

School of Education

**The Perceptions of African Refugee
Background Students: Their Schooling in
WA and Their Adjustment to the
Australian Cultural Context**

Noah T Mbano

**This Thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

of

Curtin University

January 2012

Curtin University

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ABSTRACT

This study reports on an investigation into the perceptions of African Refugee Background students about their schooling in WA and their adjustment to the Australian cultural context. The recent cohort of African refugee children and young adolescents arriving in WA schools presents unique challenges to teachers because many of these refugees have a history of trauma, multiple displacements, extended stays in refugee camps and severely disrupted schooling. There is clearly a need for further studies into the settlement of this vulnerable group in WA.

The present study is a perception study based on a qualitative approach. In total 180 participants were involved. Data was collected by way of focus group discussions and individual interviews. Classroom observations were also undertaken. The data was analysed thematically, and in addition case studies were developed to illustrate the evidence that emerged.

The findings show that participants are generally happy and have settled well in Australia. However, they do have concerns related to the issues of culture and acculturation, their transition into Australian classrooms, and their social and self-identity. In fact, some African Refugee Background students are experiencing an identity crisis as a result of their migration to Australia. Despite this, many are highly motivated to learn English, to achieve their academic, social and long term goals and to integrate into the Australian community. Together these factors have important implications for pedagogy.

While the current study has gone some way towards highlighting issues that are impacting on African Refugee Background students, there is still a need for further research to explore ways to assist African Refugee Background students to deal with the demands of their new context in WA.

DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this research study, to a large extent, was due to the co-operation of the students, their parents and teachers, whose collective goodwill ensured its success. However, my greatest regard and gratitude is reserved for my chief supervisor, Professor Rhonda Oliver, without whom this project would not have succeeded. She believed in me from the day I walked into her masters' class in Bunbury and continues to do so to this day. Professor Rhonda reminds me of Abraham Lincoln who is said to have once said: 'I am a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and I did not have the heart to let him down'.

Rhonda held my hand and walked beside me throughout this very difficult journey and when at times I thought I could not see her footsteps beside me, and I took her to task, she quipped: "The footsteps you see are mine because I am carrying you silly!" in her usual witty manner (or something to that effect). I would like by extension to thank my 'adopted family': Martin, Mike and Kathryn Exell who have had to put up with the name Noah in their house for the past three years as well as endure Rhonda fuming (with smoke coming out of her ears) while going over my work during family time on weekends. Most importantly I will miss hearing about Mike's 'shenanigans' on the basketball court and wonder what he will get up to next?

I would to thank Associate Professor Jan Gray of Edith Cowan University for her wonderful help during the first years of my PhD. I will always remember her patience and quiet re-assurance during those early years. My thanks also go to PhD Consultants Sarah Kearns, Dr Susan Hill, Dr Sarah Schivers and Dr Martin Cooper as well as Library staff at the same university. I am also indebted to my reviewers at ECU. My special thanks also go to the administrators, teachers and staff of schools where I did my data collection.

My gratitude also goes to Curtin University for the opportunity and financial support to complete my doctoral degree. In the same institution I would like to thank my co-supervisor Dr Paul Mercieca for his support and for always being available when I needed him (except for when he wanted me to do some marking!). Again this project would not have been a success without the support of the head of the school of

Education, Associate Professor Lina Pelliccione and her wonderful team (Trish, Betty, Justine, Zalila, Evelyn and Anne) who have redefined the term ‘student support’ in my view.

Professor Oliver once told me that there are always ‘casualties’ during most PhD journeys and for me the greatest of these must be my family and friends. My family has stood by me (especially my children and nieces) throughout the course of my study, despite being without me for countless hours, days and in some cases months as I travelled to conferences. I would also like to thank my parents, Eness and Jotham Mbano (May they Rest in Peace) who inspired me when I was only a little boy by telling me that I was destined for ‘great things’. Special thanks to my sister Catherine and her husband Eben Mandikutse who looked after me from a very young age.

My friends have equally endured my absence at several ‘get-togethers’ or soccer and in some instances have virtually given up calling me. However, I would especially like to mention Dr Joseph Njiru (Mutongoria) whom I met by chance at Port Hedland Senior High School in 2005 and who has been a dear friend since. I drew further inspiration from his determination to complete his PhD during very difficult circumstances. It is also an honour for me to mention Simon Hitchens, a colleague and dear friend for standing by my side even when it would have been much easier for him to walk away. But then, he wouldn’t know how as he has always taken the ‘road less travelled’ all his life. I have not given up on my attempts in the past five years to convert him to Christianity. Thank you, too, to Greg McMurdo, Godfrey Tapela and Dr Joseph Awange for their wonderful support, friendship and guidance.

Lastly, I would like to thank God for being faithful, just and true to his word. He is a wonderful ‘shepherd’ and like the good shepherd that he is he has guided me to ‘greener pastures’. My prayer is that he does not abandon me now but rather show me how I can use this award in the furtherance of his kingdom. In this I am guided by the prophet Isaiah when he says: “Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness.....” (St James, 43:19). Thank you to a God who makes everything possible. I will end my acknowledgements in the words of Charles Dickens: “Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.” It is indeed my sincere hope and wish that this thesis will help provide a way to assist

African Refugee Background Students and other minority groups in similar circumstances.

TERMS USED IN THIS STUDY

ARB

African Refugee Background students.

Intensive English Centres

An Intensive English Centre provides specialist intensive English Language instruction to eligible Stage 1 ESL students for one year. In classes at these centres students are prepared for the mainstream curriculum.

Limited Schooling

A student who has received less than three years of continuous schooling prior to his/her arrival in Australia is deemed to have 'Limited Schooling' and special allowances are made to accommodate them, specifically eligibility for an additional 12 months of Intensive English support.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Background

Australia is one of only ten countries in the world with an established annual resettlement program for refugees. Along with the USA and Canada, Australia ranks third largest for migrant resettlement programs (Haig & Oliver, 2007). Since the 1990s there has been a steady increase of humanitarian refugee arrivals to Australia from Africa and the Middle East. In recent times, many of these refugees have African backgrounds, henceforth described in this thesis as African Refugee Backgrounds (ARB). They originate from countries such as Somalia, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Liberia (Cassidy & Gow, 2005; DIMIA, 2007). As a result there are many ARB Students being integrated into Australian classrooms.

Statistics from the Department of Immigration and Citizenship (DIAC) show that between June 2000 and June 2007, 9,302 humanitarian entrants arrived in Western Australia (WA). Further, 2843 (at least 31%) of these entrants were aged between 12 and 24, thus many are of school age. This represents an increase of 114% since the figure of 1331 reported in the WA parliament in 2005 (see Haig & Oliver, 2007). While more recent WA census data were not readily available at the time of writing, the increase in humanitarian settlement in WA is clearly apparent.

Studies undertaken so far reveal that refugee students, such as those from Africa, present new challenges to Australian teachers, mainly because of their interrupted education and/or low levels of literacy and English language proficiency. A study commissioned to investigate the difficulties facing ARB students, titled: 'Waiting in line' (Haig & Oliver, 2007) found that their needs are not only extensive, but diverse, and include educational, emotional, physical, social and familial issues. These findings concur with other studies which suggest that refugee students, including those of African background, present challenges to Australian teachers, particularly because of their prior traumatic experiences.

Existing literature shows that often ARB students face transitional problems in acculturation and settlement. For example, Gbla (2010) suggests that because African refugees may not have attended schools or had interrupted schooling before coming to Australia, their literacy development may be below expected age level and, because of this, for such students school may pose difficulties for them.

There is further evidence in the literature to support such findings (see Sinclair, 2001; Miller, 2005; Ali and Jones, 2000). Ali and Jones, for instance, find that Somali students come to Australia with very limited schooling backgrounds and as such found it difficult to deal with new behavioral expectations and rules. ARB students also find concentrating in class for long periods of time challenging. Ali and Jones identified four key barriers which they suggest impact on ARB students' achievement: previous learning experience; school factors; issues of exclusion; and, out-of-school factors.

In the main, however, most studies have been undertaken from an 'outside looking in' perspective; few studies have explored how African school-aged refugees themselves feel. Whilst the 'Waiting in Line' report went some way in helping to map a way forward in the education of ARB students, it was not able to adequately address the crucial question of how the students perceive the English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum, and how, in their view, it could be adjusted to assist their integration. This study seeks to answer these questions.

The recent cohort of African refugee children and young adolescents arriving in WA schools presents unique challenges for teachers, because many have a history of trauma, multiple displacements, extended stays in refugee camps and severely disrupted schooling (McBrien, 2005; Muir, 2004). It is not surprising, for instance, that a recent study showed that 63% of African refugee students with more than two years of interrupted schooling, and almost 90% of those with no prior schooling, failed to complete Year 12 (Warrick, 2000, cited by Earnest, Housen & Gillieatt, 2007). Experienced teachers, a number of whom have been involved in the education of refugee children for many years, report that they are dealing with student needs and expectations not previously encountered. In fact, Miller, Mitchell, and Brown (2005) found that teachers are ill-equipped to respond to these challenges and the existing curriculum and resources are inadequate to meet the needs of these students. Because of this there is a need to review current strategies in student engagement and pedagogical approaches to ESL education in WA.

In spite of this, research into this vulnerable group is limited, but where available, identifies the need for further research to identify effective teaching strategies, methods and resources (Mickan, Lucas, Davies, & Lim, 2001; Haig & Oliver, 2007; Miller et al., 2005; Muir, 2004) to assist the transition of ARB students. Recent studies in New South Wales and Victoria have identified similarly complex issues, and recommend the need to further examine potential solutions so as to ease the transition for ARB students (Earnest et al., 2007). Earnest, Housen, and Gillieatt suggest that because African refugee students place education as a high priority and often possess high expectations of education and future employment, these students inevitably feel that the current system in Australia is failing them when their dreams are not realised. Nevertheless, there is clearly a need to ensure that the education system assists ARB students to successfully integrate and realise their future goals.

Although various systems of support have been made available for ARB students, across the nation there is considerable variation of service provision. For example, intensive on-arrival English-language programs for ARB and other refugee students with interrupted schooling vary widely from state to state in Australia (Miller, Mitchell & Brown, 2006). For instance, Miller, Mitchell, and Brown report that funding for such programs range from nine months in some Victorian centres to two years in WA, and state funding for ongoing mainstream support also differs from state to state.

Even so, programs have been developed specifically for ARB students. For instance, one notable approach in Victoria is a teacher development program called ‘Understanding Torture and Trauma’, which provides teachers with strategies to address ARB student issues (Palmer, 2000). In addition, the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (VFST) has developed a guide for schools to become ‘refugee ready’ through advocating a whole of school approach, professional development for staff with the aim of providing stable classroom environments, supportive curriculum programs, and partnerships with agencies and communication with parents (VFST, 2005). In WA, Assisting Torture and Trauma Survivors (ASETTS) has also developed a valuable video resource for teachers titled ‘Joining Hands: Connecting African Students, their Families and WA Secondary Education’ (available from www.asetts.org.au).

1.2 Aim

This study offers a unique opportunity to document for the school-aged ARB students the contribution ESL programs have had to their adjustment in the Australian educational and cultural context. The primary aim of this study is to research the perceptions of African Refugee Background (ARB) students regarding their schooling in WA and their adjustment to the Australian educational and cultural context. Further, this study aims to examine these perceptions to determine whether there are any cultural norms or nuances that are embedded in the ESL curriculum, or within the wider Australian socio-cultural environment, and whether these are acting as barriers to the students' learning. The study also seeks to ascertain how the backgrounds of the refugees impact on their learning and/or whether these affect student/teacher relationships in English language classrooms. It is also important to focus on sociocultural factors, as Vygotsky (cited in Swain, Kinnear, & Steinman, 2011) suggests that the source of learning and development is to be found in the social development and not only in the mind of a learner. Additionally these factors may relate to Vygotsky's educational theory within cultural contexts (See Vygotsky, 1978).

It is envisaged that this research can be used to inform ESL practice, as it may help us to better understand and potentially manage some of the factors that influence learning. For instance, the findings may contribute to the building of more positive classroom relationships and help in the design of a more culturally inclusive curriculum. Also, as an ESL practitioner of African background, the researcher is personally interested to find whether ARB experiences are similar to his and whether the results support other research findings in current ESL literature.

1.3 Context of Study

The current research was conducted in Intensive English Centres (IEC) which are all based in metropolitan Perth, the capital and largest city of the Australian state of Western Australia, and the fourth most populous city in Australia. The Perth metropolitan area has an estimated population of about 1,700 000 people. It is located in the south-west of the continent between the Indian Ocean and a low coastal escarpment known as the Darling Range. The city of Perth is situated on the Swan River; of the 10 schools involved in the research study, four were from south of the river while the rest were from north of the river.

IECs in these schools provide specialist intensive English language instruction for newly arrived students for between one and two years. In these centres, students are prepared for the mainstream curriculum. In addition, Limited Schooling programs are offered at some IECs for students in refugee and humanitarian visa subclasses. Support programs are also provided to support the transition of these and other ESL students into the mainstream context.

Table 1

The number and percentages of participants according to school location in Perth

Sector/School Location	Northern suburbs	Southern suburbs	South- West region
Private	20 (11%)	0	7 (4%)
Government	40 (22%)	70 (39%)	43 (24%)

Four of the IECs in this study were located on senior campuses. These senior campuses have students who are in the 16- to 25-year-old age group. They offer an alternative to students who wish to study upper school courses in an adult environment with an ethos of strong support. The on-campus students come from all over the metropolitan area. The campuses offer an extensive range of subjects that are prerequisites for further study and employment in Australia. They include subjects from the Tertiary Entrance Examination (TEE) Courses of Study, Wholly School Assessed (WSA) subjects and vocational and campus-based subjects.

Lastly, and more specific to the current study, the senior campuses host Intensive English Centres and a large number of international fee-paying students who are attracted, in part, to the additional language support that is provided for the school by dedicated teams of ESL teachers, as well as suitably trained mainstream teachers. These teachers administer the specialist programs and a broad range of other courses matched to the diverse backgrounds, interests, aptitudes and needs of the student body.

1.4 History of ESL in Australia

Unlike other countries receiving high numbers of refugees, Australia is exceptional in that migrant resettlement and especially ESL programs for new adult and child immigrants have, for many years, been federally funded (Martin, 1998). In relation to the latter, Burns (2003) describes how the Child Migrant Education Program began in 1970. In the 1980s the New Arrival program (NAP) and the General Support Programs (GSP) were introduced into schools.

These program structures were supported by curriculum innovations, also instigated at a national level. For example, in 1985, in contrast to the decentralised, individualised and progressive curriculum philosophy embraced in earlier ESL programs, the schools sector sought to establish a common organisational framework for the teaching of K-12 languages which included ESL. This resulted in the Australian Language Level Project (ALL), which focussed on the nature of language learning, the learners who were engaged in a range of learning experiences (activities and supportive exercises) which involved purposeful language use, and learners working towards the achievement of common goals of learning. These curriculum guidelines were produced as a manual for curriculum developers in a broad range of language programs. They were complimented by the ESL Framework of Stages (McKay and Scarino, 1991), which set out curriculum guidelines specifically for ESL programs K-12. Additionally, the aim of these initiatives was to provide a common curriculum basis for different language teaching approaches.

Against this background, new language and literacy initiatives were set up in 1991 as part of the National Languages and Literacy Institute (NLLIA) ESL development project, which led to the inception of the ESL Band scales, primarily designed to produce a suitable assessment and reporting framework for use in ESL programs in schools. Next the ESL scales were developed and these are still in use in several states in Australia.

Presently the national 'Shape of the Australian Curriculum' (2010) outlines the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) commitment to supporting equity of access to the Australian Curriculum for all learners. As part of this commitment, ACARA has developed the 'English as an Additional Language or Dialect: Teacher Resource' to support teachers as they develop teaching and learning programs as part of the Australian Curriculum.

In addition, there are four Australian Curriculum subjects proposed for English at the senior school level. These four subjects have common elements which include: continuing the development of students' knowledge, understandings and skills in listening, reading, viewing and creating. At the federal level, therefore, English language proficiency is being supported, which implies an acknowledgement that it is vital for resettlement. In fact, this has been explicitly reiterated numerous times (for example DIMIA, 2003). Such acknowledgment by authorities of the need to focus on the English proficiency of refugee migrants may be significant in facilitating the successful integration of ARB students.

1.5 The ESL Curriculum in WA

At present in WA, students of an ARB are taught by teachers who follow the ‘English as an Additional Language or Dialect Teacher Resource’ (2011) document for curriculum guidance. Previously, they followed ESL curriculum documents such as the ESL/ESD Progress Maps (2009), Classroom First (2007) and Curriculum Framework (1998). Each of these curriculum documents include statements such as that ESL students come from diverse, multilingual backgrounds and may include overseas and Australian-born students whose first language is a language other than English. They also indicate that ESL students may include those who have limited or no previous education. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students whose first language is an Indigenous language, including traditional languages, creoles and related varieties of Aboriginal English fall under this category. The aim of the various ESL curriculums has primarily been to increase the proficiency of second language students across the key learning areas, through the implementation of a culturally and linguistically sensitive curriculum, and, both by implication and more explicitly, to assist learners in their cultural adjustment.

The Department of Education (DOE) of WA facilitates the delivery of the ESL Curriculum to students who require specialist ESL assistance through classification of these students into stages, which generally relate to program provision (ESL/ESD Information for School Personnel, 2010). This is because when the students arrive in Australia they are either not proficient in English at all or are at various proficiency levels. Specifically the department specifies three stages. Stage one students have been in Australia less than a year and have enrolled into a school within six months of arrival; or are entering their first year of compulsory schooling, and this includes children who have attended pre-primary. Stage one students who are permanent residents are eligible to enrol in full-time English language instruction at an IEC.

Stage Two students include those who have had no more than two years primary or three years secondary education in an Australian school. It is important to note that students with limited schooling background are entitled to extra support. Stage Three students include those who continue to require specialist ESL assistance and have had more than two years primary or three years secondary education in an Australian school. While Stage Three students are ineligible for a staffing allocation, they are often included in ESL programs.

ESL teachers are located in schools and IECs to support these students. Additionally, Curriculum Officers support school personnel with the development, implementation and evaluation of curriculum practices appropriate to the needs of the ESL/ESD learner. ESL program officers use the curriculum in selected schools to support ESL students to attain the necessary English language proficiency and acculturation for their successful participation in mainstream schooling. They do this by assisting teachers to plan, develop and implement a balanced program that enables all students to maximise their achievement outcomes. They also help teachers to implement appropriate ways to monitor, evaluate and report on individual student achievement and then to plan for improvement.

As indicated, there is a real challenge for staff to implement appropriate strategies based on the current ESL curriculum in order to serve the needs of ARB students. This challenge is made more difficult because it seems that the level of expertise and knowledge about ARB children and their process of learning a second language, particularly in education literature, is much less than adequate (Burke, 2001; Haig & Oliver, 2007). The limited schooling and trauma faced by the African refugee children in particular is causing Australian schools, teachers, and the community to rethink the way that schooling and support services are implemented (VFST, 2005). It is acknowledged that schools that have adopted a whole school approach to address such issues have seen significant improvement in the quality of the social and learning environment in the school (Rogers, 2003). However, there is still a great deal more that needs to be done to support these students. Investigating student perceptions will help inform practitioners about achieving this goal.

1.6. Conclusion

In WA there is anecdotal evidence that the consequences of the high levels of need of African students are that many are struggling academically in our schools and socially in the community (Haig & Oliver, 2007). Teachers continue to grapple with issues such as: helping the students deal with the trauma and their new way of life; meeting classroom demands for literacy and communication; and obtaining additional needed funding as well as appropriate learning resources (Miller, Mitchell & Brown, 2005). This is compounded by an attribute common amongst the young refugees — a severely interrupted schooling background. Consequently, many have little or no literacy in either a first or second language prior to arrival, sometimes exacerbated by no knowledge of school routines or etiquette (Brown et al., 2006). This situation has prompted government agencies and other support services to

reconsider the approaches they currently have in place for such groups. Despite this there has been little research in this area, especially in WA.

To date in Western Australia, the 'Waiting in Line' report (Haig & Oliver, 2007) is one of the very few comprehensive studies to determine the perceptions and expectations of stakeholders involved in the education of African refugee children. The study was mainly qualitative and included focus groups and individual interviews to elicit information from the main stakeholders. Overall, 117 participants were involved in the study, including students, parents, caregivers, teachers (ESL and mainstream), school deputy principals, ethnic education assistants, youth workers, and officers from ESL resource centres. The report concluded that African student needs are both extensive and diverse and they include educational, emotional, physical, social and familial issues. Whilst this report went a long way in helping to map a way forward in the education of ARB students, it did not adequately address the crucial question of how the students themselves perceived their schooling in WA and their adjustment to the Australian cultural context. Therefore, the question arises: what strategies or policies, in their view, could be adjusted to assist their integration?

In formulating such strategies it is important that the perceptions of ARB students (as stakeholders) are taken into account. As Brown, Miller, and Mitchell (2006) suggest:

Making the views of these students explicit provides one starting point for not only understanding in more details their specific backgrounds and experiences, but for also developing educational strategies, resources and policies that might best meet the needs of these students. It is in this area that there is much urgent work to be done. '(p. 161)

Given this background, it is apparent that the prevailing situation regarding ARB students in Australia needs to be addressed. It is imperative that research is undertaken into ways to support them, particularly to help them to acculturate into their new context. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate these students' needs, particularly from their perspective, with a view to helping educational practitioners in their day-to-day efforts to integrate the African child into the Australian educational, socio-cultural and socio-linguistic context. Studies such as the current one may indeed assist in understanding their experiences and backgrounds, which can then be taken into account in efforts designed to meet their needs.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the literature related to ARB students. It begins with an account of previous research about these students and their schooling (Section 2.2). Next, the literature review examines culture and cultural differences that are presenting challenges to ARB students (Section 2.3). After this the review focuses on the development of ARB students' new cultural identity (Section 2.4). In the next section, issues related to culture shock and anxiety are discussed (Section 2.5). This is followed by a description of ARB students and their acculturation process and how this process impacts on their language learning (Section 2.6). A summary of the issues reviewed (Section 2.7) is followed by the Research Question (Section 2.8).

2.2 ARB Students and their Schooling: Previous Research

As indicated in Chapter One, ARB students are presenting new challenges to Australian teachers because of their interrupted education, and their low levels of literacy and English language proficiency. Waxman (2000) notes the impact of low level English language proficiency on the adjustment of refugees, and indicates that the lack of competency among refugees is dependent on a number of factors. These include age at time of arrival and pre-migration education experiences, the suddenness of their flight from their country of origin, and their lack of knowledge about their eventual destination and time of internment in refugee camps. In his findings, Waxman also reports an evident gender bias, with females demonstrating lower levels of English competency than males; he interprets this as evidence of less schooling in their country of origin. This finding may be a reflection of traditional female role in the African society.¹

In a case study of recent refugee arrivals in Western Australia (WA), Hancock (2009) observes that African humanitarian entrants often come from rural Africa and so have had little exposure to city life, which means that they are more accustomed to a pastoral, communal environment than an urban, individualistic environment such as exists in

¹ The use of the term 'African society' does not imply a uniform African culture.

Australia, and are therefore unprepared for it. This is supported by Oliver, Haig, and Grote (2009), who suggest that this problem is compounded by the fact that:

African refugees come from wide ranging national, cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds, making it difficult to obtain assistance from interpreters and those already settled in the community. Furthermore, in addition to developing competencies in English language literacy and numeracy, many students need to acquire basic organizational and time management skills as well as Western cultural concepts embedded in the curriculum. As their English skills overtake those of their caregivers, they frequently assume the adult responsibilities of dealing with banks, utility companies, and health clinics and other service agencies. Furthermore, their enthusiasm for adapting to Australian culture is diminished by their experience of, and inability to negotiate, aggression and racism within the school and community. (pp. 25-26)

As Oliver et al. (2009) note, ARB students both in school and in the wider community are facing the challenge of racism, which has been shown to have devastating consequences. Racism has been well documented in recent literature (see for example Hancock 2009), showing that unsubstantiated assertions and stereotyping directed towards African refugees influence community perceptions and treatment of this group. This stereotyping creates fear and suspicion in the community at large, resulting in harmful consequences for the ethnic identity and the wellbeing of the individual ARB student.

In addition to the problems of racism, because of their lack of English proficiency and financial difficulties, some have abandoned school to seek employment. For those who do stay at school, the effects of their past trauma and the problems encountered as part of their migration and transition into Australia society manifest in inappropriate classroom behaviour. This places considerable strains on the Australian education system; it is against this background that this research was conducted.

In this study, culture refers to and includes beliefs, values, traditions, behaviours, codes of practice, and social norms which members of a society share in their everyday lives. When two or more cultures are brought together it is the combination of these factors which present challenges. Because of the strong contrast between African and Australian cultures, this would seem to be the case for ARB students who must undergo considerable adaptation as

part of their acculturation. At the same time they need to develop an adequate level of English proficiency. Together these needs present challenges for the ARB students in the context of schooling in WA. The specifics of such needs are, however, unclear and therefore there is a real need for the current research.

Indeed the need for such research is supported by other studies undertaken so far (see for example Waxman, 2000; Barber, 2002; Brown, Miller & Mitchell, 2006; Burgoyne & Hull, 2007; Couch, 2007; Brown, Miller & Mitchell, 2006; Burgoyne & Hull, 2007; Dooley, 2009; Hammond, 2008; Miller, Mitchell & Brown, 2005; Mickan, Lucas, Davies & Lim, 2007; Oliver, Haig & Grote, 2009 Poppit & Frey, 2007; Silburn, Earnest, Butcher & Mori, 2008; Taylor, 2008). There is a particular need to examine the educational welfare and cultural adjustment of ARB students in WA, given the growing numbers resettling here.

Consequently, the current study focuses only on the distinct group of students of school-going age from Africa, born outside Australia. Note that students of migrant families born in Australia were not considered in this particular research because they did not meet these criteria, and although similarities existed, it was deemed that they are sufficiently different not to be included.

2.3 Culture and Cultural Differences

The impact of culture and cultural differences on learning is well documented and has existed in the literature since the pioneering work of Vygotsky (1978), who argued that children's home culture is indispensable to learning. More recently Vygotsky's ideas have since been supported and explored by Bakhtin (1981) and Lo Bianco (2010). Several ethnographic studies have established that one of the major reasons why minority students, and immigrant newcomers in particular, perform poorly in schools is that their home cultures, even when "celebrated," are not sufficiently utilised as the resource for their own learning (Nykiel-Herbert, 2010).

Acknowledging the work of Rogoff (2003) and Bodrova and Leong (2007) in this area, Nykiel-Herbert argues that it is the culture of the child's home that enables and supports cognitive development. This occurs through a complex system of interrelationships between social and cognitive factors that include norms, beliefs, values, behaviours, socialisation practices, as well as psychological tools of the mind such as selective attention and memory strategies. It is believed that children acquire these in the process of interaction with members

of their communities and participation in activities within these communities. For ARB students, integration into their new cultural context of Australia presents difficulties as they attempt to reconcile differences between the new culture and their home cultures. Clearly this places a huge burden on ARB students as they embark on their journey towards acculturation into the Australian educational and cultural context, and shows the need for further research.

In order to understand the cultural problems that are being encountered by ARB students in WA it is first important to define the term culture. However, this is not an easy task. As Lo Bianco and Crozet (2003) argue, culture is not only complex but is an elusive concept which means various things to various people. Culture has been defined by some as our social inheritance in a world filled with tools (artefacts) designed by previous generations to help facilitate everyday life (Pacheco & Gutierrez, 2009). Earlier, Cole (1996) suggested that culture is a tool of everyday living:

Culture can be understood as the entire pool of artefacts accumulated by the social group in the course of its historical experience. In aggregate, the accumulated artefacts of a group-culture are then seen as the species-specific medium of human development. It is 'history in the present'. The capacity to develop within that medium and to arrange for its reproduction in succeeding generations is the distinctive characteristic of our species. (p. 110)

Because culture is indexed in our everyday practices, and because we live *culturally* (Moll, 1990), the challenge for educators is to re-examine their working notions of culture, how their views influence the ways learning is organised in their classrooms, and whether extant views of culture lead to viewing cultural differences as deficits. Indeed, in a study addressing the educational challenges faced by African refugee background students in Western Australia, Oliver, Haig and Grote (2009) found that in some data samples, teachers described the abilities of ARB students using language that implied a 'deficit' perspective, although it should be noted that the authors did not share that view.

Other definitions of culture include 'the systems of agreed-upon meanings that serve as recipes, or guidelines for behaviour in any particular society' (Barrett, 1991, p.27). An interesting view of culture (and closer to the aims of the current study) is that provided by Terpstra and David (1991), who describe culture as 'a learned, shared, compelling, interrelated set of symbols whose meanings provide a set of orientations for members of a

society'. Because of these various perceptions of culture, Pacheco and Gutierrez (2009) urge educators and practitioners to recognise that children engage in schooling activities with a history of participation in a broad range of language and literacy activities that reflect their cultural communities.

This observation by Pacheco and Gutierrez suggests that for African refugee students some difficulty may indeed emerge because of cultural misunderstandings. Such misconstructions are known to cause problems 'stemming from differences in values and codes of behaviour' between parties involved in intercultural communication (Terpstra & David, 1991). In order to counter this, cultural adjustment needs to occur. This is the commonplace process of learning to live with change and difference, in this instance with a changed environment, with different people, different norms, different standards, and different customs. In the current context this process of adjustment requires students to make changes in their attitudes, behaviour and social norms in order to fit into their new study environment in WA. Whether or not this is occurring, and whether they find the current ESL curriculum is assisting them in this process, is the focus of the current study.

Notwithstanding the above propositions, Fuligni (1998a) suggests that children from immigrant families have a relatively high level of adaptation because of: the emphasis such families place on the value of education, family members' responsibilities and obligations to each other, and the dynamics of cultural identification. However, his research findings were based on studies of ethnically diverse populations, with particular attention given to teenagers from immigrant Asian and Latin American backgrounds. Whether this is the same for African background students, many of whom are refugees, remains unclear. Again, it is one of the aims of this research to investigate whether or not this is the case.

