s what made it easier for me, because the teacher was breaking it down, when you confused, they’re there to point it out, what you’re confused about, and all of that. That’s what made it easier." (Maimouna) Furthermore, students had little time to play as children, they did not have any voice or input into their schooling experiences, and they were under threat of punishment often. This type of socialization led to highly compliant
engagement when they arrived in U.S. schools, where they expected the same level of social control and pressure.

Lastly, and not surprisingly, many students reported that one major difference was the quality and quantity of the physical materials and learning resources available to them. In Yemen, Nassar had to share textbooks with classmates his entire childhood and students sometimes had to sit on the floor. Overall, students felt that American schools provided plentiful materials, supplies, and resources for learning. Teachers provided extra help after school and peer tutoring was available in the U.S., without expensive fees. The key distinction is that these learning resources were made available to students free of charge because the costs were carried by taxpayers, but that was not the case in their countries of origin. There were a few students who I believed went to schools where the educational resources exceeded what would normally be made available to primary school students in the U.S., and these were expensive private or boarding schools, considered top notch educational institutions in their region. In these schools, the students appeared to have access to materials including instruments and materials for arts education, that were clearly not available to a majority of students who attended more impoverished schools.

The Importance of Disciplinary Knowledge for Newcomer Immigrant Youth

A signature feature of the students’ high school education at CBIHS was the integration of language development with content-area instruction. Project-based curricula, learning routines and content material, all utilized a strategic weaving together of instruction to develop language and content-knowledge simultaneously. For Nassar, this model was particularly effective because of his poor quality education in Yemen. Through multiple portfolio projects, he learned
the rigorous process of writing and revising. He practiced speaking in English, presented his conceptual understanding in the disciplines, and developed public speaking skills. Such a pedagogical approach was a refreshing life preserver for students whose prior education failed to expose them to adequate literacy and content knowledge. Yet content area instruction with emergent bilinguals often feels like catch up.

**Mathematics**

For many emergent bilinguals, their cognitive burden was lowest in math, where they did not always need English to access the content. This is true for students who had a decent foundation in numeracy, basic arithmetic, and some introduction to algebra in their home country, and were better prepared for mathematics in a secondary classroom because of their ability to transfer their content knowledge.

Jhumki’s preparation in math made it relatively easy for her to transfer to high school math when she got to the U.S. She preferred the way she learned math in Bangladesh because it was more effective, a different way of breaking down a math problem:

I don’t understand the American way of doing factoring, but I do understand back home way to do it, and I always do it in that way. And that way is easier. And it’s still easier. I can totally get the problem, I can do it, I can do it faster. I can get the right answer. Better for me, more convenient for me to understand it. When they did it the American way, and I just did not understand what was going on. I don’t know what you guys are talking about. I don’t know how to do it that way. I’m just going to do it my way and get it right.

(Jhumki)

If teachers tap into the way immigrant students were taught in their countries of origin, they
could build on that to help them understand mathematical concepts. This bridging of their funds of knowledge is one way of deepening a teacher's understanding of a student's learning needs.

Students also had to grow accustomed to different math pedagogy at CBIHS, where an inquiry-based mathematics curriculum was utilized. Priya explains:

Even for math, we had projects here. Mr. Dennis would take us to the museum and then make us do the inclination with the protractor or something. Those are the things that...Here, one thing you really learn is that you get to learn knowledge. Like not just knowledge that you read books or something, but knowledge from outside of book, outside the world. But we didn’t have that there in Bangladesh. So we just learn math and something, but we didn’t really do any building, taking measure of buildings and then doing projects. In Bangladesh, we didn’t learning how to apply math to the real world.

Unfortunately, for many immigrant youth, challenges in fundamental skills in numeracy create an obstacle to their advancement in math. Nassar remembers that the math curriculum during his first two years of high school was significantly more advanced than what he had been exposed to in Yemen. Yet, the math curriculum in his 9th grade class would not be considered grade-level math. As a result of the need to catch up, Nassar was learning more math content than he had ever learned in Yemen, but was still not getting access to grade-level curriculum. At the other end of the spectrum, more well-prepared students felt the math content was too remedial and that they made little progress in learning math during high school.

Social Studies

Immigrant youth have had little exposure to the ways of thinking utilized in History and Social Studies curriculum in the United States (i.e., reading maps, demography tables, content
schema related to geography). As well, they often did not have exposure to global or American
history. Those who had access to a broader curriculum were able to utilize that background
knowledge later. Abou says that he remembers taking history courses in Senegal where the
curriculum covered World Wars I and II. His background knowledge allowed him to focus on
learning how to explain historical information in English, rather than also having to learn the
content for the first time. Since his exposure to historical knowledge was acquired first in his
home language, he was able to transfer that knowledge and focus on demonstrating his
knowledge in English.

Science Education

A number of students said they had little to no exposure to science content in their
primary school education. Nassar did not understand much of the science content at all when he
arrived in high school because he never learned it in Yemen. Even the most academically
prepared students felt that science in high school in America was challenging. Many
foundational and conceptual understandings in science were new to them. Only students who had
access to relatively high quality education, and often only those who had completed at least
middle school in their home countries, had been exposed to basic biology or ecology. Few
students had any exposure to geology, chemistry, or physics.

