

Fostering success through cultural fusion: An autoethnography exploring Ọmọlúàbí-inspired
interventions for marginalized K-5 students

by

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B.S., East Central University, 2004

M.Ed., University of Oklahoma, 2007

M.S., Kansas State University, 2022

AN ABSTRACT OF A DISSERTATION

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
Department of Educational Leadership

College of Education

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY
Manhattan, Kansas
2026

Abstract

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By situating personal experiences within broader historical and sociocultural frameworks, the study sought to highlight the resilience inherent in Yoruba customs and the critical significance of cultural preservation. It advocates for a reconnection with ancestral practices, thereby fostering a deeper comprehension of both individual and communal identities. This methodological approach significantly contributes to the ongoing discourse surrounding cultural continuity and revitalization, providing valuable insights into how we can honor and sustain our cultural heritage.

Keywords: Ọmọlúàbí Philosophy, Marginalization in Education, Equity in Education, , Cultural Awareness in Schools.

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Approved by:

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	ix
List of Tables	x
Acknowledgements	xi
Dedication	xiii
Preface	xiv
Chapter 1 - Introduction	1
Lighting the Candle	1
Guiding the Young - Agba Ki Wa Loja Ki Ori Omo Tuntun Wo	2
Rationale	4
Research Purpose	6
Research Question	6
Exploring Autoethnography and the Role of Yoruba Values	6
Positionality Statement	9
I Am Me	10
Student Perspective	12
Educator Perspective	12
Administrator Perspective	12
Philosophical Assumptions	15
Theoretical Framework	17
Operational Definition of Key Terms	19
Chapter Summary	20
Chapter 2 - Literature Review	22
Discovering Origins, Sovereignty, Culture, and Ethics	22
Yoruba Unveiled	23
Yoruba Cultural Values: Asa ati Ise Yoruba	24
Fostering Connections: Cultivating Ọmọlúàbí	25
Principles of Ọmọlúàbí	27
Disrupting Greatness	28
Roots of Fortitude: The Connection of Culture and Education	30

Cultural Ecological Theory and Minority Status in Schooling: A Constructive Perspective...	35
Culturally Relevant Pedagogy	38
Cultural Convergence: The Best of Both Worlds	40
A Thread of Wisdom: Weaving Administrative Interventions into Pedagogical Practices	41
Relevance of Cultural Responsiveness	43
Bridging the Gap.....	46
Chapter Summary	48
Chapter 3 - Methodology	49
Convergence: Qualitative Inquiry, Autoethnography, and Storytelling	49
Research Approach	49
Brief History and Significance of Autoethnography	51
Self as Subject.....	53
Challenges and Limitations of Using Oneself as a Subject	54
Research Context	55
Data Collection	55
Data Management	59
Data Analysis and Interpretation	60
Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research	62
Worthy Topic	63
Resonance	63
Meaningful Coherence.....	64
Ethical Considerations	64
Rich Rigor	65
Chapter Summary	67
Chapter 4 - Findings.....	69
Vignette 1: Cultural Disconnection and the Pathway to Academic Reengagement.....	74
Vignette 2: Anchored -The Gift of Ọmọlúàbí	82
Vignette 3: Bridge to Success.....	89
Vignette 4: Recipient to Ambassador	102
Vignette 5: Change Within	108
Vignette 6: Transcending.....	113

Interconnectedness of the Themes	118
Chapter Summary	121
Chapter 5 - Discussion	122
Research Purpose	123
Research Question	123
Implications for Practice	126
Recommendations for Future Research	128
Reflection	129
Conclusion	130
References	132
Appendix A	147

List of Figures

Figure 1.1.	3
Figure 2.1.	23
Figure 2.2.	28

List of Tables

Table 3.1. <i>Vignette Summaries</i>	57
Table 4.1. <i>Coding Analysis for Vignettes</i>	70

Acknowledgements

“Delight yourself in the LORD, and He shall give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the LORD, Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.” (Psalm 37: 4-5, NKJV).

From my first tentative steps to the final moments of this journey, I have felt the steady hand of God guiding my steps with love, mercy, and grace, even when the vision seemed blurry. My heart overflows with sincere thanks for my beloved husband, “*Igi lehin Ogba mi*”, my strong support, Babatunde Jessup BankOkoya. Your calmness and steadfast support have been my backbone and the steady strength during this journey. Through every long night and uncertain day, you held me firm, cheering me on and giving me the confidence to continue. To our precious children, Oluwa Demiladeayo and Oluwa Teniola, your laughter and motivation have been constant reminders of the deeper joy and purpose behind every word.

To my professors, Dr. Donna Augustine-Shaw and Dr. Maja Stojanović, your wisdom, encouragement, and honest feedback shaped my thinking and inspired me to reach higher than I thought possible. Thank you for believing in my work and guiding me with patience and expertise. To my committee, I am grateful for your thoughtful insights, critical questions, and unwavering support throughout this process. Your dedication challenged me to grow as a scholar and strengthened the quality of my dissertation. To my students and their parents, your curiosity, resilience, and partnership have been a constant source of motivation. You remind me daily of the importance of this work and the impact that compassionate education can have. Thank you for trusting me and allowing me to be a part of your educational journeys.

Finally, my heart overflows with gratitude to the King of Glory, the LORD GOD ALMIGHTY. This accomplishment stands as a true testament to Your steadfast faithfulness, abundant grace, and the quiet miracles along the way. As I delighted myself in You, LORD, my

every hope and longing found gentle fulfillment in Your perfect timing. I placed my dreams, my worries, and my journey in Your hands, and You shaped them into blessings far beyond what I imagined. For Your unwavering love and for carrying me every step of the way, I am forever humbled and thankful.

Dedication

With deepest appreciation and abiding love, I dedicate this work to:

To my devoted husband, Babatunde Jessup BankOkoya, “*Igi lehin Ogba mi,*” the pillar standing firmly by my side. To our wonderful children, my chicka- chika boobos, Oluwa Demiladeayo and Oluwa Teniola. Above all, to the King of Glory, the LORD God Almighty, whose abundant grace and enduring mercy sustained me each step of the way.

Preface

Sculpting Identity

This work did not begin as an academic study into early intervention; it began as a personal reconciliation of two worlds. As a researcher and educator, I observed the persistent marginalization of K-5 students whose "brilliance" was often misread by traditional systems. I found myself returning to the ancient Yoruba concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, the philosophy of "raising a virtuous child," who embodies *Iwa-pele* (gentle, balanced character) and *Opolo-pipe* (intelligence).

In this autoethnography, I adopt a reflexive stance, using my lived experiences to advocate for a "fusion" model. I argue that true early intervention for marginalized students occurs when we stop viewing them through a deficit lens and instead nurture them as potential *Ọmọlúàbí*, defined by *Otito* (truth), *Iteriba* (respect), and *Akinkanju* (bravery).

I have chosen autoethnography because the "heart" of *Ọmọlúàbí* cannot be captured through cold statistics alone. It requires a depiction that honors the *Èkọ Ilé* (home training) that our children bring into the classroom. By "observing myself observing," I intend to tear down the barriers that separate indigenous wisdom from Western pedagogical frameworks.

Readers should note that while this narrative remains highly personal, it is tethered to a mutual hope: that every K-5 student, regardless of their zip code, is seen as a hidden gem, a paragon of excellence in the making.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Lighting the Candle

Oh, NEPA! Not again! Frustration overwhelms me as I move through the darkened room, surrounded by an unsettling stillness. My hands search for a candle and matchbox, the familiar sense of dread persistent. I accidentally bumped into one of the intricately carved statues on the table. "Haa! Adesuwa, Sho Ara e!" (Adesuwa, be careful! Alhaja scolds). I managed to catch it just before it fell. My grandmother, Alhaja, gently helps me return the artifact to its place.

I let out a heavy sigh, voicing my fear of the darkness and the boredom that settles in with each power outage. Mama, ever gentle, lights the candle and pulls me into her embrace. Her voice rises in a soft song, 'Lilo mase ja tere ja mase ja...', the familiar prelude to the story of the wise tortoise. As her melody fills the room, I hear lessons of responsibility, respect, and resilience woven into every word. 'Stay true to who you are,' she tells me, her eyes shining in the candlelight. 'Listen to my words; they will guide you.' Sitting there, I reflect on Mama's wisdom and the tortoise's cleverness, feeling the deep roots of my Yoruba heritage anchoring me in that moment.

My personal narrative as a Yoruba indigene navigating contemporary educational landscapes documents my lived experiences and shapes how I interpret and engage with cultural identity and pedagogy. Through critical reflection, I recognize that my worldview is informed by the convergence of cultural heritage and professional factors. This autoethnographic perspective enables me to examine how storytelling and self-examination influence my teaching viewpoint, highlighting the important role of narrative in shaping both personal and pedagogical beliefs.

The constant interruptions from NEPA are more than just moments without light; they are reminders of the resilience and adaptability woven into our daily lives, much like what is

required in the classroom. In those stretches of darkness, the candle's glow does more than chase shadows away, it becomes a symbol of understanding, wisdom, and the enduring strength of cultural identity. As I sit staring at the flickering light, I am reminded of the stories shared by elders that carry values and principles that shape the Ọmọlúàbí spirit within us.

In my roles as behavior interventionist, academic support teacher, dean of student affairs, and assistant principal, I prioritize culturally responsive teaching practices that empower students to embrace their identities. My commitment to education is grounded in the belief that academic success must be integrated with cultural, moral, and ethical development, affirming that education goes beyond traditional academic measures (Hammond, 2015). This dissertation examines the convergence of Yoruba cultural structures and Western educational practices, resulting in a hybrid identity that honors both perspectives. Guided by a significant Yoruba proverb, the study explores Indigenous child-rearing practices and the implications for educational methodologies. It aims to demonstrate how cultural knowledge systems contribute to the development of children and young adults, emphasizing the role of cultural values in shaping educational trajectories. By fostering dialogue at the intersection of identity and education, this research seeks to provide insights into how cultural context informs effective pedagogical approaches.

Thus, the journey begins!

Guiding the Young - Agba Ki Wa Loja Ki Ori Omo Tuntun Wo

As a Yoruba indigene, the proverb, “Agba ki wa loja ki ori omo tuntun wo” has always resonated deeply with me. It means that children do not lose their way when guided by elders. This wisdom speaks to the heart of our upbringing, nurturing, protecting, and passing down culture and resilience from one generation to the next. Mothers, especially, stand at the center of

this guidance. Their hands shape not only their children's futures but also the spirit of the entire community, weaving bonds of care and love that hold us all together.

Figure 1.1.

Agba ki wa loja ki ori omo tuntun wo: Guiding the Young - Wise Supervision.



BankOkoya, Z. (2025a).

In Figure 1.1, a mother carries her child, a powerful image that captures the essence of our responsibility as adults to care for and guide the young (BankOkoya, 2025). Just as mothers create safe havens at home, teachers are called to build similar spaces in schools, where students feel protected and free to express themselves. When we nurture emotional safety, we give children the courage to explore, to stumble, and to learn without fear of judgment. It is in these gentle, supportive environments that both academic and personal growth can flourish.

Furthermore, the proverb underscores the importance of guidance within the educator-student dynamic (Noddings, 2005). Teachers not only orient students towards academic achievement but also contribute significantly to their personal development (Hattie, 2009). Despite the myriad challenges educators face in addressing diverse needs and external constraints, their unwavering commitment serves as a source of inspiration for students (Day &

Gu, 2010). The bond between a mother and child bears a striking resemblance to the connection formed between a teacher and their students (Goldstein, 1999). In both contexts, cultivating strong relational ties fosters trust and emotional support (Pianta, 1999). Ultimately, adults' dedication to prioritizing children's well-being reflects the concept of raising *Ọmọlúàbí*, preparing virtuous future generations (Falola & Akinyemi, 2017). This notion underscores the necessity for ongoing guidance, support, and cultural continuity, ensuring that individuals are nurtured to make positive contributions to society (Falola & Akinyemi, 2017; Noddings, 2005).

Rationale

This research centers on the concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, interpreted as "the virtuous child, and underscores the significance of Yoruba cultural values within educational frameworks. The exploration is anchored in the works of prominent scholars, including Osalusi and Ajayi (2021), Fafunwa (2018), Zaretta Hammond (2015), and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009). These scholars collectively underscore the transformative potential of cultural paradigms and advocate for educational models that acknowledge and incorporate students' rich cultural diversity. Osalusi and Ajayi (2021) emphasize integrating indigenous African values into school curricula, while Fafunwa (2018) highlights the foundational role of African cultural heritage in shaping educational philosophy. Hammond (2015) and Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009) both stress the importance of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy in fostering equitable learning environments and improving outcomes for students from diverse backgrounds.

By embracing this perspective, the research aims to demonstrate how integrating culturally relevant pedagogy (CRP) enhances the educational experience and also deepens understanding of diverse learning environments (Gay, 2018). Focusing on autoethnographic methodology, this study connects personal narratives to broader social constructs, particularly in

educational contexts. Through the autoethnographic lens, the complex interplay between culture, identity, and pedagogical practices is critically examined, illuminating how personal stories are situated within a wider educational paradigm (Ellis et al., 2011).

The insights generated from this research are particularly significant for educators and administrators, as they offer a nuanced perspective on the complex, multifaceted experiences that shape students' learning pathways (Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Osalusi & Ajayi, 2021). In an increasingly interconnected global landscape, the ability to recognize and value students' diverse backgrounds and narratives is crucial for fostering inclusive educational environments that acknowledge all voices (Fafunwa, 2018; Gay, 2010). Recognizing that students come from diverse backgrounds and unique aspirations is essential for effective pedagogical practice and the creation of culturally responsive curricula (Banks & Banks, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

By centering on these varied perspectives, educators are better equipped to confront prevailing challenges, foster a sense of belonging, and design curricula that resonate with students' lived experiences, ultimately nurturing empathy and inclusivity within the classroom (Gay, 2018). As an educator and administrator from a Yoruba Nigerian cultural heritage, I acknowledge the importance of integrating personal narratives into scholarly dialogue. I am dedicated to amplifying these narratives and promoting cultural fusion within educational environments, ultimately contributing to the establishment of equitable and enriching academic settings for all learners.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this autoethnographic study is to explore and critically reflect on my personal experiences with early intervention for marginalized students situated within the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts of elementary education. By grounding this exploration in the Yoruba cultural concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, I sought to examine how these interventions could empower students and facilitate their pathways to success while considering the unique challenges they faced. This study sought to provide insights into the experiences with tailored support systems that underscored the relevance of Yoruba cultural understanding in promoting educational equity.

Research Question

This study was guided by the following overarching research question: How do my experiences with early cultural intervention programs designed for marginalized students illustrate how Yoruba culture can be leveraged in early intervention programs? An early intervention program, in relation to this research refers to, a culturally grounded initiative provided early in a child's education to support marginalized students, using Yoruba cultural values and practices as foundational tools to promote both academic and personal development. The research question explores how my direct experience with the Yoruba cultural values illustrates the benefits and impact of leveraging Yoruba culture provided early in a child's intervention efforts.

Exploring Autoethnography and the Role of Yoruba Values

Critical autoethnography is a transformative methodological approach that integrates personal experiences within the broader contexts of society, culture, and history (Boylorn & Orbe, 2026). This methodology enables researchers to analyze power dynamics, identity

formation, and social justice issues through the lens of personal narratives. By reflecting on their experiences, researchers can gain a clearer understanding of their roles within complex societal structures.

According to Boylorn and Orbe (2016), critical autoethnography is vital in promoting social justice and equity. By prioritizing marginalized voices, this approach enables contesting prevailing narratives that contribute to systemic inequalities, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding these issues. This methodology fosters reflexivity and critical thinking, equipping researchers with deeper insights into social challenges and motivating them to engage in meaningful activism. Through reflection, individuals can reveal how broader cultural paradigms and institutional frameworks influence their experiences.

In this dissertation, autoethnography is a fundamental component that facilitates my reflective engagement with my students' experiences as I navigate my multifaceted roles as a behavior interventionist, dean of student affairs, and assistant principal. These roles provide unique opportunities to support students in exploring their identities, values, and beliefs, ultimately promoting their resilience and academic success. Moreover, this approach encourages me to examine my own professional journey as an educator, emphasizing my commitment to integrating African Indigenous values and beliefs into my pedagogical practices. Such a focus on cultural relevance is essential for crafting impactful educational experiences. This methodological stance aligns with the Afrocentric perspective, which asserts that centering African experiences and values is vital for authentic knowledge production and educational transformation (Asante, 1991; Asante, 1990). Asante (2003) emphasizes the importance of self-location and the reclamation of agency, arguing that educators must be reflexive about their positionality and actively create learning environments that reflect African worldviews. By

engaging in autoethnography and prioritizing Indigenous values, I embody Asante's (1991) call for culturally grounded pedagogy that affirms student identity and fosters holistic development.

Utilizing autoethnography also sheds light on my interactions with a diverse student population often categorized as at-risk, emotionally dysregulated, or marginalized. A deeper understanding of these dynamics enhances my ability to devise effective strategies to address the challenges these students encounter, fostering their overall well-being. Through this research endeavor, I have engaged in critical self-analysis of my cultural background, which has enabled me to recognize personal biases and identify strengths and areas for improvement in my educational methods. This process exemplifies positionality analysis and critical reflexivity, which are essential for understanding how identity and perspective shape research and practice (Finlay, 2002; Holmes, 2020; Milner, 2007). By centering my inquiry on Ọmọlúàbí principles, my research underscores the importance of CRP in enhancing student engagement and academic achievement across diverse backgrounds.

Thus, autoethnography emerges as a powerful means of connecting individual experiences to broader educational frameworks, fostering a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for underserved populations. The insights garnered from this reflective process could serve as a resource to empower educators to recognize the significance of incorporating cultural practices and values into pedagogical strategies, ultimately leading to enhanced educational outcomes for all students.