2.4 Cultural Identity

Identity is defined as the fact or condition of being a specific person or thing; individually, the characteristic and qualities of a person, considered collectively and regarded as essential to that person's self-awareness (Leary & Tangney, 2003). It is associated with psychological and social adjustment (see for example Burnet & Peel, 2001; Wolpert, 2007). The term 'identity' has been used to describe personal identity, the individual things that make a person unique, and, as social identity, the collection of group memberships that define the individual,

how we function within many different social situations and relate to a range of other people. In this respect our social identity is related to our cultural identity.

The concept of cultural identity is the subject of much academic debate in the literature (see for example Adams & Markus, 2001; Gjerde, 2004; Hermans, 2001; Okazaki, David & Abelmann, 2008). Theorists and researchers are, however, consistently and increasingly calling for a conceptualisation of cultural identity that is dynamic, shifting, and historically embedded, as opposed to one that is decontextualized and essentialist (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). This is particularly important for ARB students who must develop a new cultural identity, as part of their self-identity, to fit into the Australian context.

The literature provides a good starting point to understand the concept of cultural identity. Beginning with the work of Tajfel and Turner in 1979 (for example on social identity theory, self-categorisation theory), social identity has been defined as a socially derived psychological process reflecting knowledge of one's group memberships and their associated value and emotional significance. Further, strong group identification has been shown to promote identity formation (Tanti, Stukas, Halloran & Foddy, 2011), which is key to an individual's wellbeing and sense of worth. Zapf (1991) has explored this concept of cultural identity, suggesting that a kind of identity crisis results from migration (or extended visits to other countries). It can lead to social isolation and a feeling of being treated like an outsider (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986) or even as an inferior. Similarly, other studies have recorded negative variables that result from cultural transitions (see for example Winkelman, 1994; Adelman, 1988; Berry, 1980; Adler, 1987; Swallow, 2000).

For adolescent refugee students, developing positive self-identity is the key to their adjustment in their new environment. Importantly the educational environment is a key context for the development of identity. One reason for this that has been suggested in the literature (Sussman, 2000) is that formal education systems reinforce shared meanings, symbols, and values. For example, students may be outspoken and participative in a classroom simply because they believe that is how any good student should behave. Conversely, other students may be passive and non-participatory because of their cultural identity and related identity.

Even for the adults the transition to a new culture can have a negative impact. When communicating in their native language they may perceive themselves as reasonably

intelligent, socially-adept individuals who are sensitive to different socio-cultural mores. These assumptions are challenged, however, when conversing in their new second language. In this situation they may feel that their communication attempts will be evaluated according to uncertain or even unknown linguistic and socio-cultural standards. Thus there is a direct but dynamic relationship between individuals, their identity and the new social and cultural situation in which they find themselves.

Another example of this process is provided by Usborne and Taylor (2011, citing McAdams, 2006) who report that personal and cultural identities of migrant Americans, examined through their life stories, were shaped by social and cultural forces. They argue that these individuals' life stories, and by extension their personal identities, reflect much more than an individual's own efforts to make sense of his or her life. Again citing McAdams, Usborne and Taylor suggest that these stories actually reflect the social norms, gender stereotypes, historical events, and cultural assumptions stemming from the social world of the participants.

Thus, it is apparent that a clear cultural identity serves as the psychological basis on which a personal identity is constructed (Adams & Markus, 2001; Hammack, 2008; Schwartz et al., 2008; Taylor 1997, 2002). Further one's cultural identity provides the comparative mechanism by which an individual can construct a coherent sense of personal identity and, by extension, experience positive self-esteem and well-being.

For many migrant students, learning to speak English is part of their transition into the new cultural context and contributes to reconstruction of their cultural identity. When language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, they are constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world (Pierce, 1995). Thus an 'investment' in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own social identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space.

The notion of investment conceives of the language learner, not as a historical and one-dimensional individual, but rather as having a complex cultural and social history and multiple desires. In her studies in Canada, Pierce found that students understand social identity as their relationship to their social world, how that relationship was socially and historically constructed across time and space, and how they understand what possibilities

were available for their future (Pierce, 1995). This is in accord with West's (1992) suggestion that migrant students' cultural and social identity desires include the desire for recognition, affiliation, security and safety.

Norton Peirce (1995) observes that second language acquisition (SLA) theorists have struggled to conceptualise the relationship between the language learner and the social world because they have not developed a comprehensive theory of social identity which integrates the language learner and the language learning context. She maintains that SLA theorists have not adequately addressed how relations of power affect interaction between language learners and target language speakers. To address the misconceptions about the individual in SLA theory, she suggests the need to reconceptualise, drawing on the poststructuralist concept of social identity as multiple, a site of struggle and subject to change. She also suggests that identity must be understood with reference to larger, and frequently inequitable social structures which are reproduced within day-to-day social interactions. This is further supported in the literature by Bourdieu (cited in Hinkel, 2005) and Ibrahim, 1999) who argue that language has never been just an instrument of communication; it is also where power is formed and performed, based on race, gender, sexuality, and social-class identity.

Bourdieu's writing in particular concurs with this. He suggests that if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which will increase their value in the social world. Learners will expect or hope to have a good return on their investment in the target language — a return that will give them access to the privileges of target language speakers. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity. In this regard, studies have provided convincing evidence that language learning is a cultural and social practice that engages the identities of learners in complex and sometimes contradictory ways.

If learners' cultural communities are best understood in the context of their investments in the target language, what are the implications for classroom teaching? How can teachers address the needs of learners in classrooms in which there may be over thirty learners, each with his or her investments, histories and desires for the future? Ibrahim (1999) strongly suggests that it is important to ensure that migrant students understand what investments they are making and what roles, if any, race, desire, and identification have in the process of learning. Ibrahim believes that it would be more fruitful for ESL pedagogy and that the nature of SLA would be

better understood if both were located within such a sociocultural context. It is, therefore, important to understand the expectations that learners have of their language classes and the kind of curriculum they might find most useful as they acculturate into their new community. It is the aim of the current study to address this.

2.5 Culture Shock

A major problem in understanding cultural adjustment is that the approaches of various investigators have been so divergent that it is difficult to either interrelate their findings or to develop any consistencies among the factors deemed relevant to intercultural adjustment (Brein & David, 1971). However, according to a number of authors, of all the factors that affect the cultural adjustment process of students, one of the most significant is something they labelled as ‘culture shock’ (Gullahorn and Gullahorn, 1963, 1966; Kim, 2005; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960; Sobre-Denton, 2008; Swallow, 2010). This term describes a natural reaction to drastic and often sudden changes in a person’s environment. It is a migrant’s range of emotional reactions related to cross-cultural adaptation. Oberg (1960) had earlier suggested that culture shock is exacerbated not only by being overwhelmed by major life changes, but by the need to establish patterns of behaviour often without the usual support systems, and is most prevalent amongst people who relocate overseas.

Swallow (2010) defines culture shock as the inevitable process that people go through and a recognised symptom of interacting in an environment that is different, a natural emotional reaction to the situation of being in a new (foreign) place and/or adapting to a new language. Further, culture shock is described by Swallow as disorientation experienced when suddenly subjected to an unfamiliar culture or way of life, characterised by periods of frustration, adjustment, and even depression. The term cross-cultural adaptation (or the process by which individuals who relocate to an unfamiliar socio-cultural environment strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal and functional relationship with that environment) has often been used interchangeably with the term culture shock (Sobre-Denton & Hart, 2008).

Although culture shock is most often attributed to negative consequences, some research has shown that it may set in motion a manic defence leading to greater achievements (Cheng, Leong & Geist, 1993). The cultural change may be seen to encourage self-development and personal growth, with the eventual adaptation to a new environment being rewarding, particularly as the person begins to appreciate differences in other cultures.

This seems to suggest that not all people will experience the same symptoms of culture shock, and the severity and adjustment time will vary (Anderson, 1994; Cheng, Leong & Geist, 1993). Zapf (1991, 2007) found that the feeling of culture shock sets in after the first few weeks of arriving in a new place. He also found that culture shock can be both a psychological and a physiological experience. For instance some individuals show symptoms that stem from isolation which, in turn, occur as a result of feeling they lack support (often from systems that were previously accessible). The affective and physiological impact of the transition process on migrants has been well researched and documented in literature (see for example Adler, 1975; Berry, 1980, 2005; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Kashmina & Loh, 2006; Yang, Noels & Saumure, 2006).

Poyrazli and Lopez (2007) found that culture shock was very prevalent amongst students studying abroad, with the most common symptom being described as 'homesickness'. In further research, they established a link between homesickness and an individual's behaviour and physical and psychological well-being, noting that students who were homesick received low scores on adaptation to the college environment and higher scores on physical complaints, anxiety, and absentmindedness. Hall (1959) and Smalley (1963) maintain that a closed mind and ethnocentrism may limit the attainment of effective overseas adjustment, and that the more effective coping mechanisms in adjustment consist of rational attitudes, universalistic tendencies, open-mindedness, and flexibility.

This viewpoint is supported in other literature (for example Gardner, 1962; Lundstedt, 1963). It was suggested that a 'universal communicator' will have the least difficulty in adjusting to another country. The universal communicator was described as having a well-integrated personality, a more moderate value system that was accepting of universal cultural viewpoints, and a high degree of sensitivity toward others. These descriptions of the potentially good adjuster as described by Lundstedt and Gardner have gained traction in the literature over the years, despite criticism that these descriptions are based primarily upon face validity rather than empirical data (Brein & David, 1971). Even so one factor that underpins such studies is the agreement that a prerequisite to establishing effective social relationships is the development of understanding. Communication is considered as being crucial to the development of such understanding. Determining which aspects of understanding and communication are vital to ARB students is clearly important and is a focus of the current study.

2.5.1 Stages of Culture Shock

Just as culture shock is a stage in the cross-cultural adaptation process, there are also several stages of culture shock. These have been described as ranging from between four and ten stages (see amongst others Baker, 1992; Gillahorn & Gillahorn, 1966; Rhinesmith, cited in Swallow, 2010; Zapf, 1991; Mumford, 1998; Smalley, 1963; Swallow, 2010). For instance, Oberg (1960) describes a model of five stages of culture adaptation which include the Honey moon period, Culture shock, Initial adjustment, Mental isolation and Acceptance. Similarly, Swallow (2010) proposes five classic stages of culture shock:

(a) Stage One is a period of incubation, during which time individuals may feel highly elated. They may initially find conditions in the new context comfortable, the sights intriguing, the hosts courteous, and expectations for the future positive.

(b) Stage Two is a period of crisis resulting from the genuine difficulties that a person may begin to encounter in a different culture. The activities of daily living that had been previously taken for granted become insurmountable problems. The migrant may only associate with other migrants and criticise the host country and its people.

(c) Stage 3 is a period of recovery, whereby the individual migrant begins to understand some of the cues of the host culture. S/he regains their sense of humour, and may even imagine themselves an authority on the host culture.

(d) Stage 4 is the complete or nearly complete period of recovery in which the individual accepts the host culture. Although s/he may not be overly enthusiastic about the country, s/he at least is finally able to enjoy their experiences.

(e) Stage 5 is a period when the individual begins to feel their usual self again. S/he embraces the new culture and sees everything in a new, yet realistic light. Things start to become enjoyable. S/he feels comfortable, confident, and able to make decisions based on their own preferences and values. They no longer feel alone and isolated and understand and appreciate the differences and similarities of both their own and the new culture. In other words, they start to feel at home.

Although complete avoidance of culture shock is unlikely, there are actions that can be undertaken to prepare the individual for the possible effects of culture shock (Anderson,

1994). These actions will vary according to the characteristics of the individual involved and according to their stage of adjustment. Several things have been shown to reduce the severity of symptoms and have assisted the individual in adjusting to the new environment. For example, the more the individual is prepared for the cultural change, the better they deal with it (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004; Zapf, 1991).

Indeed there is wide agreement among scholars that experience reduces the effects of culture shock: 'The better travelled and experienced in adapting to new surroundings a person is, the easier it is to overcome symptoms of culture shock' (Anderson, 1994, p. 293-328). Further, once the skills needed to adjust have been learnt, they can then be applied to similar situations and, as a consequence, the individual can settle into their new environment. In the case of students, such support will allow them to begin to perform better in the classroom (Anderson, 1994). Clearly there is a pedagogical need for the curriculum to assist students in this way. In order to do this, therefore, it is first necessary to determine the perceptions of the stakeholders and particularly the students. Hence, the current study seeks to address this goal.

2.5.2 ARB Students and Anxiety

Whilst undergoing culture shock, an individual may experience anxiety and undergo feelings of surprise, disorientation and confusion as they attempt to operate within their new environment (Pantelidou & Craig, 2006). Moreover such a change can cause distress, not only psychologically but also physically. For example, Cheng, Leong & Geist (1993) found that in response to a new environment physical changes may also occur, such as hypersomnia or insomnia, variation in appetite, psychosomatic illnesses (e.g., headaches, back pain, stomach aches etc.) and all accompanying psychological effects. Other psychological symptoms have been found to include loneliness, boredom, frequent calls home, irritability and sometimes even hostility. There may also be social withdrawal, giving way to fears concerning security and safety within the home.

Spielberger (1983) found that sometimes these internalised reactions to culture shock may develop into anxiety: a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. He further observed that:

... not only is it intuitive to many people that anxiety negatively influences language learning, it is logical because anxiety has been found to interfere with many types of

learning and has been one of the most highly examined variables in all of psychology and education. (p. 112)

Typically, the anxiety stemming from cultural shock can be differentiated from other anxiety states. It is important that it be specifically distinguished from trait anxiety which is conceptualised as a relatively stable personality characteristic. Unlike trait anxiety, culture shock is state anxiety because it occurs in response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus, and in the case of the current research, the new educational and cultural context for ARB students in Australia.

Macintyre and Gardner (1991) use the term situation-specific anxiety to emphasise the persistent and multi-faceted nature of some anxieties related to acculturation. They argue that part of acculturation includes learning to speak another language. In contrast, Horwitz and Young (1991) proposed that anxiety itself is a major obstacle to be overcome in this process of language acquisition. Perhaps as a direct consequence of this, past approaches to foreign language teaching, such as community language learning and suggestopedia, were explicit attempts directed at reducing learner anxiety.

Studies in this area of language learning have found that attempts to quantify the effects of anxiety have yielded mixed results. For instance Chastain (1975) and Kleinmann (1977) found a negative relationship between anxiety and second language achievement, although several other studies found no relationship. In fact, positive relationships between anxiety and second language achievement have been identified. For example, Khawaka and Dempsey (2007) explored psychological distress in international university students in Australian tertiary institutions and found no relation between proficiency and distress. Further, they argued that as inter-cultural contact was becoming more common place, the lack of English language proficiency may not be as detrimental to mental health as it once had been assumed to be.

In an earlier review of literature Scovel (1978) indicated that previous scholars were unable to establish a clear-cut relationship between anxiety and overall foreign language achievement, attributing the discrepant findings at least in part to the inconsistency of anxiety measures used at the time, and concluding: 'It is perhaps immature to relate it (anxiety) to the global and comprehensive task of language acquisition' (p. 132). However, Curan (1976) and Stevik (1980) disagreed and discuss in detail the defensive position imposed on the learner by

most language teaching methods, which inevitably left students learning a second language with a degree of anxiety. Even so, Gardner and McIntyre (1993, p. 9) remain unconvinced of the relationship between ‘personality variables’ and language achievement.

Although anxiety may not play a direct role in second language acquisition, it can be part of the acculturation process and therefore it is important for educators to explore ways that students may be helped to overcome this. This is because for refugees, the transition from one country to another often encompasses changes in every aspect of daily life. One way could be the design of strong educational programs inclusive of educational staff, communities and families, as these have been shown to increase psychosocial well-being and educational outcomes for students from refugee backgrounds (Earnest & Mori, 2010).

ARB students are particularly vulnerable to state anxiety, as the legacy of trauma is over and above the already complex and cumbersome acculturation and adjustment process. Several studies in the literature confirm that anxiety is one of multiple stressors that impact refugee children in resettlement (see for example Angel et al., 2001; Howard & Hodes, 2000; Rousseau et al. 1996). Acculturative stress and anxiety places asylum-seeking and refugee youth at greater psychological risk and, in turn, results in difficulties at school and in language acquisition (Joyce, Earnest, Mori & Silvagni, 2010). Felsman, Leong, Johnson, and Felsman (1990), in their study of refugee children and adolescents who have experienced war, also report high levels of depression and anxiety. Whether this is the case with ARB students in WA is also a focus of this study.

2.6 ARB Students and Acculturation

ARB children of school age may have difficulty in their transition into the WA education system (Haig & Oliver, 2007). This is because they have to undergo an adjustment process—adapting from being in their familiar cultural environments to the new conditions in WA. Haig and Oliver posit that this journey can be very challenging both for the students themselves and for everyone involved in their care and support. For these students, school and other educational settings represent the main areas of contact and acculturation, and as a result, school adjustment becomes a primary task.

While relocation to a new country (whether forced or voluntary) can be a positive and optimistic time for immigrant families, it can also represent a difficult period as members of the family, particularly the children, work to adjust to the socio-cultural differences. This

process of adjustment following immigration is typically referred to as acculturation and is defined as the changes that take place when two cultures come into continuous first-hand contact (Berry, 2003; Costigan & Koryzma, 2010, 2011). A more illustrative description of acculturation as ‘the gradual adaptation to the target culture without necessarily forsaking one’s native identity’ was provided by Schumann in 1976 (p29). He proposed this description as a model both for adults entering a new culture and for children in a bilingual program in public schools.

According to Schumann (1976), what happens when someone tries to adjust to a new workplace, a new school, or a new home can vary widely, depending on a whole set of circumstances. However, he asserted that cross-cultural adaptation involves more than simply ‘making the unfamiliar familiar’. For instance, the school-aged migrant student must also accept the unfamiliar values and deal with the absence of people, places, and things back home. The effects on the individual can be ‘cataclysmic, a minor disruption, or so routine as to go unnoticed’ (Schumann 1976, p. 30). It involves both the person’s own feelings of adequacy or inadequacy and the appropriateness of his or her behaviour in the new cultural context (Torbiorn, cited in Grove, 1985). This adaptation or adjustment, Schumann argued, means constantly responding to the demands the environment makes on us and, for students in particular, the demands that schools, teachers and the curriculum places on them.

Some migrant groups in Australia, like the Sudanese, often have some form of family support (Poppit & Frey, 2007). In their study of Sudanese families in Australia, Poppit and Frey found, however, that within the context of acculturation, parental support poses a paradox in that it causes acculturation-specific stress whilst providing a sense of family security and ethnic belonging. Further, as noted by Oliver, Haig and Grote (2009), there is a difference in the pace of acculturation for parents and their school-going children. This is because acculturation occurs faster in public settings than in private settings where a host of other coping strategies might be employed. At the same time, however, this creates another level of difficulty for students struggling to adjust to the new Australian education and cultural context.

Operating in cross-cultural settings can present many demands to the newly arrived migrant. These demands may include challenges to beliefs and values, the discovery that interpersonal skills are inadequate to deal with a new situation, and the sudden discovery of being a

minority in the new culture (SIETAR,² 2009). Further, Anderson (1994) argues that the burden for adapting to a new culture falls on the individual immigrants as they must choose how to respond and, in doing so, position themselves for their own adjustment.

Berry (2005) concurs, describing acculturation as the dual process of cultural and psychological change that is brought about due to contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. He notes that at the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavioural repertoire, with the cultural and psychological changes occurring over a long period, in some instances taking years, generations and sometimes centuries. Berry also made the key observation that during acculturation the two groups involved are engaged in intercultural contact, and as such there is potential for conflict. As a consequence, there is need for negotiated outcomes to achieve common ground. When considering acculturation it is important that it is distinguished from culture change, which is one aspect of assimilation (although some have argued that this also may be a phase of acculturation).

Several models have been suggested to explain the process of acculturation. According to Schumann (1976a), a number of acculturation models are based on the assumption that the essential or most important factor affecting acculturation is the 'difference' or 'social distance' between the two cultures, that is, the differences between the individual group and the target culture or language group. Specifically, where there is congruence between the two groups the 'social distance' between them is considered minimal, which in turn facilitates the 'acculturation'. This was supported in the early studies by Brein and David (1971) and Pool (1965) who found that among foreign students to the United States, those coming from countries that are relatively similar to the United States (other Western nations) differ in their adjustment patterns from those students from countries less similar to the United States (for example, Asian or non-Western nations). The corollary of this is that when the social distance is greater, such as in the case of ARB students in Australia, acculturation is expected to be more difficult.

In more recent literature there has been some criticism of the social distance theory; see, for example Berry (2005), who argues that this view does not adequately address the concept of psychological acculturation which deals with pressures of the external culture and the changing culture on an individual who is a participant in a culture contact situation. On this

² Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research

basis, therefore, the cultural and psychological levels of acculturation are recognised as distinct. Furthermore, he observed that not every individual enters into or participates in a new culture or changes in the same way; there are vast differences in psychological acculturation, even amongst individuals in the same acculturative context. In summary, while acculturation is occurring at group level, psychologically, individuals participate at various degree levels and seek different goals from this contact.

Berry's findings highlight the problems that current support programs designed to assist successful acculturation face; that is, not everyone undergoes cultural adjustment in the same way. In fact, some migrants do not seek to acculturate (Anderson, 1994; Oberg, 1960). In addition to individual differences, the language background of the learners can impact on the acculturation process.

The need for successful acculturation support is even greater when it comes to second language communication. The complex and non-spontaneous mental operations that are required in order to communicate mean that for second language learners the target language is likely to challenge their self-concept as competent communicators and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear, or even panic. As Guiora (1983, p.8) states, language learning itself is 'a profoundly unsettling psychological proposition' because it directly threatens an individual's self-concept and world view. Therefore there is a need to explore how best to support those undergoing acculturation and second language learning – in this case, ARB students in the WA school context. The challenge in this context is to ensure that African migrant students are well supported and that their experience is not only a positive one, but one that facilitates successful acculturation and language learning.

2.6.1 Models of Acculturation

To help understand the process of acculturation, several authors have proposed various models, which in many ways have parallels to the stages of culture shock (as described in Section 2.4). For example, some of the first researchers in the area proposed the idea of the 'U' curve as a model of cross-cultural adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955; Sewell & Davidsen, 1956). This model, which is familiar to many staff and volunteers who run orientation programs, suggests that individuals go through an adjustment cycle that begins with an initial 'high' level of satisfaction (sometimes called the honeymoon), followed by a low period due

to the difficulties of adaptation, and ending again on a high note as the person adjusts to the new culture.

It is suggested that researchers initially reported only a U curve, because the studies were undertaken on the sojourners' adjustment (for example, an international student) within host cultures (see amongst others Adler, 1975; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Hottola, 2004; Pederson, 1995; Ward, 2004). In contrast others have suggested a W-curve function may be a more comprehensive description of the adjustment process (Brein & David, 1971). According to Sobre-Denton and Hart (2008) the W curve of adjustment seems to have been initially described by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963, 1966), who suggest that the W curve is basically an extension of the single-U curve to a double-U curve (that is, UU curve). It encompasses both the sojourner's adaptation to a foreign culture and his readjustment to his home culture, since the person may go through a second "U" curve upon returning home.

Despite this, more recently Sobre-Denton and Hart (2008) observe that although being first proposed over twenty years ago, the U-curve function is still well supported in existing literature and can be applied to a variety of cohorts. At the same time it must be acknowledged that cultural adjustment is a 'complex, cyclical, and recursive process of overcoming obstacles and solving problems in present-environment transactions' (Anderson, 1994, p. 294). He also argues that the adaptation process is both more complex and more common than the old models have led us to believe because while the process involves our intellect, our emotions, and the choices we make in our behaviours, it influences us cognitively, affectively and behaviourally.

To further explain this, Anderson describes a cultural adaptation continuum. On this continuum he observes that because cross-cultural adjustment is a process, there are many points along the continuum of adjustment, ranging from those students who simply cannot adjust to those who are completely participating in the new culture. He proposed the following descriptors to advance his views:

(a) Early Returnees: Those who go home early because of their inability to adapt to the new culture (although in the current context it must be noted that this is not possible for refugees).

(b) Escapers: Those who try constantly to avoid involvement with the new culture.

(c) Time Servers: Those who have resigned themselves to the problems they face and are merely enduring (serving time) until they are able to return home (although again this is not possible for refugees).

(d) Beavers: Those who keep themselves busy in a variety of tasks so that they avoid thinking too much about the implications of adjusting to the new cultures.

(e) Adjusters: Those who are in the process of trying to adjust and are still actively working on their coping strategies.

(f) Participators: Those who have made the shift to participation in all aspects of the new culture.

As indicated, for refugees the option of returning home is not available, and therefore these descriptors are not totally applicable to ARB students. In response to questions raised by educators about how they could determine when a student has made the successful leap to the ‘participators’ end of the adjustment continuum, Anderson suggested that the students themselves will begin to recognise that they have passed the most difficult part when their stress levels and anxiety have started to decrease.

It is clear that a key aspect of this process of adjustment requires students to make changes in their attitudes, behaviour and social norms in order to fit into their new study environment. To assist African migrant children face and overcome this hurdle it is incumbent upon educators and support persons to fully understand challenges that such students face in their cultural adjustment. At the same time, these students are reliant on the curriculum to provide them with the direction for their learning. Thus there is a need to explore how well it supports these students in the educational and cultural journey they need to make. It is one aim of the current study to explore this in the WA educational context.

2.6.2 Acculturation and Language Learning

There is no doubt that developing English skills is essential if the ARB children are to access education in Australia (Coventry, Guerra, McKenzie & Pinkey, 2002). At the same time ESL teachers and foreign language teachers have, for some time, recognised the need to teach the way of life of the host country to language learners (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). This has occurred with growing recognition of the need both to understand the immigrant’s way of life

and to develop their critical awareness of the host country's culture. This awareness is vital to help overcome problems related to small day-to-day issues as well as to more broad and abstract matters (Cropley, 1983). In order for this to be achieved there is a need to first document the type of misunderstandings that can occur. The misunderstandings between Africans and Australians and how they impact on ARB learning is another focus of the current study.

There are several reasons why language and culture are inseparably connected (Buttjes, 1990; Ochs and Schieffelin, 1984; Peters & Boggs, cited in Barnard & Torres-Guzman; Poyatos, 1985). The process of becoming a competent member of society is realised through exchanges of language in particular social situations: every society orchestrates the ways in which children participate in particular situations, and this, in turn, affects the form, the function and the content of children's utterances. Thus the native speaker, in addition to language, acquires the paralinguistic patterns and the kinesics of his or her culture.

It is widely acknowledged in the ESL field that culture and language cannot be considered separate entities (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). The language we speak is directly related to the cultural context in which we communicate. However, during the process of learning of a second language, learners use their cultural background as their default setting, and any additional languages they acquire will be viewed through this cultural prism (Education Alliance, 2002). Learners whose life experiences include migration, either voluntarily or as a refugee, have to deal with many things that will affect, to varying degrees, their ability to participate in the curriculum and school generally (Burke, 1990). Therefore, it is important to recognise that experiences associated with migration and cross-cultural adaptation will have an impact, not only on their school life, but more generally on their language learning.

Furthermore, Byram (1998) insists that to ease this burden it is imperative that if our goal is communicative competence, we must teach students the second language culture in our classes: the educational value of doing so in second language education is immense.

There are, in fact, historical reasons for discourse-based culture as a language and language as a cultural pedagogy (Kramsch, Cain, Murphy & Lejeune, 1996). Firstly, though culture is implicit in what we teach, to assume that those who are learning the language in our classes are also learning the cultural knowledge and skills required to be competent second language speakers denies the complexity of the relationship between culture, language learning and

communication. Secondly, we should include culture in our curriculum in an intentional manner in order to avoid stereotyping and other pitfalls (Nemni, 1992). Thirdly, including culture in our second language curriculum enables teachers to do a better job teaching culture and to be more accountable to students for the culture learning that occurs in our classrooms. Further, Savvidou (2002) adds that with an enhanced level of cultural awareness, EFL teachers may wish to question their approach to language teaching that reflects Western cultural values, and adopt and develop strategies that build upon a student's cultural and educational background, along with the design and selection of culturally appropriate materials.

In summary, Swiderski (1993) concludes that culture is not learned as language, yet language is not learned until culture is learned. At the same time culture remains an integral part of language learning and it must also acknowledge the related beliefs, values and behaviours encapsulated within it (Byram 1990; Roberts, 1994). It should be noted, however, that Bernat (2003) does sound a cautioning note about the validity and origins of some beliefs — suggesting some could even be termed 'myths'.

In addition to the impact of culture there is wide agreement in the literature that in the process of language learning an individual is affected by a number of variables, including those from the affective domain (Krashan, 1981; Naiman et al., 1978; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Schumann, 1978). This is particularly pertinent in the case of those who have to learn a new and second language as part of their acculturation. These affective variables include such things as motivation, learner expectation, personality and socio-cultural experience (Gardner & Macintyre, 1992; Skehan, 1989). Chomsky (1959) had earlier proposed that individuals are born with a language acquisition device which provides essential assistance in the learning process. However, Chomsky's work related to first language acquisition and not to learners of an additional language.

For example, it is suggested that there is a dynamic relationship between the learner's motivation and his or her specific attitudes to the target language and its speakers, and the manner in which learners approach and conduct their learning, and hence their ultimate language learning (LL) success (Stern, 1985; Skehan, 1989). Similarly, it is assumed that the learner's attitudes towards the language learner's community determine how motivated (or invested) the language learner is (Gardner & Lambert, 1972).

As previously indicated, the desire to invest in the target language has been found to increase immigrants' favourable disposition to the new culture. In addition, other researchers have found that higher orientation to the new culture is associated with better adjustment (see for example Birman & Taylor-Ritzler, 2007; Ryder, Alden, & Paulhus, 2000; Takeuchi et al., 2002). Higher levels of orientation toward the new culture may be associated with more positive psychological adjustment due to better command of the English language, which may enable immigrants to participate more fully in their new community (Costigan & Koryzma, 2010, 2011).

Age is another factor that affects acculturation and language learning. Studies have consistently shown that while adults are also affected by new surroundings, they are better able to adjust and adapt (Burke, 2001). In terms of language learning, their initial development is also more rapid than children. Children, on the other hand, develop their second language more slowly but ultimately achieve greater levels of competence (Long, 1990, 2007).