For these reasons, the science curriculum at CBIHS was somewhat limited. The 9th and
10th grade science curriculum consisted of middle school science content, and it was not until
the 11th and 12th grades that students began to learn science that was on grade level. Even so,
they studied a relatively narrow range of topics. Teachers perceived that it was almost impossible
to teach chemistry or physics even in the upper high school grades because students were still
grasping basic understandings of scientific concepts.

Quite a few students in the study referenced their love of learning history and science in part because the content was novel to them. In Social Studies, they enjoyed hearing narratives of historical events and individual stories. In Science, they enjoyed being exposed to completely new information about the natural world they had never learned before. Maimouna told me how refreshing it was for her to take classes in other subject areas other than just French and math, the only two subjects she remembers learning in Guinea. Content-area instruction can be strategically leveraged to motivate emergent bilinguals and increase academic engagement.

**Conclusion**

Ultimately, immigrant youth in this study felt that, had they stayed in their country of origin, their level of education would not necessarily have been comparable to what they had access to in the U.S. Samia’s words summarize this feeling:

I don’t think I would have received the same level of education. I don’t know if my dad would have been able to afford. Maybe he would, but it wouldn’t have been the same…the level of understanding, the openness up here, the students are allowed to be open, and… My mind has changed a lot. I learned a lot. I learned to question things. You probably know this...learning to question the world and religion, and all sorts of things, and really analyzing, thinking deeper critically. I don’t think I would have had that at this level in Bangladesh because the environment is very different, it’s more cultural there, and it’s also because there’s also not enough money for students to have scholarships and have all these great things happening. Trips and learning about this place, traveling to DR, or whatever, or going to Bangladesh for the nursing trip. None of that study abroad.
So if I did get to do all these things we get to do from school, or learn about computers, learn to use computers, it’s more than what you learn in science class, or whatever it would be…it’s great, and I wouldn’t learn all this back home. Teachers don’t have the resources.

The experiences that immigrant youth had in education and the individual ways in which students' prior schooling impacted and influenced their performance in the U.S. varied greatly. There appear to be a few overall general patterns: 1) prior schooling matters; 2) what happens in the U.S. can change a students' academic trajectory; 3) the factors that contribute to academic performance and achievement are varied, and are not just linguistic or instructional, but are also discipline-specific, cognitive, and socio-emotional; and 4) schools which do not utilize knowledge of the students prior educational histories will always fall short in identifying strategies to intervene when they struggle academically.

One critique of this study that I anticipate is that the analysis of the data is deficit-based. I am not arguing that immigrant youth do not come with assets. The highlighting of the deficits in their school readiness is not a reflection of the students' character, their efforts and motivation, or their dispositions. As well, the students have incredible funds of knowledge related to experiences and contexts that are not always relevant or valued in formal academic learning. Yet the analysis I present suggests that they have been dispossessed of quality education and actively deprived of authentic learning opportunities. They are victims of educational systems in which educational resources and learning opportunities were unevenly distributed, except for those who had means. The inadequacies of school systems show how schools have withheld knowledge from students and shine a light on how children have been shortchanged in a variety of contexts.
Chapter 10: Academic Trajectories: Disruption, Acceleration, and Drag

Cracks in the Foundation

I began this research study in part because I had long wondered what years of poor quality reading instruction might do to reading development in immigrant adolescents, and what switching to a new language in the middle of that literacy development does to the children’s overall abilities to develop advanced literacy skills in any language. Since they are used to using short-term memory to regurgitate and memorize information as a stand-in for actual reading and interpretation, how would immigrant youth prepare for education where they had to simultaneously integrate multiple practices, information, and languages to help them make sense of complex texts and content in American high schools?

Colleagues of mine who work closely with low-literacy immigrant youth have often characterized the problems that result from such educational disruption as “cracks in the foundation.” The shift that newcomer immigrant youth make from one language to another, from one schooling system to another, from one set of cultural practices used for schooling to another, and from learning little content to having to do advanced work in content areas, creates significant educational disruption. These cracks in the foundation are not fundamentally inherent in immigrant youth; they are in fact manufactured educational problems resulting from disruptive and poor quality schooling conditions and experiences. These serious fault lines compromise students’ academic performance, making it difficult to accelerate their academic and literacy development. Without literacy intervention, their reading struggles persist, the cracks in the foundation widen. In this chapter, I provide an overview of how these cracks in the foundation have implications for the overall academic trajectories of immigrant youth.
Disruption in Educational Trajectories

For immigrant youth, pre-migration education is complicated by the prevalence of disruption to continuous learning associated with poverty or displacement. Immigration itself is a significant educational disruption. The nature of disruption varies based on country, familial factors, and the process of immigration. Many school districts in the U.S. use interrupted schooling as an indicator to designate students who may have particular academic challenges, presumably because interrupted or inconsistent schooling may have an impact on a student’s ability to participate meaningfully in classrooms. Educational disruption may lead to poor academic performance, but some students may utilize various strategies to effectively overcome the impact of disruption. Educational histories are useful in aiding educators to assess to what degree educational disruption may create risk factors and barriers to learning for those students, to identify the cracks in the foundation when they first arrive in U.S. schools.