This autoethnographic exploration illustrates the significant influence of my Yoruba heritage on my educational philosophy. As I navigate the challenges associated with high-risk or emotionally dysregulated students, I have come to realize that integrating foundational Yoruba values into my teaching approach can facilitate transformative shifts in mindset and behavior

(Falola & Akinyemi, 2016). By nurturing self-esteem and instilling a sense of purpose, I aim to exemplify how cultural integration can significantly enrich the educational landscape (Khalifa, 2018).

Engaging in a positionality analysis has enabled me to adopt an Ọmọ̀lúàbí-inspired educational leadership framework that emphasizes integrity, respect, empathy, accountability, and communal responsibility (Falola & Akinyemi, 2016). This leadership approach aligns with culturally responsive and transformational leadership theories, which highlight the importance of ethical example, inclusion, and empowerment in educational settings (Khalifa, 2018; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

By rooting my leadership in Ọmọ̀lúàbí, I strive to foster an environment where students and staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to achieve their full potential, demonstrating the enduring relevance and transformative power of Indigenous values in contemporary educational leadership (Falola & Akinyemi, 2016; Greenleaf, 1977).

Positionality Statement

My journey into the complexities of educational environments has been profoundly influenced by my personal experiences and professional roles. As a behavior interventionist, dean of student affairs, and administrator, I have encountered a diverse spectrum of students, many of whom have been labeled as emotionally dysregulated, behavior disordered, or at risk. These varied roles have not only informed my pedagogical approach but have also shaped my understanding of the critical interplay between culture, behavior, and learning within educational settings.

I Am Me

"Welcome back! I hope y'all completed your reading because today, we are diving into our presentations, and we'll be working in groups of four," Mrs. Frazier announced as she passed back graded assignments. As the anticipation of collaboration hung in the air, she continued, "you four are group one, Kimberly, Jamel, and you two are group two, Romell, Jackson, Ara, and Joseph, you are group three. "Adiziwa, you'll partner with Brooklyn, Karissa, and Whitney, group four. Each group will take turns sharing their insights from the reading with the class." With a smile, I move my chair closer to the group of ladies. Despite my presence, they are deeply engrossed in a lively discussion, debating the reading and choosing their preferred topic for conversation. They ignore my attempts to join in, and in the end, they assign me the task of wrapping up the discussion. "What just happened here?" These people want to relegate me, but God will not allow them.

Mo ranti omo eni ti emi nse (I remember the child of whom I am.)

I am confident in who I am.

Confused and still trying to figure out what just transpired and why I was being ignored, I am jolted back to the present as the teacher's prompt signals the commencement of group presentations, prompting me to gather my thoughts and composure. The trio gave their insights and assigned me to conclude the presentation. Clearing my throat, I opened my discussion with a quote from the reading. After providing insights and summarizing the group's points, Mrs. Frazier was so impressed that she stated, "No one can top that. Well, done bringing it together, Adiziwa.

Brooklyn, Karissa, and Whitney praised my performance. I was considered irrelevant and unproductive before the presentation. However, they were thrilled that our group received the

highest accolade after the presentation. They openly recognized me as a valuable team member, requesting I continue as the group's spokesperson. I declined their offer to work together on future group projects, refused to be their spokesperson, and asked to be part of a different group. I was not willing to be a figurehead and afterthought taken for granted.

I know my worth. I know who I am:

I am Me - *Ọmọ́lúàbí*,

a virtuous and morally upright person who

exhibits all the 'excellencies of character' required for goodliness in a person.

The story "I am Me" illustrates a pivotal classroom moment where I initially felt marginalized during a group assignment. Although my ideas were overlooked and I was relegated to a minor role, I remained true to my values and drew strength from my sense of self-worth. When given the chance to present, I confidently summarized the group's insights, earning unexpected recognition from both my teacher and peers. This experience not only shifted how others perceived me but also reinforced my own commitment to integrity and self-respect, qualities at the heart of the Ọmọ́lúàbí tradition.

I am Me Ọmọ́lúàbí.

I included this short summary here as an example of how vignettes will be presented in Chapter 4. By reflecting on episodes like "I am Me," I demonstrate my analytic approach: each vignette is accompanied by a focused summary and interpretation that highlights its significance for my journey and for understanding the broader themes of identity and cultural values. This method provides readers with a preview of how lived experiences are woven into the analysis and discussion that follows.

Student Perspective

Reflecting on my experiences as a student in a culturally diverse landscape, I recognize the pivotal role that representation plays in fostering identity and belonging. During my undergraduate years, I was immersed in an environment rich with varied backgrounds; however, my African heritage often remained underrepresented in both the curriculum and social interactions. This disconnect revealed the essential need for cultural awareness and inclusivity in educational practices.

Educator Perspective

Transitioning into my role as an educator in a Midwestern school, I found myself surrounded by a diverse student body, many of whom faced challenges categorized as high-risk or emotionally dysregulated. In this context, I drew upon my Yoruba heritage to inform my teaching practices and classroom management strategies. Integrating culturally responsive techniques grounded in the principles of *Ọmọlúàbí* such as respect, responsibility, and resilience helped me cultivate an equitable learning environment that enhanced student engagement and academic success. My bilingual proficiency in Yoruba and American English facilitated meaningful translations that honored the cultural narratives I aimed to integrate into my teachings. Engaging classroom interactions, student responses to culturally integrated lessons, and conversations with students and colleagues guided my pedagogical decisions.

Administrator Perspective

Within my administrative capacity, I directed my focus toward initiating school-wide programs that celebrated cultural diversity and promoted inclusivity. This role allowed me to engage educators, parents, and community members in vital dialogues surrounding the importance of cultural representation in education. I assumed leadership responsibilities in

developing initiatives designed to bridge cultural gaps and provide professional development centered on cultural competency for staff. My background as a researcher, coupled with my cultural heritage, enriched my understanding of the systemic challenges faced by marginalized populations. Feedback from parents, meetings, and workshops informed me of my reflections on the effectiveness of these initiatives in transforming school culture.

These interconnected phases student, educator, and administrator have yielded rich narratives and reflections that form a comprehensive autoethnography. The insights gained into the relationship between culture and education underscore the necessity for a transformative framework that genuinely integrates diverse cultural perspectives, particularly those rooted in my Yoruba heritage. Ultimately, the information gathered from conversations and experiences across these various contexts elucidates the potential for cultural fusion to significantly enhance students' educational experiences and future trajectories.

Additionally, the interplay between language and culture is pivotal in bilingual research, especially when examining the rich tapestry of Yoruba and American English. My unique position as a bilingual individual, deeply immersed in the Yoruba cultural milieu, allows me to navigate complex linguistic landscapes with precision and depth. This cultural and linguistic alignment enhances my translation skills and enables me to engage with texts authentically and insightfully.

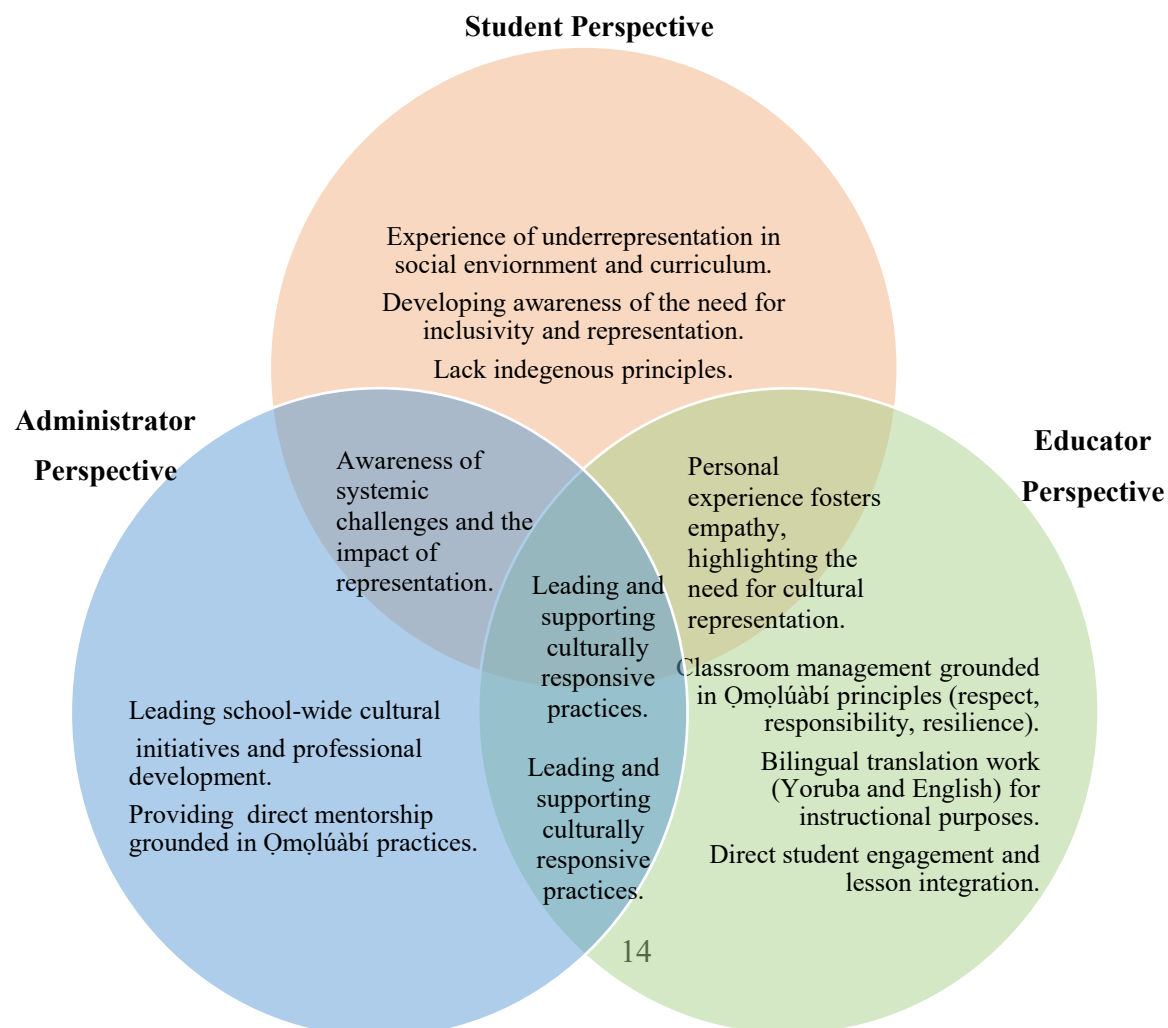
The significance of my cultural fluency is paramount in generating translations that transcend mere linguistic transpositions, embodying the cultural essence and emotional depth of the original material. Understanding Yoruba idioms, proverbs, and contextual nuances enables me to convey meanings that go beyond literal interpretations, preserving the integrity of the original discourse. Such cultural literacy ensures that crucial elements of identity, tradition, and

worldview are acknowledged and integrated into the research process. Moreover, my strong ties to Yoruba culture empower me to adopt a critical perspective that informs my analysis and interpretation of texts. This engagement nurtures an academic dialogue that exceeds mere translational tasks; it fosters a deeper appreciation for the cultural dynamics at play within the Yoruba language and its broader implications for education. Through this lens, I advocate for a more inclusive and culturally responsive educational framework that enriches the experiences of all students.

Figure 1.2.

Journeys Through Various Roles and Positions

This figure depicts the interrelation of my experiences as a student, educator and administrator. Each role depicts insights of cultural representation.



Philosophical Assumptions

In social sciences, understanding human behavior and social phenomena is grounded in specific philosophical assumptions, in this case interpretivism. This approach emphasizes individual subjective experiences as essential, suggesting that reality is dynamic and continuously shaped by social interactions and contextual variables (Schutz, 1970).

Interpretivism contrasts with positivism, which focuses on numerical data and observable outcomes. By prioritizing qualitative inquiry and personal narratives, interpretivism reveals the complexities of social reality and underscores the importance of context and meaning (Joyce, 2010; Vaughan, 1999).

As a foundational principle for this study, interpretivism allows for an in-depth analysis of social phenomena, integrating subjective realities and exploring meaning-making dynamics. This lens fosters a more comprehensive understanding of social structures and their potential for positive change. It invites engagement and reflection from the audience, encouraging connections with shared experiences that deepen the understanding of the human condition.

Additionally, interpretivism presents a compelling paradigm that highlights the subjective nature of social reality, shaped by human interactions (Schwandt, 1994). This perspective is particularly relevant in qualitative research, which seeks to uncover the nuanced significances behind individuals' actions, thoughts, and emotions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By embracing this paradigm, researchers can better navigate the complexities of human experience and appreciate the social landscapes that influence our lives.

Ultimately, interpretivism prioritizes the subjective interpretations of individuals and acknowledges the contextual influences that shape reality. This philosophical stance emphasizes reflexivity, prompting researchers to critically examine their biases and remain aware of how

these perspectives may affect data interpretation (Finlay, 2002a). Such self-awareness enriches the research process, ensuring findings authentically represent participants' viewpoints and fostering a delicate understanding of diverse experiences. In essence, interpretivism cultivates a constructive discourse on the relative and subjective nature of knowledge, inviting exploration of the myriad meanings inherent in human experiences.

Bridging Interpretivism with Culture and Self

This interpretivist foundation aligns seamlessly with autoethnography, which centers the researcher's lived experience within its cultural context and relies on personal narrative to illuminate broader social phenomena. Autoethnography recognizes that knowledge is constructed through reflection, interaction, and storytelling, principles at the heart of interpretivism (Ellis et al., 2011).

Similarly, African Indigenous methodologies, including those grounded in Yoruba ontology, emphasize the importance of relationality, community, and contextual meaning-making. Yoruba ontology, for instance, views reality as a dynamic interplay between the individual, community, ancestors, and the spiritual world (Abimbola, 1976; Gbadegesin, 1991). This holistic worldview values subjective experiences and collective narratives, acknowledging that knowledge is not static but emerges from ongoing dialogue with both seen and unseen forces.

Both interpretivism and African Indigenous perspectives reject the notion of a single, objective reality. Instead, they hold that meaning is fluid, multifaceted, and situated in lived experience and cultural context. Reflexivity, central to interpretivism and autoethnography, is also intrinsic to Yoruba thought, where self-knowledge, character (*Ọmọlúàbí*), and communal responsibility are seen as vital for understanding and transformation (Falola & Akinyemi, 2016).

By grounding this study in interpretivist philosophy, the research not only legitimizes personal narrative and cultural reflection but also honors African Indigenous epistemologies, particularly Yoruba ontology. This approach enables a multifaceted exploration of identity, meaning, and social change, ensuring that the research process and its findings are both contextually grounded and culturally resonant.

Theoretical Framework

The landscape of educational research is profoundly shaped by the perspectives and experiences of those conducting the inquiry. An individual's viewpoint is primarily influenced by their background, beliefs, and lived experiences, an understanding that becomes increasingly pertinent when assessing the limitations and possibilities inherent in this study, primarily focusing on African Americans through autoethnography. To contextualize this, Ogbu's (1983) cultural-ecological theory (CET) offers essential insights into the varied responses of minority students to educational institutions. It particularly illuminates the unique challenges faced by African American students. This theory sheds light not only on individual experiences but also on the broader systemic factors at play.

CET provides essential insights into the intricate relationships between people and their environments, highlighting how these components inform and influence one another (Bayliss & Dillon, 2010). This approach recognizes that the environment extends beyond mere physical surroundings; it encompasses individuals' social relationships and collective capacities within a community, including their lifestyles, beliefs, ideas, and aspirations (Bayliss & Dillon, 2010). CET illuminates how interactions between human behavior and the environment can significantly transform individuals and their surroundings (Bayliss & Dillon, 2010). Adopting a cultural ecological perspective in learning equips individuals with frameworks that deepen their

understanding of their experiences and contexts. These insights are a strong foundation for fostering meaningful learning and promoting personal growth.

As highlighted by Altugan (2015), there is a growing focus among researchers and educational theorists on the interplay between learning and the social world. Acknowledging the importance of learners' cultural backgrounds is crucial, as variations in ethnicity, race, language, social status, religion, or economic circumstances can lead to cultural disconnection, impacting students' motivation to learn (Altugan, 2015). However, education has the power to catalyze positive change. A learner's cultural identity is critical in transmitting values and facilitating this transformative process (Altugan, 2015). The CET framework is particularly pertinent to my study, emphasizing the link between cultural identity and successful learning outcomes (Altugan, 2015). Educators can better discern their students' unique learning styles and motivations by recognizing and valuing their cultural identities, ultimately enhancing their academic achievements (Altugan, 2015).

Translating Theory into Practice

Drawing on Ogbu's (1983) CET, this study acknowledges that African American students' educational experiences are shaped by a complex interplay of individual, cultural, and systemic factors. This perspective underpins the intervention by emphasizing the importance of recognizing and honoring students' cultural identities and lived experiences within educational settings.

By implementing an intervention grounded in the principles of Yoruba heritage and the concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, the study seeks to bridge cultural gaps and foster a sense of belonging among students who may otherwise experience disconnection in traditional educational environments. The intervention leverages CRP and restorative practices to address the unique

challenges highlighted by CET, namely, the impact of social relationships, community context, and cultural identity on student motivation and achievement (Altugan, 2015; Bayliss & Dillon, 2010).

In other words, the intervention is designed to support academic success as well as validate and integrate students' cultural backgrounds into the learning process. Activities, discussions, and classroom management strategies are tailored to draw on students lived experiences and strengths, thus transforming the educational environment into one that values diversity and promotes personal growth. By aligning the intervention with CET, the study ensures that educational practices are responsive to the needs of African American students and are positioned to catalyze positive change through cultural affirmation and community engagement.