In terms of culture, immigrant children spend a significant amount of their lives immersed in other cultures and are influenced by these cultures. Since they are still growing, these experiences can alter their blueprint (Britten, 2001) or their perceptions. These students belong to a 'Third Culture' which is a term that defines children who live or have lived and been affected by two different cultures (usually from their country of origin and the country of residence) and yet do not belong completely to either of them (Pollock & Van Reken, 1999, 2001, 2009).

This third culture phenomenon results in this special group of children having a somewhat altered cultural lens for viewing their second language. Because they spend developmental years in a different cultural environment than their parents, they are socialised differently than their parents while, at the same time, they do not live like local children either because their own culture, language and perspectives are still influenced by their home environment (Britten, 2001). Unfortunately, according to Copley (1983), for these immigrant students the homeland is merely a cultural heritage and provides a broad framework rather than detailed guidelines for the conduct of everyday life.

It is imperative for teachers to be aware of the cultural biases that they themselves bring to their class (Sears, 2006) as difficulties can arise when the students' cultural influences are not

clearly defined, resulting in teachers being unsure of how the child will react or feel about situations, materials or simply classroom work itself. It is crucial, therefore, for ESL teachers to be aware of how language and culture interact so they can help their students make sense of how they relate to each other verbally and non-verbally (Barraja-Rohan, 2003; Lo Bianco & Crozet, 2003).

In some instances, teachers may not be aware that students may be undergoing a transition and adjustment process where they are making changes in their attitudes, behaviour and social norms in order to fit into their new study environment in WA. This study, therefore, seeks to ascertain the perceptions of ARB students regarding teaching in WA schools and about the ESL curriculum more generally, and their transition into WA schools. With greater understanding of their cultural adjustment, support services will be better placed to assist their integration.

2.7 Summary

This chapter reviews existing literature pertaining to African refugee students. Firstly, it reveals new challenges to Australian teachers which have arisen mainly due to the interrupted education and/or low levels of literacy and English language proficiency of ARB students in WA. This problem is compounded by the impact of culture and cultural differences on their learning. The chapter explores the concept of cultural identity which is particularly pertinent to ARB students who must develop a new identity within the Australian context. Because of their close links to this, the effects of culture shock, anxiety and their cultural adjustment process are described. A picture emerges showing that ARB children of school age often have difficulty in their transition into the WA education system. Consequently, the chapter highlights the need to explore the ARB students' perceptions about their adaptation socially, culturally and educationally in WA, and in what ways schooling and the curriculum in particular support this. Therefore the current research seeks to answer the question:

2.8. Research Question

What are the perceptions of ARB students about the ESL Curriculum, their schooling in WA and their adjustment to the Australian cultural context? To address this question a Conceptual Framework was designed See following Fig 1:

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THIS RESEARCH STUDY

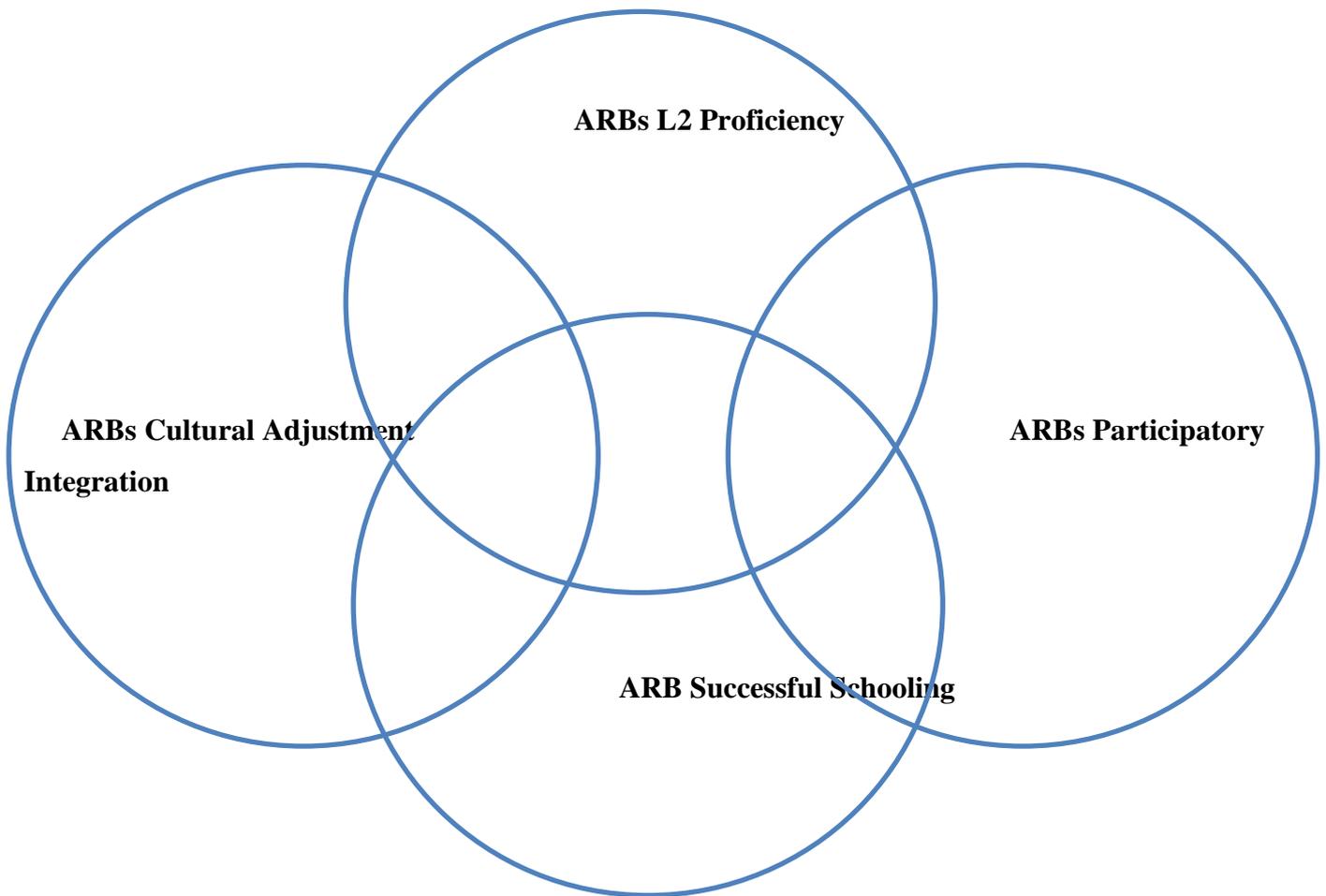


Fig. 1

Fig. 3 shows the conceptual framework of this study. In the framework, the overlapping circles indicate the relationships of the four pillars which underpin the study: **Cultural Adjustment, Second Language Proficiency, Participatory Integration** and the **Successful Schooling** of the ARBs in WA. From the current literature it is apparent that there is an interplay of these four factors so that they work in concert facilitating cultural adjustment, integration and L2 proficiency (in this case English). Upon arrival, English proficiency might appear to be the priority, but it also appears that cultural adjustment is also vital if ARB students are to integrate and achieve success in their schooling in Australia. In fact, it appears that as the students become more adjusted, they may be better placed to develop their L2 proficiency and to successfully integrate into school and society.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Approach

This chapter provides a description of the methodology and research design used in this investigation into the perceptions of a group of refugee students in a unique and culturally complex context. In order to gain a holistic picture of the students' perceptions, this research adopted a qualitative approach. The initial phase of the research involved focus group interviews. These were followed by classroom observations, enabling the researcher to observe the students in their classroom settings, in order to verify some of the assertions made by them during those focus group interviews. The final phase of the data collection process involved individual interviews with selected participants. The individual interviews were necessary to assist in interpreting the results of the focus groups and classroom observations. Once the data was collected, a thematic data analysis was undertaken.

As this is a study of perceptions, a qualitative approach was deemed to be the most appropriate. Qualitative researchers 'are more concerned to understand individuals' perceptions of the world, seeking insights rather than statistical perceptions of the world' (Bell, 2005, p. 7). This approach enabled the researcher to elicit the African students' assumptions and expectations with a degree of validity, telling us about what is supposed to be measured and described. Moreover, this approach enabled participants to become critically aware of, and self-assess, the relevance of their views/assumptions when engaging in their learning. In addition, the use of a qualitative design allowed for a primary focus on exploring issues related to the emerging themes. It also facilitated the clarification of such themes in later stages of the research.

3.2 Participants

180 African Background students aged 13 to 18 years were selected to participate in this study. This age group was selected to ensure the participants were at an age and English proficiency level where they could comfortably proffer and articulate their perceptions. Therefore, no interpreters were required because the participants were chosen because they had a sufficient level of proficiency of English language. In addition, the researcher's background in teaching English to speakers of other languages/dialects was very helpful to the process of identifying participants and engaging them well enough in the discussion to capture their meaning. Further, enough time was allocated to allow participants to articulate their ideas in a coherent and understandable manner. In addition, the focus group procedure enabled peers to help each other if they did experience difficulties in expressing their thoughts in English.

The Participants were chosen from Intensive English Centers (IEC) through personal contact, or through staff from district offices of the WA Department of Education (DOE). This recruitment enabled a wide range of experiences, biases and/or assumptions to be drawn out from African students in Perth. Where possible, respondents were selected according to their various stages of ESL proficiency. Thus the participant selection took the form of non-probability purposive sampling (Polit & Hunglar, 1999); that is, the respondents were selected in a non-random way so that the most useful information could be elicited. The age distribution of the students who took part in the two phases of the study is shown in the table below.

Table 2: Age distribution of Participants

Age of Students	Number of
13	36
14	24
15	25
16	36
17	39
18	20
Total	180

As illustrated above, the ages ranged from 13 through to 18 years of age, with a roughly equivalent distribution of each age group. 70 students came from intensive English centers (IECs) located in schools south of the Swan River, and 60 students came from schools in the north. 60 percent of the total number of students had spent at least a year and a half or more

in the IECs and were now attending mainstream English classes in the same school. Overall, the study comprised 85% students from government schools and 15% from private schools.

The schools where the participants attended were selected due to their high African student population numbers and their location in suburbs that were populated by a large number of refugee migrants. These were also schools in which the principal, and more importantly, the ESL teachers were willing to be involved in the study. Note that two of the schools involved were private Catholic colleges. Four of the schools involved in the study were senior campuses that cater for teenage to adult school students and offer a learning environment especially focused on each student's individual needs. 40% of the participants were drawn from these campuses.

3.3 Procedure

To begin the study, the necessary ethics permission was sought and obtained from the Ethics Committees of Edith Cowan and Curtin Universities and from the Department of Education (DOE) of WA. Further, because the research involved focus groups, classroom observations and one-on-one interviews — data collection activities that require more than casual interaction with students — individual informed consent was sought, in addition to institutional-level support for the study. To meet this requirement, consent letters were sent to school administrators and/or site managers, classroom teachers, parents and/or guardians, as well as the students themselves (See Appendices 1 to 8).

The letters to participants informed them of: the purpose of the research; what was expected from the research participants; the amount of time likely to be required for participation; expected risks and benefits, including psychological and social; and the fact that participation was voluntary and that one could withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions. Further, they were informed how confidentiality would be maintained, as well as of the name or contact information of the local chief investigator to be contacted for questions or problems related to the research, and the name and contact information of an appropriate person to contact with questions about one's rights as a research participant (in this case, the supervisors overseeing the research). Once individual consent was obtained from all the participants, the three stages of data collection were conducted, commencing with the focus group interviews.

3.3.1 Data Collection

As indicated, the data were collected by way of focus groups, classroom observations and individual interviews. This was undertaken in three phases. Firstly, 130 students, male and female, aged between 13 and 18 years of age were recruited from six IECs in Perth, and invited to participate in focus groups interviews. Each focus group consisted of at least 10 students. The focus groups were conducted to develop a general understanding of the beliefs the students hold about the ESL curriculum. This was done to elicit their initial perceptions of their ESL programs, whether these programs were meeting their needs and if not how they thought the courses could be structured to address their concerns. In the focus groups the researcher also sought to ascertain whether the participants felt they had adjusted to the the new Australian culture and whether they attributed this to participation in the ESL course programs in place in WA. To facilitate this, a focus group schedule was developed with open ended guide questions and followed during discussions (see Appendix 9).

Next, three students from each focus group were shadowed for a term in a classroom environment to assess their adjustment to the new school culture, observe their interactions with teachers, other students, and the frequency and quality of participation in classroom activities. This stage was also important in that it allowed the researcher to confirm data gathered during the focus group meetings. To achieve this the classroom observations, which were conducted for an hour each week with each group of students, took the form of participant observation, that is, where a researcher participates in the daily life of a target individual, group or community, listening, observing, questioning and understanding (or trying to understand) the life of the individual or group concerned (Bell, 2005).

Generally, students who participated in the interviews were observed in the classroom to evaluate if their classroom behaviours were in line with their stated attitudes, experiences and behaviours. It was expected that students who had integrated well in the Australian cultural context would exhibit classroom behaviours that were consistent with higher ratings in the classroom behaviour observation scale. The researcher evaluated each of the interview participants with their classroom behaviour score. The results of the analysis of classroom observations were compared to the focus group results and then integrated in the findings of interviews and reported concurrently

To support these observations, a classroom observation checklist was used (see Appendix 10). Along with the data from the focus group discussions, this information was later used to inform the questions used in the individual interviews

Lastly, and on the basis of findings emerging from the focus discussion group and classroom observations, individual interviews were undertaken. This provided an opportunity for the individual volunteer interviewees drawn from the focus group participants to tell their ‘stories’ (in confidence) away from other students. In doing so, this allowed the researcher fuller and deeper exploration of the data obtained from the focus groups and the classroom observations and also to allow for the emergence of any additional relevant data (Kanu, 2008).

Efforts were made to make the students feel at ease and follow-up questions were used while allowing the storyteller to structure the conversation. To aid this, an interview schedule was used and practiced to ensure optimum interview data was obtained (See Appendix 11).

3.3.2 Instruments

As indicated, the respondents were required to respond to carefully structured, open-ended questions to elicit their perceptions of their schooling and their adjustment to the Australian cultural context. To support this and to aid consistency, a number of interview schedules were developed (see Appendices 9 and 11). These included a set of focus group guide questions and an individual interview schedule. In addition, a classroom observation checklist was developed and used.

3.4 Analysis

As previously described, a thematic approach to data analysis was employed in this research. In the first instance the students’ quotes were coded (see Appendix 12). Next, all the codes were categorised and grouped into themes (see Appendix 13). Key relationships and patterns were identified and coded in the data, which in turn were informed by the research questions and the theoretical and analytical frameworks of the study (as described in Chapter Two). Miles and Huberman (1994) describe such codes as ‘tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study’ (pp. 43-49). The coding allowed the ‘clustering’ of key issues in the study and preliminary conclusions based on this could be drawn (See Appendices 12/13 for an illustration of this process). This was an iterative process and issues arising from the focus group interviews and classroom

observations were verified in the third and final phase, namely the individual one-to one interviews.³ It was only after the final stage of the data analysis that conclusions were drawn. It is these themes that constitute the findings of this research study. These are explored in each of the following chapters and illustrated, where applicable, by case studies that were written up and developed based on the individual interviews.

³ Note, although individual interviews were intended to be oral, some students found it difficult to respond either because of their lack of confidence or because of the sensitive nature of their disclosures, and these individuals wrote their responses in the form of a narrative (for example, see Case Studies 1 and 2 on pages 52 and 68)

CHAPTER 4

Findings Overview

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an overview of the findings based on the data gathered during the focus group discussions, classroom observations, and individual interview phases of this research study. In order to adequately answer the research question, the results are presented thematically in four chapters according to the themes that emerged from the data. Each chapter presents a description of the results, an explanation of the results and evidence to support the findings. The first results chapter (Chapter Five) deals with the theme of Culture and Acculturation, and the second chapter (Chapter Six) focuses on those motivational factors driving the ARB students to learn English. The third findings chapter (Chapter Seven) details issues related to ARB students and their schooling and transition into WA schools, together with suggestions from students on how the curriculum could be improved. The fourth and final results chapter (Chapter Eight) presents issues of identity and the role of English in the construction of new ARB students' identities in the new cultural context in WA. A brief overview of these is provided below.

4.2 Culture and Acculturation

Chapter Five presents the perceptions of the ARB students about how they have settled in the Australian cultural context. It appears that most students were well on the way to crossing the cultural barrier and becoming part of the Australian community; however, the findings also suggest that this has been and continues to be a very difficult journey. This chapter further explores the issues related to the theme of culture and acculturation by examining background factors that may be having an impact on ARB student learning.

The second part of the chapter outlines concerns that the students have with regard to their integration into mainstream society. One of these issues is that of racism, and examples of such incidents are discussed. While some ARB students were concerned by these racist incidents, the majority did not believe that these issues, as raised in this chapter, are truly representative of the larger Australian community. The section also examines other individual factors and describes how these affect their progress/adjustment. Lastly, the chapter examines the students' views about the role of learning English in relation to their adjustment

and settlement in the Australian cultural context. It explores whether the students perceive a link between their successful acculturation and attending English classes. This is a key aspect of the current research study.

4.3 Motivation: Why Learn English?

Chapter Six examines the motivations of the ARB Students. Such awareness is vital if we are to understand their attitudes to and perceptions about learning English. The chapter takes into account the concerns as outlined in the previous chapter by the ARB students and focuses on the fact that the students remain strongly motivated to learn English irrespective of those concerns. The second part of the chapter reports on ARB and goal setting. In this section, goals set by these students for themselves are examined against relevant literature. The chapter also includes recounts by a number of students relating to school experiences in the first few days of school. These experiences, supplemented by other qualitative data, help build a picture of the common factors that shape their schooling and the investments ARB students are making in the Australian Education system.

4.4 ARB Students: Their Schooling and Transition into Schools

In the first part of Chapter Seven there is an outline of how the ARB students feel about the Australian classroom dynamics and how these are aiding or presenting barriers to their learning. Within the scope of the current study, these issues included classroom atmosphere, interaction with other students, and strategies teachers use to make ARB students welcome in the classroom whilst ensuring they understand lessons in spite of their limited English. This includes an account of those activities that most students felt assisted their learning of English during those first months in the intensive language centres.

Although the results indicate that overall the students are very happy and have settled well in the Australian education system, the chapter does explore the challenges facing students in ESL programs. To conclude the chapter, suggestions from the students on strategies to improve language programs in WA are outlined.

4.5 ARB Students: Issues of Identity and the Role of English

In light of the fact that most ARB students originate from or have lived in more than one country, this chapter highlights the struggles these students are experiencing in terms of their identity in their new cultural context in WA. This chapter achieves this by discussing related issues that include self-identity and identity crisis; religious and cultural identities; and what

the researcher calls the ‘burden of being black’ and a reflection about how this has affected ARB students. This chapter explores the evidence and shows that a number of ARB students are experiencing an identity crisis as a result of their migration to Australia. The second part of this chapter also discusses the factors contributing to the reluctance of ARB students to succeed academically in WA schools.

CHAPTER FIVE

Culture and Acculturation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter details the findings of this research study pertaining to the theme of culture and acculturation. What emerged from the data was that while African students report that they are relatively happy and have settled in the Australian cultural environment, they still do have concerns. These concerns include being accepted in the community, access to community facilities, the way other African students have reacted to their newfound freedom, background factors affecting their progress, survivor guilt, trauma triggers, experiences of acculturative stress and anxiety, as well as some isolated incidents of racism.

These findings are discussed in relation to existing literature. The first section (Section 5.2) discusses the settlement of students of African background in terms of their cultural background and their acculturation in Australian society. Background factors, specifically trauma triggers, affecting their academic progress are presented in the second part (Section 5.3). The third part (Section 5.4) details concerns over issues of racism. The last section (Section 5.5) provides a brief summary of the chapter.

5.2 Culture and Acculturation

In this section the terms ‘Culture’ and ‘Acculturation’ will be defined as they relate to the current study. This will be followed by a discussion of how the ARB students in this study have settled into the cultural context of Australia (Section 5.2.1), their response to the new freedom that is accorded to adolescents in Australia (Section 5.2.2), and the problems of access to community facilities (Section 5.2.3).

As indicated in Chapter Two, we live culturally, and culture is indexed in our everyday practices (Moll, 1990). For migrants there is a need to learn the culture of their new context. Refugees especially need to be acculturated so they can deal with their two cultures in a context where one is dominant. For the students in this study such a process has presented them with difficulties, particularly as they transition into the WA education system. The following is an account of this adjustment process as they have striven to adapt to their new cultural environment in Western Australia.

5.2.1 Settling into the Australian Community

Despite the potential problems for refugees, as outlined in the literature, evidence from the data collected in this study suggests that the majority of ARB students have settled well and are happy to be in their new environment. Even so, a considerable proportion of the participants found that crossing the cultural barrier in order to become active members of the Australian community has been very difficult, particularly because of their low English language proficiency. This is consistent with the findings of previous research, which indicates that the determining indicator of acculturation is most likely to be proficient language use (Clement, 1986).

Further, an analysis of the data indicates that the African students share the common view that developing their ability to speak English can facilitate their integration, not only in the school community, but in the mainstream Australian cultural context more generally. This was evident in Lana's⁴ response to a question about how she had settled in the Australian community:

Learning English helped make friends in the community which we could not have done without speaking the language, 'yes English classes helped us!'

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 1_jn)

Prior to their arrival, many students reported that they had felt anxious, and that on arrival this feeling had been compounded by their inability to converse in English at that time. This left them feeling detached, not only culturally, but also from their learning. They reported that they were unaware of what was happening in the classroom since they could not understand the language. This meant that initially they were unable to engage in purposeful learning. Moreover, according to a number of the students, this situation was not helped by the fact that they had very limited schooling or had never been in a classroom before arriving in Australia.

Since we learn English we have settled very much and very happy in Australia. Some of us only in school for about three or four years, we had had little schooling when we came here.

⁴ Here and throughout this thesis pseudonyms have been used.

But after a few years we are happy to settle now with many friends. We have free house for six months and free tuition....not like back home.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 2_an)

As can be seen from this quote, despite an initial sense of anxiety, many of the students are now optimistic about their futures and about being in Australia. They are also comforted by the fact that, unlike back in Africa, they do not have to be concerned about shelter for the night, security and about paying tuition for school.

However, settling in the community presents another problem for them. Because many of them had lived for one year or more in a refugee camp where 'normal' social practices were difficult to maintain, many felt disconnected or at the very least unpractised in a social sense. This feeling was exacerbated by being unsure about Australian society's expectations, including rules about social etiquette and discourse. In the end, it appears that they chose the safest way and the one least likely to offend, namely to sit and wait. The strategy here was to let the hosts make the first move. Eighteen-year-old Fiso summed it up by saying:

We are used to waiting, so we waited to see what they would do. Most neighbours no talk to us, depends on the neighbours of course! at first, even just talking to them ...we didn't know what to do...even how to approach them. Finally, some of them came over and brought things for us. They even helped us fix our house! At first we were surprised, but now that we know Australians we understand now.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 3_mh)

As is apparent in the quote above, African refugee students, upon learning some English and developing some confidence to ask, found to their relief that most Australians are happy to help.

When we could not turn on the gas at our house we went to the nice gentleman down the street. We said 'would you like to help us with the gas meter?' and he say 'yep, no worries!'

(Stage1-Group2, Student 4_sv)

This experience of initially feeling anxious is commonplace for many African refugee migrant families who leave behind their familiar settings and support systems and are thrust

into a new cultural context in Australia. Obviously, while learning language for acculturation was indeed difficult for African students, comments from the participants help illustrate that with language proficiency came knowledge of cultural norms and nuances of the host culture, and with this came successful integration.

Now we can speak much better English. Because of that we also know the polite way to ask for help. This has helped greatly to settle in the community, we even have Australians coming to our house for a traditional African meal, which makes my parents very happy.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 5_nj)

In addition to the language barrier, a number of students reported that they found their attempts to fit in impeded by cultural barriers such as different dress codes and diverse interests. For example, when invited to a beach or pool party, they did not always know how to dress appropriately. While some students did not mind adopting the new dress codes, some participants described how their parents strongly objected.

Another thing we have found difficult to accept is the way Australians dress to go to the beach, we will never be able to wear bikinis like that, my parents would 'freak out'. Some of my friends are doing it though, and their parents don't know what to do.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 6_mm)

Appropriate dress code is a particular problem in the senior campuses where students are often not required to wear uniform owing to an 'adult ethos' culture practised at these schools. This adult ethos culture is intended to prepare the young adult students for adult life, specifically the workplace. However, according to a sizeable number of the female participants, some of their peers have now taken advantage of this lack of school uniforms to dress inappropriately even when going to school.

Some of my friends are very disrespectful to their parents and teachers. For example, I know girls who dress appropriately when leaving home but instead of going straight to school they pass by their friends' houses and change into 'minis' and tight fitting clothes which they wear

to school. They even miss classes to show off their 'trendy' wear to boys and other girls. When they go home they follow the same routine or change in the toilets.

(Stage1-Focus Group2, Student 7_lj)

The issue of being disrespectful of parents and/or going against parental wishes is compounded by the difficulty African refugee background parents have in disciplining their children. As Haig and Oliver (2007) report, many parents feel powerless in Australia. They have been told they cannot spank their children and if they do the children will be taken away or they could be sent to jail. Some participants in this study reported that because most parents were unable to stop their children from going against their wishes in the Australian environment, their peers were taking advantage of this and doing things such as dressing inappropriately.

I born in Somalia and my religion am Muslim. I see some African Muslim girls from my country wearing tight-fitting clothes that reveal their figures. This is a disgrace, but their parents cannot do anything about it here in Australia.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 8_vb)

In addition to problems associated with dress code, another difficulty for the participants occurs because of the different interests of Australians and Africans. For example, most of the boys who participated in the interviews raised the issue of Australia's fixation with Australian Rules football (AFL).

Actually, what is this obsession Australians have with football (AFL) games? To connect with some friends we have to like what they like...but footy is hard to understand.

(Stage1-Focus Group2, Student 9_ts)

Initially when they heard talk of football they would get excited and volunteer to attend or participate under the assumption that it was soccer, the colonial legacy of the African continent. However, this was not the case, as they found themselves in an Australian Rules match.

For our outdoor educations sports activities we go to the gym every week. There at the gym we are told to get into two teams to play football. It is only when the game starts that we realise that it is not football (soccer) but Australian rules (AFL) football.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 10_tm)

Even the club alliances, as designated by certain colours, caused confusion for some of the students:

One day I wore a purple sports shirt to school and a member of the public approached and said: 'Geez the good lord ain't giving ya a break son; first a refugee and now a dockers fan!!' I didn't understand this but when I got to school and told my Australian friends and they explained what the old man meant and that the Fremantle Football Club had been doing really badly this year. They also explained the rivalry between this club and Eagles football club.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 9_nm)

With time, the ARB students report, they now understand the colour codes. However, such comments reflect the cultural as well as the language barriers they must overcome. The example shown above demonstrates how these students need to develop awareness about local sporting traditions, knowledge that is taken for granted by those who are Australian born. Teachers are well advised to be aware of the long journey these students must travel. They need to ensure that ESL students develop both their linguistic and cultural understanding. To do so ESL teachers need to work to make the hidden explicit (Oliver, Haig & Grote, 2009).

5.2.2 ARB Students and Australian Cultural 'Freedom'

While it appears that many of the students have coped well with their migration and acculturation into the Australian environment, there are indications that a number of them do encounter problems related to a particular aspect of Australian culture pertaining to adolescence, namely freedom. In fact a number reported feeling overwhelmed by this aspect of Australian society. Many of the participants reported that they are still struggling to cope with the 'freedom' and latitude given to adolescents in Australia. Coming from a very different cultural background, the sudden realisation that they were now able to make certain

life choices hitherto the preserve of their parents/guardians, while welcome to some, was very unsettling for the majority.

Since I was born I have led a very sheltered life. All my decisions have been made for me by parents, my auntie or uncle. They always knew what was best for us as kids. Now here in Australia I don't have these people in my life. Yes I do have my parents but they don't understand the Australian language or way of life, so I have to make all the decisions now. This worries me sometimes.

(Stage1-Focus Group2, Student 1_sv)

While the majority have treated this ability to make life choices with caution, it was reported that some ARB students continue to manipulate this to their advantage as a way of avoiding work at home and are purposely rude to teachers to get out of homework and, at times, classroom tasks. In some schools, the participants reported, such students are 'getting away with it' as they are excused by their teachers because of their refugee status and background. This was highlighted by the following comment by one of the female students:

Some of the boys think they are so smart now. Sometimes they even call the teacher dumb, and the teacher just looks at them and does nothing. In Africa this would never happen.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 2_sv)

Hewson (2006) provides another explanation for this behaviour. She sees it as the way migrant students seek acceptance by Australian born peers. Moreover, she suggests that accomplishing this by 'being naughty' was an easier goal to achieve than academic success, which is beyond them at the moment given their lack of proficiency in English and previous educational experience. Therefore, acting this way was not only easier, but allowed them to fit in and not stand out and be laughed at.

Some participants suggested that alcohol was contributing to this unacceptable behaviour. Coming from a background where the drinking of alcohol and the taking of drugs by teenagers is not only outlawed, but often unthinkable, the binge drinking and smoking of marijuana in the open was troubling to most of the participants. The majority of ARB students in the current study expressed dismay at the way other African students take

advantage of their new-found freedom to behave in a way they thought would win them friends.

When we go for parties some African students start drinking and also take stuff they don't know. In the end they start acting crazy and at times there is violence and they get in trouble with the police.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 3_vv)

For others the issue of alcohol caused them angst in other ways: having made new friends, they find themselves in the very difficult position of having to say no when offered alcohol or drugs. The comment below reflects this:

We are also finding it difficult to deal with the social aspect of our stay here. It seems Australian teenagers have a lot of freedom. There is too much drinking...and smoking at parties. Because in our culture it is rude to refuse gifts, it is very hard to tell them no when you are offered some 'pot'.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 4_al)

Although the desire to integrate was paramount, for some of the students the question is: at what price? According to students, they were caught between the proverbial rock and a hard place. In order to be accepted by the other teenagers in Australia, they had to be 'cool', and to be cool they had to accept most of the norms that went with being part of the group. This usually meant embracing Australian cultural norms that were sometimes unacceptable to their background culture and to their parents. It is clear that Africans students in Australia are caught between the 'tensions of maintaining their ethnic languages/customs and simultaneously embracing the dominant Anglo-Australian linguistic norms' (Ndhlovu, 2010, p. 300).