I found that disruption is more common than educators may think, that some amount of missing school is to be expected, even among students who presumably had strong academic backgrounds. I infer from my data that interruption in schooling has varying degrees and types of impact on school readiness and outcomes that influence academic trajectories for immigrant youth, and that this impact is not straightforward. Young people with strong academic backgrounds may still have significant disruptions in their education, and students who have had significant gaps in schooling do not always have severe struggles with literacy. It is true that the students who struggle the most to graduate from high school in four years, who struggle to develop English proficiency even under ideal instructional conditions, are also often students who have inconsistent schooling, resulting in low literacy in their home language. Yet the educational histories I have collected show a complicated story, suggesting that gaps in
schooling are the result of different kinds of processes and can take different forms.

While interrupted schooling is often defined by the number of years a child has missed school, a more common source of educational disruption is switching from one school to another. With some populations, the disruption happens when students go back and forth between the U.S. and their countries of origin. Participants reported switching from school to school as young children, creating real and perceived effects on their educational experiences. Some students changed schools because their families could not continue paying higher tuition for a private school. Other students changed school settings because their parents wanted them to attend a school with a better reputation, leading to better preparedness for secondary school. It is not easy to predict the impact or the accumulated effects of such inconsistency. While Priya officially only skipped one year of school, cumulatively, her interrupted education lasted a span of three years – from the last year she went to school in her village due to substantial absences, through the year when she did not enroll in school because she was awaiting immigration, and then another year after arriving in the U.S. because her father did not initially allow her to enroll in school. The disruption in terms of time away from instruction is significant, yet Priya did not necessarily struggle with low literacy as a result and she had already acquired significant prerequisite skills from primary school.

Educational disruption is also more commonly thought to be a result of broader social and political turmoil in students’ home country contexts. Hawa recalled that 6th grade "don't really count it as a school year" because "war was going on" in Guinea and she left to come to the U.S. In Maimouna's case, her family moved to Burkina Faso when she was 9 years old, when civil unrest in the Ivory Coast became too dangerous. During this period, the schools in Ivory Coast shut down, and children did not finish the school year because of a civil war. Maimouna’s
education resumed briefly in Burkina Faso while her family awaited approval of their application for immigration to the U.S. through family reunification with her father, who had immigrated when she was three years old. Moreover, educational disruption due to political and economic changes is more common in particular parts of the world.

Lastly, educational disruption came from immigration itself. Not only did the transition to a new country create disruption, the year before immigrant youth left their country, they missed significant periods of school, either because they were preparing to come to the U.S., or they stopped going to school while they awaited visas or other complicated paperwork related to immigration. Some relocated to other places in preparation for their departure to the United States and missed school as a result. Families often took children out of school because they were unsure of when they would be leaving.

Overall, many newcomer immigrants experienced instability in their learning environment and disruptions to their education. Inconsistency was a common feature in their educational histories. For some students, the cumulative impact of disruption made it difficult to consistently build up funds of knowledge related to content, literacy, and academic skills and thinking. It had effects on their identities as learners, both positive and negative. Disruption created challenges to learning, but also instilled in them an ability to adapt to change. Either way, knowledge of the degree and kind of disruption experienced by immigrant youth is useful information to determine risk factors, to better understand the psychology that impacts learning, and to appreciate the resilience they bring as a result of having made so many different journeys before they arrive in classrooms in the United States.
School Readiness and Newcomer Immigrant Youth

In this dissertation, I have argued for the importance of understanding the school readiness of immigrant youth, a combination of the prerequisite foundational skills and funds of knowledge that are leveraged for education in an advanced knowledge-economy such as the United States. The term is typically associated with Head Start programs and early childhood preparedness for entry into formal schooling. For immigrant youth, school readiness involves a set of factors and considerations for the preparedness of adolescents entering the school system of a host country after moving from their country of origin. Not only must educators understand their stance towards entering a school system that operates under a different culture, language, and structures of schooling, they must also assess the students' academic preparedness for learning.

It is impossible to ascertain the effect of home country education on the school readiness of newcomer immigrant youth without doing a more systematic study using both quantitative and qualitative methods with a larger sample size. There are few studies that have examined the possible indicators we may need to examine to determine school readiness. Nevertheless, these educational histories show that the transition to a new country is particularly fraught for immigrant youth who have cracks in the foundation related to the following school readiness indicators: 1) home language literacy, 2) educational disruption, 3) negative experiences with formal schooling, 4) a lack of exposure to academic content, and 5) lack of familiarity with routines and practices needed for taking on identities as students in a classroom setting.

Possible Factors Contributing to School Readiness

While all participants felt it was overwhelming "learning in a new land," students who
felt their country of origin provided them a good educational foundation knew that was an important factor in their success (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008). Abou feels that he would have been completely lost had he not had the foundation he developed in Senegal:

If I didn’t go to school there, then I wouldn’t…I wouldn’t be this advanced, I think I wouldn’t even, I don’t even think I would go to school. […] If I didn’t study there, that means I wouldn’t know anything. And then plus, I came here and I don’t understand English.