Operational Definition of Key Terms

- **African Proverbs.** Wise sayings that convey direct or indirect messages in conversation. These concise expressions have evolved from life experiences, histories, values, and worldviews, imparting moral lessons, wisdom, and teachings to younger generations (Claybrook, 2023).
- **African Narratives:** The act of passing down traditions, codes of behavior, values, worldviews, and beliefs from one generation to another through storytelling, folktales, or folklore (Claybrook, 2023).
- **Culture:** The customs, beliefs, social forms, and characteristics of a racial, religious, or social group. Culture is transferred from one generation to another and is defined by Karenga (1980) as “all the thought and activity of a given people or society,”

emphasizing the ideological aspect, that is, the views and values that inform social practice (p. 17).

- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** Instructional practices that engage students in meaningful discussions about their cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1998).
- **Cultural Fusion:** The process of integrating new information and generating new cultural forms (Kramer, 2019).
- **Cultural Identity:** An individual's sense of self, shaped by their experiences, talents, skills, beliefs, values, and knowledge. This includes their status within families, schools, workplaces, and broader environments. As globalization progresses, cultural identity becomes increasingly relevant on a global scale (Altugan, 2015).
- **Culturally Responsive Pedagogy:** A pedagogical model that views effective teaching as facilitating both individual academic success and collective advancement by promoting students' academic, cultural, and sociopolitical development (Moses, 2015).
- **Nigeria:** A country located in West Africa on the coast of the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean (Claybrook, 2023).
- **Ọmọlúàbí:** A virtuous child who embodies ethical qualities essential for moral goodness. Individuals possessing these virtues contribute positively to society (Fayemi, 2009).
- **Yoruba:** An ethnic group from southwestern Nigeria (Claybrook, 2023)

Chapter Summary

This chapter introduces my journey as a Yoruba woman and educator, exploring the intersections of cultural identity, storytelling, and educational practice. Through personal narrative and metaphor, I illustrate how foundational Yoruba values, especially the concept of Ọmọlúàbí, inform my pedagogical philosophy and approach to student development. Drawing

upon cultural proverbs, folktales, and lived experience, I emphasize the importance of resilience, adaptability, and moral integrity in fostering both personal growth and a supportive educational environment.

The chapter also introduces the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin the study, with a focus on CRP and autoethnography. By situating my experiences within the broader context of Yoruba and Western educational paradigms, I establish the groundwork for analyzing how cultural knowledge and values shape the educational trajectories of marginalized students.

Central to this autoethnography is the integration of CET (Ogbu, 1983) and CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1998). CET illuminates how my Yoruba heritage and community context inform my educational philosophy and classroom practices, while CRP offers a lens for examining the racialized structures and systemic inequities that affect both my experiences and those of my students. By bringing together these perspectives, I offer a layered analysis that recognizes the dynamic interplay between cultural identity, systemic racism, and educational outcomes, and advocate for interventions that are both culturally grounded and equity driven.

Building on this foundation, Chapter 2 delves into the origins, cultural values, and enduring resilience of the Yoruba people. It highlights how heritage, identity, and ethics not only shape individual lives but also contribute to collective well-being, setting the stage for a deeper exploration of the historical, philosophical, and social frameworks that inform contemporary educational practice.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Discovering Origins, Sovereignty, Culture, and Ethics

This literature review explores the intersection of culture, identity, and educational practice, with a particular focus on CRP. It analyzes key concepts to reveal how cultural backgrounds and personal narratives shape both teaching as well as learning experiences. Special attention is given to scholarships addressing heritage, ethics, and community in education, particularly as they impact marginalized and heterogeneous student populations. By integrating these perspectives, the review situates the present research within wider academic discourse and emphasizes the value of understanding learning environments through both personal and cultural lenses.

Essential to this review is the concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, which not merely preserves cultural heritage but also gives a framework for developing future generations and fostering a sense of community and ethical responsibility among students (Banjo & Afolaranmi, 2023). The literature consistently highlights *Ọmọlúàbí*'s vital role in shaping individual identities and collective societal values. Scholars such as Azenabor (2023) and Fayemi (2009) emphasize that *Ọmọlúàbí* offers more than historical relevance; it also offers pragmatic uses in contemporary society, especially in educational contexts. Through this lens, the relationship between culture and education becomes apparent, as does the importance of moral upbringing for student empowerment.

Moreover, the review demonstrates how *Ọmọlúàbí* teachings can address current educational challenges. Embedding these values into learning opportunities enables educators to promote student success and individual development, preparing students for future leadership (Azenabor, 2023). This body of scholarship provides compelling evidence for revitalizing

cultural practices to meet contemporary needs, strengthening the persistent relevance of traditional values in modern life. Accordingly, this review delves into the foundational elements of Ọmọlúàbí and their value in today's academic domain (Fayemi, 2009). It investigates cultural transmission, examining how the principles of Ọmọlúàbí are passed along through generations and shape societal norms and values (Azenabor, 2023).

Yoruba Unveiled

The Yoruba people, one of Africa's largest ethnic groups, are primarily located in southwestern Nigeria and are noted for their lively culture and rich history (Captivating History, 2022). Their identity is deeply rooted within ancestral reverence and community values, expressed through terms such as “Omo Oduduwa,” which honors their tribal founder, Oduduwa. This self-reference reflects a strong respect for heritage and cultural connection (Captivating History, 2022).

Figure 2.1.

Map of medieval Yoruba cities. (2025)



Wikipedia (2025)

Figure 2.1 shows the various geographic regions where Yoruba people live in Nigeria. In the early 19th century, the region faced challenges and opportunities shaped by the British abolition of the slave trade in 1807, which transformed local interactions with colonial powers

(Odegowi, 2011). As Britain sought agricultural resources for its Industrial Revolution, palm oil proved to be a lucrative commodity, leading to a shift from slave-based economies to agrarian exports, thereby enhancing Nigeria's economic value to the British (Odegowi, 2011). By the late 19th century, British influence solidified through strategies such as gunboat diplomacy, aimed at securing commercial interests along the Nigerian coast, particularly in the Bight of Benin (Odegowi, 2011). This approach not only reshaped Nigeria's local power dynamics but also laid the groundwork for future governance and cultural convergence in the region, leaving an indelible mark on Yoruba sovereignty and heritage.

Yoruba Cultural Values: Asa ati Ise Yoruba

Understanding the significance of equitable educational opportunities and the difficulties encountered by underserved communities, it is apparent through the previously presented topics that solutions must be grounded in relevant cultural and philosophical frameworks. One such approach is the African philosophy of *Ọmọlúàbí*, which not only emphasizes the significance of character development and personal responsibility but also underscores the importance of communal support for academic success (Banjo & Afolaranmi, 2023). By integrating *Ọmọlúàbí* into educational practices, we can create a stronger, supportive and welcoming environment that empowers minority students to overcome the barriers highlighted by Ogbu (1992) and thrive academically. This holistic framework may play a key role in addressing the disparities in college enrollment and graduation rates, leading to greater economic mobility and personal success for these students.

The Yoruba proverb "*Agba o kin wa lo ja ki ori omo tun tun wo*", which translates to "Children are trained to excel with guidance and instruction," captures a profound principle of child development within the Yoruba community. This adage underscores the vital role of

education in helping children reach their full potential while fostering a deep-seated understanding and appreciation of their cultural identity (Sutton & Anderson, 2010). Mohatt and Erickson (1981) build on this core perspective, stating that teachers who used language interaction styles that approximated students' home cultural patterns were more successful in increasing academic performance.

By emphasizing community and joint responsibility, educators can foster personal accountability and character development among students, guiding them to take ownership of their educational journeys. Cultivating values such as hard work, perseverance, and respect is especially important for minority students, as these principles can foster a strong work ethic and stamina, traits essential for overcoming the multiple challenges they may face due to environmental factors.

Moreover, culture plays a fundamental role in this developmental process, acting as a shared phenomenon encompassing acquired behaviors, values, perspectives, language, and identity (Sutton & Anderson, 2010). Each cultural group, including the Yoruba, possesses a distinct identity characterized by its unique attributes. The Yoruba community's rich cultural heritage deeply influences individual and collective values and ethics, which are instrumental in shaping a cohesive sense of identity (Sutton & Anderson, 2010). In essence, fostering a culturally enriched educational environment also enriches students, allowing them to thrive.

Fostering Connections: Cultivating Ọmọ́lúàbí

Ọmọ́lúàbí is a virtuous child who embodies ethical qualities for moral goodness. Individuals possessing these virtues contribute positively to society (Fayemi, 2009). Ọmọ́lúàbí values are guiding principles that reflect cultural perspectives on what ought to be, molding individuals' interpretation of existence and behavior. According to Osalusi and Ajayi

(2021), these foundational beliefs provide a moral and ethical framework for decision-making, with a community's value system being essential to its identity (Azenabor, 2023). In the context of Yoruba culture, these cultural values serve as a guide for personal development, with the community offering vital support throughout the journey.

Yoruba culture is firmly grounded in community, hospitality, spiritual beliefs, moral ethics, and expressive visual arts such as dance and music. Among these core values, moral ethics particularly respect, communication, and the concept of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* are crucial in guiding the upbringing of children (Azenabor, 2023). The Yoruba community diligently preserves and transmits these cultural values from generation to generation, preserving the continuity of its rich heritage.

At the heart of Yoruba cultural beliefs are moral ethics that guide individual behavior and social interactions. A key tenet is the concept of "*Ọmọ́lúàbí*," which denotes a person of good character (Azenabor, 2023). This framework focuses on individual character and represents a psycho-cultural foundation that informs how people interact with one another. Embodying *Ọmọ́lúàbí* illustrates integrity and reflects a supportive upbringing (Azenabor, 2023).

The significance of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* extends to Yoruba humanistic moral philosophy, serving as a measure of social desirability (Azenabor, 2023). It illustrates the relationship between *Molebi* (relatives) and *Ebi* (community), suggesting that ethical goodness is essentially linked to collective welfare (Azenabor, 2023). This moral framework assesses actions based on their impact on the broader community, emphasizing unity and a sense of belonging among the Yoruba people. Embracing this concept fosters a collective commitment to uplifting one another and promoting positive character traits essential for the holistic development of both individuals and society (Azenabor, 2023).

Principles of Ọmọ́lúàbí

The code of Ọmọ́lúàbí serves as the ethical and moral framework of Yoruba culture, emphasizing the importance of personal integrity and social responsibility, thereby fostering a conducive environment for personal and community growth (Azenabor, 2023). The key components of Ọmọ́lúàbí outlined by Azenabor (2023) include:

- Oro Siso (Speech): This principle emphasizes the power of truthful, thoughtful communication, to shape relationships and strengthen community.
- Iteriba (Respect): This principle focuses on respecting others. It promotes harmonious interactions and enriches relationships throughout the community.
- Inu Rere (Goodwill): This principle encourages positive intentions and goodwill toward others, promoting community and reciprocal support that fosters individual collaboration.
- Otito (Truthfulness): This principle fosters trust and upholds high ethical standards by promoting honesty and transparency in all interactions.
- Iwa (Good Character): This principle emphasizes the development of strong moral character, inspiring individuals to conduct themselves with integrity and honor every day.
- Igboya/Akinkanju (Bravery): This principle emphasizes the importance of courage and urges individuals to stand up for what is right and take on challenges with determination.
- Ise (Hard Work): This principle celebrates a dedicated work ethic and recognizes the value of diligence and effort as essential for personal and community success.
- Opolo Pipe (Intelligence): This principle values intelligence and promotes persistent learning and critical thinking, encouraging a culture of inquiry and growth.

These principles establish a comprehensive framework that guides individual behavior and fosters stronger community ties. By embracing the Code of Ọmọ́lúábí, one creates a society and learning environment built on respect, responsibility, and positive social values, thereby enhancing both personal conduct and the collective identity of our schools and community.

Disrupting Greatness

Amidst significant political shifts and external influences, the Yoruba people's foundational identity has demonstrated remarkable resilience. A poignant saying sums up their experience: “*Igi ajoyi lori eka iroko, o le dabi iroko*” (“Just as a grafted branch cannot nourish a tree, foreign influences struggle to uphold a culture lacking its foundational identity”) (Yoruba Oral Tradition, personal communication, September 15, 2025). Figure 2.2 visually depicts attempts to eradicate homogeneous African culture in favor of colonial values, illustrating the threats posed by external forces.

Figure 2.2.

Disrupting Greatness.



(BankOkoya, Z. 2025b)

Yet, despite such encroachments, the Yoruba have steadfastly preserved their strong cultural traditions and practices (Fayemi, 2009). Their firm devotion to cultural roots has not only enabled endurance but further enriched their collective identity in the face of disruption.

The analogy of the grafted branch vividly demonstrates that a strong foundational identity is crucial for maintaining cultural heritage external influences alone cannot sustain a culture disconnected from its core values and traditions. To flourish, communities must embrace the vital elements of their culture, including customs, beliefs, and practices (Altugan, 2015). Without these core elements, cultures risk fragmentation, weakening, and ultimately, the dilution of identity and heritage (Altugan, 2015).

The Yoruba people exemplify this resilience. Despite the formidable challenges of British colonial rule, they made extraordinary efforts to sustain and preserve their vibrant ethnic, cultural, and traditional beliefs, a dedication that persisted from the mid-19th century through Nigeria's independence in 1960 (Odegowi, 2011). Such strong determination testifies to the resilience and endurance of cultural identity, demonstrating that a deep-rooted connection to heritage can empower communities to thrive even under significant external pressure. By honoring their past and upholding tradition, the Yoruba demonstrate the unique power of cultural identity, exemplified by the concept of *Ọmọlúàbí* ensuring that their values and traditions endure, strengthen and are passed down to future generations.

Ọmọlúàbí is pivotal to understanding Yoruba cultural identity, as it reflects ideals of character, diligence, and respect for others. Even amid adversity during colonial rule, the Yoruba people upheld the principles of *Ọmọlúàbí* which expresses the essence of a person who demonstrates ethical conduct and a deep commitment to community (Banjo & Afolaranmi, 2023).

By nurturing this spirit, they cultivated a resilient community rooted in mutual respect and shared identity. The embodiment of *Ọmọlúàbí* is evident in the sustained maintenance of

cultural practices and social structures, which have enabled the Yoruba to navigate historical challenges while fostering a strong sense of belonging and purpose in the present and future. This ongoing emphasis on moral character and communal responsibility further underscores the Yoruba's outstanding resilience in preserving their rich heritage amid external pressures.

A clear parallel exists between the historical experiences and the present-day marginalizations encountered within American education. Just as colonial forces once sought to undermine the Yoruba's foundational identity, American educational systems have historically marginalized African American students by devaluing their histories, cultures, and ways of knowing (Asante, 1991). The imposition of Eurocentric curricula and the erasure of African contributions are contemporary echoes of efforts to supplant Indigenous identities with external values. Nevertheless, much like the Yoruba, African American communities have responded with fortitude, upholding cultural practices and a strong sense of identity in the face of systemic exclusion (Dei, 2000). The Yoruba example affirms the importance of a solid cultural foundation for resisting fragmentation and sustaining collective identity an insight that remains vital for current efforts to create increasingly inclusive and affirming educational spaces in America. Afrocentric educational approaches, as advocated by Asante (1991, 2003), seek to restore agency by centering African worldviews, histories, and values within the curriculum, thereby empowering students to thrive amid ongoing marginalization.

Roots of Fortitude: The Connection of Culture and Education

The bond between culture, *Ọmọlúàbí*, and education is significant, revealing just how vital cultural values and ethical development are in shaping our educational systems, especially across Africa. Culture forms the backbone of education, guiding both what we learn and how we learn (Fafunwa, 2018). Within African communities, education isn't just about knowledge

acquisition; it's a vibrant tapestry crafted with cultural values and practices that mirror the community's worldview and social norms. This connection is vividly illustrated in traditional African Traditional Education (ATE) (Achi, 2021), which emphasizes the transmission of cultural heritage. Fafunwa (2018) points out that African education historically stemmed from experiential learning, blending local history, folklore, and community practices. This approach develops an integrated understanding of one's identity and responsibilities within the community.

At the foundation of this cultural framework lies the concept of *Ọmọ́lúàbí*, a term from the Yoruba culture that embodies personal character, ethics, and citizenship. An *Ọmọ́lúàbí* is defined by integrity, respect, and humility, embodying a commitment to personal growth and the well-being of the community (Azenabor, 2023). Education serves as a powerful vehicle for instilling these values. As Achi (2021) highlights, ATE goes beyond skill development to focus on character formation and instilling a sense of duty within individuals to positively contribute to society.

Integrating *Ọmọ́lúàbí* principles into educational practices nurtures an environment where students engage thoughtfully with their cultural backgrounds. This approach resonates with African Deep Thought, which champions critical thinking through cultural stories, proverbs, and lived experiences (Claybrook, 2023). By weaving these culturally relevant tools into their educational journey, students can understand their roles as *Ọmọ́lúàbí*, embarking on their studies with a strong ethical foundation and social awareness.

Storytelling stands out as a captivating method within this educational interplay. As Darko et al. (2021) discuss, storytelling is an enchanting medium for passing down cultural lessons and moral values. Through narratives, individuals traverse complex life situations, weigh

choices, and reflect on the consequences of their actions. This engaging process not only sharpens critical thinking skills but also reinforces the core cultural values rooted in Ọmọ̀lúàbí, as exemplified in conversation with Alhaja, my grandmother, at the beginning of the study. By immersing oneself in stories that reflect the trials and triumphs of ethical behavior and community cohesion, the audience (children/learner) become better equipped to embody these principles.

The use of storytelling as a pedagogical tool connects deeply with the principles of CRP. Delpit (1995) asserts the importance of affirming students' cultural backgrounds and integrating their lived experiences into classroom instruction. Storytelling, as practiced in African educational traditions, serves this function precisely: it validates students' cultural identities while nurturing critical thinking and moral development. In line with Delpit's advocacy, storytelling empowers learners by connecting curriculum content to their cultural heritage, thus fostering a strong sense of identity and belonging.