While saying no to alcohol and/or drugs may seem to be a difficult choice for a number of the ARB students, it is a choice they will have to make. Such choices highlight the complexity that these students face as they adjust to Australian society. At the same time, there is a clear need for more research into the socio-cultural issues affecting ARB students as they adjust to the schools and classrooms (Naidoo, 2009) and the wider community.

5.2.3 Access to Community Facilities

The ARB students in this study identified community support and sporting activities as factors that have helped them settle well into the Australian environment. Specifically, they suggested that taking part in activities helped them feel like members of the community in Australia. There is confirming evidence in the literature (although it concerns foreign students rather than refugees), which suggests that when given support and better access to community facilities, they fare better. For example, Toyokawa and Toyokawa, Yeh and Isono (cited by Poyrazli, Senel, Grahame & Maraj, 2007) suggest that engagement in extracurricular activities enhances international students' adjustment and results in a lower level of acculturative stress. The participants also described how participation in community activities was a very good way to learn the cultural norms of Australia. For example, taking part in club sporting activities meant that they had to learn punctuality and to pre-plan their days.

We play soccer with many white students so we have made many friends. What we have discovered is that Australians plan their day: they are more organised, keep time, always on time, unlike Africans.

(Stage1-Focus Group 2, Student 1_tm)

The students reported that whilst they were living in Africa they hardly ever planned their days, as issues would arise daily due to extended family situations and the fact that most of their time was spent on doing chores for their parents. As a consequence of this, their experience of punctuality and planning was different from what they are now encountering in Australia. For example, they described how, back home, community functions began when people 'gathered' and not at a specific time. Unlike in Australia, in Africa time is usually given in terms of early morning, midmorning, lunch time and late afternoon or nightfall.

The only day that we are punctual is Sunday when we go to church. It is very embarrassing to be late in church! I look forward to Sundays because it reminds me of Africa where we dress up and go to church every Sunday. We also meet some very nice people at our local church here in Australia who give us things. The church people furnished our house! And the pastors here are very nice; they are even helping us to conduct services in Dinka, our home language, once a month.

(Stage 3-Individual Interviews, Student 2_jj)

According to most participants, their religious faith has played a major role in their adjustment in the Australian environment. It is an area where they have found common ground with the Australian religious community. Analysis of the data reveals that for many ARB students their Christian faith provided them with a safe haven during times of hardship in Africa. Therefore, being welcomed in the local Christian community has not only assisted their settlement, but has been of immense value for them personally. This view was again supported by another stage three participant in the following case study:

Case Study 1

My name is Maina⁵ and I live in Mirrabooka, Perth. I was born in Sierra Leone (West Africa) but have spent most of my life in a refugee camp in Guinea where my family sought refuge. I came to Australia in February 2006 and am currently studying year 11 at a senior campus in the north of Perth city.

When I first came to Australia life was very hard, it was not easy for me at all. I had a lot of hopes and expectations upon arrival but the reality was a bit different. My inability to speak English meant that I could neither speak nor understand the language and this made life very difficult. Being an orphan I did not have the support of my parents so I became very anxious and nervous around the people helping us. Even the prospect of going to a new school worried me greatly and I did not sleep well the night before my first day at school. I wondered how I was going to speak to the teachers and other students because I had had very little schooling before coming over.

However, now after just a few years I am able not only able to speak fluent English but feel very motivated to achieve all my educational goals. I intend to pursue a career in nursing, although the challenges in Australia are many because the system of education here is very different to the one we were used to in Africa. These challenges, for most African students, revolve around English language proficiency and behavioural issues after years of living in a refugee camp where youths did not receive proper guidance. On the other hand the opportunities in Australia are endless and I am greatly motivated to pursue a nursing degree and eventually become a midwife.

To achieve this goal I am currently working as a nursing assistant in an aged care facility

⁵ Here and throughout the thesis pseudonyms are used

and I have already learnt a lot of things that will help prepare me for a career in nursing. My current situation is vastly different to the one I was in before leaving my homeland for Australia. More so, after receiving counselling in Australia I have decided to forget my past life, where I was gang raped in the refugee camp. I have been told that things like that don't happen here in Australia which makes me happy. We attend a local church here and white pastor talked to me about Jesus Christ and how he suffered at the hands of people like us. Therefore, I have given my life to Jesus Christ and will now focus on my bright future. This is because I am living a good life, not only do I feel very safe and secure in Australia, but fully understand now that my future is in my hands.

It is very important for ESL teachers, particularly those in the government school system, to be aware of the sensitivities and value of religion to ARB students and to exercise care when selecting curriculum content. Whilst working within education department guidelines, it still may be possible to use religion to provide these students with the support they need for their integration into the school and wider community.

Despite the positive effect of sport and community activities, attending sporting events was not unproblematic. The students reported that to get there they may have to get lifts with friends or catch a bus or train, even at night. For the boys this presented less of a problem, but it was not as simple for girls. Further, these gender differences extended beyond the sports field. While boys could go out, find work and afford cars after a few months, many of the girls responded that they did not drive. For those who had tried to learn to drive they found the driving lessons too expensive. As a consequence, the majority of girls were not able to get jobs because they could not easily get themselves to work.

Sometimes we get jobs that require shift work at odd hours of the night. I have no car and I don't drive. It is very hard for me to travel from say Joondalup to start work in Bayswater at ten pm. In the morning I have to spend two to three hours again going back home.

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student 2_mh)

In addition, the girls also described the responsibilities they had in the family home they had to consider when deciding whether or not to accept a job offer:

Before I go to work my mother insists that I look after little brothers and sisters. I have to make dinner for them and help them with their homework before putting them to bed. In the morning I have to bath them, dress them up and make them breakfast before they go to school. So if I take a job I have to make sure that it does not interfere with my other duties at home. How many employers would understand this?

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 3_nm)

This participant's experience is not surprising in terms of her cultural background. It is quite common for African girls to assume mothering duties in the home: cooking, doing laundry, ironing and the general upkeep of the house, and looking after younger brothers and sisters. Previous researchers have found similar practices in Australia and other countries. Williams (2003), for example, whose study was undertaken in Australia, describes how migrant girls drop out of school completely to help raise younger siblings and to help contribute to the household income by working full-time. This is exacerbated by the situation in various cultures where gender equity is a foreign concept for most parents and where, despite placing immense value on education, they often treat boys and girls differently in this regard.

One exception to this is described by Campey (2002), who also investigated refugees in Australia and found the opposite to be true. Specifically, Campey describes how pressure is put on young men to opt out of their education to provide financial support to the family. In the current study a number of boys did indicate that they may not complete year eleven and will opt for apprenticeships so that they can quickly earn money to help look after their families.

I like school, my teachers like me and I am getting very good grades but my father is too old and cannot find work so I will have to leave school this year to find work. Also, we have to send money to help our relatives in Africa. It is very hard for them now that my father is here in Australia. He was looking after many people back in Africa.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 6_bc)

Whilst acknowledging that exceptions do exist, according to the girls there was more pressure on them to quit school and help look after their siblings, due to the high cost of kindergarten care.

Sometimes I want to find work but my sister insists that I must look after her children while she goes to work. She has suggested that I might stop school next year so that I can help with family chores and look after her children and my brothers and sisters. White girls don't have to do any work at home but African girls have to do all the work. This stresses me so much.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 8_tb)

However, not all studies have found that the level of family obligations has a negative impact on refugee students. Fuligni and Pedersen (2002) suggest that for a number of immigrant students these family obligations may provide a sense of identity (see Chapter Seven) and purpose while they are in the process of adapting to society. Additionally, as shown in a study of Cambodian American women, Chhuon, Kyratzis, and Hudley (2010) found that academic decisions often depend on students' perceptions of the utility of schooling for their immigrant family. This is illustrated in the following sentiments expressed by an eighteen-year-old female participant:

At school I am not yet confident but when I am home I am in charge and I know what I am doing. I know that school is important, but at home I make all the decisions and my brothers and sisters look up to me.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 6_js)

Although there was no consensus about schooling, the participants were all in agreement that proficiency in English was an investment that would bear substantial dividends, whether it was for their future education or for the sake of employment or both. For example:

I want to study hard, and when my English is good, I want to be a doctor and work at the big hospital. I may go back to Africa to treat the peoples (sic) in the refugee camps.

(Stage1-Focus Group2, Student 7_lj)

5.3 Background Factors Affecting Progress

It is widely accepted in the literature that whatever the circumstances, when compared to other migrants, refugee students are at a considerable disadvantage when entering a host country and, as a result, are likely to experience considerably greater difficulty acculturating than do other established ethnic groups (e.g. Berry, 1980; Berry & Kim, 1988; Hayes & Lin,

1994; Sykes & Eden, 1985). These difficulties are compounded by the trauma they experience related to their lives before leaving their home conflict zones.

From an analysis of the data it was apparent that this was the case for the participants in this study. For the purposes of this study, these difficulties affecting the acculturation of ARB students into Western Australia have been categorised as: survivor guilt (Section 5.3.1), acculturative stress/anxiety and loss of self-esteem related to lack of social acceptance (Section 5.3.2), and trauma triggers (Section 5.3.3).

5.3.1 Survivor Guilt

The guilt associated with being safe in Australia emerged as one of the major stumbling blocks for the African students in this study. It was apparent from the discussions with the students that they felt a real sense of guilt and sadness, and a disturbing sense of responsibility for the traumatic events that occurred in their countries of origin. For example, this is how Jane responded to a question about how well she has settled in Australia:

Me am not settle yet. The reason I think of my past as an orphan too much...I think of my brothers and sisters....not knowing where they are....me living a good life here in Australia...I feel guilty....don't even know if they are still alive...'

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 1_jn)

Some of the students described how these feelings of guilt could be triggered by certain classroom discussions or visuals such as those about Africa. While not all students felt the same way, a number showed discomfort with certain curricula content.

When we are shown pictures of Africa, sometimes we miss our friends back home. We start to feel lonely. Should we have been so lucky and not our friends?

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student9_al)

These comments reflect the suggestion made by McDonald (2000) that when individuals are subject to trauma, this can lead to a sense of confusion and guilt. The students feel that by surviving, they are somehow responsible for the tragedies that have befallen close friends and relatives.

We escaped those terrible soldiers...they just wanted to kill us for nothing. We got to the refugee camp where they took us in Kenya. But my little brother died a month before we came to Australia. I still cry when I think of him.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 3_mh)

According to McDonald, the effects of this trauma and violence can be carried by individuals both short and long term. It was clear in the focus group discussions and interviews in the current research that a number of participants still exhibit symptoms of survivor guilt.

We are very happy at home now, but sometimes when my father is praying before we go to bed he asks God to look after my uncle and his family because we don't know what happened to them. I think about them when we talk about Africa in class and that makes me sad.

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student 4_mm)

Although it is clear that there is an emotional impact for refugees because of their survival, not all scholars agree on the long term effects of trauma on refugees. For instance, research studies in Australia and North America (Silove, 2004; Silove, 2005; Silove & Sinnerbrink, 1997; Silove, 1999) reveal that the majority of survivors of conflict situations do not experience long term psychological problems and suggest that studies over-estimate the level of psychological trauma people from such zones suffer. For instance, a study of over a thousand Vietnamese refugees in Australia (Steel, Silove, Phan & Bauman, 2002) found that although there was a prevalence of mental health issues, these reduced over time. In this current study it was apparent that a number of students suffered from survivor guilt, but whether these effects will be long term or short term is yet to be determined. However, what is known is that there is a need for teachers to be aware of the effects of migration on ARB students and to provide appropriate support as required.

5.3.2 Trauma Triggers

One specific aim of this study is to ascertain what factors, especially those relating to experiences prior to their coming to Austria, are presenting barriers to academic progress and cultural adjustment for ARB students in WA schools. For the ARB students in this study it appears that the format of the focus group discussions was extremely comfortable, non-intrusive and non-threatening, and as such most students spoke freely about their

backgrounds. In this context it became clear that most, if not, all the students had momentary flashbacks of traumatic incidents that made them pause or hesitate when talking.

Trauma can present real barriers to academic progress. This was again highlighted in the current study when the students were encouraged to share incidents in their backgrounds that interfered with their learning. At times these trauma triggers were very difficult for the students to describe and understandably, they were initially hesitant, but as they became more comfortable with the discussion they shared their experiences:

I think of my father when teachers mention Africa or show pictures of Africa, he is still missing in Africa.

(Stage1-Focus Group 4, Student 1_ch)

When teachers ask questions about Africa we think of a lot of things. For example, will we ever go back? Will I ever see my country one day...ever again? We just don't know.

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student 5_mj)

It is hard when we see movies on Africa. Movies like Hotel Rwanda, Blood Diamond...like that...are good to watch but they may affect us so much. Sometimes it is very hard to sit through these movies. For some of us it is not a movie, it is our lives before we came here. No, we don't want some of the African movies in curriculum.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 3_vv)

Incidents such as these represent low moments on the ARB students' journey to cultural adjustment. However, they understood that their teachers had good intentions and chose to include the resources in their lessons out of ignorance. Even so, the impact of such choices did not lessen the negative impact on the African students. An example was given of a student-teacher who, excited about having travelled to Africa on holiday, brought pictures to share with the class. She had travelled to Burundi and the Congo as part of a university research project. The pictures were very confronting, especially for those students from these countries, and the experience made some participants in this study very upset. However, because they liked the teacher and knew she meant well, they just smiled and did not say anything. According to the participants, such a response is also in line with their African culture which teaches them that adults do know better and are to be treated with respect.

Despite the apparent acceptance of such actions, it is clear that teachers need to be cognisant of the impact of their actions, particularly when students are vulnerable and may, in fact, be suffering symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (McDonald, 2000).

It is not uncommon for newly arrived immigrant students to exhibit various symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. First (1988) and Jay (2000) describe how in the United States, newly arrived immigrant students from war-torn or conflict countries like Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Haiti may have been first-hand witnesses of such occurrences as death, homelessness, poverty, or may have been forcibly and unwillingly separated from parents, friends, and other relatives, and may therefore exhibit various symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Symptoms of this disorder have been found to include flashbacks, unwillingness to form relationships in school or other social situations, irritability, insomnia, memory loss, and panic attacks (Williams & Kent-Butler, 2003). The results in this current research suggest that this may be the case for some ARB students in Western Australia. One of the younger participants had this to say when asked about curricula content that affected him:

My teacher is very nice but she says we must read to our mothers every night, and give them nice gifts on mothers' day. My mother was taken away together with my uncle at night when we were in Africa. My uncle worked for the government. Some people later told me that my mother was dead.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 4_sm)

Most of the students looked visibly upset when relating these traumatic memories; however, having an outlet for these emotions and hearing their peers relating the same experiences appeared to make them feel better. Orji clearly welcomed the opportunity to tell his story:

I wasn't sure about joining this group but now I am happy I did. In my mind I was the only one with sad memories. My parents don't want to talk about it to us, when my uncle comes over they tell me to go to my room. Today I was able to tell someone how I feel about what happened to my brother.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 10_tm)

It is important for teachers to be aware of trauma triggers for each group of refugees when choosing content for classroom activities. This is more so because students from Africa tend to be perceived as a single group, despite being individuals with unique attributes and social backgrounds (Muir, cited in Haig & Oliver, 2007). Educators also need to take into account the fact that ARB students may have heightened sensitivities associated with being victims of trauma, or, as Muir (2004) suggests, may suffer psychological scarring as a result of those experiences. Some of these symptoms are worsened by the fact that the students were already experiencing high degrees of anxiety and stress before arriving in Australia. Teachers not only need to be aware of this when selecting curriculum content and materials, but to provide support and be sensitive to opportunities for the students to share their experiences.

5.3.3 Acculturative Stress and Anxiety

For most African students, the migration process meant a parting of ways with family and friends, and in some cases it was accompanied by a loss of parent(s) and/or other loved ones. While migration to Australia promised security and freedom from persecution, the prospect of going to a new and unknown country, far from home, and without family, posed significant problems for some.

Many of the participants were apprehensive about not being able to communicate in the host country's cultural language/context. The following comment by one of the participants illustrates his anxieties and fears upon receiving the news that he was going to Australia;

*Some of us could not speak English...so....how were we gonna talk to the white people there?
The fact that all these were quickly resolved has made our settling here much easier.*

(Stage1-Focus Group 4, Student 1_ch)

Lack of English proficiency has been identified as one of the greatest barriers to adjustment (Church, 1982), and this clearly was a source of anxiety for a number of the participants. Similarly, Ying (1996) in his study of Chinese immigrants, found that their anxieties before migration concerned lack of English proficiency, followed by other concerns such as racial discrimination, social isolation, and homesickness. Overall, there is a broad level of agreement in the literature about the lack of English language fluency being a source of stress among immigrant adults and adolescents (Lee, 1996; Lin & Yi, 1997; Nwadiora & McAdoo, 1996).

Naturally this level of stress will diminish as English proficiency increases. For example, one of the boys in the discussion group confessed that he had begged his parents daily to send him back home. Looking back now, he felt foolish and wondered why he ever wanted to go back. To him, it seemed like ages ago since he had arrived, although it had only been a few months. He was able to point out that the way he felt now about Australia had a lot to do with his ability to speak English.

When I first arrived in Australia I felt lost and didn't know what to do. I didn't know the language and I couldn't talk to anyone but now I can and I have made friends. It is such a relief to me to be able to speak English.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 6_js)

Another source of stress for the students before their arrival in Australia concerned their fears about what the schooling would be like. In particular, many of the students were nervous about corporal punishment in schools in Australia. The reason for their anxiety was that corporal punishment had been an effective tool to maintain discipline in refugee camps or in Africa.

We thought the teachers here hit in class like back home and we were apprehensive about that. I remember one of my friends was hit by a ruler and broke his finger in class.

(Stage1-Focus Group2, Student 6_mn)

Many of the anxieties ARB students experience relate to this fear of the unknown, and when considered in the light of their backgrounds, their fears may be well-founded. Since the students are aware that they are destined to attend government schools, a degree of anxiety is reasonable, given that schools in Africa and other countries have been used by totalitarian regimes as instruments of state control, and, like any other government institution, are suspect in the eyes of those who have fled oppression (Campey, 2002).

At our school in Liberia, we always had soldiers with their guns. Sometimes we were afraid. And sometimes they asked us what the teachers were teaching us. One of our teachers was taken away after he said we had no books because the government didn't know how to rule the country.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 4_kk)

Comments such as these illustrate not only the prior anxieties of ARB students, but also their mindset when they enter the school systems here in Australia. In addition to these types of stressors, there is wide agreement in existing literature that both pre-migration issues and the actual experience of migration itself often cause distress for migrants, asylum seekers and refugees (Marsella, 1996; Minas, 1990; Ward, 2001). For example, one of the participants in this study disclosed how anxious he was about where he would live and go to school, and whether their parents would have enough money to pay tuition for all of them.

The sum effect of these stressors, coupled with the lack of resources available to assist foreign students in the transition to the host society, renders the students highly susceptible to the damaging effects of acculturative stress (Ebbin & Blankenship, 1988). Symptoms of acculturative stress include confusion, anxiety, depression, feelings of alienation, hopelessness, identity confusion, and heightened psychosomatic symptoms (Berry & Annis, 1974; Smart & Smart, 1995). In fact, a meta-analytic study of acculturation and adjustment by Moyerman and Forman (1992) found that acculturative stress is positively correlated with psychosocial and health problems. The impact of this can be even more profound, given that migrant students may not seek proper psychological help for fear of stigma (Ebbin & Blankenship, 1988).

Another factor contributing to difficulties that these refugee students encounter are the cultural differences that exist in relation to such problems. For African students, any counselling they may have experienced previously would have been provided within the extended family context in Africa. In their new Australian context this may not be possible or desirable. Clearly, there is a need to find alternative means to assist African refugee background students cope with acculturative stress and anxiety. One role of teachers and staff at schools who have refugee students is to ensure that those students needing help are aware of the availability of such support and how it can be accessed.

5.4 Racism

For the purposes of this study, racism is defined as the belief, attitude, behaviour or practice which reflects an assumption, stated or implied, of superiority of one culture over another (Racial Discrimination Act, 1975). It may be directed towards individuals or groups on the basis of their race, colour, descent, national identity or ethnicity. Since Australia has one of the most multicultural and diverse populations in the world, it is inevitable that cases of perceived racism would be reported by the participants. In the following section, racist

incidents experienced by African refugees students when travelling to school are described (Section 5.4.1), followed by an account of the negative incidents related to their housing and accommodation (Section 5.4.2) and lastly, there is a discussion about issues associated with lack of social acceptance and their sense of inferiority within the western cultural context (Section 5.4.3).

In recent times, the media has highlighted more and more racist-related incidents in several Australia states, especially in Victoria, with some involving the police. There have also been some incidents reported in the press in WA. However, a picture of rampant racism in WA schools and the community was not supported by the current research. The students did, however, raise concerns about incidents which left them feeling sad and/or confused, and some of these could be construed as racist or discriminatory.

Racism is not tolerated in WA schools and is a particular concern for the Department of Education. During the data collection phase of the current study, it became increasingly obvious that although it was not a major concern for many of the students when it did occur, it was most hurtful. However, it should also be noted that most of the negative incidents narrated by the students occurred outside the school environments. In fact, most students were at pains to describe how they felt well treated in the IECs both by teachers and other support staff.

5.4.1 Racist Incidents Related to Travelling to School

For some ARB students, sadly, their first contact with the general Australian public was a racist encounter. Further, although not at all frequent, when these incidents did occur, it was usually in transit between home, school and work.

Australia culture seems very different; when we sit on the bus or train some people seem to get offended and move seats.

(Stage1-Focus Group 1, Student 1_jn)

Some boys at the train station (especially at night) tell us to 'go back where we came from.' This is very surprising because most teachers and adults are kind to us and help us with everything.

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student 9_ts)

For those few African students who experienced these events, this kind of behaviour by members of the community was the most puzzling and difficult to comprehend. To their surprise, when they tried to engage the seemingly hostile hosts when using public transport their attempts were often ridiculed. Some of the ridicule often took a nasty tone as they were at times told to: *'Go back to your starving relatives in Africa!'* When one considers that some of the African students may have left parents, brothers and sisters, friends and other relatives in terrible situations back home, this kind of verbal attack is especially difficult for them to deal with. Their distress is made worse when they do not have adequate social support to cope with these incidents. The need for support to help them cope with this, through class discussions generally, or with specific strategies about what to do, could be a role for teachers, especially in the ESL context.

5.4.2 Racist Incidents Related to Housing/Accommodation

A number of the African students described how their families had encountered racism after leaving government housing and when they were looking for a place to live. The African students reported their shock at realising that racism was not limited to members of the public they did not know. They reported racist treatment from Australians who in previous contact had endeared themselves to their families. Estate agents were singled out as the most racist in the eyes of the students.

Estate agents smile at us a lot but go on to tell us that they cannot give us the house we applied for, saying that it was taken by someone else. But we then see the house empty for months.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 3_mh)

Poverty in Africa affected some of us but here we faced different problems and it took us a while to get used to the system in Australia, like finding and moving houses without speaking English! Living in one house for only six months or a year, moving from place to place....this was hard, very hard, we try to explain what we want to the estate agents but they just smile and say it will be right, but we never get the house.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 4_mm)

It was clear that these incidents troubled those African students who had encountered them. Others described how they found it difficult that they could not help their parents understand

English and/or read housing leases. Even though they had faced huge problems back in Africa, they still found this aspect about Australia very intimidating and quite challenging, with some wishing they were back home. One or two even expressed regret about coming to Australia. Again, there could be a role for ESL teachers in developing the students' functional literacy so that they could develop the understanding necessary to read such 'real world' texts.

5.4.3 Lack of Social Acceptance

Part of the process for school-aged immigrants is the requirement that they attend a new school and live in a new cultural environment, often after losing close family members. Immigration also requires the creation of new support networks in a distant and unfamiliar cultural context. This next section outlines the challenges faced by African refugee students related to the theme of a lack of social acceptance. A number of students described their feelings when they are suffering social rejection.

Some students don't want to sit with us in the classroom, or don't talk to us at all when we sit next to them.

(Stage1-Focus Group 5, Student 1_lm)

The African students, it seems, felt slighted that fellow students would not sit with them or talk to them. While they were prepared to deal with rejection by adults, peer rejection was extremely difficult for them to accept. They also experienced feelings of rejection when they were not invited to social events. However, some other students were thankful when not invited to these events as they did not identify with the dress codes for these functions.

Sometimes we are not invited to events, but that's ok anyway because we don't have clothes for certain parties. Also, one day I wore a suit to a party and they made fun of me. In Africa you are supposed to dress very nicely to a party. How was I to know that in Australia you wear shorts and thongs to a party?

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student 9_kc)

These findings are similar to those by Hayes and Lin (1994) and Pedersen (1991), who argue that one of the biggest challenges faced by migrant students in Australia is a lack of social

support and acceptance. Indeed, for many immigrants, the process of migration entails loss of a familiar support network from family and friends (Sluzki, 1998; Yeh et al., 2008).

Furthermore, it is a long and cumbersome process to develop new social networks to replace those they have lost (Hernandez & McGoldrick, 1999). It is vital, therefore, for teachers to be aware that some of the African refugee students may be dealing with peer rejection and problems with acceptance long after they first enter their classrooms.

This situation was well documented by James (1997), who described how lack of peer acceptance (and at times teacher acceptance) was one of the biggest challenges faced by newly arrived migrants. He outlined how misunderstandings related to differences in language, dress, and patterns of speech were factors that contributed to this. Further community reluctance to learn about the special circumstances of refugees often results in immigrants feeling unwanted and having a diminished sense of self and of belonging (James, 1997). Similarly, in a study of young Sudanese refugee students in Western Australia, Cassidy and Gow (cited in Haig & Oliver, 2007) found that the biggest challenge for most recently arrived migrants is to identify a community to which they can safely belong. What also became clear from the focus group discussions held as part of this study was that the students themselves were aware that part of the problem was within themselves. This was reflected in Tito's response to a question on racism:

Before I started my ESL classes I was a bit worried. One of it was the thought [of] that colour difference. Also there was a bit of inferiority complex in me that was bothering me so much. But as time goes on I found it very exciting living here...and despite some of these difficulties, but have settle in Australia. Have permanent resident now.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 5_ny)

If the students are aware that they could be viewing these incidents through the prism of certain emotions, they are less likely to escalate incidents and are well positioned for the adjustment process. As Hewson (2006) describes, by taking risks and 'repositioning themselves and challenging the stereotype of refugees as helpless victims...by so doing [they] have created a good return for themselves in the school' (p. 47). The challenge therefore, is for educators to re-affirm and capitalise on the African students attempt to position themselves in the period of adjustment. This is supported by Anderson (1994) (see Chapter Two), who argues that the way in which students position themselves can have

positive or negative effects. Again, this suggests there may be a role for those concerned with educating ARB students to support them in their cultural adjustment by providing opportunities for them to position themselves in positive ways.

5.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the findings of the current study in relation to the theme of culture and acculturation. Background issues affecting academic progress and racism experienced by African refugee students in Western Australia are discussed in terms of the research question. The results have also been discussed in relation to relevant literature. The findings in this chapter point to a number of factors that participants perceived as impacting on their acculturation in the new cultural environment in Western Australia. These on-going concerns include community acceptance, peer acceptance, access to community facilities, their reaction to the aspect of freedom in the new cultural environment, and racism. Some suggestions for the potential role for teachers are also discussed. The next chapter presents the findings in relation to the African students' motivations to learn English.

CHAPTER SIX

ARB Students and Motivation

6.1 Introduction

Despite hardships prior to coming to Australia, it appears that many ARB students are highly motivated to study and learn the English language and integrate into the Australian community. This desire for and high regard for education is exemplified in the following case study:

Case Study 2

My name is Samuel and I am 20 years old. I was born in southern Sudan in the equatorial region in Nimule town. I grew up in Olijji refugee settlement camp in the Adjumani district of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda. The settlement is located on a riverbank- there are lots of mosquitoes which made sleeping very difficult. Living in that camp was tough but manageable despite the high refugee population and the fact that we were on land that was not fertile. It was very difficult to grow crops or engage in any other type of subsistence farming on that land.

In this camp I faced lots of challenges; having property stolen by thieves in the night, violence and sometimes the rape of young girls, lack of food and clean drinking water and no education. I personally lost a small transistor radio (which was my only link to the outside world), clothes and two bicycles which had been donated by an overseas refugee support group.

While I was prepared to accept the other hardships as part of my life as a refugee, it was not going to school that worried me most. The end result was that we had a lot of idle time and because of that we formed youth gangs and would assemble in the bushes at the end of each day to play cards for money. These money games usually occurred at secret hideouts away from adults and almost always ended in violence. We fought every day in groups to identify which groups were stronger than the others, with the winners taking anything that belonged to the other groups. One day I chose not to join my group and instead went about my usual chores for the day. Along the way I was confronted and was severely beaten by a rival group. I was viciously attacked and left for dead on the ground, bleeding profusely through the nose.

Some passers-by took pity on me and carried me home. It took a few days for me to receive some sort of medical attention but by then I was feeling much better.

A week later and after my parents had gone to bed I sneaked out of the house, hid for a while, then made my way out of the compound and into the night. I eventually found my way to my group and we decided to go to a beer garden which was out of the camp and was some distance away. What was supposed to be a night of good fun at the beer garden ended in a bitter fight between two rival gangs so we ran back home. When I got to our small house I found the door to the boys' room locked but I managed to open the window latch using a panga. When I got in I woke my brother who mistook me for a burglar and screamed loudly. This woke my father who wanted to know where I had been the whole night. When I couldn't explain myself he ordered my young brother to run and get some very hard bamboo sticks in the yard which he used to lash me about twenty times on my back and buttocks. This happened in full view of some of my friends and neighbours who had by now been awakened by the commotion. That morning and for the next three days I was sore and could not sit or walk properly.