Students who completed upper grades in their home country especially had fewer cracks in the foundation, and their home language literacy was further developed.

Students who had relatively positive educational experiences explained how high quality schooling in their country of origin made a difference. Moustapha said, "I think that's where I started my foundation. What I learned there, it’s like my basic foundation from there in school. If I didn’t get that foundation there, I would be a different student when I got here.” (Moustapha)

Other students described school with a tone of pleasure and appreciation. With Jhumki, it was apparent how much she loved school in Bangladesh:

I worked really hard, I liked school. I loved to go to school, I would sleep, and get up in the morning, and eat something really fast to run and get a rickshaw, like a van, to go to school. I was really energetic, I always paid attention to my class, I always paid attention in my classroom. I had good relationship with the teachers too. And I would do my work I had to do my work, I had to do my best, all the time.

Since Jhumki attended a prestigious high school in Chittagong, she had access to a rigorous curriculum and higher quality instruction. Like Jhumki, students with quality schooling reported more opportunities for group learning, preparing for exams with other children, and active
strategies they used to increase their class ranking and to raise the marks on their exams.

Positive learning experiences contributed to their overall school readiness for secondary education in the U.S. The consistency in their development of content knowledge and skills over time, their routines and stance toward learning, their description of a culture of achievement (rather than a punitive one) reflected an intellectually engaging academic environment that shaped their identities as learners. In positive learning environments, learning did not involve memorization alone, but critical thinking and active control over their academic performance. Moustapha described how he created his books of notes from class, where he organized the information he learned, and systematically documented important questions and answers from his lessons. He also wrote down comments and feedback from his teachers. While Moustapha's experience with schooling was still ultimately the product of a banking model of education, he recalled a level of intellectual engagement and some indications of authentic learning experiences. In comparison, other participants emphasized the punitive aspects of schooling, how laborious it was to memorize information, and the energy they exerted in their attempts to evade teacher discipline. These are all indicators of school readiness that can propel or paralyze immigrant youth when they arrive in US secondary classrooms.

*The Inoculation Fallacy*

To be clear, I do not believe that students who have strong educational backgrounds are immune from a wide variety of academic struggles after immigration. Their funds of knowledge do not provide insurance against academic failure. The *inoculation fallacy* is a term often used to describe struggles in adolescent literacy development and the notion that the teaching and learning of foundational literacy skills, typically in primary school through Grade 3, are
prerequisites but not determinants in strong outcomes for literacy development in children (Snow & Moje, 2010). Applied to newcomer immigrant youth, we cannot presume that strong prior schooling or early literacy instruction at younger ages will inoculate them permanently from reading difficulties or school failure later after immigration. In fact, because of subtractive schooling in the U.S., and because of numerous out-of-school factors related to poverty and discrimination, immigrant youth are still at risk of illiteracy, dropping out, and may be less likely to finish a post-secondary degree (Valenzuela, 1999). Continuous monitoring of academic progress is crucial for all students, and for immigrant adolescents in particular, whose educational histories provide data about school readiness and possible cracks in the foundation.

**The Academic Matthew Effect: Educational Trajectories of Newcomer Immigrant Youth**

Given the educational foundation established through education in countries of origin, what can we learn from tracing the educational histories of immigrant youth over time, across borders, from primary to middle to high school to college, from home language development to learning English to emergent bilingualism? In U.S. secondary schools, instruction and assessment can play a significant role in identifying risk factors based on students’ school readiness. Schools can provide interventions in response to identified needs, monitor progress closely when academic performance changes, and providing opportunities for academic intervention and acceleration. While we cannot necessarily predict a student’s academic trajectory, educators can make informed decisions based on deep knowledge of newcomer immigrant youth as learners, including information from their educational histories.

In literacy studies, Keith Stanovich (1986) theorized the notion of a Matthew Effect contributing to the differences in literacy outcomes and the widening gap between weak and
strong readers. Given the Matthew Effect in reading, we know that there are some consistent trajectories whereby immigrant students continue to struggle with reading (Kieffer, 2011; Slama, 2012; Stanovich, 1986). For immigrant youth, however, even students who have higher levels of home language literacy appear to require significant support and intervention (Snow & Moje, 2010). Hence, educators need to understand literacy development over time.

For immigrant youth, I apply the concept of the Matthew Effect more broadly to explain their academic trajectories, encompassing their language and literacy development, as well as content-knowledge and global academic competencies needed for academic success. Educational histories and academic trajectories allow us to observe an academic Matthew Effect, whereby school-ready immigrant youth may show positive academic trajectories while those with significant cracks in the foundation continue to struggle. Importantly, the course of their academic trajectories can change based on their interaction with U.S. schooling after immigration, leading to academic progress or decline. As I apply the concept to immigrant youth, I characterize the trajectories as academic acceleration or drag because of the temporal urgency, the limited time they have to learn English and to meet graduation requirements in high school. The following academic trajectories demonstrate how some students were at risk for academic drag, how others quickly accelerated, what interventions mitigate against academic stagnation, and highlight divergent pathways in reading development.