Stories that recount significant historical events not merely entertain but also nurture critical thinking while imparting essential ethical lessons (Fasoro, 2012). The role of the storyteller, often a respected elder or community figure, is critical here. Through insightful questioning and establishing clear behavioral expectations, storytellers illuminate moral conduct within the community. This nurturing approach deepens the audience's understanding of ethics and promotes positive behaviors among community members (Fasoro, 2012). In lively family discussions or valuable life lesson exchanges, the discussion often unfolds like this:

‘Eyin omode, ki ni itan yi ko wa?’ (Children, what is the moral of the story?)

‘ogbon wo ni a ri ko ninu itan ti e sese gbo tan yii?’ (What lesson or wisdom did you gain from the story we have just heard?)

‘E ma se gbo itan yi lasan, e gbodo, (tabi e ko gbodo) se bi... (ijapa, ode, agbe, etc.) inu itan naa’. (Do not just hear/listen to the story; you must or must not act like the... tortoise, hunter, farmer, etc. in the story)

This thought-provoking exploration emphasizes the strong connections between education and cultural values, laying a strong foundation for both personal growth and community enhancement. The relationship between culture, the concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, and education is fundamental in shaping well-rounded individuals who make meaningful contributions to society. By embracing and incorporating cultural values into educational approaches, educators have the unique opportunity to nurture a generation that truly embodies the spirit of *Ọmọlúàbí*. This not only promotes responsible citizenship but also ensures the sustainability of our valuable cultural legacies.

Despite external challenges, the strength of African educational systems demonstrates a firm commitment to ideals such as cultural preservation, communal responsibility, and moral development. Here, education is not simply a path to individual knowledge acquisition, but an indispensable means of sustaining culture and advancing society. Teaching methods such as storytelling, apprenticeship, and communal rites reinforce values, foster social cohesion, and encourage ethical behavior grounded in collective well-being (Azenabor, 2023; Fafunwa, 2018).

In contrast, Western educational systems often emphasize individual achievement, critical thinking, and objective knowledge. While there is recognition of ethics and citizenship, the dominant decision-making models in Western leadership such as Kohlberg’s moral

development theory and Rest's four-component model tend to focus on the individual's reasoning, autonomy, and observance of universal principles (Kohlberg, 1981; Rest, 1986). Kohlberg's model illustrates the progression from obedience to authority (pre-conventional) through social conformity (conventional) to principled reasoning based on abstract ethical principles (post-conventional). This approach, although valuable, is often critiqued for its emphasis on individual justice over communal values (Power et al., 1989). Similarly, Rest's four-component model (1986) frames ethical decision-making in leadership as a series of cognitive steps: moral sensitivity, moral judgment, moral motivation, and moral character. While widely used, this model often abstracts ethical reasoning from cultural and communal contexts. By contrast, African leadership and ethical decision-making models such as Ubuntu and Omolúabí prioritize harmony, collective responsibility, and the interrelation of individuals within their communities (Falola. & Akinyemi., 2016; Ncube, 2010). Ethical issues are resolved not through isolated reasoning, but through dialogue, consensus, and a focus on what sustains the group and honors traditions.

In a nutshell, African models position education and leadership as communal acts, strongly intertwined with culture, history, and shared identity. Ethical decisions are made with attention to their impact on community cohesion and cultural continuity. Western models often center on the individual leader's reasoning and universal ethical principles, sometimes at the expense of context-specific or communal considerations. Greater understanding and benefit emerge when educational leaders integrate both perspectives, valuing ethical reasoning and principled leadership, while also honoring the cultural, historical, and communal realities that shape ethical decision-making in diverse educational contexts.

Cultural Ecological Theory and Minority Status in Schooling: A Constructive Perspective

“If you lose your culture, you lose your soul/ identity.”

“He who is ashamed of his culture never commands respect.”

~Ewe- Togo Proverb

CET provides a valuable framework for understanding the academic performance of minority students (Ogbu, 1983). This autoethnography is rooted in this theoretical perspective. As Ogbu (1990) suggests, CET examines the reciprocal interactions between established behavioral patterns and a variety of environmental factors. Within this framework, two crucial elements emerge that considerably influence the academic success of minority students: the treatment they receive from society and educational institutions (the system), and the ways in which minority communities respond to such societal and educational conditions (community forces). Exploring these interactions might improve the understanding of the difficulties and possibilities that minority students encounter in their educational journeys, paving the way for more effective support and strategies to foster their success.

To fully appreciate the academic achievement of minority students, it is essential to recognize the diversity within minority groups (Ogbu, 1983, 1985). Ogbu (1990) categorizes these groups into involuntary minorities and voluntary minorities. Voluntary minorities who migrate to a host country by choice often adopt a proactive approach to engaging with new societal structures. Conversely, involuntary minorities who face historical marginalization through conquest or forced migration (e.g., enslavement) may adopt a more resistant stance towards these institutions (Ogbu, 1992b, 1983, 1985, 1995).

Ogbu's CET (1983) comprises four key components: (1) a recognition that both community and systemic forces influence students' academic success, emphasizing the importance of understanding community dynamics and the challenges faced by involuntary minorities; (2) a categorization of minorities into voluntary, involuntary, and autonomous groups; (3) an identification of the universal, primary, and secondary discontinuities between students and their schools; and (4) an acknowledgment of the various survival strategies developed by involuntary minorities, some of which may promote academic success, while others posing challenges. These strategies include clientship, collective struggle, hustling, emulating dominant cultural practices, and camouflage (Foster, 2004).

Ogbu (1983) acknowledged the significance of diverse educational experiences among minority groups, reflecting the pluralistic nature of contemporary society. The author noted that community dynamics partially account for the variations in academic performance between immigrant and non-immigrant minorities (Ogbu, 1999). In urban and industrial settings, where formal education is increasingly viewed as essential for attaining full adult status, the complexities of these educational experiences become particularly pronounced. It is imperative to evaluate the high rates of academic failure critically reported among certain minority groups to improve the effectiveness of current educational approaches and improve their outcomes (Foster, 2004).

As an African American of Nigerian descent, my account represents the experience of an individual who consciously chose to relocate to the United States while preserving their cultural identity. This journey showcases the experiences of many African Americans, whose historical connections have been disrupted, frequently resulting in a challenging relationship with the dominant culture (Ogbu, 1992b, 1983, 1985, 1995). Understanding these differences is essential,

as they impacted my educational pursuits and decisions, which vary considerably from those of my African American peers. This insight emphasized the importance of reintegrating lost cultural elements to foster a strong sense of identity and agency among all students. Grounded in a strong cultural heritage and guided by strong personal values, my identity empowers me to resist marginalization.

Emi mo omo eni ti mo n se. Mi o ni se ako bata ni aye mi.

I stand firm and self-assured in my identity

I know who I am.

I will not be relegated.

I will not be diminished!

As I contemplate the intersection of minority status and educational outcomes, I have developed a genuine respect for the African American experience. Although my ethnic background naturally connects me to this community, I remain mindful of the distinct experiences that shape our cultural narratives. This awareness fosters a respectful, nuanced engagement with their culture, allowing me to acknowledge the historical and systemic factors influencing their educational journeys and successes. Within this context, the relevance of CET becomes evident.

While CET has greatly influenced discussions around minority student achievement, it has faced notable criticism. Scholars argue that CET's concept of "oppositional culture" could oversimplify minority experiences and risk deficit thinking by attributing low achievement to cultural attitudes rather than to institutional inequalities (Carter, 2003). Critics also highlight that CET underestimates the role of institutional racism and school structures in shaping educational

outcomes, instead placing too much emphasis on family and community responses (Ladson-Billings, 1997; Stanton-Salazar & Valenzuela, 2010).

Additionally, CET is said to treat minority groups as monolithic, overlooking intra-group diversity and intersectional factors like gender and class (Foley, 2005). Finally, some scholars contend that the theory underplays the agency and resistance strategies of minoritized students, who often navigate or challenge educational barriers in complex ways (Carter, 2006). Despite its contributions, these critiques urge a more detailed and systemic approach to understanding educational differences.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

CRP stands as an important concept in present-day educational discourse, aiming to integrate cultural knowledge into instructional practices. This approach enhances the learning experiences of all students while fostering an inclusive classroom environment (Milner IV, 2010). As educators evolve from merely recognizing cultural histories to actively using effective pedagogical strategies, it becomes essential that they engage with and appreciate their students' diverse cultural backgrounds. Such engagement not only benefits individual learners but also enriches the collective educational experience, cultivating a more equitable and responsive learning environment (Hammond, 2015).

Ladson-Billings (1998) expresses that CRP transforms instructional methodologies by motivating students to engage in purposeful dialogues about their cultural backgrounds. This participation supports the exploration of diverse cultures and global perspectives, ultimately enriching the educational experience for all students. By establishing a connected, integrated educational setting, CRP emphasizes the importance of understanding and valuing diversity.

When educators recognize and embrace their students varied cultural backgrounds, they empower them to engage in higher levels of understanding and participation. Educational settings should be thoughtfully designed to create opportunities for students to express their viewpoints and actively participate in the rich discussions inherent in the learning process. Learning should extend beyond mere information absorption; students should be encouraged to analyze, critique, and shape the knowledge presented to them (Freire, 1998).

This pedagogical framework underscores the critical role of educators in implementing culturally relevant practices, thereby promoting equitable representation and the expression of diverse cultural values. Such dedication fosters a classroom community characterized by inclusivity and mutual respect (Milner IV, 2010). Additionally, Ladson-Billings (2009) argues that CRP methods not only facilitate academic growth but also serve as vital tools in revitalizing underrepresented cultures. This positively impacts students' perceptions and nurtures the celebration of their cultural identities, helping them feel valued and respected throughout their educational journeys.

Addressing critical issues like the lack of representation in textbooks and curricula, CRP is essential for empowering students on intellectual, social, emotional, and political levels. By integrating cultural referents into the educational process, educators enrich learning experiences and promote the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that connect with students' backgrounds. This approach not only acknowledges and encourages the students' existing cultural identities but also stimulates them to fuse these identities with new cultural ideologies, ultimately fostering what can be conceptualized as cultural fusion.

CRP, as articulated by Ladson-Billings (1995), emphasizes teaching that affirms students' cultural identities, promotes academic success, and develops critical consciousness.

The Yoruba concept of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* which embodies integrity, respect, responsibility, and community-mindedness naturally aligns with the tenets of CRP. Integrating *Ọmọ́lúàbí* into educational practice implies recognizing and valuing students' cultural backgrounds, using cultural narratives and proverbs to foster ethical development, and encouraging students to see themselves as responsible contributors to their communities. In this way, CRP and *Ọmọ́lúàbí* together create a framework where academic achievement is coupled with character formation, and in which learning is anchored in both personal excellence and communal well-being. This partnership not only supports students' scholastic growth but also nurtures the moral and cultural foundations necessary for meaningful engagement in society.

Cultural Convergence: The Best of Both Worlds

Cultural fusion is an enriching process that stems from the dynamics of intercultural communication (Kramer, 2019). It embodies the idea that by fusing diverse cultural perspectives and practices, individuals can better understand one another. This transformative process allows students to appreciate and integrate diverse cultural viewpoints across various domains, including education, family structures, and governance, fostering an environment where creativity and collaboration thrive (Kramer, 2019).

Understanding cultural fusion allows individuals to experience the best of both worlds. They can appreciate multiple cultures while the host society embraces diverse perspectives, fostering dynamic interactions among various traditions (Kramer, 2019). This idea aligns with research by Haskins et al. (2009), which highlights education's key role in promoting economic mobility. Their findings indicate that 55% of respondents believe earning a college degree is closely linked to achieving personal success. The evidence demonstrates that postsecondary

education substantially impacts the economic prospects of individuals and their families, making it one of the nation's most important catalysts for upward mobility.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that pursuing equitable educational opportunities remains an ongoing challenge. Only one-third of families in the lowest income quintile pursue a college education, and even fewer complete their degrees. Given the substantial economic advantages of higher education, it is essential to enhance college enrollment and graduation rates, particularly among underserved and disadvantaged communities (Simhoni, 2024).

A Thread of Wisdom: Weaving Administrative Interventions into Pedagogical Practices

Warren Bennis (1989) suggests that effective leadership involves turning a vision into tangible outcomes. This profound insight emphasizes the pivotal role of school administrators in steering educational success. According to Soehner and Ryan (2011), effective communication of high-performance expectations is vital for fostering an environment that promotes positive outcomes and enhances student achievement. Nevertheless, Day et al. (2016) reminds us that while measurable academic progress serves as an important indicator of a school's effectiveness, it fails to encapsulate the holistic notion of true success.

Research over the past two decades indicates that successful schools prioritize the holistic development of their students, embedding core values such as integrity, compassion, and fairness within their institutional culture (Leithwood & Day, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Mulford & Silins, 2011; Putnam, 2002). These educational environments also ignite a passion for lifelong learning while nurturing personal, economic, and social skills (Leithwood & Day, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Mulford & Silins, 2011; Putnam, 2002). To effectively champion student success, it is essential to implement various proactive interventions and strategies. Providing additional resources and

support empowers students to navigate an educational landscape that may not fully resonate with their backgrounds and experiences. Initiatives like after-school tutoring, peer tutoring, parental involvement, and community volunteer support prove instrumental in enhancing opportunities for all students (Cooper et al., 2009).

While federal and state education reforms are crucial, local school principals are uniquely positioned to tailor and execute instructional leadership strategies that meet the specific needs of their students. Parker (2020) underscores that effective local leadership is key to ensuring every student receives the vital support needed for success. An example of such instructional leadership is Treasure Quest.

Treasure Quest immerses students in the rich tapestry of African cultural heritage (BankOkoya, 2025), enhancing their understanding of their roots while simultaneously strengthening academic skills. By fostering self-belief, resilience, and strong character, Treasure Quest empowers students to thrive both academically and personally. Its mission is to build, inspire, and equip children to become respectful, responsible, and resilient individuals, all while improving their academic outcomes and preparing them for future educational endeavors.

Participating in Treasure Quest encourages students to embrace the Yoruba cultural concept of *Omọlúàbí*, which symbolizes individuals who embody virtuous and morally upright qualities. This foundational teaching instills in them the capacity to face challenges with a positive mindset and intrinsic motivation, thereby nurturing resilience when confronting adversity.

Treasure Quest supported five students, four in third grade and one in second, playing a significant role in creating a nurturing educational setting through cultural heritage lessons and academic tutoring as part of its after-school programming. Recognizing the challenges faced by

students of color in high-poverty, under-resourced schools, programs like Treasure Quest help enhance college and career readiness. These initiatives offer valuable pathways to postsecondary opportunities and improve academic performance. Investing in such programs empowers students and helps them reach their full potential. To further its mission of empowering children to become well-rounded individuals, Treasure Quest is grounded in three foundational pillars:

- Resilience: Encouraging students to recover and grow from challenges and setbacks.
- Respect: Instilling values that foster good character and integrity.
- Responsibility: Reinforcing the significance of ethical behavior and accountability.

(BankOkoya, 2025)

At the core of the administrative philosophy is the guiding principle, "*agba ki wa lo ja ki ori omo tun tun wo*," meaning children thrive with adult guidance. This underscores my commitment to advocacy, equity, and inclusion. As an administrator, I provide underrepresented students with equitable access to opportunities. By fostering empathy and recognizing the unique challenges our students face, we cultivate an environment that prioritizes emotional well-being and effective mentorship. Maintaining strong communication channels is crucial as administrators and educators collaborate with students, parents, and the wider community, ensuring that all stakeholders are informed and engaged in processes that support educational success and prepare students for a promising future.

Relevance of Cultural Responsiveness

A key goal of education is to not only provide students with facts and information but also to guide them in learning how to learn (Hammond, 2015). Research has shown that underserved students of color and English learners often receive less instruction focused on

higher-order skills, which can limit their opportunities for productive struggle (Hammond, 2015). This dynamic can lead to a reliance on dependent learning rather than fostering independence.

Helping students become independent learners by third grade is vital. Unfortunately, this is not always achieved (Hammond, 2015). Culturally diverse learners and students of color frequently encounter obstacles that hinder the development of critical thinking habits and cognitive growth, largely due to educational inequities. These challenges can result in students becoming dependent learners, unable to fully utilize their potential.

As independent learners, these students can thrive academically. Michelle Alexander (2012), in *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, highlights how dependency can lead to the school-to-prison pipeline, where inconsistent policies and instructional decisions lead to inadequate literacy and content instruction for students of color. Disproportionate discipline for minor infractions can deprive these students of valuable learning time (Hammond, 2015).

The loss of instructional time can deepen the achievement gap and create a cycle where dependent learners struggle to prepare for middle school, secondary education, and future careers (Hammond, 2015). Many students of color may feel overwhelmed and drop out of school due to academic pressures and insufficient emotional support (Hammond, 2015). This disappointment often arises from a lack of opportunities in the classroom to develop essential cognitive skills and mindsets needed for greater academic and socio-emotional responsibilities (Hammond, 2015).

To address these challenges, simply increasing academic standards and instructional rigor is not enough (Hammond, 2015). Educators have the important role of equipping students with new cognitive skills and habits of mind that enhance their learning capabilities. One effective

approach is incorporating culturally responsive teaching, which can play a significant role in supporting the growth and independence of all students (Hammond, 2015).

Hammond (2015) stated,

Culturally responsive teaching is an educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning. (p.15)

Many studies indicate that culturally responsive education can significantly enhance student connection to school and improve learning outcomes (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Tatum, 2009). Unfortunately, culturally responsive teaching is often presented primarily to address behavioral issues or motivate students, while its potential to foster rigorous cognitive development is sometimes overlooked (Hammond, 2015). Hammond (2015), explains how the Ready for Rigor Framework serves as a valuable tool for educators, providing a way to translate culturally responsive pedagogical principles into effective teaching practices. This concept promotes a deeper understanding of fundamental concepts in CRP.