A typical day in the refugee camp started at 6:00 am because we had to go and trap birds to stop them from feeding on the grains in the fields. Sometimes we took dogs along to help chase away the birds but we also carried spears and arrows to defend ourselves from wild animals or rival gangs from other ethnic tribes. Despite my obvious pain after the punishment my father insisted that I wake up at six the following morning to go and trap the birds but I refused and this made him even more upset with me. He locked me in my room for three full days and instructed that I should not be given any food except water.

Even the water I was given was very minimal because in that settlement drinking water was a big problem. There was not enough water fit for human consumption so people ended up drinking water from little streams off the river bank near the refugee camp, which was also a problem because the water was infested with mosquitoes and various maggots. It was very common to suffer bilharzia and other water-borne diseases in that camp. I managed to survive for those three days without food because even on normal days we hardly got enough food in the camp. As a result our diet usually consisted of green leaves, edible insects and other living organisms in the soil.

By the time our refugee visas were approved my parents were too old and unwell to travel so

I arrived in Australia in July 2009 with my uncle and his children. I am extremely relieved and happy to be in this country. I have discovered that I can have almost anything I need and anything is possible in Australia, if you work hard. My main objective now is to study hard, improve my spoken English and work towards attaining a sound education which was not possible back in the refugee camp. I am really motivated to achieve this goal because I hope to one day re-visit my homeland to see my mother and father again, but this time they will be proud of me.

While Australia is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world, it is mainly an English speaking country. For the ARB students to fit in socially, culturally and academically, English proficiency is essential. The students in this study expressed a realisation that the new currency of trade in Australia for them is the English language. As a consequence, these students are motivated to learn English, as the language now represents a passport that will give them access to all the other benefits available to them in Australia. This notion of investment in English for attaining future rewards is in agreement with findings of studies in other Australian states and other countries such as Canada and America (see for example Magro, 2008 and Norton-Pierce, 1995).

This chapter begins with a brief description of motivation (6.2) and of the factors that motivate African students to learn the English language and the goals they have set to achieve this (Section 6.2.1). A particular feature that emerged from the data is the way these students are motivated because of the value they place on education generally (Section 6.2.2) and specifically in relation to the learning context of WA (Section 6.2.3). An explanation is provided of the reasons students are keen to develop English proficiency for cultural integration (Section 6.2.4) as well as their instrumental motivations to learn English (Section 6.2.5). Related to these motivations is the issue of goal setting; therefore, a description is provided about how ARB students have set goals for themselves in their new setting (Section 6.3). The last section (Section 6.4) concludes the chapter.

6.2 ARB Students and Motivation

For the purposes of this study, motivation is seen to encompass effort, desire, and positive attitudes toward learning the second language (Gardner, 1985). In fact, Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) suggest that any factors that motivate an individual to learn will result in

increased acquisition. Motivation is purported to be the basis of desire to learn a language and to facilitate language-learning (Gardner, 1985). More recently in the literature, motivation has been described as the internal process that energises, directs and sustains individual behaviour (Waugh & Njiru, 2005). In the next section those motivational factors that drive African refugee background students in Western Australia to learn English are examined with a view to highlighting how social and contextual factors, together with individual learner internal factors, affect language learning.

One of the surprising key motivating factors reported by the ARB students as a concern in the refugee camp was the lack of education. These students have lived through devastating poverty, the crushing reality of HIV/AIDS and other terminal diseases, and of drinking [contaminated] water from muddy puddles, and they have experienced first-hand violence and death of loved ones, so it was somewhat unexpected they would identify missing out on an education as one of their major concerns. Despite their seemingly hopeless situation in the refugee camps they remained optimistic that one day they would make it to Australia, attend school and along with this, enjoy all the opportunities that education provides. In fact, they all agreed that the one thing they needed most to change their circumstances was a sound education.

The following sentiments expressed by Musa during a one-on-one interview support the point that ARB students do indeed place value on education:

Case Study 3

My name is Musa. I was born in 1990 in Sierra Leone. It was very hard when I was living in my country with my family of three sisters and two brothers. Soldiers came to our village, burnt our house and barn and killed many people. The entire village had to run away including my family. We spent at least three days in the bush hiding until we were sure the soldiers had gone.

We found almost all our property destroyed and all food taken away. We survived on maize porridge for those few days while we were packing up whatever was left. This happened when I was ten years old and the experience has stayed with me since to the extent that each time I see a soldier in uniform I start trembling with fear.

We left the village carrying the few belongings we had left and walked in the forest for days

until we it made across the Sierra Leone border into Guinea where we lived in a refugee camp for almost nine years under very difficult conditions. Along the way we buried my sixteen-year-old brother Paul, who got sick and died before we made it to the Guinea border. This was very difficult for my mother to accept and she was stopped from killing herself by my uncle. She did not live long in the refugee camp and we all thought it was because of my brother and because she didn't want to live anymore. This was very sad for my family but we accepted it.

The biggest disappointment for me was that there was no school in the refugee camp so I missed out on my education. Some people tried to start a school but there was no money to build the school and buy books. My heart was very sad but there was nothing I could do. Instead, I learnt to knit jerseys and plait women's hair.

By the grace of God in 2009 we made it to Australia. I have since started a new life in Australia and I do not have to worry about my equal rights. This is a good country and I have already written down everything I want to achieve after high school and university.

Motivation is often defined as the psychological quality that leads people to achieve a goal. For language learners, the goal may simply be to master the target language as an end in itself, while for others the goal may be to develop communicative competence in order to interact with the target language community. This later motivation is described in the literature as *integrative motivation* (Benson, 1991; Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Ellis, 1997; Falk, 1978; Finegan, 1999; Taylor, Meynard & Rheault, 1977). This orientation suggests a learner's positive attitude towards the target language group and the desire to integrate into the target language community. Gardner (1985) argues that integrative attitudes toward or intention to identify with the L2 (second language) community strongly influence motivation in L2 learning. As will be shown later in this section, this was found to be the case for many of the students in the current study. This concept of integration will be discussed in detail later in this section (6.2.4).

Participants in this study also displayed *instrumental motivation*, which is indicative of the desire to obtain something practical or concrete from the study of a second language (Brown, 2000; Ellis, 1997; Hudson, 2000; Kachru, 1977; Lukman, 1972). According to Hudson, instrumental motivation underlies the goal to gain some social or economic reward through

L2 achievement. Similarly, Dornyei (1990) suggests that when students are driven by a practical motivation to learn a foreign language, this is usually related to the utilitarian advantages derived from language proficiency, such as better employment or a higher salary. Further empirical support for such motivations is explored in other motivation models in literature (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dornyei 1994; Oxford & Shearin, 1994). In Section 6.2.5 there will be a discussion of instrumental motivation in relation to ARB students.

Section 6.3 deals with the issue of how ARB students have set goals for themselves in Australia, as reported by the participants in this study. This issue, like that of the lack of education in the camps, was again unexpected because in Australia and many other countries, goal setting often requires direct teaching to assist students to set realistic, time sensitive goals which will be helpful throughout their academic career (Ames & Archer, 1988). Given their dire backgrounds, where they often did not know when or if ever they would make it to Australia, one would expect that these ARB students may not have spent enough time thinking about what they want from life, nor was it expected that they would set goals for themselves. However, in this study, the contrary was found to be true. It appears that by setting goals most participants have raised their self-confidence, recognised their potential ability and competence and are now motivated to turn their visions of the future into a reality.

6.2.1 ARB Students and Motivation to Learn English

The majority of African background refugee students in this study appear greatly motivated to learn and to be proficient in English. Given their backgrounds and special circumstances, particularly in terms of their migration to Australia, this is somewhat surprising. One would have expected a degree of trepidation, pessimism and stress-related unwillingness to engage fully in the educational process at a general level, and with English language learning in particular. However, this was not the case, as evidenced by the following quote:

When I first got to school in Australia, I was nervous and a bit scared. But everyone was nice and I soon felt at home. I have noticed that the more English I learn, the more I understand the teacher. I also make more friends and I can help my parents by interpreting and explaining to them when we go to government offices or when they come to see my teachers.

(Stage1-Focus Group 1, Student 1_jn)

Such comments in the data reflected a sense that ARB students are not only dealing with their anxieties, but as they acquire English they become less apprehensive about the Australian context. It is clear that the realisation that communicative competence will enhance their quality of life in Australia presents a powerful motivating factor.

The ARB students in the current study reported a wide range of reasons that motivated them to learn English. Some described how they are motivated to achieve English proficiency for cultural integration, others so that they can achieve personal, educational and career goals they have set, and yet others are motivated by their desire to sound Australian. It is clear that all these students are learning English for a collection of practical reasons (Spolsky, 1989).

What motivates me to learn English? I have many reasons. At first I want to hear the teachers and then to be able to speak with everyone. Another reason is I want to learn English and get a very good job in the office; I want to wear a tie. When I get a job I will be able to look after my brothers and sisters. This is why I work hard every day at school.

(Stage1-Focus Group 4, Student 2_mh)

Warden and Lin (2000) similarly observed that there are many possible reasons for this motivation. How important these reasons are to the learner will determine what degree of effort he or she will make, and what cost he or she will pay for the learning. Many of the participants in this research confirmed that they had various motivations for learning English. Further, it appears the ARB students are not only motivated, but are prepared to work hard in pursuit of their goals.

Before we came here, like in the refugee camp, we worried about a lot of things. We worried that we didn't speak good English, we worried about leaving our homeland, and we worried about not knowing where we were going, things like that. But now we are here, we go to school every day, we learn good English and we understand that to achieve our goals we have to work very hard. There are many opportunities in Australia.

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student 3_ma)

Such optimism is particularly important in a school setting because, as Waugh and Njiru (2005) suggest, learners need motivation in order to achieve academically and their optimism supports this motivation. Specifically Waugh and Njiru suggest that optimism is typically

associated with high levels of interest in learning, pro-active attitudes to achievement, and active attempts to learn from peers.

6.2.2 ARB Students and the Value they Place on Education

It is clear from participants in the study that many place considerable value on Education and are highly motivated to learn English as a way to fully engage in their schooling. The following two case studies illustrate this.

Case Study 4

My name is Yamusi and I was born in Liberia where I lived with my family. When I was nine years old (2002) the region where we lived in Liberia came under rebel attack and my family was forced to evacuate and cross into neighbouring Guinea without my dad who we believe was captured before we got to the border. He remained behind to distract the soldiers while we crossed into Guinea.

We spent two years in a refugee camp in the Mende region where we came into contact with some of my mum's relatives who had also escaped death in Liberia. One of my mum's cousin sisters (Hava) told us that it was possible to apply for asylum in Australia if we managed to get to Conakry the capital city of Guinea. We did not have any money and also transport was very difficult between Mende town and Conakry so we walked for three full days with very little food and eventually got a lift in a truck heading to Conakry.

In Conakry we did not know anybody but some kind strangers took us to their home and offered us shelter for a month while we made phone calls to Liberia (phones were very difficult to find those days) to find anyone with friends in Conakry. Eventually we got somewhere to live in another refugee camp and stayed there for another five years while our papers were being processed. I feel like I wasted five years of my life because there was not much schooling in that camp. We didn't have money to attend schools outside the camp and they were very far. This is my biggest regret ever.

We arrived in Perth Australia on the 19th of August in 2009 and everything now seems like a dream. When I sit in the classroom here at my school I remember my past and wonder if I will ever see my dad again. However, his last words to me were that he loved me, that I was to remember to be always positive and that he knew I would make him proud. So while we don't have him here, we are very happy in Australia and I am working hard to look after my

brothers and sisters and to make my dad proud of me one day. He used to tell me when I was young that he once dreamt of me wearing a university gown and standing in front of a classroom at the local school in my village.

Case Study 5

My name is Emaranzia. Everybody has an important story to tell. I have one too. I am from the Sudan where I was born. Because of fighting we left Sudan when I was 12 years old and went to live in a refugee camp in Kenya. The camp was close to the Kenya/Ethiopian border and it became our home for five years. I lived there with my family of two brothers and two sisters and it was very difficult living there. We lived in a small house which was made of bamboo sticks and there was no water and electricity. A refugee organisation provided food for us. Unfortunately there was no school for us to attend. We could not legally attend school anyway. All the kids complained about this but there was nothing we could do.

There were no good hospitals and no opportunities to make even a little money. We could not go outside the camp without the camp commander's permission. That place was like a prison so we hated every day we lived there. I wanted to come and live in one of the developed countries like Australia. I knew that I could greatly improve my life in a new country.

I constantly prayed to God and one day my miracle arrived, my prayer was answered: we were advised of our departure date! I went through the medical checks and other pre-travelling procedures like I was in a dream. My heart was beating fast because I was thrilled at how lucky I was. I had never been on a plane before and my flight to Australia was about to begin. The take-off was very smooth but my heart beat wasn't. As we flew over the clouds I looked outside the window; I could see the amazing view of Australia. I immediately liked everything about Australia and I knew that my life was different now.

I have been in Australia for two years now and starting to deal with new things. Australia is a big multicultural country and the Australian government gives freedom to its people; they have a right to say what they want or what they think on social issues. All people are equal under the law. Most importantly, I like the Australian education system which allows all students to be educated without any barriers. All children can afford to attend school unlike back home. Also, I now have lots of chances to improve my life, be part of the country and

will be proud to have Australian citizenship. I am sure that will give me responsibilities and privileges in my new country and will allow me to achieve my aims. I wish to become a teacher because I am willing to make a contribution to improve education in Australia. When many people are well educated our country will develop more benefits than ever before. I am going to try my very best and let teachers guide me to reach my destination in my new country of residence. Finally I thank the Lord my creator for giving me this fantastic opportunity to be able to live in a fantastic country like Australia. There is no doubt that coming to Australia was the greatest achievement ever for me and my family in our lives.

One of the key themes to emerge from these case studies and other data from this research seems to be the students' regret at the education opportunities they missed in the refugee camps. It also appears that many have held on to their dreams and remain motivated to achieve them. It is very clear that for them, education will help make these dreams a reality.

6.2.3 Motivation and Learning Context in WA

Motivation, or lack of it, can be directly linked to a learner's new cultural context more generally, and specifically to their learning context. Therefore, any consideration of motivational factors must include an examination of the nature of that context (De Courcy, 2005). For the students participating in this study, their learning context is a WA secondary school or college and the ESL classrooms within these. A number of students, despite most of them having various expectations of the Australian classroom, attribute their happiness and motivation not only to the environment in Australia, but to the way their teachers welcomed them into their classrooms and how they made them part of the school family:

I started off in Mr Smith's class. He was kind and made us laugh all the time...when we made a mistake he didn't growl at us. This made me work hard to make him happy.

(Stage 1-Focus Group 5, Student 8_kb)

Because of their African cultural background, where teachers are held in high esteem, for many of the participants, as soon as they are enrolled in school in Australia they hold immense respect for the Australian teachers. Whilst initially many work hard to please their teacher, if the teacher does not ask much of them, their enthusiasm slowly diminishes.

I love most of my teachers, you can tell they like us and they love their job. So I try to work hard so that I don't disappoint them. Some teachers, however, can't be bothered; they treat us like we are the same. They explain the work and then they are like: "Just do what you can" and then move on to other students. So why should I be bothered working hard?

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 5_sm)

Clearly, teachers have the capacity to reinforce highly motivated students and to develop students who are less motivated (De Courcy, 2005). It is also clear from analysis of the data that ARB students resent not being treated as individuals. Mostly they want to be noticed by their teachers and to be treated as capable individuals and to be encouraged to do their best. These participants are aware that they need to develop English language competence, but they do not want their lack of English to result in them being treated as cognitively deficient.

In some schools, a number of participants reported that teachers appeared to feel sorry for them because of their backgrounds. As a consequence they were not pushed to succeed, resulting in some ARB students lagging behind academically. Similar results were reported in a study by Ebbin and Blankenship (1988), who describe how a number of teachers admitted that at times they contribute to the helpless situation by not setting high standards of excellence. There is no doubt that teacher attitudes are an important factor in understanding students' motivational disposition, and more importantly, can have significant impact on their learning (See Dornyei, 2001a; Doyle & Kim, 1999; Jacques, 2001; Schmidt, Borale, & Kassabgy, 1996; Pennington, 1995).

Sometimes I wonder why we bother doing the work. The teacher doesn't even look at my work. It's like ah well you are a refugee... 'you don't have to do anything...you will be right, I know it's hard for you' she says. We just laugh about this at recess because we used to do much harder work in Africa the few years we were at school.

(Stage 2-Classroom Observation stage, student 7_ms)

Thus in the current study the impact of teacher attitudes was clearly apparent. While some of the ARB students have limited schooling backgrounds, others do have experience of schooling and bring certain expectations to Australian classrooms. Teachers in Australian classrooms need to be made aware of this and be encouraged to see beyond their students' lack of English language proficiency. Also, it would appear that teachers need to be

supported to work closely with the African students, discussing with them their expectations and needs and helping them to be realistic in their goals.

6.2.4 Developing English Proficiency for Cultural Integration

Many of the students in this study described how they are motivated to learn English to enable successful social and cultural integration. In this section, integrative motivation is defined and its impact on ARB students in Australia outlined. Additionally, this section describes how the social context and the goals the students have set for themselves provide them with motivation and a sense of purpose.

Previous research shows that students who are most successful when learning a language are those who like the people that speak the target language, respect the culture and have a desire to become familiar with or even integrate into the society in which the language is used (Byram, 1998; Falk, 1978; Kramsch 1998; Hinkel, 1999). This form of motivation is known as integrative motivation and ‘typically underlies successful acquisition of a wide range of registers and a native-like pronunciation’ (Finegan, 1999, p. 568). According to Gardner (1985) this aspect of motivation appears in three different forms — integrative orientation, integrativeness, and the integrative motive. Further integrative motivation is a complex set of attitudes, goal-directed behaviours, and motivations.

Integrative motivation requires the creation of positive connections with members of another language group where real communication is established within the second language group (Gardner, 2001). This, Gardner argues, distinguishes integrative motive from other motivational processes that also have an impact on language learning. Ellis (1994) suggests an integrative orientation represents the underlying reason for studying a second language, whereas integrative motivation involves the mixture of a student’s efforts and desire to achieve the goal of language learning.

In the current study it was found that, although the ARB students may have a range of motivations for learning English, they are all agreed that developing their English language proficiency helps facilitate their settlement into the academic and cultural context in Australia. In fact, most of the participants reported that they were most highly motivated to learn English so that they could settle into Australia, and in particular for their transition into the Australian cultural and school context. This is despite their initial hesitancy and uncertainty when faced with invitations to be part of the community.

While a number of the ARB students reported their uncertainty and lack of motivation upon arrival, it appears the presence of other migrant students in the IECs provided great comfort to these students. There is also a realisation that learning to speak English allowed them access to both Australian peers and peers from other different cultures.

When we arrived, we didn't know there were other people here from Africa. So when we got to school and saw many other African students we were happy although we could not talk to some of them because we did not speak their language or English. When we started to speak a little English we made friends in school and at home were able to talk and get to know the neighbours. Because we can now speak English we can also connect with other African Background students from other countries. This made me study hard.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, student 4_jn)

It also seems that the motivation to learn English is in part driven by genuine interest in Australia and Australian people. For instance, in a student-to-student exchange during the classroom observation stage of the current study, two students exhibited an appreciation of Australia and of Australian people despite their poor English proficiency.

Student 1: *What's your name? Do you like Australia?*

Student 2: *Yes I like Australia, have seen the beach?*

Student1: *I have seen beach and Kings Park. I like it too. And the people are nice.*

Student 2: *Where we live our neighbours are nice too. They brought us things for the house. But we talk much with them...even though my English is very poor.*

(Stage2-Classroom Observation, Student 1_sn & 2_mm)

The student exchange above illustrates that in spite of the language barrier, ARB students are highly motivated and hold English language and Australians in high regard. This favourable attitude towards learning the language is known to assist integration (Gardner, 1985). Further comments by participants support evidence in the literature that an integrative orientation influences a language learner's motivation. For example, one of the participants had this to say:

Every night I do my homework. I am working very hard to learn English even at school. I also like English and I will be so happy when I can speak like the other people here in Australia. I will be able to meet and mix with them without feeling shy and alone.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 4_mt)

From the data, it was very obvious that African refugee background students feel that sounding Australian is an important way to integrate into Australian society. In fact, for many it is more important than learning the English concepts and grammatical rules. They described how ‘sounding different’ made them feel excluded in the school playgrounds and socially outside of school, and how it would do so later in their workplace. Thus, gaining an Australian accent, they believe, is a true mechanism to facilitate successful integration.

‘At first I was shy but now have learnt grammar and sentence structures...I can now make a speech in front of class....but before was afraid to speak in case people laugh...but here we learn accent...we learn to speak like them which is more important!’ Now am not shy...am fluently...confident...can speak to friends, yes we learn good pronunciation here...not like Africa. Also people understand us now and don’t stare at us when we talk.

(Stage1-Focus Group 6, Student 5_mk)

A number of students reported that they were particularly appreciative of the assistance they received from their teachers in terms of their pronunciation.

‘Yes very helpful...they encourage us to speak....also help with pronunciations....want to learn English way of speak English accent...that is good’. When we speak like Australians we make friends.

(Stage1-Focus Group 6, Student 6_bc)

Thus the findings in this study suggest that ARB students are driven by a need to master the Australian accent. The ARB students seem to possess a perception that sounding Australian not only facilitates academic performance, but also prevents them from being treated differently.

6.2.5 Instrumental Motivation

More recent studies (for example Brown, 2000) have emphasised the importance of instrumental motivation in language acquisition. In contrast to integrative motivation, instrumental motivation is where the purpose of language acquisition is more utilitarian. This would include being motivated to learn English in order to: meet the requirements for school or university graduation; apply for a job; request a pay rise based on language ability; read technical material; gain employment in the translation field or to achieve higher social status (Brown, 2000; Hudson, 2000). Kachru (1977), for instance, suggests that in India, where English has been widely adopted as the international language, it is not uncommon for second language learners to be motivated for instrumental purposes, particularly for further study. Instrumental motivation often underpins second language acquisition where there is little or no social integration or where it is not even desirable for the learner to integrate.

An analysis of research data gathered during the focus groups and individual interviews of this study confirmed that a number of ARB students indeed viewed English language learning as a utility from which they would obtain something practical or concrete (Hudson, 2000). The views expressed by many of the students in this study underscored their goal to gain some economic reward through the development of their English language proficiency.

It was clear that although some had other ambitions prior to arriving in Australia, they had since realised that to pursue these same or other goals, English language learning and competency was a must. Some of this realisation was a result of feedback obtained from peers who had ventured into the workforce or had been seconded into work placement programs through their schools. The following case study gathered during an individual interview supports this observation:

Case Study 6

My name is Providence and I am now in year eleven this semester. My favourite subjects are English, maths and independent living. I have just completed certificate 1 in IT and a certificate 1 in Business. When I was growing up in Africa my dream was to become a missionary but when I came to Australia everything changed for me because of the new language and culture.

Now my dream is to work as a case worker at a migrant centre and help migrants of all

nationalities who came from a difficult place like me and struggle with the English language. Most people from my country do not speak or understand English. Once I help them with the language, they can then be placed into technical and vocational colleges, go for job interviews and even work as interpreters like me.

Some of my peers are being sent back to our school by employers who say they cannot speak good English. As a case worker I will be able to work with them so that they are able to talk to their supervisors to resolve workplace issues. Another problem is they cannot read the code of conduct at work or some of the rules that are passed around for everyone to read. With my friends we have decided that it is important to learn English so that we do not face the same problems when we go to work.

Although instrumental and integrative motivations are quite distinct, Brown (2000) argues that integrative and instrumental motivations are not necessarily mutually exclusive: learners seldom select one form of motivation when learning a second language, but rather are motivated by a combination of both orientations. He cites the example of international students residing in the United States, learning English for academic purposes while at the same time wishing to become integrated with the people and culture of the country. This combination of motivation was also evident in the current study and is demonstrated in the following quote:

I am learning English to become a nurse in the future so that I can help poor people. Another thing is that I want to help my parents so that we can all settle well in Australia. When I can speak good English I will also find my future husband, maybe by the end of 2012. I also have a dream to learn to speak other world languages like French and Chinese.

(Stage 3-Individual Interviews, student 5_ms)

Similarly, during the focus group discussions, many of the ARB students revealed how they associated learning the English language with gaining tangible results in the immediate future. One of the introverted participants, Thelma, described how it was imperative that she achieve English proficiency in as short a period as possible:

My father died in the war before we left Guinea, so I live with my mother and five brothers and sisters. At the moment we get money from the government but we have been told that

because I will soon be turning sixteen this will stop. But my mother never went to school and cannot speak a word of English, so I have to learn English so that I can go to TAFE and train as an enrolled nurse. When I finish I will buy a car to take my little brothers to school and look after my family.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, student 6_bc)

During the focus group sessions, many of the participants expressed the desire to learn English, with the expectation that they would do well as a result. There is also a need to acknowledge that some students may have felt the need to sound positive about their future, too, out the fear of being 'left out'. However, there is a consistency in the data as similar findings emerged during the classroom observation and individual interview stages.

6.3 ARB Students and Goal Setting

The results of the current study reveal that the majority of the African students have not only settled into Australia and embraced their new educational opportunities, they are setting goals for themselves in order to achieve well. It would appear from the evidence in this study that the motivation demonstrated by the African students is contributing to the goals they are setting for themselves. Further, a number of participants explicitly stated that they are willing to work towards achieving these goals with the assistance of their teachers and with the community.

From the data it emerged that for the ARB students to move forward and achieve their set goals it is imperative that they overcome the traumatic difficulties they have experienced in the past. It is clear that some participants have indeed decided to put distance between themselves and the past in order to accomplish their new ambitions. Kizito summed it up this way:

I forget about the things that happened in the past now that I am in Australia, you can set a goal for yourself and have a better, successful education when you grow up! Our teachers always tell us to work hard in English, because without English you can't graduate.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, student 10_tm))

These reflections suggest that the ARB students' language learning goals underline deeper objectives for their future. By learning English, it appears, these students have found a pathway to achieve other goals. This is supported in the relevant literature which explores how language learning goals can be part of a student's own internal goal system (Dornyei, 2005). Dornyei argues that learners see themselves as users of the language in the future. These goals, however, can also be external to the students and tend to be embedded in the social context in which the L2 is learned, and are typically influenced by the values a given society attributes to knowledge of the specific language. Most of the ARB students have come to realise their future is in Australia, and to achieve their goals they need to respond by setting appropriate goals for their unique situation in Australia. This is exemplified in the following quote:

When I was in the refugee camp back in Tanzania I was depressed every day because I was not going to school. Now that I am in Australia I have a chance to get an education and become someone in this good country. Some of my friends don't care if they pass or not, they want to go to their parties and see their girlfriends. If I do that what will become of me as an orphan? If I make a girl pregnant how am I going to look after her? I have to use this opportunity to achieve my dreams.

(Stage 3-Individual Interviews, student 7_nm)

Therefore, ARB students are now looking beyond their simple need to learn the English language to how learning the language can assist them to achieve lifelong objectives. Further, analysis of the data confirmed that there was a realisation that while they had experienced untold difficulties in Africa, by being in Australia they had cleared an almost insurmountable hurdle and this presented an opportunity to attain hitherto inaccessible goals. This is supported by the following sentiments expressed by two participants during the observation stage of the data collection:

When I was in Africa, I used to drive cars made out of fencing wire stolen from the white people's farms. Now that I am in Australia I am going to buy a real car and drive my parents.

(Stage2-Classroom Observation, student 4_mm)

We used to see planes high above when we were herding cows and I would tell my mother that I will be a pilot one day. She would say "shut up that nonsense and do your work". Now

when she comes to me when I am studying and I tell her that I am going to be a pilot, she doesn't laugh anymore.

(Stage1-Focus Group5, student 10_tm)

ARB students, like other migrants, associate English proficiency with getting new and better jobs, and with entrance to Technical and Further Education (TAFE) or universities courses. However, overall it would appear that the hardships these students have experienced have not made them pessimistic or cynical. Instead, they are motivated to achieve and are setting goals in order to do so. Such behaviour and motivation reflects positively on the education system in WA.

6.4 Summary

ARB students have various motivations for learning English and teachers need to be aware of these. They also need to ensure that these students are aware that, as their teachers, they believe that the students can succeed. At the same time the teachers need to be cognisant that the success of students in language learning should never be attributed solely to motivation, for the simple reason that lack of success will inevitably be attributed to lack of motivation, thus disadvantaging students. The findings in this chapter reinforce the need for teachers to consider not only language skills but also the motivation, expectations and goals of the students.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ARB Students: Their Schooling and Transition into Schools

7.1 Introduction

Given their anxieties prior to coming to Australia (See Chapter Five), it is not surprising that the school environment was at first intimidating for ARB students. Many described in detail how they felt small and unsettled by the initial experience of walking into a West Australian school. This experience, according to the refugee students, was made worse because this was the first time they were parting with their parents or guardians for any length of time since their arrival in Australia. One of the participants reported her experience this way during an individual interview:

First day at school was very hard for us. Being left by our parents and not knowing whether they will really come back for us...even just going round the school, finding toilets, the tuck shop and our classrooms made us very nervous. Asking for directions around the school was difficult because of our English. Thankfully other students approached us and asked where we wanted to go. We just nodded and followed them. However, by the end of the day we were fine because all the teachers were nice to us and made us welcome.

(Stage3-Individual Interview, Student 5_jj)

As secondary schools have been found to facilitate the transition of language minority students from displacement to well-adjusted individuals (Major, 2006), it is also not surprising that other ARB students who had previously gone through the experience came to their assistance and helped them settle into school, although it needs to be acknowledged that this did not occur immediately. The ARB students in the current study attributed their eventual successful transition to the supportive environments in their schools, including the support they received from other students, from their teachers and from the structure of the schooling more generally. This phenomenon of support is widely acknowledged in literature (See for example Cummins, 2002a; McKay & Wong, 1996; Miller, 2000), with researchers arguing that schools need to create this type of school environment that includes practices and beliefs that support the adjustment process (Major, 2006)

This chapter will present further qualitative evidence about some of the issues surrounding the transition of ARB students and their schooling in the IECs and high schools of WA. Firstly, this chapter examines the issue of African students and school attendance (Section 7.2). Secondly, issues relating to their perceptions about their ESL teachers are discussed (Section 7.3). Thirdly, the chapter gives an overview of ARB students and academic progress (Section 7.4). The next section (Section 7.5) describes the challenges the ARB students face in their schools. Then the challenges facing ARB students in the classroom are presented (Section 7.6). This is followed by suggestions from African students on strategies to improve their schooling (Section 7.7). Lastly, a summary brings the chapter to a conclusion (Section 7.8).