**Academic Trajectories: Acceleration**

My interview data show that adequate education in the country of origin prepares immigrant adolescents to do grade-level work, even as they learn English, after immigration. They may lag behind in vocabulary knowledge, and need additional and differentiated language
support and scaffolding for content knowledge provided by their teachers. While they may also have significant struggles due to language proficiency, and other possible socio-emotional challenges, it is possible for immigrant youth who had strong prior schooling to accelerate very quickly. They may even surpass performance of their monolingual counterparts (NYCDOE, 2009b). Academic acceleration is often a consequence of their school readiness and because they received adequate support after immigration, mitigating against the effects of mediocre education in their country of origin.

Moustapha

Moustapha’s educational history indicated that his home country education in Guinea made it possible for him to accelerate his language and literacy development quickly after he immigrated to the United States. His self-reported French literacy was high in comparison to other Francophone students I interviewed, who could handle verbal and receptive skills with dexterity, but struggled with reading and writing in French, especially with complex texts. Moustapha transferred his literacy skills in French to learning English and was also able to converse fluently in English by the end of 9th grade, within a year after he arrived in New York City. He stayed on pace with the academic content and language demands as he advanced into the 10th grade. Once his oral language proficiency reached a threshold level, his grades improved, he was able to engage in the academic content at a deeper level, and he was able to express his knowledge and utilize his oral language skills in English to support his reading of printed text and in writing. By the 11th grade, within two years of arriving in America, Moustapha’s writing in English was virtually free of syntactic errors common to students learning the language.
To an untrained eye, Moustapha's acceleration might have been attributed to his motivation or open demeanor to learning, since he is a very charismatic individual. In fact, his language and literacy skills accumulated and accelerated quickly because of the funds of knowledge he brought with him from Guinea. Coupled with his motivation and cognitive skills, Moustapha school readiness accelerated his academic performance as a result of the effective instruction and opportunities he took advantage of at CBIHS. He passed all of his high school exit requirements, the New York State Regents exams, on the first try in the 11th grade, which typically only happened with a third of the students in a given cohort at this high school.

Moustapha did not face some of the risk factors that typically lead to dropping out or academic decline. He made steady progress over time and felt proud of his academic success. He received awards from his teachers for his outstanding leadership and he was the first in his family to graduate from high school in the U.S. A few years after he graduated from high school, I bumped into Moustapha at Brooklyn Bridge Park. He was dressed up in a smart suit, and told me that he had just finished his Associate’s Degree at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and had gotten into a competitive internship program called Year-Up.

Nassar

Another example of academic acceleration is Nassar, who in fact had very poor home country schooling. By 11th grade, he had a good grasp of English, was motivated and cared about doing well in school, and he made attempts at every assignment he was given, even if it was difficult. Over his four years in high school, Nassar made steady progress. While he was nowhere near grade-level literacy, he was diligent and disciplined. Through the instruction he received at CBIHS, Nassar acquired new academic skills and developed advanced literacy
practices he could use to attack complex texts. He soaked up the new content knowledge he was never exposed to, and received an education that was a far cry from where he started in Yemen. Even though Nassar was not academically competitive for entry into selective colleges, and he only barely passed the Regents exams, he kept a healthy stance toward learning, and had an unwavering stamina to study and engage in difficult literacy tasks even when they were beyond his understanding. While he did not enroll in college after high school, I never once worried about his academic performance in the two years I was his advisor. I believe that he developed sufficient academic skills that he could leverage if he decided to pursue a post-secondary academic career later in life. Nassar trajectory is instruction because it is a testament to the role of quality instruction in academic acceleration. He believes he only started accelerating after his arrival in the United States.

*Academic Trajectories: Drag & Stagnation*

On the other hand, students may not only experience *academic decline*, they may also experience *academic drag and stagnation* (Suárez-Orozco, et al., 2008). Students experience drag or stagnation when they do not accelerate to the degree that they reasonably should based on their school readiness and in comparison to normal paces of development. Academic drag is not unique to low-performing students. Students who have excellent educational histories may experience academic drag when a school does not fully support their learning, fails to tap into their home language or funds of knowledge. Academic drag may also be common for students who have low literacy because they plateau in their reading development and do not accelerate quickly enough to meet a four-year graduation timeline. Lastly, immigrant youth may experience drag as a result of being insufficiently prepared for post-secondary education.
Abou

Similar to Moustapha, when Abou arrived in the U.S. from Senegal, he had already advanced into the upper grades in high school, and had developed a foundation in multiple content areas as a result. He was more advanced than other immigrant students in mathematics and science upon arrival in the US. His use of learning routines and metacognitive skills were also appropriate to his stage in adolescent development. Yet Abou struggled with literacy and experienced academic stagnation in unexpected ways, given his relative school readiness.

When he began learning English in earnest after immigration, Abou utilized French translation, but also relied heavily on oral instruction in Wolof from a teacher who had taught in Senegal through the Peace Corps. That is, the language he used most as a resource for learning turned out not to be a language in which he used for print literacy. In retrospect, Abou believed that he did very little meaningful reading while he was a student in Senegal, and that his literacy in French was not particularly advanced as a result. He did not spend a lot of time actively interpreting French texts in school, in part because he was not prompted to do so by his teachers, creating issues for literacy in English later on. While he did not have trouble with code-based skills in English, he stagnated when he needed to develop advanced literacy skills – so much so that his reading behaviors led his teachers, myself included, to believe for a long time that he had missed significant years of schooling in Senegal and that his prior education was worse than it actually was.