In examining my experiences with Treasure Quest students, I drew upon the four pivotal components of the Ready for Rigor Framework: awareness, learning partnerships, information processing, and community building (Hammond, 2015). These strategies not only enhanced student learning outcomes but also fostered growth within a culturally responsive educational context. Awareness was instrumental in recognizing and understanding that students from

culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly those belonging to historically marginalized groups, confront distinct challenges in their educational journeys. It is critical to move beyond merely employing specialized teaching methods; one must also consider the sociopolitical contexts that shape their perceptions and learning experiences (Hammond, 2015).

Establishing a learning partnership through trust was essential in cultivating a social-emotional connection that enriched the student's educational experience. This trust created a foundation for authentic relationships grounded in mutual respect. By nurturing this bond, I was able to encourage the students to embrace high expectations while providing feedback in emotionally intelligent ways. This approach facilitated students' capacity to process information more effectively and empowered them to rise to intellectually demanding challenges. Integrating cultural elements, practices, and orientations is critical in creating a socially and intellectually safe space for students. This comprehensive approach not only reinforces self-directed learning and identity but also cultivates a sense of responsibility, thereby contributing to a more inclusive and effective educational experience (Hammond, 2015).

Bridging the Gap

The imperative to foster independent learning and cognitive growth among cultural and linguistically diverse students cannot be met solely through instructional change it requires visionary, equity-minded educational leadership (Khalifa, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris & Alim, 2017). Effective leaders play a critical role in shaping school cultures, policies, and practices to ensure all students have access to rigorous, culturally responsive learning opportunities. By championing frameworks such as Hammond's (2015) Ready for Rigor Framework, educational leaders move beyond compliance-driven approaches to equity,

cultivating environments where teachers are supported in building trust, leveraging cultural knowledge, and promoting higher-order thinking for every learner.

Achieving these goals is possible through the adoption of cultural sustaining pedagogy. Paris and Alim (2017) define culturally sustaining pedagogy as an approach that not only recognizes and values students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds but also sustains and supports the ongoing development of students' home languages, literacies, and cultural practices within educational settings. Cultural sustaining pedagogy advances beyond CRP by emphasizing that schools are spaces where students' cultural identities are maintained, valued, and allowed to flourish.

Culturally relevant and sustaining leadership, therefore, involves an ongoing awareness of intentional relationship-building and a commitment to scaffolding learning through students' cultural identities (Khalifa, 2018; Paris & Alim, 2017). Leaders must model and facilitate professional learning that equips teachers to recognize and respond to the unique assets and challenges of marginalized students, while also expanding opportunities for authentic engagement (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2012; Tatum, 2009). By integrating the principles of CRP and culturally sustaining pedagogy into the fabric of school leadership, leaders empower teachers to move beyond surface-level inclusion, instead leveraging cultural knowledge to promote learner independence, academic excellence, and resilient school communities. Such educational leaders transform schools into environments where cultural identity, cognitive rigor, and social-emotional connection are central to student success.

Chapter Summary

Discovering origins, sovereignty, culture and ethics, examines the interplay between culture, identity, and education, emphasizing the foundational role of the Yoruba concept of *Ọmọlúàbí* in shaping both personal and collective values. The chapter highlights how cultural narratives and heritage inform educational practices, especially for marginalized communities, and underscores the Yoruba people's resilience in preserving their identity amid adversity. It also contrasts African communal models of ethics and leadership with Western individualistic approaches, advocating for a synthesis of both. The chapter discusses the importance of culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy, drawing on theoretical frameworks like Ogbu's CET, and provides real-world examples, such as *Treasure Quest*, to illustrate the impact of integrating cultural values into educational practice.

In Chapter 3, the focus shifts from theoretical and cultural foundations to research methodology. Chapter 3 introduces qualitative inquiry, autoethnography, and storytelling as essential methods for exploring lived experience and personal narrative. This methodological approach enables a deeper investigation into how individual and collective stories shape educational realities and drive transformative changes, setting the stage for a more intimate engagement with the research questions.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

Convergence: Qualitative Inquiry, Autoethnography, and Storytelling.

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to explore and reflect upon my personal experiences with early intervention for marginalized students within the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts of elementary education. By grounding this exploration in the Yoruba cultural concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, I examined how these interventions could empower students and facilitate their pathways to success while considering the unique challenges they faced. This study aimed to provide insights into the experiences of tailored support systems and underscores the importance of Yoruba cultural understanding in promoting educational equity. The research question that guided this study was: How do my experiences with early cultural intervention programs designed for marginalized students illustrate how Yoruba culture can be leveraged in early intervention programs?

In this chapter, I lay the groundwork for my methodological approach by explaining how I used autoethnography to explore and represent my experiences. I also describe how I gathered and analyzed my data and reflect on the ethical aspects and strategies I used to ensure my research remains trustworthy.

Research Approach

Autoethnography is a natural fit for my study because it allows me to examine my individual journey as both an educator and an administrator. Through this approach, I can share the details of my lived experiences and see how they connect to the wider cultural and educational landscape (Ellis et al., 2011). As I reflect on my path, I uncover what it truly means to create an environment in which everyone feels accepted and appreciated (Lindgren & Frisk, 2020).

With autoethnography, I weave my own stories together with academic ideas, offering a fuller picture of how cultures merge within educational spaces (Chang, 2008). This method invites me to be open and honest, drawing readers into my world and showing how cultural values like *Omọlúàbí* shape the ways we support students and build community. While I reflect on and share my story, I find that my personal narrative becomes part of a larger conversation about cultural awareness and diversity in education (Kramarczuk Voulgarides & Tefera, 2017). Through autoethnography, I connect my own experiences to the social environment around me, strengthening my understanding of how culture, ethics, and personal history all come together in the classroom (Holt, 2003). This process reminds me that learning and truth are always evolving, shaped by the stories that we carry and the relationships we build (Denzin, 2003). By focusing on lived experience, I can examine more closely the challenges marginalized students face in our schools (Yosso, 2005). This approach highlights just how vital it is to understand culture extensively if we want to teach and advocate effectively. Autoethnography gives me a way to push back against the usual stories told in educational research, which too often leave out the voices of those on the margins (Dupuis, 1999). By sharing my own experience, I hope to shed light on the realities faced by underserved communities and encourage change. My goal is to help create educational spaces where everyone feels they belong and where both students and teachers can see themselves reflected and valued.

In autoethnographic research, methodological design is critical for framing the study and guiding the research process. It often entails a combination of qualitative strategies, including narrative analysis, reflective writing, and other creative approaches that allow for a deep exploration of personal and cultural experiences (Ellis et al., 2011). This design emphasizes the importance of context, which can influence the interpretation and meaning of research findings,

using reflection and writing to explore my personal experiences and connect them to wider cultural and social meanings. This helps me shed light on how my personal experiences relate to my cultural values and practices.

Brief History and Significance of Autoethnography

“Where there is no narrative, there is no history.”

Benedetto Croce

Stories have always held a central place in human society, intricately weaving together the historical knowledge, cultural beliefs, and values that influence our lives. As Leavy (2009) eloquently points out, narratives are much more than simple storytelling; they encompass the complex meanings embedded in our social fabric, cultural identities, and human actions, capturing the essence of human experience. By drawing on individual experiences, storytelling illuminates the rich tapestry of existence and reveals deeper truths about who we are.

Autoethnography offers a compelling framework for understanding and analyzing personal experiences within broader social and cultural contexts (Kim, 2016). This narrative approach promotes critical reflection and interpretation, drawing on the anthropological roots of ethnography. By actively engaging with both their own lives and the lives of others, researchers can gain deeper insights into the research process itself (Kim, 2016).

In this light, autoethnography serves as a significant self-study methodology that emphasizes personal experiences to illuminate broader social and cultural norms (Hughes et al., 2012). First-person narrative scholarship enhances our understanding of ourselves and, consequently, of others (Bochner, 2012). It is essential to clarify that this approach is not merely self-indulgent; rather, it seeks to explore social and cultural contexts alongside personal experiences. Thus, situating these narratives within historical, cultural, and political frameworks

is crucial for effectively communicating the goals of critical self-study, self-representation, and self-narration (Kim, 2016).

Embarking on my reflective journey, I intend to explore themes of diversity and identity through the lens of autoethnography. This methodology involves analyzing culture through personal narratives, fostering a significant emotional connection with readers. Such connections invite engagement with the lived experiences of individuals often characterized as “others.” In this way, autoethnography not only facilitates personal exploration but also nurtures a broader understanding of how these individual experiences relate to larger cultural contexts. This dual perspective encourages researchers to look inward while considering the outward implications of their narratives, thus enriching the cultural narrative (Boylorn & Orbe, 2016). By adopting this nuanced perspective, I aim to contribute to meaningful conversations around diversity and identity, illustrating the intricate interplay between personal and shared experiences.

By intertwining the autobiographical with cultural and social realms, this approach blends research, writing, and methods that encompass action, emotion, embodiment, self-awareness, and literary conventions. Rather than merely reflecting, it invites critical analysis of how personal experiences influence the research process (Bochner, 2012). Autoethnography values ordinary language over scientific terminology and incorporates literary devices such as metaphor, irony, parody, and satire to capture the richness and complexity of everyday life through personal narratives. This approach fosters connection and understanding with audiences, effectively integrating literary writing into research (Foley, 2002).

Delving deeper, autoethnography emerges as an avenue to explore the intricate relationship between culture and power, and to examine the formation and study of cultural identities, intersectionality, and social inequality. This approach encourages vital self-reflection

and cultural commentary, providing a mechanism to analyze personal experiences, social interactions, and intercultural challenges (Ellis et al., 2011).

As an administrator committed to fostering cultural hybridity, I have gained valuable insights into the challenges individuals face in a society that often fails to support cultural mixing. These challenges often manifest as resistance to change, fear of the unknown, and a need to preserve culture. My experiences illuminate the transformative power of embracing diversity and inclusivity.

Specifically, this autoethnography explores and reflects on my personal experiences with early intervention for marginalized students within the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts of elementary education. Daily, I integrate my ethnic, moral, and cultural values into my role and responsibilities, demonstrating the profound impact of cultural exchange and the importance of recognizing these diverse influences in educational settings. Through this exploration, I aimed to weave together personal narratives and broader cultural insights, illustrating the shared journey of understanding identity and diversity.

Self as Subject

The self becomes a central focus in autoethnography, as researchers draw on their own experiences to provide insights into broader cultural phenomena. This approach allows for a rich, nuanced exploration of personal narratives, thereby illuminating how individual lives intersect with societal structures (Archetti & Reed-Danahay, 1998). By using themselves as subjects, researchers can bridge the gap between personal experiences and collective identities, offering unique perspectives that contribute to broader discussions in the field.

In autoethnographic research, the researcher takes on multiple roles, including that of a storyteller, a cultural critic, and an analyst (Jones, 2005). The researcher must engage in

reflexivity, critically reflecting on their own biases, position, and impact on the research. This dual role, both subject and observer, challenges traditional boundaries of research and encourages a deeper engagement with the material. By sharing personal narratives, researchers connect with readers on an emotional level, fostering empathy and understanding.

Challenges and Limitations of Using Oneself as a Subject

While autoethnography offers unique insights, it also presents challenges and limitations that should be acknowledged. One major concern is the risk of bias: researchers may inadvertently project their own perspectives onto their narratives, thereby affecting the authenticity of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Additionally, there are ethical considerations regarding privacy and the potential for harm, especially when other individuals are included in the research (Ellis, 1999). The subjective nature of autoethnography can lead to critiques regarding its validity and reliability compared to more traditional research methodologies (Anderson, 2006). Finally, revisiting personal experiences can be a significant emotional toll, sometimes impacting the researcher's well-being (Chase, 2007).

As I revisit my own memories, I have come to realize the importance of having a clear sense of purpose. Knowing why I am doing this work keeps me grounded and reminds me of the difference it can make for others. I take care to look after myself, whether by going for a walk, talking things through with my family, or simply taking time to reflect. These moments help me sort through my feelings and thoughts. I am also careful about which parts of my story I choose to share, setting boundaries that protect my well-being and help me maintain perspective as I navigate the challenges of this research.

Staying rooted in my purpose, caring for myself, and knowing my limits allows me to face challenges and stay true to what matters most. These choices not only help me stay well but

also make my research more honest and trustworthy. By being open and reflective, I hope to offer work that is both authentic and grounded in my own integrity.

Research Context

I situated this study within the changing landscape of present-day education, using a public school in the Midwest United States as the backdrop for my personal reflections. I centered my inquiry on my own thoughts, emotions, and responses to events in this setting rather than on the institution itself. The school's demographic diversity and commitment to CRP offered a meaningful context for examining how my identity as an educator was shaped through daily interactions and encounters. By reflecting on my personal journey, I gained deeper insights into the convergence among my values, the institutional culture, and students lived experiences. Although the school offered important context, I found that my most meaningful insights came from reflecting on the specific places where my daily interactions and conversations unfolded. By focusing my attention on these settings, I was able to capture the moments that truly reflected the lived experiences at the heart of my study. As I reflected, I returned repeatedly to the classrooms, offices, and shared spaces like the library and cafeteria places where I connected with students and where our conversations unfolded. In these everyday settings, I witnessed and participated in the practice of Omoṣúàbí values. By focusing on these moments, I saw how cultural values, school expectations, and my own personal stories intertwined in the daily life of the school.

Data Collection

In an autoethnography, a rich network of data sources can be woven together to gain an understanding of personal and cultural experiences. Equally significant is the process of reflecting on personal memories. By recalling and articulating these memories, researchers can

construct their identities and analyze how past experiences mold their current realities (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Through reflective storytelling, researchers connect their personal histories to wider cultural narratives, enriching their analyses. Additionally, personal artifacts (i.e., photographs, letters, emails, and artworks) serve as tangible representations of one's cultural and personal history and can support storytelling. Analyzing these items can yield useful insights into researchers' identities, values, and the social conventions that influence them (Illeris, 2003)

Reflective writing served as my primary data collection strategy, complemented by a parent's written communication as an additional source. To facilitate honest and thorough self-exploration, I adopted the "words on paper" technique, a brain dump that encouraged me to quickly release my thoughts, ideas, and emotions onto paper or a digital platform. This unstructured, spontaneous approach fostered creativity and allowed me to uncover essential insights without being restricted by organization or structure. By giving myself space for ideas to flow freely, I was able to externalize my internal reflections and capture a depth of meaning that might otherwise have remained hidden.

During this brain dump, I actively documented various aspects, including memories, thoughts, questions, challenges, and any frustrations related to my research. This self-reflective practice encouraged me to ask pertinent questions, record my responses, and transcribe them for further analysis. My diligence in generating reflective data through journaling, centered on my experiences and perceptions of the research topic, ensured I engaged throughout the process, fostering a meaningful connection between my research and its significance.

Acknowledging that memory is intrinsically subjective and not an absolute reality, I focused on personal recollections, as they represented what is truly significant within the context of my autoethnography. Furthermore, I examined the cultural values interwoven in my memories

and literature, depicting how these cultural perspectives shape our recollections. This exploration enriched my autoethnography and illuminated the impactful role cultural values play in shaping memory. My work reflected the proverbs, attitudes, family sayings, and perspectives cultivated during my formative years, revealing the acculturation I experienced within my family and household.

By weaving these pieces together, my autoethnographic approach offered not only deep insights into my personal experiences but also contributed to a broader understanding of how cultural context and memory shape identity and professional practice. To establish a clear foundation for my analysis, I included a summary table of vignettes (see Table 3.1), highlighting pivotal moments and stories that were central to my research. These concise snapshots provided readers with essential context for the analysis that follows, while the full narratives of each vignette are explored in detail in Chapter 4.

Table 3.1.

Vignette Summaries

Vignette	Discussions/Experiences
Vignette 1 Cultural Disconnection and the Pathway to Academic Reengagement.	The discussion focuses on a ninth grader named Jayden who is struggling with his schoolwork and class attendance. He expresses a lack of interest in the curriculum, particularly in Shakespeare, and highlights the disconnect he feels between his ethnicity and the material's relevance. This frustration stems from his difficulty in understanding the content, which he finds culturally irrelevant, ultimately affecting his grades. To help Jayden connect more with literature, I introduced him to Maya Angelou, an influential African American poet whom he could relate to. I also knew that Jayden, being a talented artist, admired Bruce Lee. Therefore, I suggested a creative activity that would allow him to incorporate drawing while completing assigned tasks, encouraging him to express his thoughts and feelings through the lens of Bruce Lee, who exemplifies strength and courage. Furthermore, I recommended exploring Shakespearean literature through Maya Angelou's perspective, as her work resonated with him on both ethnic and cultural levels.