7.2 ARB Students and School Attendance

This section details the experiences of ARB students when they first entered Australian schools and the school dynamics that have contributed to the development of their linguistic and social skills. The dilemma facing ESL learners in most countries, as was found in the current study, is that they come to school with a set of cultural experiences which up to that point make sense to them, but differ from those found in the school. When their expectations are not met, the refugee students lose their ability to predict social outcomes, and this compounds their difficult situation (McEvedy, 1986).

The ARB students in this research described how unsettled they were at the beginning of their enrolment. They also described their need to become proficient in English so they could fit in with the rest of the school community. This reinforces claims in earlier chapters that it appears there was a realisation by the students that learning the English language would not only facilitate integration into the school context, but would lead to many other immediate benefits in their futures. A participant during the focus group discussions supported this view in the following way:

Once we picked up the language at school it was easier to mix in the school because we made friends. This also enabled us to talk to the community in Australia. This has led to us accessing many opportunities here in Australia. Like...we can go to school, TAFE or university and we can now find jobs; opportunities we did not have back home as some of us were orphans and had no future. So we have to fit in because it is important that we go to school.

(Stage1-Focus Group 2, Student3_vc)

This desire to learn English and become educated was widely reported by the students. They also confirmed their regret, as recounted in Chapter Six, that they were disappointed that there were no schools or any form of education inside the refugee camps in their countries of origin where they could learn English.

The ARB students reported that while their adjustment in the playgrounds was less difficult, the classroom presented particular challenges. According to the students, they stood out in the classroom. They reported feeling, at least in the initial stages, self-conscious, and hoping, in most cases, that teachers would not ask them direct questions or make them talk at all in class:

We could not talk in class so it was very difficult to make friends or to understand teachers because of our English. Things were difficult, even trying to find friends from similar backgrounds was very hard because of the language barrier. It was a pity that we could not get help from many other African students we found in our classes. Unfortunately we could not engage with them...our English was too poor!

(Stage1-Individual Interview, Student 5_jj)

The initial failure by the ARB students to access help from students of similar backgrounds that had entered the IECs ahead of them was indeed a source of concern. Many of participants expressed that they felt that communicative interactions with students who had arrived in Australia earlier would have improved their understanding of the school culture in their new environment. A number told how they relied on other refugee students who had only a little bit more schooling than them or who had English instruction back in their countries of origin to help them cope in their first few weeks.

Indeed, prior experiences have been found not only to influence responses and reactions in new situations, but to assist students to operate in new contexts as they transfer learned behaviours and meanings to new contexts (Mickan, Lucas, Davies & Lim, 2007). The potential of assistance provided to newer peers by ARB students who had been in school longer was clearly observed during the classroom observation stages of the current research study. It was evident that the newer ARB students would gravitate towards the more experienced students and take their cue from them. Sometimes there were hushed whispers in a foreign language and a lot of nodding by the newer refugee students. This is supported in the literature by Norton and Toohey (2001), who identify socio-cultural learning contexts

where experienced participants engage with novices. Although ESL teachers encourage the use of English language in the classroom, it was observed in this study that they were not concerned about this use of L1(their first language). Thus it seems that ESL teachers in WA acknowledge peer support as being vital to the creation of a supportive environment in their classrooms.

7.2.1 Transport to and from School and Disruption to Study

The ARB students reported that they were experiencing some disruptions to their study due to the complicated bus and train network in Perth and the fact that they did not hold driving licences or were unable to afford the prohibitive cost of obtaining them. Most, if not all of the participants, were unable to attend mainstream local schools as a result of their limited schooling background and/or English proficiency. Instead they were required to travel across at least two Perth suburbs, or get into the city first, then proceed to the suburb where they were enrolled at an IEC.

We live far from school and getting to and from school is very hard for us because we do not have cars or driving licences. We have quickly learnt that without a driving licence life is very hard and your options are limited in Australia. Because of this when we get home we are too tired to study.

(Stage1-Focus Groups6, Student 10_msl)

Since most parents/guardians of the ARB students did not drive or have cars, many of the participants reported that they used public transport to get to school, which meant leaving home at least two hours before school started and another two hours getting home after school. As a result, the African students were too tired to focus on their homework when they got home. Further, most participants indicated that they missed out on at least an hour's sleep every day. For the girls (as reported in Chapter 5) this situation was especially difficult, as they still had to perform household chores in the home before they were allowed to do their homework. In some homes it was not just a matter of being allowed to do their homework, but the absence of a mother figure altogether. Many of the older female participants reported being de-facto parents, looking after their aged fathers and younger siblings. This finding in the data suggests that getting to and from school is an issue, and sometimes disrupts the education of ARB students in WA.

7.3 ARB Students and Perceptions of their ESL Teachers

In the main, the ARB students in this study are happy with the relationships they have formed with their teachers and with how ESL and English courses are being taught. These perceptions of their classroom teachers are important, as they can greatly influence their learning. Indeed, there is wide agreement in literature that teachers' expressions of their attitudes and willingness to help greatly influenced students (see for example Kortering & Braziel, 1999a, 1999b).

Similarly, other researchers (Habel, Bloom, Ray, & Bacon, 1999) report that teachers' encouragement and discouragement directly influences students' learning. Habel et al (1999) describe the most important characteristics of good teachers, as listed by students, as affect, caring personalities, and professionalism, in that order. Other studies emphasise the influence that classroom culture, organisation and physical arrangements have on students' experiences in classrooms (Franquiz, & Salazar, 2004). Similarly, Little (2001) found this to be true, particularly in lessons and activities that engage students. This finding is supported by Robinson (2001), who reports how warm, caring, and empathetic relationships foster collaboration in classrooms with refugee background students. These findings are further corroborated in more recent studies (Whitney, Leonard, Leonard, Camelio & Camelio, 2006). Certainly these findings are corroborated in this study, with students describing how they found ESL teachers to be courteous, hardworking and prepared to go beyond their call of duty to make them welcome in Australian classrooms:

ESL teachers are very friendly, helpful and hardworking. Teachers on most occasions went out of their way to help each student in class, especially students like us who are from Africa.

(Stage1-Focus Group 4, Student 1_ch)

It also appears that ARB students appreciate the collaborative approach to learning used in the classrooms. This was reported in particular with reference to the paired or group-oriented activities that were used in many classrooms studied. Because the ARB students were self-conscious (owing to their lack of English proficiency), the group work setting represented a smaller and safer platform to trial their English. This is reflected in the following two comments:

Another important factor is that we have to learn to collaborate with other classmates. This means that the other classmates have to talk to us and we have to talk back to them. We are

not too shy to talk to peers and some of them correct us, which is good. Because we collaborate with other students in class we have found mingling up and interacting with many other students outside much easier.

(Stage2-Classroom Observations, Student 6_jsk)

Teachers encourage students to work in groups and we learn to work collaboratively with others in classroom activities. This helps us get to know other classmates quickly and we are not shy to ask for help when we get stuck.

(Stage2-Classroom Observation, Student 5_mt)

It was apparent that the students had established the link between the collaborative atmosphere in the classroom and their smoother adjustment in the other aspects of their school life. Most participants reported that working together in the classroom had indeed translated into the building and fostering of relationships in the schoolyard. This is not surprising, as Vygotsky (1978) argues that these developments take place within a child's 'Zone of Proximal Development' (ZPD), a level or range in which a child can perform a task with help, expands when participants interact positively in common activities. More importantly, the participants added that these interactions greatly improved their vocabulary and ultimately their proficiency in English:

The interactions help us because we learn new words every day and as a result we also learn English quickly. Because of the happy atmosphere we have confidence to work together with Australian students.

(Stage2-Classroom Observations, Student 12_mtl)

On the other hand, a small number of the participants indicated that they were not comfortable with group work, whole class discussions, and speaking in front of the class. When pressed further, their opposition was found to relate to their limited language skills and traits brought from their traditional home culture, particularly their shyness in speaking in public.

These responses are not surprising: In the literature, the problems of learning a new language and its consequence, and the lack of courage to voice one's opinions, have been described as commonplace for many immigrant students, especially those who come from non-English

speaking backgrounds (See Olsen & Jaramillo, 2000; Nsubuga-Kyobe & Dimock, 2002; CRC⁶, 2006). Further, it has been found that ARB students are more comfortable copying lessons down from the board, reading comprehension questions, and working independently rather than in pairs or in small groups. This discomfort with group work was expressed in this manner by one of the participants in an individual interview:

My English is very poor so I don't like working in groups or speaking to the whole class. I am very shy that they will laugh at me. I also find it hard to understand the teacher sometimes so I like it when they write notes on the board and I simply copy everything. Some teachers give us handouts and we read and answer questions, that way only my teacher reads my work.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 9_tk)

For those ARB students comfortable with group work, it is much to their credit, as it is currently a practice frequently implemented as part of communicative language teaching (CLT) for second language learners (Harmer, 2003). Many ESL teachers use CLT approaches to encourage students to work collaboratively in pairs or small groups. It has been suggested that group work followed by class discussion and teacher feedback raises learners' awareness of the linguistic elements of the target language (Olsen & Jaramillo, 2000). As Long (1983) contends, such meaningful interaction is now accepted as facilitative of second language acquisition.

From the focus group discussions with the ARB students, it became apparent that a major factor contributing to their favourable view of the Australian classroom was indeed the fact that they were allowed to talk and freely give opinions on classroom topics under discussion. For those students who had gone to school in Africa, this was a situation in direct contrast to their past classroom experiences. In Africa, they were not accustomed to expressing opinions in front of or even to teachers (who had village-elder status). In fact, in Africa they did not interact freely with teachers; rather, teachers were the people to administer disciplinary measures, without recourse to parents. In their countries of origin, being able to tell an adult, let alone a teacher, that they were uncomfortable following a certain instruction or flatly saying no would have been unimaginable and, if they were to do so, the consequence would have been very dire.

⁶ Community Relations Commission for a multicultural NSW

Most teachers are really good to us and allow us to give opinions in class, which we really like as we can tell them what we think, although the language is difficult. This is different to Africa where we had to be very quiet or be caned, and if we had to say something we had to be very careful!

(Stage2-Classroom Observation, Student 22_kt)

Teachers working really hard and they allow us to give opinions in class, which is very good because it makes us feel that we have a say in what we are learning.

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 10_msl)

It was therefore clear from the evidence in the current study that the African students were appreciative of the qualities and actions of their Australian teachers, but at the same time they were surprisingly unwilling to condemn the punitive approaches that occurred in parts of Africa.

In most countries in Africa they have stopped beating students at school but I think it was ok. You see in Africa all adults are your parents so we were brought up by the whole village, not just your parents and this included teachers. A lot of children have no parents in Africa so that is have they are disciplined and taught to behave. There is an old saying in Africa that an orphan receives values from overhearing when the woman next door scolds her children loudly. We hear that since they stopped caning students all students are now misbehaving in schools.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 5_jn)

Despite believing that the system in Africa was well founded, the participants reiterated that they very happy to have a voice in the classroom and thus a voice in the direction of their education. There is support in the literature related to African refugees who have come to live in the west for the finding that there is a substantial appreciation of the pedagogical approaches used in their host countries. For Somali refugees in the Netherlands, for example, after the shock of entering the Western upper secondary system and being confronted with piles of books to read every week, they showed great relief after learning that they did not have to memorise them, but needed to understand the themes and the theories (Ali, 2007). Hence, the opportunity to develop their own thoughts, ideas and opinions was a new

experience. However, the Somali students struggled with the concept that they were, despite refugee status, being asked what they thought.

The ARB students in this study further added that the only hindrance to exercising this new-found freedom to speak was their limited English. This how one of the participants explained this:

Despite the fact that initially we understood little English, classes were fun and we were eager to join in the fun. We desperately wanted to speak like the other students, to tell the teachers what we thought. Anyway teachers took time to explain everything and would only proceed when sure that we understood. Because we understand how teachers explain, if you work hard you can actually 'see' yourself getting better every day. You learn new things every day.

(Stage2-Classroom Observations, Student 16_al)

Studies in the US confirm that limited English and adapting to new communication norms present major challenges for English as second language learners. Specifically, in their new academic culture, they are expected to speak out, to debate, to argue, to express disagreement, to deal with conflict, and to make recommendations, and together these are new behaviours and values they must develop (see for example Olaniran, 1993, Gopinath, 1999, Mori, 2000). Clearly this is something that teachers need to grapple with and work carefully to develop in their students.

7.4 ARB Students and Classroom Dynamics

The ARB students in this study reported that they are happy with their schooling and academic progress. They further report that they feel comfortable and relaxed in their English classes. This was attributed to a positive atmosphere and the fact that teachers took time to explain content and task instructions well. Further peer-to-peer communication was encouraged and supported, and together with the teachers' interaction, enhanced the classroom environment.

In addition, the students expressed appreciation for the pedagogical approaches used to support their learning. For example, they indicated that their learning was assisted by such strategies as introducing subject content or language practice via games:

Teachers help us get to know other students and sometimes they do this by making us play games in class. We play the games and when we play the games we get used to each other and get to know each other quickly

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 13_mh)

An analysis of the data revealed that generally students wanted to be clear on what was required for their assignments, homework, class work and what is being covered in class. At the same time they wanted to enjoy classroom activities, and a number of participants described the type of things they enjoyed, such as: group activities, group assignments, excursions, interactive games, skits, rhymes and other fun techniques used to help the remember information. The students also reported wanting lessons that involved interactive activities and that included all the students. On the other hand, they listed activities that they found ‘boring’ and these included: silent reading, numerous worksheets, and what they termed ‘going-by-the-book’, ‘page-by-page’ teaching, even though they had grown accustomed to this in Africa. Similar findings have been reported by researchers including Whitney, Leonard, Leonard, Camelio and Camelio (2006).

The games help us ask questions that we are usually shy to ask but because of the games we are less shy and we talk more. Another important thing is that the games help with our reading, because most of the games involve learning words, reading them aloud and/or memorising them.

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student 8_mj)

There were a few participants who were not happy with games being part of the classroom repertoire. These students in the main seemed to come from parts of Africa that followed a very strict and religious educational regime.

It seems the way we are taught is really different but it really helps develop our confidence. Some of us are different, we don't like games, and how can you be serious about education and play games at the same time? Games are not serious, we are here to learn and we want to learn!

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 9_mh)

Clearly these participants are adamant that education is a serious ‘business’ and therefore the classroom is no place for fun and games. These sentiments invoked a fierce debate amongst the participants. However, the participants were in agreement that although some were not in favour of this approach in the classroom, it was these same pedagogical approaches that had led to their current proficiency and progress in English within schools in WA.

7.5 ARB Students and the Challenges they Face in School

Although the African students in this study are mostly very happy and have settled well in the Australian education system, they also acknowledged that they face many challenges within the school context. This section highlights and explains these challenges, which include issues relating to English language proficiency and their fear of negative evaluation by peers.

7.5.1 English Language Proficiency

The very first hurdle identified by ARB students was that of issues surrounding their lack of English language proficiency. This revelation was not in itself a surprise, given the limited schooling backgrounds that many of them had experienced. Further, there is wide agreement in the literature that English as second language learners will face difficulties and challenges not just linguistically, but also as they adjust to their new environment (Iwai, 2008). At the same time, in the current study there was an element of pride in the voices of the participants as they recounted some of the difficulties they had overcome getting to the stage they had reached. Two participants described their success in the following manner during the individual interviews:

When we first came to Australia language was very hard but we worked had to learn it and now we can speak English without much difficulty and have now been able to make many friends. Life is much better now.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 1_jn)

English classes made us have confidence in ourselves and be confident to speak to all our teachers and because we can speak English, we have now settled very well here in Australia.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 12_mh)

Additionally, some of the students indicated that English had helped them understand other subjects. When they were not sure of something especially in relation to vocabulary or terminology they described how they could seek assistance from their teachers or even those peers with greater English proficiency. Others reported that mastery of English helped them with the development of their cognitive skills, especially with respect to the acculturative process.

We were also trying to learn other cultures from many people in the school but we did not have the vocabulary, it was very difficult. The English classes helped us with our vocabulary, which helped to hear other people...so now I listen to other people's views and try to make up my own mind.

(Stage2-Classroom Observations, Student 4_mm)

It is interesting to note that the lack of appropriate vocabulary emerged as a significant concern during the students' early days in Australia. However, they also described how their vocabulary development was supported because in most classes they did not just learn new words, but also the cultural context within which these words could be used. This helped them to remember the new words and, in time, to engage in conversations, even outside school.

We also face the problem of finding the appropriate words not only to structure our sentences but to express ourselves. Sometimes we find the words but it seems in the Australian context certain words mean something else. For example: I once called a student I had just met a 'friend' and this upset her very much. She immediately said 'You're not my friend! This confuses us because we are just trying to be nice.

(Stage2-Classroom Observations, Student 23_tn)

This particular issue of cultural appropriateness for different words was a source of great interest amongst the participants and was discussed at length during the focus group discussions. For example, the students were amused by the fact that Australians distinguish between a friend and a mate and they described how their African culture makes no such distinctions.

Participants singled out specific classes as being particularly helpful in their adjustment. A number reported how having to adjust to physical education classes as part of their schooling had helped in developing positive relationships in the classroom and the schoolyard.

We get help with new words, the spelling of the words the grammatical context and how to use the vocabulary in telling new stories. We are also able to understand some new stories that we didn't even know. This has helped us settle in Australia....we have made good friends....all from different backgrounds!

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 15_jj)

We also have gym classes here and we like that very much. The gym also helps us meet new people and to exercise.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 10_jn)

I like going to the gym and the sports activities there. We are put into teams so became team members with Australian students. If they see that you are good they like you and you become friends, they help you with the words for sports.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 18_mk)

One issue that emerged in almost all the interviews and focus group discussion was that of pronunciation. A number of participants described how they paid careful attention to the way words were pronounced:

We like the way teachers say (pronounce) the words and we do activities with the teacher, there is more communication in class...than back in Kenya. We learn new words in class and some of the Australian words are very hard to understand and the pronunciation is also difficult. However, because here we learn the words and how they are pronounced at the same time, this has led to a great improvement of my vocabulary and ability to speak orally.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 6_mh)

Teachers help us with pronunciations when we talk in class. At first this made me unwilling to talk in class but everyone was corrected and we were all made to repeat the word after the teacher so it was okay. They were also nice about it, the teachers, and standing up to talk wasn't that bad at all!

(Stage3-Individual Interview, Student 17_sk)

The students recognised that as they increased their ability to speak English, they were able to make oral presentations in front of their classroom peers, an unthinkable feat on their arrival. Many found this a worthwhile classroom activity: they pointed out that this not only improved their English, but their self-confidence as well. The following comments made by three of the participants during the focus group discussion support this point:

We do classroom presentations here...for me to stand in front of class...that's really something! I am very shy, you can ask my mother! She doesn't believe me when I tell her some of the things I do in class!

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 4_al)

In some schools in Africa we did not have English classes so the English classes here really helped me a lot academically. We learn good grammar...and how to construct good essays. This was hard for some of us because it was all quite new. But now we are more confident speaking English and we are able to make friends out in the yard and where we live.

(Stage1-Focus Group4, Student8_mj)

My English has improved a lot after my classes...now other people tell I am going to achieve what I really want in Australia. I found speaking in front of people challenging at first...one day I did oral presentation...I get so nervous....I stay for two days without talking to anyone!

(Stage1-Focus Group5, Student 7_jn)

Liu and Littlewood (1997) suggest that for refugee students and other second language learners to orally express themselves in class is risk-taking behaviour. Being able to make an oral presentation, if done in a supportive environment, helps them overcome their fear of making mistakes, revealing their weaknesses, being evaluated negatively, and losing face. However, before they have developed a sufficient level of proficiency and confidence, risk-taking activities trigger considerable anxiety. Some of the participants reported how this occurred in activities in class that involved standing up and talking to the class for an extended period

In some classes we have to read newspapers in the morning and summarise some news items and share them with the rest of the class. We really get anxious about this, it is very hard.

(Stage1-Classroom Observations, Student 20_mh)

Such comments indicate that upon arrival ARB students were very self-conscious and all too aware of their language deficiencies.

One way that a number of the participants coped with this anxiety was to remain silent, at least in the initial part of their enrolment. However, many participants also explained that their early silence did not appear to be a concern for their teachers, perhaps as most were aware of their limited schooling backgrounds.

7.5.2 ARB Students and Fear of Negative Peer Appraisal

Many of the students in this study described that their greatest fear in the school context was the fear of negative appraisal from their Australian peers. While they were prepared to accept such evaluations from teachers and other support staff, they found scornful appraisal from their age peers very difficult to accept. In their culture, the participants explained, it was almost natural and expected to receive negative feedback from adults, as this was the norm for their culture (e.g., children often received compliments in the form of a rebuke). Feedback expressed in this manner from peers, however, left them feeling inadequate and played into the anxieties they held prior to coming to Australia. Hence, due to the fear of being evaluated negatively, many of the ARB students reported that they tended to avoid oral communication in English to avoid the experience of feeling unease or fear. This avoidance syndrome was often carried over into the classroom, where most participants confirmed that they avoided classroom discussions.

At first I tried to speak in English but my friends corrected me all the time. Sometimes they got upset with me for not getting the words right so they raised their voices when correcting me. I know they were trying to help but I became very uncomfortable speaking in when I was with them or when I was in class. In the end I just kept quiet and didn't say anything. Some of my friends called me rude but it was better than how I felt when they put me down for failing to pronounce words correctly.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 9_al)

Clearly, fear of negative appraisal has an impact on the oral participation of ARB students in our schools. This is an issue that schools need to consider and address to enable the successful transition and education of these students.

The available literature suggests that English language-related issues, such as fear and anxiety, play an important role in English as a second language (ESL) students' speech behaviour in the classroom, and their subsequent development (see for example Cheng, 2000; Cheng et al., 1999; Lai, 1994). The findings of the current study also support previous research by Horwitz (1986) and McCroskey (1984) who established that non-native speakers are more self-conscious and sensitive about others' evaluation of their oral performance and likely feel uncomfortable as compared to speaking their mother tongue, and when individuals are faced with situations that make them uneasy, they tend to avoid the situation in order to avoid any negative feelings. Unfortunately, such behaviour results in ESL learners preferring to withdraw from classroom participation rather than bear the negative attribution of incompetence (Coleman, 1997; Ladd & Ruby, 1999; Liberman, 1994). Such findings have recently been confirmed by Lee (2007).

Many of the participants also reported that their hesitancy to speak English was due to their fear that they may not sound Australian. They not only found the Australian accent difficult to emulate, but to understand as well. This is demonstrated in the following comment:

The most challenging issue we face here in Australia is the accent they use. It is quite challenging to understand it, especially for us migrants. So how do we speak it? We find watching more Australian movies in class helps us to learn the accent and the slang (colloquial) words. We thought the teachers were going to speak up like the 'England way of accent' ...speaking fast and the words coming out of the nose like they do in Africa.

(Stage3-Individual Interview, Student 21_mah)

Most participants in the current study described how they were assisted when their teachers provided modelling and supportive feedback. ESL teachers need to be aware of such findings to enable them to continue giving and increasing such support to ARB students so that they may improve their English proficiency.

7.6 ARB Students and Classroom Challenges

For ARB students who have had prior schooling, engagement in learning often requires negotiating new styles of teaching and learning. In the west teaching is likely to be more informal and less didactic than that to which the students are accustomed. As a consequence, learning is more active and independent. This is evidenced in comments by ARB students about corroborative approaches (as described in previously sections). Due to the type of instruction in Africa, students are most likely to be accustomed to listening and taking notes, and in turn these need to be studied for examination purposes. But after arrival in Australia, the students are confronted with engaging in an unfamiliar array of pedagogical activities that characterise learning in Western contexts.

7.6.1 Grammar Based Activities

Since most ARB students had not been exposed to formal English instruction before arrival in Australia, a major challenge many participants identified was learning the language structure of English. Grammar based activities presented great difficulties, especially developing proficiency with English tenses. Despite these difficulties, Batstone (2008) makes it clear that because grammar has evolved to the extent that we need it to function effectively in our day-to-day lives, it is almost impossible to disentangle grammar from most processes of socialisation. The following sentiment was expressed by several students during individual interview discussions:

Grammar was very difficult, very difficult to understand and we really struggled when we came. Our parents couldn't help us at home so we had to learn on our own. Even now when we do grammar lessons we find tenses really difficult and some of the grammar questions in comprehension tasks.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 4_sk)

For me the most difficult thing to learn was grammar, especially knowing the difference between: the simple past, simple present or future tense! It was all too hard to know when to use which? It took me a long time and a lot of practice to understand them. Fortunately the teachers were patient.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 24_ah)

It was clear from the discussions that grammatical English had indeed posed a challenge and created a level of anxiety for most participants. Their struggle with grammar, it seems, added to the initial belief of some that proficiency in English was beyond them. When asked how they overcome this, one of the participants made an interesting observation:

We still struggle with grammar here and there but we are much...much better now! You see, unlike Africa here we learn and speak English at the same time. So we get to practise what we learn and so we don't forget easily. In Africa some of us went to school but we were always speaking in Dinka so we forgot everything.

(Stage 3-Individual Interviews, Student 14_sm)

This realisation is shared by many of the participants. It is a belief that is well supported in the literature. For example, quite some time ago Long (1983) argued that in the case of grammar, teachers should use problem-solving group tasks in order to encourage learners to participate in real communication. Additionally, in terms of grammar instruction, studies have shown that this may work best when it is linked with opportunities for authentic communication (Spada 1987; Fotos & Ellis 1991). Some scholars (e.g., Allwright, 1984) support the view that active participation has an impact on the depth of language acquisition. More recently Fotos (1994) and Starch (1996) have shown that grammar instruction is most effective when followed by exposure to communicative input. As ARB students seem to be aware that communicative practise in English will improve their acquisition, particularly of grammar, they are better placed to achieve productive language proficiency.

7.6.2 Biographical Activities

Another activity that African students highlighted as being very helpful to them was the writing of biographies. In particular they pointed out how these have led them to understand Australian history and folklore. During the interviews, a number of participants recited legendary names such Sir Donald Bradman, Ned Kelly and Paul Hogan. Additionally they were familiar with household names like Kylie Minogue, Nicole Kidman and Cathy Freeman. These sentiments are illustrated in the comments from two of the participants:

We learn biographies in class and this helps us learn how to write our own stories although writing stories in our own words was very difficult. We have learnt about some very important people in Australia and all the film stars. This was very exciting because we watched some of them back in Africa, especially that one...Kylie from Neighbours!

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 14_sm)

Apart from the fact that we can now write and make speeches in class, we read and write biographies. We find reading biographies hard some of the words are hard to understand and we don't [know] the people we read about. Some of us don't get help because we are too shy to speak to other classmates who are 'smarter than us'. Also, biographies make us think back what we had gone through and writing about it was very hard. Sometimes it made us sad, very sad.

(Stage3-Individual Interview, Student 7_nm)

Other participants described how studying such biographies assisted them to reflect upon their own life stories, although a number of participants reported how they found such biographies to be somewhat of a double-edged sword. For some writing their own life stories was very difficult, although when they pointed this out their teachers understood their discomfort and advised them to make up stories for the purpose of completing classroom tasks. However, a number of these same participants reported that because of the good relationships with their teachers, it seemed to them that by not writing their stories they were letting their teachers down. They added that they felt that in order to help them, most teachers had a genuine desire to understand where they had come and to understand the difficulties they had experienced.

7.6.3 Developing Research and Computing Literacy

ARB students in this research study reported how they could not hide their excitement upon realising that learning how to use computers was part of the curriculum. Although strictly not part of their English classes, computer literacy, they felt, contributed to their learning. This was because, especially for those participants in upper mainstream, English courses involved researching and developing ideas for homework assignments. These tasks meant that they had to frequently visit the library for access to the internet and reading multiple sources.

We have computer classes here and this really helped us a lot, we had no computers or internet back home. You had to pay to learn or use computers in Africa. Now we have discovered another community online, we can chat with friends back home on the computer!!

(Stage2-Classroom Observations, Student 2_mm)

However, for some students, the initial excitement of having free access to computers quickly diminished as they struggled with computer literacy. To many, this became such a concern that they became unhappy and briefly wished they were back home. This was an area in which they could not quickly catch up with their Australian peers. With time, however, they reported being more comfortable and better able to use computers. It is an area that teachers need to carefully consider and to address appropriately, particularly in the ESL context, as students are prepared for mainstream learning.

We take computer classes which are excellent but problem is that we find working with computers difficult at first and some teachers were not very patient with us. We really felt dumb because other students quickly logged home and played computer games online. Some students got very frustrated with this and wanted to go back home.

(Stage2-Classroom Observations, Student 9_ks)

7.7 ARB Students and Suggestions for the Curriculum

When asked for suggestions about ways to improve their English programs, ARB students initially struggled to do so as most felt that their teachers are doing their best under the circumstances. After some hesitation they gave the following suggestions, which identified making career choices and reading-based activities as areas that could benefit from their input to improve their learning.

7.7.1 Making Career Choices

ARB students continue to grapple with understanding subject selections that lead to chosen career paths. Many described how because of their backgrounds they were not familiar with the Australian system which requires that they make career choices early in high school:

One of the most difficult and most important is making career choices and choosing the right courses when we get to year eleven. This is very hard simply because we don't understand them. The school provides career counsellors but we still find the course combinations difficult to understand. Some of us attended a different schooling system in Africa, where there was a set syllabus and students did more or less the same subjects. Here there are 1C/D, 2A/B, 3A/B courses etc.; it's hard to understand the combinations and it makes it much harder to make our career choices.

(Stage1-Focus Group 2, Student 1_sv)

The participants held the view that, as is the practice in Africa, students must all be educated to a certain level (for example, the Cambridge ordinary level) and thereafter make their career choices. They argued that this allowed more mature and informed choices as they felt that the placement of students in the different year levels based on their age on arrival in Australia did not take into account their limited academic background.