Furthermore, Abou relied heavily on his content-area funds of knowledge and conceptual understanding, and his overall strong academic skills, rather than actual reading comprehension of texts, in order to get through the literacy demands he faced in high school in the U.S. Because there were no systematic assessments of his reading during the time Abou was a student in high
school, teachers did not diagnose the root of his reading difficulties accurately and early on. As a result, Abou floundered for two years in high school.

It was not until the 11th grade that Abou began developing in earnest the literacy skills he needed to engage meaningfully in a high school curriculum. The turning point for Abou was both the result of a change in his own psychological stance toward learning English, and because the input in his learning environment, in texts and content he was learning, was finally comprehensible as a result of his improvement in language proficiency. Abou ended his high school academic career with high B’s and A’s on his transcript. When I met Abou in the 11th grade as his advisor, he completed most assignments but struggled to elaborate on central ideas in his writing. By 12th grade, he knew exactly the structure of how to construct an argument in an essay. His writing became more analytical, rather than focused on summarizing, and his understanding of the plan of development in an essay was crystal clear. Abou believes that he eventually succeeded in high school because he was interested in the subjects in his classes, and that he improved his English by increasing his participation in class discussions. Not surprisingly, as his English improved, Abou did better in school.

Yet, when Abou reached community college, he realized that he was far behind and he struggled to keep up with the volume and complexity of the reading and writing he needed for his college courses. While he did not need remediation in literacy, Abou’s trajectory suggests that even a student who had consistent schooling his entire life, who had completed secondary school in Senegal, may continue to struggle with reading. Abou is an example of academic drag because, while teachers saw him under-performing during his first two years in high school, they did not have a plan for helping him. Given his educational history, Abou should have accelerated much more quickly than he did, and yet he did not. In retrospect, Abou needed not merely a
natural course of academic development through immersion in language and content instruction, but a clear diagnosis of his academic struggles early on. Had I utilized better information about his educational history and literacy profile, I might have developed a very different plan to accelerate his learning.

More often, academic drag is experienced by immigrant adolescents who already struggled academically in their home country education, and those who were least school-ready upon arrival in the U.S. Often, intervention is necessary from the start, upon arrival, in order to avoid academic stagnation. For immigrant adolescents with low home language literacy, they experienced a challenging academic trajectory, characterized by intense struggle with reading from the beginning, and the upward climb toward high school graduation was incredibly steep.

*Maimouna*

Maimouna's French literacy was tenuous when she was a child in the Ivory Coast, even by her own accounts. She says that she forgot how to read and write in French very soon after she stopped having to do so in school on a regular basis. Maimouna was also evaluated as a special education student because she had struggles with working memory. When she and I discussed what she thought made it so difficult to maintain her literacy skills, she confirmed that she had trouble retaining information, and that she required consistent repetition of information over time.

After arriving in the U.S., Maimouna recalls not starting to speak in English until two years after she arrived, a very different trajectory in comparison to Moustapha. In high school, Maimouna's reading and writing skills continued to lag behind her peers. She persisted and was motivated to continue, but her development was uncharacteristically slow, possibly a result of
the lack of early intervention in her early literacy development as a child in the Ivory Coast. Fortunately, Maimouna has a fighting spirit. Despite a slower pace and prolonged academic trajectory, Maimouna still enrolled at Medgar Evers College, a public university, after high school. After more than two years of remedial courses, Maimouna persisted to fulfill her college requirements. The last time I spoke to her, almost seven years after she graduated from high school, Maimouna told me that she expected to graduate from college within a year.

Mariama

Mariama’s story also exemplifies the literacy challenges common to many newcomer immigrant youth. Though Mariama attended school relatively consistently in Guinea, albeit with a few interruptions and switching between schools, she feels that she did not really learn to read and write until she was around 10 years old. She recalls struggling to read early in her childhood. When she could finally “start seeing things, and reading to myself, and pronunciate,” the meaning of the words became clear (Mariama). She continued to have trouble getting words off the page, even well into adolescence:

I mean, I can learn in a conversation, and give you some answers, ‘cause I have to memorize. You know what I mean? But I see a word, you see how it says, I couldn’t see the word and read. It does not mean that I couldn’t…I just couldn’t read. I know, it’s odd. Because if you can’t read, how can you understand? That’s what you’re thinking, right? (Mariama)

When Mariama arrived in the U.S., her reading difficulties in English were not always noticeable to her teachers. She created the illusion that her literacy skills were more advanced than they were because her oral language proficiency accelerated faster than the average student’s. When I
met her a year after she immigrated, she already spoke fluently and eloquently in English, expressing her sophisticated insights and sharp analytical mind. Her struggles, then, were not with English proficiency alone, but with reading texts.