	Throughout our interactions, I emphasized the importance of resilience, perseverance, and the strength that comes from one's cultural identity. My goal was to help students like Jayden recognize the value of literary study and its potential to enrich both their academic and personal lives.
Vignette 2 Anchored –The Gift of Ọmọ́lúàbí.	The discussion centers on the concept of "Ọmọ́lúàbí," which represents a moral value or principle that guides one's behavior. The student (narrator) reflects on how learning about Ọmọ́lúàbí helped him manage his emotions, particularly anger. Instead of reacting negatively when upset, he reminds himself of the principles of Ọmọ́lúàbí to maintain composure and avoid trouble. This experience leads to feelings of strength and pride, as he recognizes his ability to control his actions and navigate challenging situations effectively. The phrase "I am me, Ọmọ́lúàbí " suggests a reaffirmation of one's identity and values, drawing from Yoruba cultural teachings that emphasize integrity, respect, and personal responsibility. The act of closing one's eyes and repeating this phrase indicates a personal practice for finding calmness and grounding oneself during times of distress. Overall, it highlights the importance of recognizing and embracing one's true self in the face of emotional challenges. It highlights the importance of self-regulation, personal growth, and the positive impact of adhering to moral principles.
Vignette 3 Bridge to Success: Araya's story & China's Bounce Back.	This section explores self-identity and self-soothing, focusing on a student's experience in the Treasure Quest program. Initially, she felt nervous but gradually built her confidence as she continued to participate. She shared that the skills and lessons gained from Treasure Quest significantly enhanced her confidence at school and improved her academic performance. Overall, her story highlights a journey of personal growth and empowerment through learning. In a related conversation, a third grader described how she managed frustration and persevered through challenges, especially during tests. She stressed the importance of resilience and self-motivation, repeating positive affirmations and learning to embrace new opportunities rather than giving up. The concept of "Ọmọ́lúàbí," which embodies values such as resilience, integrity, and self-discipline, served as a source of strength for her during difficult times, illustrating how cultural identity can empower students to face adversity.
Vignette 4 Change Within.	The discussion revolves around the proverb "empty vessels make the loudest noise," which implies that those who have little knowledge or substance often tend to speak the most. The student reflects on her personal growth and maturity, particularly in relation to receiving new shoes from her nana. Instead of bragging about this gift, she chooses humility, acknowledging that her understanding of being " Ọmọ́lúàbí " (a term in Yoruba culture meaning a person of good character) has influenced her behavior. This suggests a shift in values—moving

	away from seeking attention or validation through boasting and instead embracing modesty and self-respect.
Vignette 5 Recipient to Ambassador.	The discussion revolves around the concept of "Ọmọ́lúàbí," a term in Yoruba culture that signifies a person of good character, integrity, and honor. The student expresses pride in this cultural value and a desire to educate others about it, promoting its understanding and appreciation. The emphasis is on spreading awareness of Yoruba culture and the importance of embodying the principles of Ọmọ́lúàbí.
Vignette 6 Transcending.	The discussion is about the concept of "Ọmọ́lúàbí," which refers to being responsible, resilient, and respectful. The conversation reflects on how a student applied these qualities during a lockdown drill at school, feeling strong and brave. She emphasized the importance of staying calm and quiet to ensure safety. Overall, the conversation highlighted the significance of these values in challenging situations.

Data Management

In my autoethnography, I found that effective data organization and storage were vital to making my research process systematic and truly reflective of my personal experiences (Chang, 2008). To facilitate this, I implemented several key methods for managing my data.

First, I utilized digital journals to document my personal experiences and reflections. As Ellis et al. (2011) highlighted, maintaining a diary was vital for self-reflection, which became a key element of my autoethnographic research. Tools like Microsoft Word and Google Docs helped me easily organize, tag, and retrieve my entries

In addition to narratives, I kept reflexive notes that captured my thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. I stored these notes alongside my primary data, organized either chronologically or thematically. This practice enhanced the reflexivity in my work and underscored my impact on the research context (Sparkes, 2000). To protect my data from loss, I adopted a strong backup strategy that uses cloud services and multiple platforms to securely store my data and make it easily accessible when needed. The organization and storage of data in my

autoethnographic research played a vital role in increasing both the clarity and coherence of my study, as well as its reflective nature. By employing a combination of digital tools, thematic organization, and methodical documentation, I successfully navigated the complexities inherent in my research journey.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Autoethnography is a compelling research methodology that invites an extensive analysis of personal experiences within their broader cultural contexts. This approach transcends mere recognition of emotions, intuition, and aesthetics, necessitating an in-depth study of critical themes such as class, culture, race, and gender. As Foley (2002) highlights, engaging with these themes demands a perceptive understanding of their historical, social, and political dimensions. Consequently, autoethnography fosters meaningful dialogue among the researchers, the text, and the audience, creating a rich environment for discussion and potential transformation (Jones, 2005).

My autoethnographic inquiry used narratives derived from personal experiences and observations to explain the process of cultural integration in educational settings. These accounts foreground the significance of culturally responsive practices, particularly in supporting marginalized students' education and social well-being. Through detailed exemplification and in-depth engagement, I examined the practical implications of this research, offering nuanced insights regarding educational equity and the multiple challenges encountered by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Ultimately, this chapter demonstrates the transformative potential of culturally grounded interventions and contributions to ongoing scholarly discussion on enhancing educational frameworks in diverse communities. Upon completing data collection, I undertook a comprehensive, immersive analysis, employing thematic analysis to systematically

clarify and interpret my experiences as captured in the data. As Bochner and Ellis (2016) assert, analysis in autoethnography is inherently iterative and non-linear, developing in tandem with continuous engagement and immersion in the text. Thematic analysis, as delineated by Maguire and Delahunt (2017), involves the identification and interpretation of recurring patterns or themes within qualitative data, thereby facilitating the extraction of meaningful insights and the elucidation of greater significance. This analytic process is characterized by an ongoing interplay among the dataset, coded extracts, and evolving interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006). For the purposes of this study, the analysis foregrounds latent content, focusing on the underlying ideas, conceptualizations, and ideologies that inform my experiences.

To further strengthen the analysis's genuineness and cultural specificity, I employed in vivo coding to capture authentic language (Saldaña, 2016). This coding strategy foregrounds indigenous terminology and preserves the integrity of lived experience. I used in vivo coding in combination with emotion coding strategy. This twofold approach entailed methodically identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the qualitative data. It captured emotions and conceptual groupings and helped identify overarching themes connecting them to Yoruba cultural values. The codes were grouped accordingly based on similarity into broader categories and associated themes, thereby facilitating the identification of key cultural values and their practical importance within educational contexts.

The analytical process was structured according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework, as outlined below:

1. Data Familiarization: Engaging in repeated readings of journals, recalling personal narratives, and situating experiences within relevant cultural settings.

2. Generating Initial Codes: Applying in vivo and emotion coding strategies to capture both the linguistic and affective dimensions of the data, with particular attention to expressions relevant to leveraging Yoruba culture in early intervention (Saldaña, 2016).
3. Searching for Themes: Organizing codes into logical themes that reflect underlying ideas and directly address the research question.
4. Reviewing Themes: Refining themes to ensure that they accurately represent latent meanings and remain congruent with the central focus of the research.
5. Defining and Naming Themes: Clearly articulating the conceptual significance of each theme and its relevance to the research aims.
6. Producing the Report: Presenting themes in relation to extant theory and literature, substantiated by illustrative excerpts from the data.

Throughout the autoethnographic process, analysis and reflection were conducted in tandem, with prose and emergent insights continually revisited and refined. Consequently, the analysis section of this dissertation integrates reflection and critical interpretation for each vignette, consistently returning to the guiding research question: How do my experiences with early cultural intervention programs designed for marginalized students illustrate how Yoruba culture can be leveraged in early intervention programs?

Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

Qualitative research represents a nuanced and rigorous endeavor that requires adherence to high standards to ensure trustworthiness. Tracy (2010) identified eight critical criteria for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research, including worthy topic, sincerity, credibility, resonance, meaningful coherence, rich rigor, significant contribution, and ethics. Within the

framework of my research, I place special focus on the worthy topic, resonance, meaningful coherence, ethical standards, and rich rigor.

Worthy Topic

At the core of effective qualitative research lies the concept of a worthy topic. The significance and timeliness of the subject substantially enhance the impact of a study. Engaging research often uncovers surprising elements that challenge conventional wisdom, provoking thoughtful discourse among readers. Tracy (2010) emphasizes that worthy topics should captivate audiences while reflecting meaningful societal or personal moments. My autoethnography exemplifies this principle as it explores the intricate dynamics of cultural fusion and its implications for human well-being and identity (Berry, 1997). This exploration is particularly timely, offering fresh perspectives on how cultural fusion informs personal and communal identities. While my experiences resonate with previous autoethnographic accounts, my narrative seeks to enrich the dialogue surrounding cultural fusion, inviting readers to engage in profound reflections on its implications within educational contexts.

Resonance

The concept of resonance serves as a pivotal criterion in qualitative research, emphasizing the necessity of a deep, personal connection between the researcher and the audience. Achieving resonance requires a relational approach, characterized by a compelling first-person narrative and an inviting conversational tone. In my autoethnography, I endeavor to connect with readers through relatable and evocative stories that highlight the impact of cultural hybridity. This narrative style not only enhances engagement but also fosters empathy, rendering complex themes more accessible and resonant with a diverse audience. Scholars in the field

affirm that stories serve as powerful tools for facilitating understanding and bridging gaps between diverse cultural experiences (Creswell, 2013).

Meaningful Coherence

Meaningful coherence stands as another vital standard, ensuring that all components of the research design, spanning data collection to analysis, are intricately linked within a coherent theoretical framework. My objective was to craft an autoethnography that is not only clear and purposeful but also presents my personal experiences and cultural background in a logical and digestible manner. Striving for this coherence enhances the reliability and legitimacy of my narrative, thereby amplifying its impact across academic and non-academic audiences alike. By aligning my research purpose and questions with a structured narrative, I create a robust framework for my findings, reinforcing the legitimacy of my inquiry (Tracy, 2010).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are paramount in autoethnographic research, particularly given the deep personal nature of the inquiry and the potential impact on both the researcher and others embedded within the narrative. As autoethnography invites the sharing of intimate experiences, it raises unique ethical challenges related to consent, confidentiality, and the responsible representation of individuals and communities (Ellis, 2007).

A central ethical responsibility in this research was to safeguard the privacy and dignity of everyone referenced in the study. Although my primary focus was on my own experiences, the narratives of family members, colleagues, students, or community members sometimes intersected with my story. To uphold confidentiality and minimize potential harm, I used pseudonyms and made alterations to identifying details, ensuring the anonymity of students and the program (Tolich, 2010). Data Collection was conducted through the systematic collection of

memories and reflective journaling following approval of my research protocol by the Kansas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (See Appendix A).

A further ethical dilemma arises in the disclosure of sensitive or potentially distressing information. The process of revealing personal and communal stories can lead to unintended consequences, such as emotional distress, damaged relationships, or misrepresentation (Chang, 2008). Researchers must carefully weigh the value of transparency and authenticity against the potential risks to themselves and others. Reflexivity is essential in navigating these complexities, as it encourages continual self-awareness and consideration of the ethical implications of all research decisions (Adams et al., 2015).

Moreover, the dual role of the researcher as both subject and analyst introduce additional ethical complexities. Maintaining a balance between honest self-revelation and respect for others' privacy requires ongoing ethical reflection and sensitivity (Ellis et al., 2011). Researchers should remain vigilant in assessing the impact of their disclosures and strive to represent all parties involved with fairness and integrity.

Ultimately, ethical autoethnographic research is a dynamic, negotiated process that demands humility, transparency, and a commitment to minimizing harm. By prioritizing these ethical principles, the researcher not only safeguards the well-being of all participants but also upholds the integrity and credibility of the research itself.

Rich Rigor

Balancing academic rigor with creative expression in autoethnography requires thoughtful integration of scholarly research and personal narrative. This approach adheres to academic standards and captures the depth of personal experience (Chang, 2008). As noted by Ellis and Bochner (2000), autoethnography serves as a unique bridge, connecting personal

experience with academic scholarship. It allows researchers to engage with their narratives while grounding them in theory, showcasing the relevance of academic concepts within personal stories.

To effectively weave academic theories into these narratives, it's important to frame experiences within theoretical contexts, providing depth without sacrificing the storyline. Employing creative literary techniques such as metaphor, dialogue, and vivid imagery can enhance the narrative's emotional resonance, keeping readers engaged while maintaining an academic tone. Jones (2005) emphasizes that the use of creative methods in autoethnography can highlight the complexities of lived experiences, all while aligning with scholarly standards.

Another essential aspect of maintaining creative rigor is ensuring methodological rigor in research methods. While creative expression is vital, it should not compromise the integrity of the research methodology. This rigor can be manifested through clear selection criteria for personal stories, thorough analysis, and transparent presentation of findings. Denzin (2006) emphasizes the importance of methodological rigor, arguing that autoethnographers must maintain a critical lens in both creative expression and academic inquiry, thereby producing valid and reliable work.

Reflexivity also plays a significant role in crafting a compelling narrative. By creating a reflexive narrative, one can connect personal insights with broader cultural or social issues, as suggested by Behm and Denny (2020). This process enables a critical examination of personal biases and perspectives within the narrative, thereby enhancing the authenticity of the shared stories while maintaining academic rigor.

Ultimately, understanding the audience's perspective is essential in contributing to academic discourse that resonate emotionally while meeting scholarly expectations (Mills,

2000). Engaging with the audience and obtaining constructive feedback on the impact of the study can provide valuable insights into striking a balance between academic rigor and creative expression. This collaborative process facilitates the integration of diverse perspectives, enhancing both narrative and theoretical framing and ultimately leading to more impactful scholarship.

Engaging in my autoethnographic exploration, I committed to reflect deeply on my experiences, to enable me to draw new insights and enrich my understanding of my area of study. To ensure the integrity and accuracy of my research, I followed the four essential criteria outlined by Feldman (2003) for conducting robust autoethnographic research.

These criteria include:

1. Clearly articulate the methods for data collection and defining what constitutes data within the scope of the study.
2. Providing comprehensive descriptions of how the data will be used to construct representations, along with the specific elements that shape the assumptions made.
3. Expanding the concept of triangulation to include diverse means of representing the same self-study.
4. Illustrating the ways in which research influences my growth as an educator, while also summarizing its significance to the broader profession.

By adhering to these guiding principles, I aim to enhance the validity and relevance of my study for readers, establishing a solid framework for data collection and analysis.

Chapter Summary

This chapter offered a detailed exploration of the qualitative research methodology that shaped this study, emphasizing the vital connection between my personal experiences and

cultural context. By fostering openness and sincerity, the chosen approach deepened my appreciation for lived experiences and their role in advancing educational equity. Through autoethnography, I challenged conventional accounts that often overlook the voices of underserved communities. The integration of my personal stories with critical analysis enriched the ongoing academic conversation about cultural awareness and diversity in education. Ultimately, the aim was to inspire meaningful change and promote integrative educational practices.

With this methodological groundwork established, Chapter 4 will present the study's findings and explore how culturally sustaining pedagogy rooted in Yoruba principles, especially the concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, shaped early intervention programs to support student engagement, identity formation, and socioemotional growth.

Chapter 4 - Findings

This chapter presents the core empirical findings of this study: an examination of my personal experiences with early intervention for marginalized students within the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts of elementary education. Through six representative vignettes, this chapter traces the transformational journey from academic disengagement and cultural alienation to engaged involvement and identity-anchored learning. These accounts, drawn from authentic classroom exchanges and student reflections, reveal how cultural grounding functions not as supplemental content but as essential psychological infrastructure that enables students to navigate academic obstacles, control emotions, and develop resilient self-concepts.

The vignettes that follow document specific moments when I witnessed students using Yoruba cultural models, proverbs, values, and identity constructs as practical tools to manage real life challenges. From Jayden's initial resistance to a curriculum, he perceived as culturally irrelevant, to China's application of proverbial wisdom in daily decision-making, to Shade's deployment of *Ọmọlúàbí* principles during a school lockdown drill, these stories illuminate how CRP generates meaningful outcomes. Each vignette is accompanied by a detailed analysis that examines both the immediate interactions and their broader conceptual implications, demonstrating how cultural identity is internalized as cognitive scaffolding, an affective regulation strategy, and a source of academic self-efficacy.

The chapter is organized to trace a progressive journey through the various dimensions of cultural engagement. It begins with initial resistance and the gradual formation of connections (Vignette 1), then explores how cultural identity serves as a psychological anchor (Vignette 2). The narrative then highlights the creation of safe cultural spaces that foster confidence and resilience through cultural affirmation (Vignette 3), followed by the emergence of cultural

ambassadorship as students begin to advocate for and represent their heritage (Vignette 4). Next, the focus shifts to the internalization of cultural wisdom, illustrating how students draw upon these values for self-regulation (Vignette 5), and culminates in the application of cultural principles when navigating crisis situations (Vignette 6).

Collectively, these vignettes provide empirical support for the theoretical claim that culturally grounded educational practices equip students with lasting psychological resources that enhance academic engagement, socioemotional development, peer relationships, and the ability to respond to challenges while maintaining cultural integrity.

Table 4.1 presents the coding analysis of the six vignettes, mapping the relationships among specific codes, analytical categories (grouped patterns of meaning), overarching themes, and their connections to Yoruba cultural values. The table also connects themes back to the Vignettes in which they are prominently features. This coding reveals how students' expressions and behaviors exemplify broader patterns of cultural disconnection, pedagogical intervention, and eventual reengagement through culturally sustaining practices.

Table 4.1.