According to ARB students, this problem, coupled with English language limitations, was a big hurdle for academic progress, future learning opportunities and, in the case of some students, affected school attendance itself. The problem of placement was highlighted in the reports of the African Think Tank (ATT) and the Community Relations Commission (CRC) (2008). In his study of African students in Victoria, Batrouney (2008) noted the complaints of immigrant parents about placing their children on the basis of age rather than on that of their previous schooling. This concern was raised repeatedly by older participants in the current study, with some also indicating that due to their ages, they found the lessons, especially in Years 11 and 12, sometimes too difficult to cope with. This may also help explain the problem of school attendance as raised by some of the ARB students.

7.7.2 Reading-Based Activities

ARB students in this study overwhelmingly expressed a wish to see their needs reflected in the curriculum. When asked how they felt teachers could enable this, they suggested that more books and films presenting the immigrant experience from an adult or child's perspective would offer opportunities for refugee and other immigrant children to see themselves in the curriculum. This is how two students in focus group discussions expressed this view:

We do a lot of reading and they are good books, which help us with our English. We have tutors after school to help us with our reading. This helps improve our English and our confidence in class the following morning.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 7_mu)

We also want more books, journals, magazines, newspapers that relate to successful migrant stories to learn new words to use in our speech and....most importantly...to learn how to speak fluently...reading books helped us understand English better. We really like reading stories and other activities related to reading.

Reading (in most cases with tutor assistance) emerged as another factor that impacted strongly on their academic progress. The students appear to engage more in lessons that taught English in the context of successful migrant stories. This was surprising, as one might expect that migrant stories would have the effect of reminding them who they are. Many of the participants clearly found stories of former refugee students who had gone on to become community leaders not only gave them pride, but helped with the development of their self-esteem.

Classroom teachers should therefore ensure that reading material captures this optimism and pride and reflects the range of cultures present in the classroom. This view is supported by Campey (2002), who argues that teachers must take advantage of a growing variety of books, curriculum materials, video, internet, and other resources to present an inclusive view of the world. Based on his experiences in Canada, Campey adds that awareness and celebration of the rich variety of cultural days of significance provide a window of opportunity for migrant refugees. There is more evidence in the literature that points to the fact that it is crucial for students to be motivated to read. For example, Grolnick, Gurland, Jacob and De Courcy (2002) posit that in order to encourage such students to read, teachers should provide topics that interest students, or provide opportunities for students to select materials and topics they would like to read by themselves, for when they have autonomy, they are more likely to be motivated.

7.8 Summary

This chapter has highlighted the issues relating to ARB students and their transition into WA schools. The school environment was initially intimidating for ARB students, leaving many anxious and unsettled by the experience. Further, these students are experiencing some disruptions to their study due to problems related to transport. As reported in the chapter, it appears that while their adjustment in the school environment was less difficult, the classroom presents particular challenges for ARB Students: English language proficiency, fear of negative evaluation by peers, and developing research and computing literacy. Despite these challenges, ARB students in this study have developed solid and cordial relationships with their teachers and are content with how ESL and English courses are being taught. ESL teachers should be made aware of the transition challenges ARB students face, and of [the

importance of] their positive perceptions of their classroom teachers, as these can greatly influence their learning.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ARB Students and their Identity Crisis

8.1 Introduction

Given that most ARB students in this study claim two or more countries as their countries of origin, it was not surprising that the issues of cultural and social background, as well as the more general concept of self-identity, should emerge as important to them. This is illustrated in the following case study:

Case Study 7

My name is Musa, I was born in Liberia and I belong to the proud Bassa tribe. I was brought up there by my mother until I was seven then we moved to Guinea. I do not know my father, but this was not a problem because most children in Liberia are brought up by young single parents because of the war. We lived in Guinea for eight years in a refugee camp until we were transferred to another refugee camp in Kenya. We stayed there for five years while waiting for our applications to be accepted by Australia.

Deep in my heart I feel that I am Liberian, but I left Liberia at a very young age so I do not recall much about my homeland. I also have a very a strong attachment to Guinea because that is where I grew up and lived longest. I spent most of my teenage years in Kenya so I guess the Kenyan culture shaped me as a man. I can speak fluent Swahili and I learnt to appreciate a lot of things in the Kenyan culture.

Now I am in Australia and I am now learning the Australian culture, so who am I? As I grew up I developed a deep bond with three other countries and their cultures. So does this mean that I am Liberian, Guinean, Kenyan or Australian? This worries me a lot and I have asked my mother but she just says I am and will always be African, that's my homeland. To me that does not make sense because I cannot belong to all 53 countries and cultures which make up the continent of Africa. Most people have one homeland and that is what I want. If I cannot belong to one country in Africa then Australia will be my homeland. I have to find a place in my new home which is Australia but it hurts at times.

Anyway my friends tell me to 'get over it' so I am forgetting about Africa. But to be

Australian I must speak good English so I work hard at school and I ask many questions in class. I feel that if my classmates respect me in class then they will respect me outside and see me as more Australian.

As indicated above, along with place of birth and time spent living in a country, language makes an important contribution to attachment and identity. This occurs because when language-learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with the target language-speakers, they are constantly organising and reorganising a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Therefore, their identity aligns not only with the language(s) they speak, but also the language(s) they choose or need to learn.

Many ARB students in WA see a need to learn English and this is related not only to their everyday functional needs, but also because it can aid their academic success and assist them to fulfil their goals for the future: issues that are closely aligned to their identity. Thus, developing proficiency in English is an ‘investment’ (Norton-Peirce, 1995). When learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, and together this will increase their value and enhance their identity in their new social context.

In a similar way, Bourdieu (1977) suggests that an investment in the target language is also an investment in an ESL learner’s own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space. Further, Bourdieu argues that because language learning is a social practice, it engages the identities of learners in complex and sometimes contradictory ways. This is clearly demonstrated in the internal conflicts confronting Musa in case study 5.

Therefore, teachers need to understand that ARB students will be affected as they work to create a new self-identity, one that will develop within their school environment. It is also one that reflects their cultural background and the struggles they confront in their new social context within Australia.

To highlight the struggles ARB students are experiencing in relation to their identity in their new cultural context, this chapter will discuss firstly self-identity and identity crisis (Section 8.2), then religious and cultural identities (Section 8.3), and thirdly the burden of being black

(Section 8.4). The next section (Section 8.5) will explore ARB students' reluctance to succeed. The last section (Section 8.6) gives a summary of the chapter.

8.2 ARB Students, Self-Identity and Identity Crisis

In Chapter Two, social identity was defined as the condition of being a specific person, that is, as the aspect of an individual's self-concept derived from perceived membership in a related social group. Further, it was argued that individuality is formed by the characteristics and qualities of a person. When considered collectively, these are regarded as essential to our being and how we identify ourselves (i.e., our self-identity). Ferdman (1990) suggests that despite changes in environment, each of us maintains an image of the behaviours, beliefs, values and norms appropriate to the ethnic culture to which we belong. However, when we struggle to integrate our ideas about ourselves with what we believe others think about us, especially in adolescence, identity crisis can occur. Zapf (1991) suggests that identity crisis is strongly related to forced migration. This clearly is an issue for a number of the ARB students in WA:

I know that I am African and I was raised as an African child back in Africa. I did not decide to be here but I am here now and I have to deal with it. Some people here think that all refugees are poor people who did not go to school. They expect me to behave that way. But I am very clever and all I want is to be myself and to be a true African girl. But I also want to be Australian so that people do not treat me different.

(Stage3-Individual interviews, Student 25_jkl)

It was clear from such comments during individual interviews that the issue of self-identity is one that ARB students are battling with, that is whether to retain their 'Africanness' despite their changed environment, or to accept the new culture and feel a sense of disloyalty to their culture of origin and their parents. Many of the participants reported that they had now made a conscious decision to conform to the new culture as a way to facilitate their stay in Australia and improve their English proficiency. They described that they are doing this by not only adopting new identities but by taking on new Western names, with a number of students describing how they felt safe and at home in their schools.

8.2.1 Adoption of their New Identities

Strong evidence did emerge in this study that many ARB students have adopted new Australian identities. That is, it was found that the students, rather than avoiding their new culture, are making attempts to mediate the identity dilemma posed by their new context by, among other things, taking on a new cultural identity.

This is in contrast to previous research, where it is shown that in response to an identity crisis some migrant students have been known to try constantly to avoid involvement with the new cultures (Anderson, 1994). Anderson suggested the term *escapers* to describe such students. This, however, does not appear to be the case for ARB students in the current study, although there are some that are troubled by this issue.

The following case study gives insight into the feeling of some students:

Case Study 8

Before we came to Australia we were uncertain about many things. We were afraid that we will not fit in but now when I am in school I am happy. I feel like I can achieve anything, but to do this I have to decide who I want to be in this culture.

There are many questions of identity which I have to answer. Who am I? What can I do to become a successful student? How can I fit into the school community? What do the teachers expect from me? How can I meet those expectations? What do I want to become in future?

As you can see there are many questions and I wish I had all the answers but I don't know yet. You ask about my identity in Australia gees that is hard. I don't think I am having a problem with my identity in Australia because I know who I am and that will not change. I am an African girl and proud of it! I just take what is good from my culture and what is good in the Australian culture and follow that. But some of my friends are really having problems.

Let me tell you a story about Lenny, one of my best friends. He disobeyed his parents and followed the Australian culture. They tried to talk to him but he wouldn't listen so his father beat him up. He ran out of the house and went to the police. The police came to the house and his father was severely warned and was told that if this happened again the parents will be in big trouble with the law and Lenny will be taken away from them to the custody of child services.

This made his father very angry and upset because this shamed his family in the African community in Australia. In the African culture respect for the elders is very...very...important. Africans also place big value on education and my friend had gone against both by behaving in this manner. After that his parents kept quiet and then suggested going on holiday for Christmas back home in Sierra Leone. They all went but Lenny never came back. So all my friends are afraid now and they don't know what to do.

This case study reflects the dilemma facing ARB students as they assume new identities in Australia. Having decided to accept their new cultural roles in Australia, many of the participants are keenly aware of the pitfalls facing them if they fail to get the balance right between their ethnic cultures and those of the new cultural and educational context here in Australia. Teachers, if enlightened about these cultural dynamics, may have a role to play in assisting ARB students negotiate evenly balanced cultural identities. This may, in turn, ultimately translate to improved classroom performance.

8.2.2 Adoption of New Western Names

In their attempt to negotiate their new identity as well as mitigate effects of their identity crisis, some ARB students have gone to the extent of taking on new western-sounding names, despite their original names having important cultural meanings and connotations. Many of the male participants who reported doing so said they were attempting to distance themselves from their original identities. They also described how long sounding names were too difficult for their friends to pronounce. The following response typifies the rationale provided by the students:

Hey man am in Australia now. My African name is too long and too hard to pronounce. Every time people asked for my name and I told them they would go huh? So I changed it. I am Master D or just MD now. Anyway my father says I got my name from his father who got the name after fighting some war back in Sudan. But he's dead now and I got nothing to do with that old man. I don't care about stuff like that anywayz. I am still African but now I got a name that my friends can say out loud and it's all good now.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, student 4_jn)

Existing literature (see for example Burke, 2001) suggests that for some individuals, the decision to adopt a Western name may be a result of a desire to ensure smooth interactions with English language speakers. The underlying assumption for this action is that a name that is familiar to the Western speaker is less likely to be mispronounced and to cause embarrassment to the learner and the people the learner is interacting with. Burke, however, in a study of Puerto Rican migrants in Australia (cited in De Courcy, 2005) suggests that this adoption of a Western name is a 'coping mechanism' used by the learner to assist their interactions within the context of an unfamiliar culture. In that regard, individuals who have independently chosen to assume an alternate name have shown a high level of comfort with this decision and dismiss suggestions of any loss of cultural identity.

For other learners, taking on a Western name seems to be a result of recommendations from, or at the instigation of, language teachers. In such instances Burke (2001) suggests that educators need to appreciate that learners whose teachers have recommended the adoption of western names are more likely to be unhappy with the arrangement than those who independently elect to do so. In the current study there was no evidence that teachers in WA may be suggesting that ARB students take on western names. However, teachers do need to be aware of the dilemma related to identity and identity crisis faced by refugees, including ARB students, especially as this relates to name changes.

8.2.3 School as a Second Home

Notwithstanding the identity crisis experienced by some ARB students in their new environment (as described above), it was also clear from the research data that many ARB students feel safe and well supported at school. To achieve this, many described how they had cultivated a school persona: a more confident and happier student who liked to believe that they were just like anyone else in the school population. For them schools present a 'comfort zone', a safe haven where their identities are secure. On the other hand, for some the home environment stands in stark contrast. At home they are African with African families who are refugees. There is a constant trickle of sad news about missing and lost relatives, updates about their destroyed properties back in Africa and news about ongoing family conflicts. Two much younger participants explained this during individual interviews:

I like my teachers and I am now very comfortable when I am in class, with my friends and around school. When I am not at school sometimes I am not happy. It's like a second home

for me. Home reminds of where I am from and why I am here. I love my parents but mostly I like it better when I am at school.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 7_nm)

I am always happy at school but when it's time to catch the train home I feel a bit sad. Going home is like beginning a new life...It is worse at the end of term. I really don't like the school holidays but it is good that holidays here are much shorter. In Africa a school holiday was over a month. Imagine if I had to stay home for whole month! I would go crazy. My mother died so I live with my father and his new wife. She doesn't like me because she says my mother was a bad person and I should have died with her.

(Stage3_Individual Interviews, Student 21_mh)

Thus the school environment and the relationships built within them appear to provide respite from difficulties experienced by many of the ARB students in their homes. This is particularly the case when teachers provide social and emotional support to often traumatised refugees, many of whom are also experiencing family hardships (Haig and Oliver, 2007). The positive consequence is evident and shows the impact of teachers on students' lives. As Cummins (2005) indicates, adjustment to schooling occurs when there are positive relationships that exist between teachers and students in ESL contexts.

Similar findings are reported elsewhere in the literature (see for example Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu & Sastri, 2005): when teachers display genuine interest in the experiences and insights of refugee background students, they create environments that affirm the identities of students, particular their positive identity as English language learners.

The teachers are willing to help when I need it. If I am having trouble with an assignment then teachers are willing to take personal time to help me. This makes me feel important...like am valued like...despite my identity. I feel better about myself and who I am.

(Stage3-Individual Interview, Student 24_mh)

Such comments are instructive in that they show that, although teachers can battle with how best to teach refugees with disrupted schooling or little prior education, they have an important role in helping their students to develop a positive identity (Norton, 2000). It

cannot, therefore, be over-emphasised that educators and support staff involved in the care and education of ARB students need to be made aware of the importance of this aspect of their role.

8.3 ARB Students and their Religious and Cultural Identity

Having been informed by immigration officials amongst others that Australia (despite its religious plurality) is a Christian country, a number of the participants indicated that one aspect of their Australian experience that contributed to their identity crisis was the almost secular context they have encountered since their arrival. Coming from cultures steeped deep in tradition and spiritualism, the participants explained how this presented a problem as they attempt to form new identities in their new environment:

In my home country of Ethiopia there were many traditional beliefs, however, we believed in one God who was above everyone and everything. Although people engaged in many traditional ceremonies they all went to church every Sunday and it was regarded as a very good thing. People who did not go to church were accused of being bad and no good. Australia is very confusing: very few people go to church, the churches are very beautiful...very nice buildings but they are empty. Hundreds of people pray under trees in Africa. If I talk about God to my Australian friends they are shocked and they look at me in a strange way. One girl called me a 'weirdo' and I didn't understand. I told my teacher and she told me that in Australia people do not discuss religion and politics because it makes people upset, but why? I can understand that politics divides people, even back home people fought over politics, but God makes people upset?

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 7_ms)

Given their African backgrounds, where there is a deep-rooted traditional and religious culture, the difficulties the ARB students face in relation to religion in Australia are understandable. In Australia religion is a matter of personal choice, with religion and culture existing as seemingly separate entities. In contrast, in most parts of Africa, religious and cultural identity is closely interwoven. As such, the participants explained how this made it difficult for them. Being religious was communal and celebrated in Africa, but in Australia they had to suppress this aspect of their identity. Further, many do not understand why it exists as a deeply private issue in the Australian community. One older African Muslim participant expressed this in the following manner:

My name is Mohammad, I am from Eritrea in eastern Africa and my identity is Tigrinya. Back home our daily lives involved religion: what we ate, what we talked, how we dressed and even our schooling. For me this was normal and I had no problem with it. But my Australian friends tell me that my life is being controlled and ask me why I have to listen to other people about how I run my life? The idea of someone having authority over their lives is totally new to them and unacceptable. I am beginning to have questions myself about who I am, why I do the things that I do and who I want to be as I become an adult. My parents are not happy about this so I don't talk to them about it anymore.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 25_jkl)

It is apparent that a tradition of religion is central to the identity of many Africans. However, it also must be acknowledged that the desire for traditional practises has somewhat diminished since the arrival of European missionaries in Africa (Mbiti, 1992). Whilst a number of the participants indicated that they are slowly coming to terms with their new identities, it has been very difficult for some. Mohammad (above), for example, has found that the transition from an ordered life where one defers to authorities to one of freedom of choice has been especially difficult. He feels ill-prepared and out of depth in the Australian religious context where he is torn between values and beliefs imposed by his religion, upbringing and culture and his new-found opportunity to form his own identity in the Australian environment. Such findings provide important background information for teachers, especially in terms of their awareness of the issues facing their students.

8.4 ARB Students and the Burden of Being Black

For ARB students creating an identity for successful acculturation is indeed a site of struggle (Pierce, 1995). Whilst for many of the participants the new context presented a number of possible identity pathways (e.g., adopting an Australian identity, being part Australian and part African, or maintaining their 'Africanness') what many faced from Australian students was their perception of them not as African, but rather as 'black'. As one of the students explains:

Do I have an identity problem? No I don't think so. I have personally chosen to be Australian and to be like any one of my many classmates that were born here. But this is not easy because Australian students want me to be naughty or 'cool' like black American students...I must 'act like the black people on TV', they tell me. It is clear to me that before I came to this

school some Australian students had never met or gone to a school with an African before. My parents would be shocked and send me away if I act like those black teenagers in America. Our culture is not like that.

(Stage1-Focus group 6, Student 9_mh)

Although this student seems to have rejected the stereotypical ‘black’ identity, one example cited in the literature describes how in South Australia older Sudanese students are assuming the characteristics of Afro-Americans. This was attributed to the fact that local students expected them to behave in that way because, until the arrival of African students in their schools, Australia students were only familiar with black people from media presentations of ‘rap’ artists or basketball players in America (Hewson, 2006). Similarly, the participants in this study described how many of their Australian friends want them to act like those African American students they have seen in American movies and shows. This entails talking, dressing and behaving ‘black’, wearing such things as baggy pants that reveal their underwear, caps and other headwear, wrist bands and necklaces, and other ‘bling bling’.⁷

The participants reported that there was also an expectation by Australian peers that by being ‘black’ African students will move around in gang-like groups. For ARB students not familiar with gang culture this expectation was indeed very difficult for them to comprehend. They did not understand how they could be judged and have conclusions drawn about their characters by simply walking alone to the bus or train station. This is how another focus group participant expressed his concerns:

In most cases I walk alone when I am going home but some Australian students find that weird. They laugh at me and ask me why I have no friends. They say I should be with my friends or something. The other day they called me ‘that loner’. I was surprised...it’s like I can only be a person if I am with a group of friends. It was also like they were judging my character because I walk home alone?

(Stage1-Focus Group6, Student 10_msl)

Many participants reported how such expectations – that is, acting ‘black’— placed a huge burden on them. It is also apparent that it contributes to the identity crisis that many are

⁷ American colloquial English term for such jewellery

facing as they try to reconcile their own beliefs about themselves with the expectations and beliefs of others. A number described how they were not prepared to pay the price for assuming such negative identities (as illustrated in the next section). From this, it is clear ARB students are aware of threats to their attempts to create new identities. As such, teachers are encouraged to work with the ARB students to ensure that pedagogical approaches in ESL reinforce positive African Australian identities.

8.5 ARB Students and the Reluctance to Succeed Academically

A number of the participants in the current study described an issue that was somewhat contentious, namely the reluctance of a substantial number of African students to 'succeed'. According to a number of the participants, particularly the female students, because of their 'black' image there were many incidents of misbehaviour involving African boys. More disturbing to them still was that their school performance was also deteriorating. The following comment describes this feeling:

Some of the African boys have totally rejected their identity. They act like gangsters and they don't do their class or homework. When teachers ask them why they become rude and walk out of class. So many of these boys are failing or dropping out of school. When teachers try to follow up with their parents it is very difficult because most them have moved out of home and some are even living with their girlfriends. Some of the boys say they don't care because they get money from Centerlink. This could never happen in Africa.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 24_mh)

Another participant was not only critical of such behaviour but felt it would have been amusing had it not been unfortunate. The sentiments expressed by this participant also revealed how African girls expected certain academic and cultural standards from their male peers:

They think they are cool...oh my God! Walking with your pants down is cool hahaha...that is funny. We always laugh about it with the other African girls; there is nothing cool about walking around showing us your bum. Me I tell them you are just an idiot with your pants down. Which girl would want that...? tell me? To me cool is when you can help me with my work in class but they can't. It is also against our culture what they do and I don't see Australian boys going around like that.

Comments such as these highlight the difficulties experienced by ARB students as they make identity choices. However, their reluctance to succeed academically cannot be ignored by educators as it may point to a deeper problem amongst ARB students in Australia. It may be, as suggested by similar studies in America, that they were rejecting school success because they attribute it to 'whiteness' and their rejection is one way that students deal with their identity crisis as they work to integrate their self-, social and cultural identities. Based on the research they conducted in the USA, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) suggest that in response to cultural barriers, especially in schooling, African Americans develop 'survival strategies' and other coping mechanisms which include ambivalence about success. Even those students who are academically able do not work hard or persevere in their school work. Further, they argue that this oppositional cultural mind frame has led these same students to reject certain forms of behaviour, activities or events, symbols, and meanings as inappropriate for them because they are characteristic of white Americans. Ogbu and Margold (1986) described this phenomenon as the 'burden of acting white', suggesting that for students being successful was tantamount to joining the 'enemy' and is equivalent to giving up one's minority background.

However, within the literature there are alternative explanations that point to the significance of class, ethnicity, and school context with respect to the relationship between race and school achievement (e.g., Carter, 2005; Cook & Ludwig, 1998; Downey & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1998; Ferguson, 2001; Tyson, 2002; Tyson & Darity & Castellino, 2005). For instance, Tyson et al. (2005) found that both black and white students were generally achievement oriented and that racialised peer pressure against high achievement was not prevalent in all schools.

8.5.1 Male ARB Students

To examine the reasons underlying the behaviour of the ARB students in WA with regard to lack of motivation to succeed academically, follow-up individual interviews were organised with a number of male participants. They were asked why they seemed reluctant to pursue success in class. Further prompt questions were also asked such as: was school work too hard? Was success not in keeping with their desired image? Were they just reluctant to work hard in class? With evident annoyance this is how one participant responded:

I don't know what you mean or what these girls are saying...man. I try to do my work but I don't like the work and sometimes it is too hard and the teachers are always on my case. I know that I should get some help but I can't do that man. Back home in Sudan I was the leader of my gang and everyone came to me for help. I didn't go to school much but I was the man coz I was so smart and no-one would dare mess around with me. So am not acting any different, this is how I dressed in the refugee camp and we moved in groups...of course we did this away from the elders but we had our gangs. The girls in Africa didn't like boys that were in gangs but girls here don't care and they like it. The African girls are just jealous and full of shit.

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 12_mtl)

Such comments suggest that ARB students, particularly boys, may not be reluctant to succeed, but rather that there are other factors at play. For instance, their limited literacy skills means that for a number of them school work is difficult. This was highlighted in the following comment:

I am not familiar with the way they teach here and the work in class is hard. Also we have to do a draft before handing in the real one so when I try my best they say it is only a draft and I must try again. So rather than be embarrassed I stay away from class or ignore the teacher. Some of the teachers treat us like high school kids and not like adults that we are!

(Stage3-Individual Interviews, Student 15_ah)

Instead of losing face over work they struggle with, they retreat to their 'street-smart' identities that they developed in the refugee camp prior to coming to Australia. This type of behaviour may represent the coping mechanisms as described by Ogbu (2003). Further, it may not be that they are rejecting school success because it is associated with being Anglo-Australian, but instead such behaviour emerges as they develop their new identity, integrating those facets from their social and cultural background with their new context.

8.5.2 Female ARB Students

In this study there were ARB girls who admitted to falling behind in their school work. Further, a number agreed that there was indeed room to improve their efforts although they were at pains to point out that their academic indifference was related to what they termed 'this education system in Australia' and a school culture that did not re-affirm their identities as African women.

A number of participants pointed out that apart from not doing well, they were disappointed that many African girls were also getting into trouble at school. In a focus group discussion conducted with a number of the girls with the express intention to explore this issue, most were either unwilling to give their reasons or unable to articulate them. One that did respond had this to say:

I know I am going to fail this semester, I will have to repeat year 11 again next year but I don't know what to do. I know that I have to be at school but I find school boring and not interesting. I really don't know why I don't like to be at school you know, maybe it's just this country...I don't know. Maybe I will go to TAFE next year but my parents want me to finish year 12.

(Stage1-Focus Group3, Student 10_cl)

For most ARB girls underperforming at school, their impressions of Australia are less than positive, with many describing Australia as rather uninteresting and boring in terms of friendships and social contact. This is despite the fact that they had built some good friendships with other African girls. They told how in Africa there were many places they could go to with their parents'/guardians' permission, which was not the situation here.

In Africa all our relatives were there, cousins, sisters, brothers or aunties and all that. You could ask your parents to visit your sister in the city or visit grandma away from home and there would be no problem. They knew that we would be safe and my sister or aunty will not let us get into trouble. But here our parents are terrified to let us (girls) out of sight. It's like you will get pregnant by simply saying hi to an Aussie guy or somethin'. It's all that bad stuff about teenagers in Australia that they see on TV and the papers. They don't even trust us with African boys here in Australia. They feel that the African boys have lost their way and have gone wild in the new culture. So for us it's home straight from school and only go out to church on Sundays with the whole family. I don't like this kind of life.

(Stage 3-Individual interview, Student 23_jj)

It appears that indeed this less than positive view of their new cultural context may be partly to blame for this indifference to school work. However, it was also apparent that most of the girls that reported serious difficulties with school work had been in Australia for a shorter period and were hoping that their performance would improve the longer they stayed:

My teachers tell me that I have to do better. I try but I just don't understand what they want me to do and they don't understand about my life. I think I need time, maybe after another year in Australia I will do good.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 6_mm)

On the other hand, there were girls who expressed different views of Australia. Some of them were more positive about their new environment, seeing Australia as an opportunity for them to attain an education, but felt that other responsibilities weighed them down. In terms of their academic achievement girls in this group reported that they felt they were doing better at school, although they also felt that they could improve their efforts. This is how one girl expressed this:

My teachers don't understand why I am not coming to school at times, my mother was sick so I had to cook and go to hospital. I also have to go to immigration to help bring my young brother to Australia. The teachers say I will fail if I don't come to school, they don't understand me.

(Stage1-Focus Group1, Student 2_an)

It should be noted that in most schools involved in this research it was confirmed by the staff that there was a correlation between poor performance at school and absenteeism by both girls and boys and that this was a growing concern.

Some girls expressed their reluctance to attend school due to feelings of non-acceptance by their peers, with a number reporting that they sometimes experienced perceived discrimination as a result of their identity:

I have been here for about two years am Australian now I don't feel like I belong here. Some girls don't talk to us and sometimes at school I feel like I am expected to fail because I am a refugee or something. Some girls come to me and say 'how did you get that mark?' It's like I don't deserve to pass a test or something. I really hate that.

(Stag11-Focus Group2, Student 7_lj)

Such strong feelings as expressed by these participants in this study seem to indicate that with ARB girls a clear sense of identity and belonging within the Australian cultural context was linked to better academic achievement. The girls who found themselves on the margins of the host culture tended to face more difficulties with their school work. The following case study supports this viewpoint.

Case Study 9

My name is Esther and I am from Sierra Leone which is situated in Western Africa. My country shares borders with Guinea and Liberia. I like my country because it is on the North Atlantic Ocean and there is a lot of fish there. I have been here for two years and let me tell you about my school experience.

It is not that us African girls don't like school. People just don't understand us. You see, some of us had already grown up in Africa and were ready for marriage; some of us had dropped out of school because of pregnancies or to look after families and things like that. Some parents in Sierra Leone don't believe in educating girls because it is wasting money since the girl will get married anyway.

Now imagine being suddenly moved to Australia and then having to start this whole school thing all over again, and in a new place. At home I am the parent but when I get to school I am treated like a child, like being pushed around you know. So it is like we don't know anything and that is very frustrating.

Another problem is that some female teachers tell us off about the way we dress, I don't like that. I dress the way I want and nobody should tell me anything. Back in the refugee camp we used to dress like that: you always dress well so the men will notice you.

So it is not that we don't like school but we are just being ourselves. Sometimes we are placed in classes with much younger students and we have to do silly stuff, like games and all that. I just want to do the work and finish it. Because of this sometimes I avoid classes. My problem in Australia is that I feel like I don't belong in school anymore, but at the same time I know that I need a good education to be able to have a good job in future

Similarly, in a study of the academic performance of Chinese immigrant girls, Fan (1996) argues that assimilation may not be the only pathway to satisfactory adjustment. She suggests that how migrant students identify with their own culture of origin often affects satisfactory adjustment, and thus these students should be encouraged to find a personally suitable pathway, rather than being forced along one 'modal pathway'. Teaching and support staff of ARB students should be cognisant of such factors and thus exercise sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of these students.