By her second year in high school, Mariama’s reading issues came to a head. She recalled that her teachers wanted to hold her back in the 10th grade instead of promoting her to the 11th grade because her literacy skills were not developing at an adequate pace. As the literacy demands grew in the upper grades, she continued to struggle with literacy and found it difficult to keep up with her peers. Literacy was also the major obstacle she faced on standardized exams, which she struggled to pass even after multiple attempts. When we discussed her difficulties with reading, she explained that she was not able to make the connection between a word on the page and its meaning, but that she used her listening skills and oral language to absorb content knowledge. Her observation skills and sharp memory helped her to get by in high school.

For students like Mariama, a natural course of development through language immersion, or the “wait and see” approach, was completely inappropriate. She needed strategic literacy intervention from the beginning, upon arrival, and on an ongoing basis throughout her time in high school. Mariama’s experience exemplifies the academic stagnation that immigrant youth experience, and the students who are most at-risk for academic drag are often those who are below grade level literacy in their home language and in English. While they may compensate for this through sheer willpower, resilience, and stamina, their academic trajectories suggest that literacy intervention, especially in the early stages of language development in English, may be crucial for students who arrive in the U.S. not quite ready for secondary classrooms.
Implications

Academic trajectories of immigrant youth are not easily predictable. Not all students who have quality schooling in the country of origin will automatically do well after arrival in the U.S. Indeed, I have taught students who have had severely disrupted schooling and eventually accelerated in unexpected ways, showing tremendous growth, and reaching advanced proficiency in English and literacy. Yet these instances of super-achievement are rare, their circumstances quite exceptional to the norm. For a vast majority of immigrant adolescents, their academic trajectories are influenced by a host of factors and further research is needed into how to design an instructional program that is responsive to their needs.

In terms of implications for the findings in this research study, educational histories of immigrant youth can be used in different ways, specifically for the purpose of understanding the profiles and characteristics of immigrant students and to design instructional programs that meet the needs that are surfaced through conducting educational histories. The findings can help practitioners design tools for collecting educational histories or academic inventories, leading to clearer identification of learning needs. These data collection tools can be used as components within assessment systems that also include formal diagnostics in home language literacy, English language proficiency, a student’s scholarship report or academic transcript, and classroom observations and anecdotes. In this way, schools and districts can conduct assessments of immigrant youth that are holistic and take into account not only linguistic and academic needs, but social and emotional ones as well.

Intervention programs can be designed that target specific needs surfaced through educational histories, leading to more student-centered, holistic, targeted educational services and, ultimately, improved educational outcomes. In particular, gathering educational histories
and other assessments at arrival are crucial procedures used to design strategic early intervention programs and ongoing progress monitoring to ensure that students do not experience academic drag or decline. Further research needs to be conducted into to how certain risk factors surfaced in an educational history at the beginning of a students’ education in the U.S. might relate to ongoing and overall educational performance.

Specifically, tools for educational histories should be utilized as a strategic component within a school or district’s intake and identification procedures. Once students are identified as English learners, schools and districts can develop time-efficient tools for meaningfully gathering educational histories. This information should be used to inform a school or district about what kinds of academic services or program a student needs to be matched with to facilitate academic success. At times, the educational histories may surface the need for new resources and services a school or district does not yet have the capacity to provide. Furthermore, educational histories can be used to build capacity among teachers and practitioners. Learner profiles, based on specific school contexts and districts, can be written utilizing information gathered from educational histories. These profiles can be shared with teachers and practitioners, who analyze them to surface the needs and assets of their students and learn how to develop responsive educational experiences based on their analysis.

The design of such data gathering tools for educational histories should incorporate research-based findings related to risk factors and areas of inquiry important to assess when serving immigrant youth, such as home language and literacy knowledge, disciplinary knowledge, inter-personal skills and assets, non-academic experiences and skills developed in their countries of origin, and the role of social class in producing differential access to learning opportunities. Taken along with formal assessments and diagnostics, schools and districts can
pull together a robust profile of a students and his or her school readiness, in order to take immediate and targeted action to support students.

**Summary**

In this dissertation, I have detailed the educational histories and linguistic portraits of immigrant adolescents in their countries of origin, and provided accounts of their academic trajectories after arrival in the United States. The data provide evidence of poor quality instruction and educational environments in low-income sending countries. I argue that prior schooling experiences in the country of origin has an impact on school readiness, the degree to which immigrant youth are prepared for education in secondary classrooms in the U.S. I provide an analysis of how pre-migration education interacts with educational performance after immigration, leading to academic acceleration or stagnation. I have demonstrated how educational institutions in the countries of origin and in the United States have systematically enacted symbolic violence, mediating and withholding linguistic and educational resources and learning opportunities from immigrant adolescents.

Such marginalization of immigrant youth has broader political consequences. While newcomer immigrant youth are at risk of educational neglect, they are expected to prove their deservingness of membership in American society through academic achievement (Newton, 2005). Schools are increasingly borderlands and act as gatekeepers, acting as “border patrols by denying diplomas” (Fine, et al., 2007, p. 77). Fine et al theorize that the accountability policies constitute as a “subtractive public policy,” that leaves students “academically undocumented,” by denying the supports that are required to help students succeed (ibid). Educational policies are now immigration policies designed to withhold “the diploma passport” from immigrant students,
especially to those who are unauthorized (ibid). Their liminality is reinforced by the intersection of economic, education, and immigration policies and ideologies (Newton, 2005; White & Glick, 2009). Subtractive educational policies of accountability and acceleration serve as a significant impediment to the fulfillment of the immigrant bargain, when necessary resources are not available.