Coding Analysis

Codes	Category	Theme	Yoruba Relevance	Vignette
Makes no sense Detachment Frustration	Initial resistance and disconnection	Alienation to Engagement	Highlights a need for CRP; signals resistance to content perceived as irrelevant to lived experience	Vignette 1
Identification Courage Engagement	Willingness to engage and cultural identification	Cultural Relevance	Seeks relatable role models who embody resilience and fearlessness; echoes Yoruba values of standing firm ("we do not run or disrespect because we do not know or are afraid").	Vignette 1

Codes	Category	Theme	Yoruba Relevance	Vignette	
Reflection	Reflective awareness	Metacognitive Awareness	Yoruba values, especially Ọmọ́lúàbí, not only provide culturally grounded coping strategies but also promote metacognitive awareness. In Treasure Quest’s supportive setting, students engage with these principles, building self-reflection, self-control, and confidence as they face challenges. Affirmations like “I am Ọmọ́lúàbí” foster resilience, self-worth, and a strong sense of identity. This culturally affirming environment supports academic and emotional growth, empowering students to develop perseverance and thrive in and beyond the classroom.	Vignette 2	
Emotional trigger				Vignette 3	
I don’t get this I may get that.	Growth mindset			Vignette 4	
Confident in school					
Resilience					
Self-efficacy	Internal change				
Persistence					
Thoughtfulness					
When I got mad I would say Ọmọ́lúàbí	Self-regulation	Emotional management		Cultural traditions rooted in Yoruba heritage are not simply academic content; they serve as practical tools for emotional and behavioral development. Students’ repeated use of self-talk, reminding themselves they are “Ọmọ́lúàbí” during emotionally challenging moments,	Vignette 4
Self-affirmation					Vignette 6
Composure	Emotional empowerment				
Application					
Resourcefulness					
Bravery					

Codes	Category	Theme	Yoruba Relevance	Vignette
			reflects a deep internalization of these values. By embracing principles such as humility and Ọmọ́lúàbí, students are guided in their decision-making, fostering self-regulation, emotional resilience, and a strong sense of pride. This underscores the central role Yoruba values play in equipping students to manage their emotions effectively and approach challenges with integrity.	
Esegan ni (Thanks so much) Appreciation	Family engagement and validation of cultural grounded pedagogy	Home-School cultural alignment	The mother's embrace of Yoruba culture and her modeling of values such as Ọmọ́lúàbí which emphasizes good character, respect, and integrity directly fosters her child's confidence and sense of belonging. When she uses culturally meaningful expressions like "Ẹ́ sẹ́ gan ni", she not only teaches her child the importance of gratitude and politeness in Yoruba tradition but also reinforces positive social behaviors and emotional connection. This everyday use of Yoruba language serves as a living example of cultural	Vignette 2

Codes	Category	Theme	Yoruba Relevance	Vignette
			pride and continuity, helping the child internalize a sense of identity, respect for others, and the confidence that comes from being rooted in a valued heritage. Through such expressions, the mother nurtures both emotional warmth and cultural awareness, embodying the principles of Ọmọlúàbí in daily life.	
Curiosity Uncertainty Realization I want them to know Yoruba	Misconception to understanding	Ambassador	Yoruba cultural relevance, especially values like Ọmọlúàbí, transforms students from passive recipients into active ambassadors by fostering cognitive reorientation. Initially, students internalize these values through family and community, developing self-reflection and self-regulation. As their mindset shifts, they apply Yoruba principles to new challenges, building confidence and resilience. This growth enables them to model and share these values with others, moving from simply receiving cultural wisdom to actively promoting it among peers.	Vignette 5

Codes	Category	Theme	Yoruba Relevance	Vignette
Proverbs	Cultural wisdom	Cultural Identity	The use of a Yoruba proverb as a guiding principle demonstrates how cultural identity is shaped and reinforced through language and tradition. The student's explicit identification with Ọmọ́lúàbí signals a successful internalization of Yoruba values, revealing not just cognitive understanding but also an active embodiment of these virtues. Drawing on Ọmọ́lúàbí for composure and bravery during a challenging experience highlights the effectiveness of cultural transmission; the student applies these values in real time, reflecting how deeply rooted cultural identity can guide behavior and self-reflection, especially in moments of adversity.	Vignette 4
Restraint				Vignette 6
I am Ọmọ́lúàbí	Cultural knowledge			
Identity				
Learned Ọmọ́lúàbí				
Awareness				
Understanding				

Vignette 1: Cultural Disconnection and the Pathway to Academic

Reengagement

Me: *Jayden, is that you?*

Jayden: *Yes.*

Me: *What are you doing there? Why aren't you in class?*

Jayden: *I don't care 'bout no dead white dude talking crazy.*

Me: *But avoiding class and the lesson is affecting your grades. Your current grade in the course is an F.*

Jayden: *I don't understand what he sayin, makes no sense and I do not know what to say when they ask me questions.*
when they ask me questions.

Walking through the busy hallway, I could not shake off my weighty responsibility towards students like Jayden. This conversation, which took place between a ninth-grade student and me, highlighted the challenges posed by disengagement and avoidance behaviors in the classroom. Jayden's unwillingness to engage with Shakespeare and other academic subjects led him to spend prolonged periods in the hallways or hiding in the bathroom. It was evident that he had difficulty connecting with the material, feeling that learning about a deceased author from a different racial background was irrelevant to his life. As an educator and a behavior interventionist, I was wholeheartedly committed to helping students like Jayden who faced academic and behavioral challenges. Yet I needed more training and guidance to address such complex situations efficiently. Despite taking on the role of aiding these students, I frequently found myself thinking: How can I genuinely help them?

Me: *Jayden.*

Jayden: *Yeah.*

Me: *Do you know Maya Angelou?*

Jayden: *No*

Me: *Maya Angelou is an African American female poet, dancer, singer, and activist (someone who fights for justice).*

Me: *This is what Maya Angelou looks like, she has used her poetry to help people speak on issues and fight for justice. Listen to her poem and draw what you see in your mind.*

Jayden: *Ok. (Jayden draws a picture of Bruce Lee with his nun chucks).*

Me: *Tell me about your picture.*

Jayden: *Well, Bruce Lee is tough, and he fights anybody. He ain't scared of nobody. So the lady talkin 'bout not being scared. So I ain't scared. I'm gonna be strong like Bruce Lee!*

Me: *See, Shakespeare is just like Maya, though. He teaches lessons in his stories, and all you have to do is listen, draw, and then write what it means to you.*

Jayden: *Kk*

Me: *Also, we don't run or disrespect because we do not know or are afraid. We stand and face our challenges. That's how we develop ourselves, that's how we become virtuous.*

Jayden: *What's that?*

Me: *What?*

Jayden: *What you said.*

Me: *Virtuous. That means having high standards, being hardworking, and not quitting or giving up.*

Jayden: *K, Ms. O.*

As Jayden delved into his readings, an emerging appreciation for literature blossomed. He found a particular admiration for Shakespeare, jokingly dubbing Maya Angelou as the "white version" of the Bard. This shift triggered a spark, and soon he began attending class regularly

with zeal. Working closely with his teacher, we devised creative ways for Jayden to express his understanding of assignments. An avid artist, he naturally blended his drawing talent with his academic work. Instead of conventional written responses, Jayden crafted comic-like answers, complete with sketches of his characters, all while articulating his thoughts in straightforward, familiar language. He backed up his ideas with insightful quotes from the readings, transforming what could have been mundane assignments into vibrant displays of his knowledge and creativity.

Reflection and Analysis

This vignette highlights the significant need for CRP in educational contexts serving diverse student populations. The student's initial resistance to engagement with curriculum materials signals what Ladson-Billings (1995) identifies as cultural discontinuity, the disconnect that occurs when educational content fails to relate to students lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and identity frameworks. This resistance does not represent academic deficiency but rather a sophisticated assessment of content significance, wherein students evaluate whether instructional materials reflect and validate their cultural realities.

Jayden's explicit articulation of disengagement with content perceived as culturally irrelevant demonstrates what Paris and Alim (2017) conceptualize as students' implicit demands for culturally sustaining educational approaches that not merely acknowledge but actively center students' cultural identities, experiences, and knowledge systems. This resistance functions as "critical consciousness" (Freire, 1970), wherein students recognize and resist academic practices that marginalize their cultural perspectives or present knowledge through exclusively dominant cultural lenses.

Yoruba Cultural Relevance

The observed shift in student engagement when content is presented in culturally relevant ways provides empirical support for the efficacy of culturally responsive teaching practices. This transformation corresponds with Gay's (2010) conceptualization of culturally responsive caring, the capacity of culturally grounded pedagogy to activate student motivation, increase intellectual involvement, and facilitate learning by connecting cultural knowledge with academic content. The student's willingness to attempt previously avoided tasks when presented through culturally congruent frameworks demonstrates that resistance frequently reflects pedagogical inadequacy rather than student deficiency.

His expressed desire for relatable role models who embody fortitude and fearlessness reflects core Yoruba cultural values, particularly the principle articulated in the proverb "we do not run or disrespect because we do not know or are afraid." This principle emphasizes the values of *igboyà* (courage), *òwò* (respect), and *ifarabale* (steadfast composure), which value dignified engagement with unfamiliar situations rather than avoidance or dismissal. The student's search for role models who demonstrate these qualities suggests an implicit cultural framework already operating within their meaning-making processes, awaiting pedagogical approaches that explicitly connect to and build upon these cultural foundations.

Furthermore, this vignette stresses the importance of what Yoruba pedagogical traditions conceptualize as *àgbà* (elder/mentor) guidance, reflected in the proverb "*Agbà kì í wà l'òjà, k'órí ọmọdé ó wò*" (An elder does not stand by watching a child make detrimental decisions). This principle stresses the responsibility of knowledgeable adults providing culturally situated support, guidance, and modeling that enables learners to navigate unfamiliar terrain with cultural integrity intact.

My approach to working with Jayden embodied this àgbà principle through several deliberate pedagogical moves. Rather than pathologizing his resistance or implementing punitive measures for his avoidance behaviors, I adopted a stance of cultural curiosity and purposeful bridge-building. I initiated the intervention by introducing Maya Angelou, a culturally relevant role model whose identity and background closely aligned with Jayden's own positionality. This move demonstrated cultural responsiveness: recognizing that Jayden's disengagement stemmed not from academic deficiency but from the absence of culturally congruent entry points into the curriculum.

My pedagogy reflected the Yoruba value of *itójú* (careful, patient nurturing), characterized by meeting Jayden where he was rather than insisting on immediate compliance with existing curricular structures. I validated his creative expression (drawing Bruce Lee in response to Maya Angelou's poetry) rather than correcting his interpretation toward predetermined outcomes. This validation communicated respect for his meaning-making processes and honored his cultural references (Bruce Lee as a representation of strength and fearlessness), even when they diverged from expected responses.

Critically, I introduced *Ọmọlúàbí* principles not as abstract moral imperatives, but as practical frameworks for navigating the specific challenge Jayden faced: his avoidance of difficult academic content. The statement "We stand and face our challenges. That's how we develop ourselves, that's how we become virtuous" directly addressed his behavioral pattern while simultaneously offering a culturally grounded alternative narrative. Rather than framing avoidance as personal failure, I positioned engagement as an opportunity to embody valued cultural virtues, reframing the situation from a deficit to developmental potential.

My collaborative work with Jayden's teacher to create alternative assessment formats (comic-style responses integrating drawings with text) demonstrated flexibility and cultural responsiveness. This adaptation honored Jayden's strengths as an artist while maintaining academic rigor, exemplifying the Yoruba pedagogical principle that multiple pathways to knowledge demonstration should be valued. The approach communicated a fundamental message: the educational system could adapt to accommodate his cultural expression rather than requiring him to abandon his identity to access academic success.

Throughout these interactions, my attitude embodied what culturally sustaining pedagogy scholars describe as an asset-based orientation, viewing Jayden's cultural identity, creative talents, and critical consciousness not as obstacles to overcome but as resources to leverage. I positioned Yoruba cultural wisdom not as remediation for deficiency but as a gift offering psychological tools, identity affirmation, and connection to ancestral knowledge systems. This framing communicated profound respect for African cultural heritage and depicted it as intellectually rigorous and practically valuable, countering dominant educational discourses that marginalize non-European knowledge systems.

The *àgbà* role I assumed was defined by patience, strategic cultural brokering, collaborative problem-solving, and resolute belief in Jayden's capacity. My approach reflected the Yoruba understanding that education is fundamentally relational and that effective teaching requires not only content expertise as well as cultural competence, emotional attunement, and devotion to seeing and supporting the full humanity of each learner. By bringing Yoruba culture into the intervention, I was not simply adding multicultural content; I was providing Jayden with a cultural anchor, a psychological resource, and a mirror reflecting positive possibilities for his identity as both a Black male and an engaged learner.

My pedagogical approach with Jayden embodied this àgbà principle through several deliberate interventions. Rather than pathologizing his resistance or implementing punitive measures, I adopted an asset-based orientation that positioned his identity and creativity as resources to leverage rather than obstacles to overcome. This stance manifested in multiple strategic decisions. First, I introduced culturally relevant role models, specifically Maya Angelou, as a link connecting Jayden's cultural identity to academic content, thereby addressing the cultural discontinuity that had precipitated his disengagement. Second, I validated his creative expression by honoring his Bruce Lee drawing and his unique meaning-making process, and by communicating respect for his interpretive frameworks, even when they diverged from conventional academic responses. Third, I introduced Ọmọlúàbí principles not as abstract moral imperatives but as practical frameworks directly applicable to the specific challenge he faced: his tendency to avoid difficult academic content. This reframing shifted the narrative from personal failure to developmental opportunity, positioning engagement as a route to embodying valued cultural virtues.

Fourth, I collaborated with his teacher to create an alternative assessment format: comic-style responses that fused visual art with text, honoring his artistic strengths whilst maintaining academic rigor. Jayden's positive response to culturally situated mentorship validates the Yoruba pedagogical emphasis on apprenticeship models, in which learning occurs through guided participation in culturally meaningful contexts.

Methodologically, this vignette demonstrates the diagnostic value of student resistance as pedagogical feedback. Rather than interpreting disengagement as a behavioral problem requiring management, culturally sustaining frameworks reframe resistance as important data revealing a disconnection between instructional approaches and students' cultural learning preferences.

These reframing shifts pedagogical responsibility from students (who must adapt to culturally incongruent instruction) to educators (who must design instruction that recognizes and builds upon students' cultural resources).

This analysis thus contributes to the conceptual understanding of how Yoruba cultural values inform students' engagement with educational content and draws attention to the necessity of culturally sustaining pedagogical approaches that provide relatable role models, culturally grounded mentorship, and content that resonates with students lived experiences and cultural frameworks. When educational environments fail to provide such culturally responsive support, students experience cultural discontinuity, manifesting as disengagement not from learning itself but from learning contexts that do not recognize or validate their cultural identities and knowledge systems

Vignette 2: Anchored -The Gift of Ọmọlúàbí

The parent-teacher meeting was winding down when Ms. Black leaned forward, her eyes bright with excitement. *"Ms. O, something remarkable happened last night something that reminded me why Treasure Quest means so much to Jordan." She glanced at the clock. "I'll email you the details since we're out of time, but I just had to mention it. It was so powerful watching him share with his brother how Ọmọlúàbí helps him."* That afternoon, her email arrived. I opened it eagerly, and warmth spread through my chest as I read:

Parent Email: *"Yes, it's so amazing to witness. Last night, David and Jordan were talking. David was frustrated about some things happening at school, and then Jordan said something that made my heart swell: 'This is where being in Treasure Quest is helpful because I think of Ọmọlúàbí and that helps get me*

through it.' He told his brother that Qmphiàbí helps him get over obstacles and mental roadblocks.

Ese gani - thanks for all you do! You are making a difference in all the kids' lives.

😊” I was filled with joy as I read her words, as a reminder of why I did this work. Content and encouraged, I typed my reply:

Me: *“Good morning, Ms. Black. I am so glad Jordan is generalizing what he’s learning and encouraging others, especially his brother. That just warms my*

heart! 😊” Ese pupo - Thanks so much for sharing. That afternoon, I walked to the classroom with the email still glowing in my mind. During our celebration time, I knew I had to share this with everyone.

Me: *“Jordan,” I said, catching his eye with a smile, “I got this email from your mom.” I read it aloud to the class, watching the students lean in to listen.*

Jordan: *Jordan nodded, his voice steady and sure. “Yeah, I use Qmphiàbí to help David 'cause he gets mad sometimes.” He looked around at his classmates. “I tell him, ‘I remember when I first learned Qmphiàbí, and then when I got mad, I would say in my head Qmphiàbí. Then I would calm down, so I wouldn’t get in trouble for my actions.’ When that happens, I feel strong. I feel proud because I feel good—because I didn’t get in trouble. And I feel proud 'cause I feel like I can do anything.” He paused, then shared his secret. Jordan: “When I’m upset, I close my eyes and I say, ‘I am me, Qmphiàbí.’ And I feel myself calm down.”*

The classroom fell quiet for a moment, the weight of Jordan's words lingering over us like a gentle blanket. I looked around at the other students, their faces thoughtful as they

absorbed what their classmate had shared. Here was a young person who had found his anchor, his way back to himself when the world felt overwhelming.

Reflection and Analysis

Vignette 2 demonstrates how Jordan's internalization and autonomous application of Ọmọ́lúàbí principles reflects the progression from cultural learning to psychological tool deployment. The coding structure illustrates the relationships between the codes conceptual groupings (categories), overarching findings (themes), and their connections to Yoruba cultural values.

Jordan's story illustrates the transformative power of being anchored in one's identity. Jordan's practice of whispering "I am me, Ọmọ́lúàbí" represents more than a self-soothing technique it is a deliberate act of self-affirmation rooted in Yoruba cultural teachings that emphasize integrity, respect, and personal responsibility. My pedagogical approach with Jordan exemplified the Yoruba principle of *itọ́jú* (careful nurturing), in which I introduced Ọmọ́lúàbí not as an abstract moral doctrine but as a practical psychological tool he could deploy in moments of emotional challenge. Through systematic instruction in the Treasure Quest program, I explicitly taught the components of Ọmọ́lúàbí resilience, responsibility, and respect using culturally grounded stories, proverbs, and role modeling. Rather than simply presenting these values as behavioral expectations, I positioned them as sources of personal power and identity strength, communicating that embodying Ọmọ́lúàbí would provide him with internal resources to navigate difficult situations.

To facilitate internalization, I created multiple opportunities for Jordan to practice invoking Ọmọ́lúàbí identity in safe, supportive contexts before independent deployment became necessary. During circle time discussions, I modeled self-regulation language and encouraged

students to articulate their own strategies for managing frustration. When Jordan experienced moments of anger or dysregulation in the classroom, I provided gentle, culturally grounded reminders: "Remember who you are. You are Ọmọ́lúàbí." This consistent reinforcement helped him internalize the connection between cultural identity and emotional regulation, transforming external guidance into internal dialogue.

My teaching approach emphasized that Ọmọ́lúàbí was not something external he needed to achieve but rather an inherent aspect of his identity that he could access and activate. By framing cultural values as already residing within him part of his ancestral heritage and cultural birthright I fostered a sense of ownership and pride. This asset-based framing contrasted sharply with deficit approaches that position students as lacking self-control and needing to acquire skills they do not possess. Instead, I communicated that Jordan already possessed strength, dignity, and resilience; he simply needed tools to access these qualities during challenging moments. The phrase "I am me, Ọmọ́lúàbí" emerged organically from Jordan's engagement with these teachings, representing his personal synthesis of cultural learning into a functional self-regulation tool.