8.6 Summary

From the evidence presented here it appears that some ARB students are experiencing an identity crisis as a result of their migration to Australia. It is apparent that as they undergo their schooling and interact with teachers and students of similar refugee backgrounds, particularly in schools with high numbers of ARB students, their identity is also being constructed. However, the students described a number of issues that are presenting threats to their adjustment in terms of cultural identity. These included the outwardly secular context, their own reluctance to succeed as displayed by some of their African peers, and the long term implications associated with developing a new identity. Because it is not possible to separate the construction of the ARB students' identity from the educational context, teachers must be made aware of this when undertaking placement of students in appropriate English classes, because this may impact on the process of shaping the identities of these students.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

9.1 Overview

The primary aim of this research (as stated in Chapter One) was to find out the perceptions of ARB students regarding their schooling in WA. The study offers a unique opportunity to document the contribution of ESL programs to these students' acculturation in the Australian educational and cultural context. This study also sought to ascertain how their refugee backgrounds impact on their learning and whether or not these affect student/teacher relationships in English language classrooms. Overall, therefore, this study examines ARB students' perceptions to determine whether there are any cultural norms or nuances that are embedded in the ESL curriculum or within schools and the wider Australian socio-cultural environment acting as barriers to the students' learning and adjustment.

This research used a qualitative approach that entailed focus group interviews, classroom observations and individual interviews. Open-ended questions were used, as these allowed the researcher to probe the students' responses in depth. Further, participants were able to respond in their own words, rather than forcing them to choose from fixed responses as would be the case with other research methodologies. The open-ended questions enabled the researcher to elicit from the participants responses that were meaningful and culturally salient to them. Consequently, there was the flexibility to ask why or how questions, listen carefully to the participants' responses without judgement, and engage with them according to their individual personalities and styles. Some participants chose the option of writing their experiences in the form of a narrative rather than speaking out. Overall, there was richness and an explanatory nature in the participants' responses.

The particular cohort for this study, because of their experiences, can be vulnerable. Therefore, a careful and ethical approach was undertaken to make them feel at ease. The researcher ensured that the aims of the research were carefully explained and that the students, their parents and teachers understood that this is a study into: what are the perceptions of ARB students about the ESL Curriculum, their schooling in WA and their adjustment to the Australian cultural context?

In total, 180 students participated in the study. It should be acknowledged that some students were too shy to participate in the discussions, especially during the focus groups. However, these students surprisingly chose to remain, listening throughout the interviews. This level of interest may indicate an appreciation of such research and, despite a lack of English proficiency, a willingness to engage in public discourse about issues related to their problems and their acculturation.

9.2. Summary of findings and Pedagogical Applications

The following key themes emerged from an analysis of the data. These are summarised below and are discussed in terms of the pedagogical implications.

9.2.1 Culture and Acculturation

This study found that while African students report that they are relatively happy and generally have settled well into WA, they have concerns which include those related to culture and acculturation. The results in the current study point to a number of factors that participants perceived as impacting on their acculturation in the new cultural environment. The ARB students themselves described how their background and related factors were affecting their academic progress. Some also recounted their experiences of racism in the wider community. Other ongoing concerns for the ARB students include a lack of community acceptance and peer acceptance, and their limited access to community facilities. One issue that prompted a reaction from many was in relation to their newfound freedom in the new cultural environment. The ARB students made suggestions regarding the potential role for teachers in assisting their acculturation.

While some ARB students are clearly revelling in this freedom, this is not the case for a number of them. Many described how their feelings of survivor guilt were impacting negatively on their attempts to enjoy the privileges offered by the Australian culture. It is not clear at this stage whether these effects of survivor guilt will be long term or short term. However, what is known is that there is a need for teachers to be aware of the effects of migration on ARB students and to provide appropriate support as required. This is particularly pertinent because students from Africa tend to be perceived as a single group, despite being individuals with unique attributes and social backgrounds (Muir, cited in Haig & Oliver, 2007). Educators also need to take into account the fact that ARB students may have heightened sensitivities associated with being victims of trauma, and because of this may have suffered psychologically damaging experiences. Some of these symptoms are

worsened by the fact that the students were already experiencing high degrees of anxiety and stress before arriving in Australia (See Chapter Five).

The study found that ARB students did have concerns about racism and described some racist incidents that they had experienced. They told how they find such incidents extremely upsetting and most hurtful. What some were clearly not aware of is that racism is illegal in Australia and the Department of Education in WA (DOE) has deemed it unacceptable in WA schools. It should be noted that most of the negative incidents narrated by the students occurred outside the school environments, which is in contrast to a common belief that racism is rampant in WA schools and in the community more generally. Although not widespread, it must be acknowledged that such incidents are particularly difficult for ARB students because they do not have adequate social support to help cope when they do occur. Therefore, as indicated in Chapter Five, there is a need for support for ARB students to help them manage their reaction to such incidents. This support may take the form of classroom discussions and activities, generally providing opportunities for the students to develop strategies for coping. This may be a role for teachers, especially in the ESL context.

9.2.2 ARB Students and Motivation

Notwithstanding hardships prior to coming to Australia, this study found that many ARB students are highly motivated to study, to learn English and to integrate into the Australian community. Further, ARB students acknowledge that in order to fit in socially, culturally and academically, English proficiency is essential. As a consequence, these students are motivated to learn English as it represents a gateway that will give them access to all the other benefits within Australia.

In addition to having various motivations for learning English, a number described how they would like their teachers to be more aware of the affective factors that impact on their learning. For example, some reported a strong desire for their teachers to demonstrate that they believe they can succeed as students.

Given their unique backgrounds and hitherto bleak prospects, when they were unaware of when or even if they would make it to Australia, one would expect these ARB students to be uncertain about what they want from life. However, the findings in the current study were to the contrary. In fact, it would seem that the ARB students in this study have clear goals. Further, it appears that having such goals has enabled them to be optimistic and self-

confident about their futures. Somewhat surprisingly, it was evident that quite a few were aware of their potential ability and competence and as a consequence set high levels of academic and career achievement as their goals. Teachers in WA, especially ESL teachers, are uniquely placed to work with these extremely motivated students and to assist those students who are less motivated. At the same time, it is important that education staff work with ARB students to set realistic goals for their futures.

This does raise the important issues of individual differences and the need for teachers to be cognisant of this in their dealings with ARB students. A number of participants in this study described how they were uncomfortable when treated as stereotypical refugee students and not as individuals. Some even talked about their need to be treated as capable individuals who should be encouraged to work hard. Although they are aware of their lack of English language proficiency and their need to improve, they did not want their lack of English to be viewed as a cognitive deficiency. Therefore, ESL teachers are encouraged to consider not only language skills, but also the ability, motivation, expectations and goals of the individual students.

Teacher attitudes to students and the impact of this on their learning was one of the themes that emerged from the research data. Although some of these students have limited schooling backgrounds, a number of them have experience of schooling and have certain expectations when they walk into Australian classrooms. A number of the participants described the need for teachers to be aware of this and to see past their students' lack of English language proficiency to assist them to achieve. At the same time, the students identified a need for more support for teachers who work with ARB students.

9.2.3 ARB Students Schooling and Transition into Schools

Several issues emerged as key to ARB students' transition into WA schools. Many described in detail how they were unsettled by their initial experience of walking into a WA school. They found the school environment was quite intimidating and this experience left many feeling anxious. The classroom presented particular challenges for ARB students: they described how their level of English language proficiency was challenging; some expressed fear of negative evaluation by peers; a number recounted the difficulty they had developing research and computer literacy skills; and yet others told how they are experiencing some disruptions to their study due to problems related to transport. Notwithstanding these challenges, ARB students in WA have developed firm and amiable relationships with their

teachers and are generally content with how ESL and English courses are being taught. Therefore, it appears that these students have been able to overcome their transition challenges in part because of their positive perceptions of their schooling, and of their classroom teachers in particular.

It should be acknowledged, however, that the Australian classroom does present a challenge to ARB students in WA. The current study found many of these students are clearly 'out of their depth' in the new setting, especially in the initial stages. Because of this, and as stated earlier, newer ARB Students tend to gravitate towards the more experienced students to seek their guidance. This resulted in quiet discussion between the students in their first languages. Although some second language teachers in different contexts would discourage such behaviour, from what the students described in this study, ESL teachers in WA view peer support as being integral to their efforts in creating a supportive, multicultural environment in their classrooms. This is clearly appreciated by the ARB students.

Despite this commendation, other pedagogical approaches were found to be a source of much debate during the focus group meetings. Some ARB students expressed strong support for the education system in Africa with its stricter approach to schooling, thus discouraging complacency, which has become problematic amongst some ARB students here in Australia. Others expressed support for western pedagogical approaches practised in Australia, some outlining their great appreciation for being given a voice in the classroom and in their academic future. Others described how they favoured pedagogical approaches such as collaborative activities, teacher modelling and the supportive classroom atmosphere.

Even so, for many the new educational context in WA in which students learn through games and activities and where they are expected to express opinions, to engage in classroom debates, to argue, to show disagreement, to deal with conflict amicably, and to be able to make suggestions during classroom activities, remains quite challenging. Coming from backgrounds where teacher-centred approaches are practised, these students have to learn and develop these new behaviours in the Australian classroom. Therefore, ESL teachers need to work to assist ARB students to develop the ability to express their own thoughts, ideas and opinions.

9.2.4 ARB Students and their Identity Crisis

Issues of cultural and social identity, as well as the more general concept of self-identity, emerged in the current study as important to ARB students. For example, many of the ARB students in this research claim two or more countries as their countries of origin. As indicated in Chapter Eight, place of birth and time spent living in a country makes a vital contribution to the attachment and identity of an individual. At the same time, the languages of the home and host countries contribute to identity. Therefore, developing proficiency in English means that ARB students will acquire a new range of symbolic and material resources, and together this will change their identity in their new social context. A number of issues are presenting challenges to the students as their new cultural identity emerges. These include: the seemingly secular context in Australia, for some their reluctance to succeed, and for many the long term implications associated with the development of a new identity. For some individuals, it was apparent that this process results in a situation of identity crisis.

On a more positive note, however, it is apparent that, as ARB students undergo their schooling and interact with teachers and students of similar backgrounds to themselves, their transition is enhanced and their identity is being reconstructed in positive ways. Even so, teachers need to be aware of this process that their students are experiencing and work to provide the necessary support for them.

Many ARB students in WA have made the crucial link between learning English and their successful integration. The current study found that these students believe that English proficiency will not only help them to function socially and educationally, but this is also an integral part of their new and emerging identity. To this end, for these students, developing proficiency in English is an 'investment' from which they expect to realise a dividend in the form of a wide range of symbolic and material resources. Additionally, many appeared to realise that this investment in their second language will add to their value and enrich their identity in their new social context.

However, such decisions and changes are not without their challenges. A number of ARB students reported the struggle of balancing their new cultural identities and their new educational context with that of their ethnic cultural background. This calls for teachers to be alert to such cultural dynamics, and assist ARB students to negotiate their way through such challenges. Further, educators need to be aware that their students may be undergoing an identity crisis and that they have an important role in helping their students to develop a

positive identity, as well as ensuring that they implement pedagogical approaches in their ESL teaching that reinforce their students' positive African-Australian identities.

9.3 Limitations of Study

This study focussed on ARB students in the Perth Metropolitan areas, and thus cannot be generalised to the wider ESL population, that is, to other cultural groups and students in the remote or rural areas of the state. It is also acknowledged that the sample size (180 students) may not be representative of the wider ESL population. Another limitation may be the research methodology used. Focus groups, for example, while undoubtedly valuable in collecting 'in-depth' information can sometimes present some difficulties, as strong personalities can influence or at times take over a group and make it difficult for less assertive members to speak (Bell, 2005). Another issue of concern is that if 'group members regard their opinions as contrary to prevailing opinion within the group, they might be inclined to keep quiet or moderate their views somewhat' (Denscombe, 1998, cited in Bell, 2005, p. 115). Although this is acknowledged, it must also be pointed out that the use of individual interviews helped ameliorate this.

Another limitation of this research is that the data was collected in English, as the researcher does not speak the students' first languages. Students who are more proficient in English were encouraged to assist in making sure that other participants understood the discussion and any questions directed to them. However, complete understanding could not be ensured, and nor is it possible to determine if the participants were truly able to express their feelings in English.

An additional limitation is that participant classroom observations may suffer from observer bias. Critics of this method cite the problem of representativeness (Bell, 2005): after studying one group for a period of time, can one really make claims about a similar group somewhere else? To address this, a structured and systematic approach was put in place to ensure reliability and consistency, specifically through the use of an observation checklist.

Researcher bias was also possible because of the researcher's background. Part of the reason the researcher undertook this study was the fact that as an African, there was the possibility of unprecedented access to students and an affinity that enhanced the opportunity of sharing, as compared to a Caucasian researcher, for example. This factor, ironically, may have been an impediment in the initial stages of the current study. In addition, the researcher's

‘Africanness’ may have resulted in problems with data collection and analysis: specifically viewing the data through his own refugee lens.

A further limitation was the self-selecting basis of the schools who participated. Because data was collected from those willing, it may have distorted the representativeness of the data that was collected. One interesting observation was the geographical difference in the school responses to the research. Specifically, schools in the southern suburbs of Perth welcomed the researcher and assisted the identification of suitable students and the collection of data, whereas northern suburb schools had misgivings about the study and were reluctant to participate. Even where permissions had been granted from the participants in the northern suburb schools, access still presented a problem and took a long time, resulting in the researcher adapting some of the data collection methods so as to minimise inconvenience to school staff.

The reluctance of educators to be involved in this research may have been due to the stress that ESL teachers are experiencing, which is because of the increasing number of students entering their classrooms on a day-to-day basis. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that a number of ESL teachers in the WA system are not formally trained ESL teachers. Because the current research involved classroom observations, many were uncomfortable with this aspect, especially as the researcher is a trained ESL teacher.

Moreover, as the researcher is African, some teachers may have felt uncomfortable with him talking to their students. Why these differences were geographically determined is unclear, although differences in the school leadership personnel certainly seemed to contribute to this. To help overcome the teachers’ reluctance, the researcher gave them assurances that there were not the focus of the study and the aim was reiterated many times to those educators who were involved. Further, various strategies were put in place, and, in some instances, changes made in terms of data collection to ensure minimum disruption to the different schools and their teaching staff in order to gain their participation in the study.

9.4 Future Research

From the findings of the current study, it is clear that developing English skills is essential if the ARB children are to access education in Australia. For educators to assist these students there is also a need to explicitly teach about culture and to provide information to assist the acculturation process. There is also a reciprocal need for teachers to understand the refugees’

way of life and to develop their critical awareness of the host country's culture. This is important to avoid cultural misunderstandings and the effects that such misunderstandings have on ARB student learning. How this is best achieved by teachers and within the classroom is unclear and much further research is needed in this regard.

As indicated in previous chapters, a key aspect of this process of adjustment requires students to understand their own attitudes, behaviour and social norms to help them fit into their new study environment. Educators need to fully understand the challenges that such students face in their cultural adjustment. The ESL curriculum is one area where such assistance can be provided. Thus there is a need to further explore how students' educational and cultural adjustment can be achieved by way of curriculum innovations.

Therefore, while the current study has gone some way towards highlighting issues that are impacting on ARB students, there is still a need for further research to explore ways and means to assist ARB students deal with the demands of their new context in WA. For example, this study found, that there were a number of older female participants that are struggling with their classroom engagement due to other social pressures that seem unrelated to their schooling. In addition, a number of male participants are disengaged for other reasons. This suggests that there is need for further research to account for this, and into how this might be addressed.

9.5 Concluding Statement

This research has drawn attention to ARB students, their schooling in WA and their adjustment to the Australian cultural context. What emerged in the findings relates to issues of culture and acculturation, motivation, transition into WA classrooms, and the development of new identities. Although ARB students are generally happy and have settled well in WA, they do have concerns which are having an impact on their learning and day-to-day lives. It is important that these concerns are addressed so that this vulnerable group, despite being motivated, will not remain marginalised in the educational and social context in WA.

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APPENDIX 1

Information Letter for School Administrators

Curtin University

Bentley Campus

Beazley Road

Perth

The Perceptions of African Background Students: Their Schooling in WA and their Adjustment to the Australian Cultural Context

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a Doctoral Research Candidate at Curtin University and currently undertaking a research project investigating the education of African refugee children in Western Australia.

I am trying to find out about what African children think about their education experiences in Australia and what they expect from schooling. The Education Department and Curtin University approve this research, parents and the community also support of this study. It is supervised and must meet strict ethical standards. After the study is complete copies of my report will be made available to the school and will also be made available to the parents through the school should they wish for a copy.

I will require the assistance of willing classroom teachers in identifying suitable participants for focus groups, classroom observations and individual interviews. As such I will also require their assistance in distributing mail to parents of said participants at minimum disruption to their duties or classroom teaching. The children will be asked questions about their schooling and their adjustment to the Australian cultural context. This activity will only take a short period of time. If any child feels at all uncomfortable, they may withdraw from the research at any time. All the data will be kept anonymous. Some students will be invited to volunteer for further follow-up one-on-one interviews with the researcher.

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 31/2011). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Thank you for giving this your attention. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Noah Mbanu

APPENDIX 2

Consent Form for School Administrators

- I have read this document and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.
- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I am willing for this school to become involved in the research project, as described.
- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntary and that parent permission will be sought before commencement of the study.
- I understand that the participant students are free to withdraw their participation at any time, without affecting the relationship with the researcher or Curtin University.
- I understand that teachers are not the focus of the study and will assist the researcher on a voluntary basis.
- I understand that this research may be reported on at seminars or published in a journal, provided that the participants or the school are not identified in any way.
- I understand that DOE will be provided with a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion.

Name of Site Manager (printed):

Signature:

Date: / /

APPENDIX 3

Information Letter for Teachers

Curtin University

Bentley Campus

Beazley Road

Perth

Attention: Teachers in the Intensive Language Centre

Re: The Perceptions of African Background Students: Their Schooling in WA and their Adjustment to the Australian Cultural Context

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am a Doctoral Research Candidate at Curtin University and currently undertaking a research project investigating the education of African refugee children in Western Australia.

I am trying to find out what African children think about their education experiences in Australia and what they expect from schooling. The Education Department and Curtin University approve this research, parents and the community also support this study. It is supervised and must meet strict ethical standards. After the study is complete copies of my report will be made available to the school and will also be made available to the parents through the school should they wish for a copy.

I would like your help in facilitating the distribution of Information/consent forms to parents of research participants as well as any assistance you may give while I conduct focus groups, classroom observations, and individual interviews as part of my project. The school principal is aware that you are helping me and has given his written consent. All the data will be kept anonymous and stored for a minimum of 5 years in line with Curtin University Policy.

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 31/2011). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University

Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Thank you for giving this your attention. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Noah Mbano

APPENDIX 4

Consent Form for Classroom Teachers

- I have read this document and understand the aims, procedures, and risks of this project, as described within it.
- For any questions I may have had, I have taken up the invitation to ask those questions, and I am satisfied with the answers I received.
- I am willing for my students to become involved in the research project, as described.
- I understand that participation in the project is entirely voluntarily.
- I understand that students are free to withdraw their participation at any time, without affecting the relationship with the researcher or school.
- I understand that these research findings may be reported or published in a journal, provided that the participants or the school are not identified in any way.
- I understand that the DOE will be provided with a copy of the findings from this research upon its completion.

Name of Classroom Teacher

(printed):

Signature:

Date: / /

APPENDIX 5

Information Letter for Parents/Guardians/Caregivers

Curtin University

Bentley Campus

Beazley Road

Perth

Request for your child to participate in research:

The Perceptions of ARB Students: Their Schooling in WA and their Adjustment to the Australian Cultural Context

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

I am a Doctoral Research Candidate at Curtin University and currently undertaking a research project investigating the education of African refugee children in Western Australia.

I am trying to find out about what African children think about their education experiences in Australia and what they expect from schooling. The Education Department and Curtin University approve this research, and your child's teacher and school also support this study. It is supervised and must meet strict ethical standards. After the study is complete copies of our report will be available from your child's school should you wish for a copy.

We would like permission for your child to participate in focus group discussions, classroom observations and individual interviews with other children of the same age. The children will be asked questions about their schooling and adjustment to the Australian cultural context. This activity will only take a short period of time. If your child feels at all uncomfortable, they may withdraw from the research at any time. All the data will be kept anonymous. We may also ask your child to volunteer for follow-up one-on-one interviews with a researcher

This study has been approved by the Curtin University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval Number HR 31/2011). The Committee is comprised of members of the public, academics, lawyers, doctors and pastoral carers. Its main role is to protect participants. If needed, verification of approval can be obtained either by writing to the Curtin University

Human Research Ethics Committee, c/- Office of Research and Development, Curtin University, GPO Box U1987, Perth, 6845 or by telephoning 9266 2784 or by emailing hrec@curtin.edu.au.

Thank you for giving this your attention. Looking forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,

Noah Mbano

APPENDIX 6

Parent Consent Form for Participation

I have been asked to give permission for my child to participate in a research project that is concerned with the perceptions and expectations of those involved in the education of African refugee students. I understand that this project is being undertaken Curtin University and is subject to ethical standards.

I understand that as a participant in this project my child will be involved in focus group discussions, classroom observations and individual interviews where they will answer questions about their perceptions and expectations related to the education of African refugee students. She/he may also be asked to participate in an individual interview.

I understand that my child may not directly benefit from the research but that it may inform future approaches to improving the educational outcomes of students.

I have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to allow my child to participate in this research, realising that he/she may withdraw at any time.

I agree that the research data gathered in this study may be published provided my child is not identifiable.

Parent/Guardian: _____ Date: _____

Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Age of child _____

APPENDIX 7

Information Sheet for Focus Group Participants

Hello,

My name is Noah. I have a project that you might like to help me with.

The project is about getting to know what students think about how useful the ESL programs are in helping you to get familiar with the Australian way of life.

I would like you to help me by taking part in focus group discussions where you will be asked questions about your schooling and adjustment to the Australian culture. You may be invited to take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher at a later stage. If you want to withdraw from the project you can do so at any time, that's OK with me.

I won't tell anyone your answers, I have advised your parents, or the person who looks after you, and they have talked with you about helping with the project.

If you would like to help with the project, please draw a circle around the word YES, and print your name on the back of this page. If you don't want to help with the project – that's OK too.

Regards

Mr Noah Mbano

APPENDIX 8

Consent Form for Focus Group Participants

- I know that I have to participate in a focus group at a convenient time to me.
- I know I have a choice whether or not I want to help with this project
- I know that I can stop whenever I want.
- I know that I need to print my name, draw a circle around the word YES, on this page before I can help with the project.

YES

NO

I would like to help with
the project

I do not want to help
with the project

Name of child:

Today's Date: / /

APPENDIX 9

Focus Group Questions

1. Let us all think back to the three stages of the ESL programs, what did you think about the program?
2. What did you like best about the program?
3. What did you not like about the program?
4. How well is the current program working?
5. How best do you think it should be structured?
6. Is this program effectively meeting your needs?
7. How have you settled in your new culture?
8. Do you think the ESL programs have contributed to this?

APPENDIX 10

Classroom Behaviour Observation Checklist

Student Name _____ Date _____

Researcher _____ Time _____

Classroom Observed _____

Classroom Behaviour Observation Checklist										
BEHAVIOURS	Ratings by number 1 -10 1 being poor to 10 being excellent									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Attentive										
Competing										
Cooperating										
Dependent										
Disruptive										
Exploring										
Helping others										
Imitating										
In Transition/Changing										
Inappropriate										
Independent										

Recalls routine											
Initiates activity											
Intent to learn											
Leading/Demonstrating											
Making choices											
Onlooker											
Participating											
Requesting Help											
Uncooperative											
Uninvolved/Wandering											
Unsafe Activity											
Using materials appropriately											
Using appropriate manners											
Waiting											

Comments: (Including changes in behaviour, adult interactions, health concerns, etc.)

APPENDIX 11

Individual Participant Interview Questions

1. In general, what are your perceptions of your English classes?
2. How have your English classes helped your progress academically?
3. What did you find most challenging academically during the program?
4. How has the ESL program helped you talk to classmates and make friends, any challenges?
5. How have you settled in Australia?
6. How do you think the language program contributed this?
7. What have you found to be most challenging culturally?
8. What other things could be done to help your learning of English?
9. What could be improved in your English classes to help with this?
10. What other factors in your past prepared you or affected you negatively before entering the Australian classroom?

APPENDIX 12
Example of coding of student's quotes

Case study 8	Categories
<p>Before we came to Australia we were uncertain about many things. We were afraid that we will not fit in but now when I am in school I am happy. I feel like I can achieve anything, but to do this I have to decide who I want to be in this culture.</p>	<p><i>Feelings of uncertainty and anxiety</i></p>
<p>There are many questions of identity which I have to answer. Who am I? What can I do to become a successful student? How can I fit into the school community? What do the teachers expect from me? How can I meet those expectations? What do I want to become in future?</p>	<p><i>Willingness to integrate and an awareness of the need to redefine self- identity in the new cultural context.</i></p> <p><i>Reflecting on future investments</i></p>
<p>As you can see there are many questions and I wish I had all the answers but I don't know yet. You ask about my identity in Australia gees that is hard. I don't think I am having a problem with my identity in Australia because I know who I am and that will not change. I am an African girl and proud of it! I just take what is good from my culture and what is good in the Australian culture and follow that. But some of my friends are really having problems.</p>	<p><i>Consciousness' and pride associated with of African identity</i></p> <p><i>Acceptance of host culture despite attachment to homeland</i></p> <p><i>Emergence of a third identity</i></p>
<p>Let me tell you a story about Lenny, one of my best friends. He disobeyed his parents and followed the Australian culture. They tried to talk to him but he wouldn't listen so his father beat him up. He ran out of the house and went to the police. The police came to the house and his father was severely warned and was told that if this happened again the parents will be in big trouble with the law and Lenny will be taken away from them to the custody of child services.</p>	<p><i>Evidence of culture clash between host culture and culture of country of origin</i></p> <p><i>Evidence of confusion associated with parenting role as parents are forced to abandon culture of origin as they raise children in the new culture.</i></p>

<p>This made his father very angry and upset because this shamed his family in the African community in Australia. In the African culture respect for the elders is very...very...important. Africans also place big value on education and my friend had gone against both by behaving in this manner. After that his parents kept quiet and then suggested going on holiday for Christmas back home in Sierra Leone. They all went but Lenny never came back. So all my friends are afraid now and they don't know what to do.</p>	<p><i>Loss of face for parents in Australia, Some of the ARBs were concerned about this</i></p> <p><i>Value of education in African community</i></p> <p><i>Consequences for ARBs if they do not conform to home culture.</i></p>
<p>In this camp I faced lots of challenges; having property stolen by thieves in the night, violence and sometimes the rape of young girls, lack of food and clean drinking water and no education. I personally lost a small transistor radio (which was my only link to the outside world), clothes and two bicycles which had been donated by an overseas refugee support group.</p>	<p><i>Violence and Trauma in the refugee camps</i></p> <p><i>Lack of food and water leading to issues related to hunger and health</i></p>
<p>While I was prepared to accept the other hardships as part of my life as a refugee, it was not going to school that worried me most. The end result was that we had a lot of idle time and because of that we formed youth gangs and would assemble in the bushes at the end of each day to play cards for money. These money games usually occurred at secret hideouts away from adults and almost always ended in violence</p>	<p><i>Students concerned about lack of schooling in refugee camps</i></p> <p><i>Gang violence, group identities and Violence in the refugee camps</i></p>

APPENDIX 13

Categorisation of themes

Categories	Student quotes
RB Students, Self-Identity and Identity Crisis	<i>I know that I am African and I was raised as an African child back in Africa. I did not decide to be here but I am here now and I have to deal with it. Some people here think that all refugees are poor people who did not go to school. They expect me to behave that way. But I am very clever and all I want is to be myself and to be a true African girl. But I also want to be Australian so that people do not treat me different.</i>
Adoption of their New Identities	<i>You ask about my identity in Australia gees that is hard. I don't think I am having a problem with my identity in Australia because I know who I am and that will not change. I am an African girl and proud of it! I just take what is good from my culture and what is good in the Australian culture and follow that. But some of my friends are really having problems.</i>
Adoption of New Western Names	<i>Hey man am in Australia now. My African name is too long and too hard to pronounce. Every time people asked for my name and I told them they would go huh? So I changed it. I am Master D or just MD now. Anyway my father says I got my name from his father who got the name after fighting some war back in Sudan. But he's dead now and I got nothing to do with that old man. I don't care about stuff like that anywayz. I am still African but now I got a name that my friends can say out loud and it's all good now.</i>
School as a Second Home	<p><i>1. I like my teachers and I am now very comfortable when I am in class, with my friends and around school. When I am not at school sometimes I am not happy. It's like a second home for me. Home reminds of where I am from and why I am here. I love my parents but mostly I like it better when I am at school.</i></p> <p><i>2. I am always happy at school but when it's time to catch the train home I feel a bit sad. Going home is like beginning a new life...It is worse at the end of term. I really don't like the school holidays but it is good that holidays here are much shorter. In Africa a school holiday was over a month. Imagine if I had to stay home for whole month! I would go crazy. My mother died so I live with my father and his new wife. She doesn't like me because she says my mother was a bad person and I should have died with her.</i></p>
ARB Students and their Religious and Cultural Identity	<i>In my home country of Ethiopia there were many traditional beliefs, however, we believed in one God who was above everyone and everything. Although people engaged in many traditional ceremonies they all went to church every Sunday and it was regarded as a very good thing. People who did not go to church were accused of being bad and no good. Australia is very confusing: very few people go to church, the churches are very beautiful...very nice buildings but they are empty. Hundreds of people pray under trees in Africa. If I talk about God to my Australian friends they are shocked and they look at me in a strange way. One girl called me a 'weirdo' and I didn't understand. I told my teacher and she told me that in Australia people do not discuss religion and politics because it makes people upset, but why? I can understand that politics divides people, even back home people fought over politics, but God makes people upset?</i>

ARB Students and the Reluctance to Succeed Academically

Some of the African boys have totally rejected their identity. They act like gangsters and they don't do their class or homework. When teachers ask them why they become rude and walk out of class. So many of these boys are failing or dropping out of school. When teachers try to follow up with their parents it is very difficult because most them have moved out of home and some are even living with their girlfriends. Some of the boys say they don't care because they get money from Centerlink. This could never happen in Africa.

They think they are cool...oh my God! Walking with your pants down is cool hahaha...that is funny. We always laugh about it with the other African girls; there is nothing cool about walking around showing us your bum. Me I tell them you are just an idiot with your pants down. Which girl would want that...? tell me? To me cool is when you can help me with my work in class but they can't. It is also against our culture what they do and I don't see Australian boys going around like that.