Education has long played a role in the divergent socio-economic pathways of the children of immigrants (Gibson & Koyama, 2011; Kasinitz, 2008; Kasintiz, et al., 2008; Louie, 2004; Zhou, 1997). While the “one size fits all” model of schooling allowed large numbers of immigrants in previous generations to become upwardly mobile, current generations may see a diminishment of the power of educational institutions as a strategy for mobility in a new post-industrial knowledge-based economy (Foner, 2001). The ability for educational institutions to integrate immigrants and the myth of the immigrant bargain is now compromised more than ever, a challenge to the prevailing immigrant optimism that has long fueled the dreams of immigrants in America.
Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Interview #1: Focused educational history with as much specificity as possible; reconstruct comprehensive educational history up to the present

HOME COUNTRY BACKGROUND:
2. Tell me about life in your home country.
3. Tell me about your family.
4. Tell me about other people in your life at home. What were they like?
   a. What kinds of people were in your community?
   b. Who did you have interactions with while you were growing up? Who were your neighbors?
   c. Who did you spend time with? Social networks
5. What was your daily life like when you were growing up in your home country? How did you spend your time?
6. In your home country, would you consider your family as well off, in the middle, or struggling financially?
   a. What did your parents do? What did your mother do? Were they educated?
   b. Did your parents go to school in your home country? What were their educational opportunities?

IF SUBJECT DID NOT HAVE FORMAL SCHOOLING:
1. How did you spend your time growing up, if you did not go to school?
2. What are some important memories that you have of your childhood growing up in your home country?
3. Why did you not attend school?
4. What were your responsibilities growing up? Did you have to work? Help out your family?
5. What knowledge did you gain from your experiences?

FORMAL SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES:
1. Tell me about your schooling in your home country.
   a. What are some vivid memories you have of school?
   b. What were you like as a student? What were you good at? What did you struggle with at school?
   c. What were your teachers like?
   d. How did the teachers teach? Teaching style?
   e. What was your school like?
   f. What kinds of subjects or topics did you learn about in school?
   g. What kinds of schoolwork did you do in school?
   h. What kinds of academic work did you do at home?
2. English Proficiency:
   a. Did you learn English in your home country? What was that like?
   b. Did you use English while you were living in your home country?
3. Did you spend a lot of time learning or reading on your own when you were growing up?
4. Tell me about your proficiency in your home language. How well did you develop your
language skills in your home language?

5. Did your parents, caregivers, or family members have to pay tuition for you to go to school?
6. What was the best part of going to school? What did you struggle with the most in school?

OUTSIDE SCHOOL:
1. What kinds of resources or opportunities were available to you to help you do well in school? (i.e., tutoring services, material resources, opportunities, etc.)
2. Did you go to any early childhood programs?
3. Did you attend enrichment programs outside of school?
4. Do you feel your family was able to provide you a good upbringing and a good education?
5. Do you feel you received a good education in your home country? Do you feel you went to a good school?

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN EDUCATION SYSTEM:
1. How would you compare your education and upbringing to other students your age in your home country?
2. How do people in your home country define a good education? What are the values and beliefs they have about what is considered a good education?
3. What did teachers care about and value in school? What did they award students for? Test scores, memorization?
4. Did some people in your country have a better education than others? What made the difference?
5. If you had stayed in your home country, what would your education have been like in high school and college?

OTHER
1. What other factors influenced your upbringing when you were in your home country?
2. Did you have responsibilities growing up? Work? Helping out with childcare, or helping your family?
3. Do they have photos of their life back home that you’d be willing to show me?

Interview #2: Reflection and interpretation of students’ own educational histories, as it relates to their education in the US; participants make sense of their educational histories, analyze and theorize about their own experience

1. Tell me about your immigration to the United States. Why did you come to the US? How did you feel about immigrating?
2. Were you separated from your parents when you were a child? If you were reunited with your parents when you came to the US, what was that reunification like?
3. When you started school in the US, how did you feel as a student?
4. Looking back at your education in your home country, what kinds of knowledge did you bring with you that helped you in your education in the US?
5. How would you compare your education in your home country to your education here in the US?
6. Do you feel that your education in your home country prepared you for education here in the US? How do you think your education in your country impacted your education here in
the US?
7. What are some aspects of your education in your home country that you appreciate, or wished you had here in the US?
8. If you could change one thing about your life or education in your home country, to better prepare you for education in the US, what would you change?
9. How did you adapt to education in the US? What helped you the most?
10. Is there anything that you would change about your education here in the US that would have served you better? How did the US system serve your needs, or not?
11. How would you describe yourself as a student now? How are you doing in school now?

Closing Questions:
1. What are some important experiences you have had in your life that affected who you are today?
2. Is there anything else you’d like to tell me?
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