

Chapter 18

The Threat of Downward Assimilation Among Young African Immigrants in U.S. Schools

Immaculee Harushimana
Lehman College (CUNY), USA

Janet Awokoya
California Lutheran University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents research implications geared toward preventing the downward assimilation trend prevailing among young African immigrants in US public schools. Secondary data from three qualitative studies of integration and adaptation processes of African-born immigrant youth in urban school settings helped identify signs of downward assimilation, especially among males. Salient signs of this trend include low academic achievement, gang inclination, and defiance towards authority. Four major theories—segmented assimilation, socio-ecological theory, intersectionality, and critical race theory—served as framework for the analysis of the risk factors that may lead young African immigrants to follow the downward assimilation path. The analysis reveals the need for intervention measures at the federal, state, and school levels to reduce the vulnerability of non-predominant minority youth in US school settings and the moral responsibility of school authorities to ensure their welfare. Recommended preventive measures include (1) educating immigrant families and school communities; (2) encouraging collaboration and dialogue between African community organizations, school administration, and policymakers purported at creating a favorable school climate for the marginalized African immigrant youth; (3) increasing intervention measures, such as school-community mediation and political representation.

INTRODUCTION

The price of immigration is too damn high!

Families in desperation opt to leave behind

Loved ones, secure jobs, and their dignity

In pursuit of an American dream out of reach. (Immaculee Harushimana)

Despite the Trump administration's nationalist agenda and anti-immigration stance, the prediction by demographers (Kotkin, 2010) and immigration studies scholars (Massey, 2008) that by 2050 the United States of America may become a "majority-minority" country requires deep thought and the development of sound, practical policies. A shift from the US being a predominately White nation to being one where ethnic minorities will become the numerical majority implies a major shift in the nation's politics, economy, and reputation. Racially, the US population has become markedly diverse as a result of the post-1965 new immigration wave (Massey, 1995). Though not mentioned in Massey's discussion of the post-1965 new immigration demographics, it is important to highlight the significant surge in African migration noted in the 1980's (Gordon, 1998; Takougang, 2003). A special feature of the new immigration population is that the majority of them come from non-western nations and consist predominantly of poor, economic and political refugees, some with little or limited education and finances (Dodoo, 1997; Gordon & Gordon, 1992; Noguera, 2004). If the descendants of this new wave of immigrants are expected to become US leaders of tomorrow, as demographer predictions indicate, it is critical that research should begin to focus on how adequately or inadequately this new generation is being nurtured and supported to assume leadership roles of this great nation. Critical reviews of the school adaptation processes of "new immigrant" youths, unfortunately, do not project a positive picture (Awokoya & Harushimana, 2013; Harushimana, 2013; Lukes, 2015; Mthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The conditions under which these children learn, especially those attending public urban schools, are infelicitous. Some are either bullied (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2015; Harushimana, 2013) or underserved and overlooked (Agyepong, 2013; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000); others are either "shut out" or "pushed out" (Lukes, 2015). As the US population becomes more and more diverse, and cultural globalization (Held & McGrew, 1999) spreads around the world, the odds that contemporary immigrants can follow the straight-line model of assimilation, also known as vertical or classical assimilation, are considerably low. This unforeseen trend needs to be acknowledged and prevented.

Educational anthropologists (Fordham, 1985; Ogbu, 2008) have contended that "American minorities" develop an oppositional culture that directly challenges White, mainstream society's notions of success, particularly academic success. Due to living in poor, disenfranchised communities, alienation from parents, peers, and school, and low prospects of job and career opportunities, the threat of downward assimilation, or the prediction of downward mobility into a rainbow underclass (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993), has been noted among late arrival African immigrant youth. Three research studies focusing on 1.5 African-born immigrants (i.e., children who either immigrated with or joined their parents at the secondary school level), and second generation or US-born children born to African immigrant parents, call attention to the dangers of generalizing what some researchers, such as Williams (2007), have identified as favorable factors for positive assimilation, including age at arrival, family

23 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-threat-of-downward-assimilation-among-young-african-immigrants-in-us-schools/229413

Related Content

Designing for Distance Learning: Analyzing the Process of Redesigning Online Courses Using the Three Pillars Method

Mapopa William Sangaand Sherri L. Brogdon (2021). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design* (pp. 62-72).

www.irma-international.org/article/designing-for-distance-learning/274321

Modelling Spoken Multimodal Instructional Systems

Niels Ole Bernsenand Laila Dybkjær (2011). *Instructional Design: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications* (pp. 541-565).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/modelling-spoken-multimodal-instructional-systems/51839

Enhancing Inter-Cultural Mathematics Teaching Competencies: What Must Mathematics Teachers Do?

Judah Paul Makonye (2019). *Globalized Curriculum Methods for Modern Mathematics Education* (pp. 1-14).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/enhancing-inter-cultural-mathematics-teaching-competencies/208765

Position of Blockchain: Internet of Things-Based Education 4.0 in Industry 5.0 – A Discussion of Issues and Challenges

Shrikant Tiwari, R. Ravinder Reddyand Amit Kumar Tyagi (2024). *Architecture and Technological Advancements of Education 4.0* (pp. 292-311).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/position-of-blockchain/334402

Improving Distance Student Retention Through Satisfaction and Authentic Experiences

Madeleine Bornschlegland David Cashman (2018). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design* (pp. 60-77).

www.irma-international.org/article/improving-distance-student-retention-through-satisfaction-and-authentic-experiences/204984