What makes this transformation particularly significant is how Jordan internalized these values and made them his own. He developed a personalized practice for grounding himself during times of distress, creating a method for recognizing and embracing his authentic self amid emotional challenges. More remarkably, he transitioned from learner to teacher, sharing this cultural gift with his brother David, his classmates, and others within his social network. This spontaneous cultural transmission demonstrates that the teaching had become sufficiently internalized that Jordan could articulate it to others and serve as a cultural mentor within his own family system.

The vignette demonstrates the ripple effects of culturally sustaining pedagogy. When students access cultural anchors that provide genuine psychological support, the benefits extend far beyond individual outcomes, touching families, classrooms, and communities in ways that generate organic cultural transmission across peer networks and family systems. Jordan's journey illustrates that culturally grounded frameworks, when taught with intentionality and cultural integrity, become durable psychological resources that students can autonomously deploy, adapt, and share with others.

Yoruba Culture Relevance

This vignette exemplifies Ọmọ́lúàbí as a culturally grounded psychological resource that functions as both a cognitive anchor and a behavioral regulation mechanism. Jordan's systematic deployment of Ọmọ́lúàbí identity during emotional dysregulation demonstrates what cultural psychologists conceptualize as "cultural toolkits" (Swidler, 1986) repertoires of cultural resources that individuals strategically activate to navigate challenging situations. His engagement with Yoruba values transcends passive knowledge acquisition, manifesting instead as active praxis wherein cultural teachings become embodied strategies for self-reflection, impulse control, and psychological empowerment.

The cultural framework operates not as abstract academic content but as lived psychological tool for emotional and behavioral self-regulation. Jordan's repeated invocation of "I am me, Ọmọ́lúàbí" during moments of emotional challenge constitutes what developmental psychologists' term "self-directed speech" or "private speech" internalized language that mediates behavior and regulates emotion (Vygotsky, 1978; Winsler et al., 2009) However, Jordan's practice extends beyond generic self-talk to culturally specific identity affirmation,

wherein the content of the self-statement draws explicitly on Yoruba cultural values of *ìwà* (character), *ifarabale* (composure), and *òwòṇ* (self-control).

From a methodological perspective, the *in vivo* coding reveals practical, implementable strategies for self-regulation through culturally anchored self-talk. Jordan's articulated process of closing his eyes, reminding himself of his *Ọmọ́lúàbí* identity, and experiencing physiological calming demonstrates a high level of self-regulation sequence that integrates somatic awareness, cognitive reframing, and cultural identity activation. This multi-modal approach aligns with contemporary trauma-informed and mindfulness-based interventions yet derives its psychological potency from cultural grounding rather than decontextualized techniques.

The emotion coding reveals a significant affective trajectory: from anger and frustration to active self-regulation, and then to calmness, strength, and pride. This progression suggests that *Ọmọ́lúàbí* identity serves multiple psychological functions simultaneously as an emotional regulator (managing anger), as a cognitive reframe (shifting from reactive to reflective stance), and as a source of positive self-concept (pride in self-control). The convergence of these functions indicates that culturally grounded identity frameworks provide integrated support for the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of self-regulation.

Particularly significant is the intergenerational and peer transmission documented in this vignette. Jordan spontaneously assumed a teaching role, sharing his self-regulation strategies with his brother, David, and articulating them to his classmates. This peer-to-peer and sibling-to-sibling cultural transmission represents organic dissemination that extends program impact beyond direct participants. When students experience cultural tools as efficacious for managing their own challenges, they become cultural ambassadors who model and teach these strategies within their social networks. This multiplicative effect distinguishes culturally sustaining

approaches from individualized interventions that remain confined to therapeutic or classroom contexts.

The mother's explicit recognition and affirmation ("Ese gani/thanks for all you do!") demonstrates family engagement and validation of culturally grounded pedagogy. Her use of the Yoruba language (ese gani/thank you) in communication with me signals cultural alignment and suggests that the program's cultural grounding facilitates authentic home-school partnerships. When families observe tangible benefits such as children applying cultural values to navigate real-world challenges, they become stakeholders who reinforce and extend cultural learning beyond formal instructional settings.

This vignette thus contributes empirical evidence for the theoretical proposition that Yoruba cultural values, particularly *Ọmọlúàbí*, provide functional psychological resources for emotional regulation, behavioral self-control, and positive identity development within early childhood contexts. The deep internalization Jordan demonstrates, wherein cultural identity becomes an accessible psychological tool during moments of emotional dysregulation, illustrates the transformative potential of integrating culturally grounded frameworks into early intervention approaches. When cultural traditions are positioned not as supplemental content but as foundational psychological resources, they equip students with durable tools to navigate emotional challenges, maintain behavioral control, and develop resilient self-conceptions anchored in cultural pride and values.

Vignette 3: Bridge to Success

Araya's Story

The classroom buzzed with chatting and laughter as children settled around the snack table, munching happily. I glanced at the timer and raised my voice just enough to be heard over the friendly chaos.

Me: *"You have three minutes, and then we'll get straight to work. Don't waste time, so we can get to it quickly."*

Students: *"Yes, ma'am," they chorused back.*

Me: *"Thank you for that respect," I said with a smile.*

Beep, beep, beep. The timer went off, cutting through the conversation. China stood up and turned off the timer. The students moved with practiced ease throwing their trash away, gathering in a circle, and reciting the Ọmọlúàbí pledge together. Their voices blended into one as they settled down, ready for the discussion prompt. I looked around the circle at their expectant faces.

Me: *"Get ready to share with family" I gestured to the group "what being Ọmọlúàbí means to you."*

The term "family" within Treasure Quest represents a deliberate pedagogical choice rooted in Yoruba cultural values of collective identity and communal responsibility. In establishing Treasure Quest, I intentionally created what I conceptualized as a "cultural family" a learning community bound not by biological ties but by shared cultural heritage, mutual respect, and collective commitment to growth. This framing draws directly from the Yoruba concept of ìdílẹ̀ (family/household), which extends beyond nuclear family structures to encompass broader kinship networks and communities united by common values and reciprocal obligations.

From the program's inception, I implemented several practices to operationalize this family concept. First, students consistently addressed one another as "family" during circle time, reinforcing the idea that they belonged to a collective rather than functioning as isolated individuals. This linguistic practice served to create psychological bonds and foster a sense of belonging that transcended typical classroom peer relationships. Second, we established rituals that mirrored family practices: sharing meals together (snack time), gathering in circles for communal discussion (family circle time), reciting collective affirmations (the Ọmọlúàbí pledge), and celebrating individual achievements within the group context. These rituals created predictable structures that communicated safety, stability, and interconnectedness.

Third, I modeled the role of àgbà (elder/mentor) within this family structure providing guidance, wisdom, and nurturing while maintaining high expectations for all members. Students were encouraged to support one another as siblings would, celebrating each other's successes and offering encouragement during challenges. This peer support system reflected the Yoruba pedagogical tradition wherein learning occurs within communal contexts where individual development is understood as contributing to collective well-being.

Araya spoke first, her voice thoughtful.

Araya: "If I was at a different place, I would be thinking of Treasure Quest. Like when I first started Treasure Quest, I was nervous." She paused, as if remembering that earlier version of herself. "But as I keep going to Treasure Quest, I became proud, and I feel strong. As I keep going and learning, I know I will get better at school. The learning in Treasure Quest makes me more confident in school."

Me: "Thank you for sharing, Araya,"

As I listened to Araya articulate her transformation, I felt a profound sense of validation for the pedagogical approach we had cultivated in Treasure Quest. Her words were not simply a recitation of programmatic expectations; they represented authentic testimony to the psychological impact of culturally affirming educational spaces. The fact that she spontaneously connected Treasure Quest to her broader academic confidence signaled successful transfer effects precisely the outcome culturally sustaining pedagogy aims to achieve.

What struck me was Araya's metacognitive awareness. She could identify her initial emotional state (nervousness), trace her developmental progression ("as I keep going"), and project future growth ("I know I will get better at school"). This level of self-reflection indicated that our cultural space had provided not merely content knowledge but psychological tools for self-understanding. She was becoming an observer of her own transformation, capable of narrating her journey with clarity and insight.

In that moment, I recognized that my role as educator extended beyond instruction to creating what I conceptualized as a "safe container" a space where students could be vulnerable about their initial fears, persist through challenges, develop cultural pride, and ultimately transfer that confidence to mainstream academic contexts. Araya's testimony validated that Treasure Quest functioned as both mirror, reflecting positive cultural identity back to students, and bridge, facilitating confidence transfer to settings where cultural representation might be limited.

My response "Thank you for sharing, Araya" was intentionally affirming, communicating that her vulnerability and self-reflection were valued contributions to our learning community. By honoring her narrative publicly within the circle, I reinforced the cultural practice of communal learning and collective celebration of individual growth. This moment exemplified the Yoruba pedagogical value of *itójú* (careful nurturing), wherein individual development is

recognized and celebrated within communal contexts that provide both support and accountability.

Her journey illustrated the transformative power of persistence. She began with nervousness, acknowledging the early fears and emotional barriers that come with any new experience. But she did not let those fears stop her. Despite her initial apprehension, she developed a positive self-concept. I watched persistence transform her vulnerability into strength and pride.

The cultural learning experience cultivated an optimistic outlook on her entire academic trajectory. She now believes in ongoing improvement and future success. More importantly, she recognized the direct impact of cultural learning on her school confidence and performance. Cultural affirmation translated directly into academic self-confidence. In that moment, I understood what Treasure Quest truly was: a “safe container” a space where students could be vulnerable, persist through challenges, develop cultural pride, and ultimately transfer that confidence to mainstream academic contexts. The cultural space served as both a mirror, reflecting positive identity, and a bridge, connecting to academic success.

Reflection and Analysis

Vignette 3 illustrates how Araya and China’s participation in Treasure Quest as a culturally affirming space facilitated their transformation from nervousness to confidence and academic self-efficacy. The coding structure demonstrates the hierarchical relationships between student expressions (in vivo codes), conceptual groupings (categories), overarching findings (themes), and their connections to Yoruba cultural values, while tracking the emotional progression from apprehension to empowerment and pride.

Araya's developmental trajectory from initial apprehension to confidence and pride mirrors the Yoruba pedagogical tradition of *itójú* (careful nurturing), wherein individual potential is cultivated within communal contexts that provide both support and accountability. This progression aligns with Ladson-Billings's (1995) CRP, in which educational environments simultaneously develop academic, cultural, and critical consciousness. The transformation Araya attributes to Treasure Quest demonstrates the psychological protective functions of culturally affirming spaces, particularly for students who may experience cultural discontinuity between home and mainstream educational settings.

Araya's affective descriptors "proud," "strong," "confident" provide linguistic evidence of positive identity internalization, a central objective of culturally sustaining pedagogical frameworks. These self-descriptors reflect what Steele (1997) conceptualizes as "identity safety," in which students experience educational environments as spaces that affirm rather than threaten their social identities. When students perceive educational spaces as culturally congruent, they can allocate cognitive resources toward learning rather than toward managing identity threats or negotiating cultural code-switching.

The explicit connection Araya articulated between participation in Treasure Quest and mainstream academic confidence ("The learning in Treasure Quest makes me more confident in school") demonstrates successful transfer effects a critical indicator of program efficacy. This transfer suggests that cultural affirmation functions not as a compensatory intervention but as a foundational strength that enhances overall academic self-efficacy. The cultural space serves dual functions: as a mirror, reflecting positive cultural identity back to students, and as a bridge, facilitating the transfer of confidence to mainstream academic contexts where cultural representation may be limited.

From a developmental perspective, Araya's metacognitive awareness of her ability to recognize and articulate her own transformation indicates a capacity for self-reflection. The fact that she can identify specific emotional states (nervousness), trace developmental progression ("as I keep going"), and project future growth ("I know I will get better at school") suggests that the cultural space has provided not only content knowledge but also psychological tools for self-understanding and self-advocacy.

Methodologically, the coding process employed in this analysis yields critical insights into the mechanisms by which culturally responsive spaces generate positive outcomes. When students participate in educational environments that reflect and respect their cultural heritage, they experience multidimensional growth encompassing academic achievement, identity development, and socioemotional well-being. This holistic development pattern distinguishes culturally sustaining approaches from narrow academic interventions that address cognitive skills in isolation from students' cultural identities and lived experiences.

China's Bounce Back

China's hand shot up during our family circle time. "*I have something to share with family,*" she said, her voice carrying a mix of excitement and seriousness. The implementation of "family" within Treasure Quest also addressed a critical need many students faced: cultural disconnection and isolation within mainstream educational settings. By creating a space where students could experience cultural belonging and collective identity, Treasure Quest functioned as a cultural home, a place where their heritage was not merely acknowledged but celebrated as the foundation for learning and growth. The family framing communicated that students were not alone in their cultural journeys; they were part of a larger community with shared values, shared struggles, and shared aspirations.

When China stood to “share with family,” she was not simply reporting to classmates; she was contributing to a collective knowledge base, modeling vulnerability and growth for her cultural siblings, and reinforcing the communal bonds that made Treasure Quest a psychologically safe space for authentic self-expression and cultural affirmation.

“Go ahead,” I encouraged, settling back to listen. China took a breath and began.

China: *"I was frustrated when I was doing my test today. I told Ms. Favor, 'The question is wrong! It doesn't make sense.'"* She shook her head, remembering the moment. *"But when I feel frustrated and ready to give up, I say to myself, 'I can do this. I am Qmólúàbí. Take a deep breath and bounce back, because I know if I don't get this, I can go on to the next question and I may get that.'"*

As China spoke, I observed the other students leaning forward, their attention fully engaged with her narrative. This moment exemplified the power of the family structure we had cultivated; students felt safe enough to share authentic struggles, confident that their vulnerability would be met with support rather than judgment. China's willingness to articulate her frustration publicly demonstrated the psychological safety Treasure Quest provided, while her testimony to using Qmólúàbí during academic challenge offered powerful peer modeling for classmates navigating similar difficulties.

I was taken back with the specificity of China's self-regulation strategy. She had not merely invoked Qmólúàbí as an abstract concept but had developed a concrete, multi-step process: recognizing frustration, employing self-talk ("I can do this"), invoking cultural identity ("I am Qmólúàbí"), implementing physiological regulation ("Take a deep breath"), reframing setback as temporary ("I can go on to the next question"), and maintaining hope for future success. This sophisticated sequence demonstrated deep internalization that she had transformed

our collective cultural teachings into a personalized psychological toolkit she could deploy autonomously during testing situations where I could not provide direct support.

Moreover, China's narrative revealed metacognitive awareness of her emotional states and regulation processes. She could identify the precipitating event (encountering a confusing test question), name her emotional response (frustration), recognize the behavioral risk ("ready to give up"), and articulate the intervention strategy she employed. This level of awareness indicated that Treasure Quest had provided not merely behavioral scripts but psychological tools for understanding and managing her internal experiences. I smiled at her, feeling pride swell within me not pride in her test performance, but profound satisfaction that she possessed cultural resources to navigate academic challenges with resilience and dignity.

Me: "Yes, you are right. You are Qmòlùàbí." I looked around the circle at the other students, using this teachable moment to reinforce the connection between her actions and our cultural framework. "Which of our pillars of Qmòlùàbí did China use? Which R?"

China didn't wait for the others. "Resilience!" she blurted out, her face lighting up. "Because I bounced back."

Around the circle, the other students nodded and raised their hands in agreement, using the practiced gestures thumbs up, fingers to their heads showing they made a connection. They saw themselves in China's story. These gestures called "talk moves" are structured communication practices explicitly taught and consistently reinforced within Treasure Quest to facilitate meaningful dialogue, active listening, and collective meaning-making. From the program's inception, I had systematically introduced and modeled specific physical and verbal

signals that students could use to participate in discussions without interrupting speakers, to show engagement with peers' ideas, and to build upon one another's contributions.

The talk moves included several key gestures thumbs up to signal agreement or affirmation, finger to head to indicate making a personal connection to what was shared, hand on heart to show empathy or emotional resonance, and open palm raised to request a turn to speak. These nonverbal communication tools served multiple pedagogical functions. First, they enabled all students to participate simultaneously rather than requiring sequential turn-taking, thereby increasing engagement and reducing wait time. Second, they provided visual feedback to speakers, communicating that their contributions were being heard, valued, and processed by peers. Third, they created a shared communication system that fostered community cohesion and collective learning practices.

Students were taught talk moves through explicit instruction, modeling, and consistent practice during every circle time gathering. Early in the program, I would pause after a student shared and prompt: *"Show me your talk move if you agree with what China just said"* or *"Use your connection gesture if you've experienced something similar."* Over time, these prompts became unnecessary as students internalized the practices and deployed them autonomously, as evidenced in this moment when they spontaneously used thumbs up and connection gestures in response to China's sharing.

The talk moves reflected Yoruba pedagogical values of communal learning and collective knowledge construction. Rather than positioning learning as an individual cognitive process, these practices embodied the understanding that knowledge emerges through dialogue, that individual insights contribute to collective wisdom, and that learning is fundamentally relational. The gestures created what I conceptualized as "visible thinking" making students' internal

cognitive and emotional responses externally observable, thereby strengthening the sense that we were thinking and learning together as a cultural family.

Moreover, the talk moves served an equity function. Students who might be reluctant to speak aloud or who processed information more slowly could still participate meaningfully through gestures. Students whose primary language was not English could communicate agreement or connection without linguistic barriers. The nonverbal communication system democratized participation, ensuring that all voices whether spoken or gestured contributed to our collective learning.

In this moment, the students' spontaneous use of talk moves demonstrated deep internalization of our community practices. Without prompting, they responded to China's sharing with affirmation gestures, creating a supportive environment that validated her vulnerability and encouraged continued sharing. The connection gesture (finger to head) was particularly significant it indicated that students were not merely passively listening but actively relating China's experience to their own lives, recognizing that her struggle with test frustration was not unique but shared. This recognition of common experience fostered empathy, reduced isolation, and reinforced the understanding that *Qmólúàbí* principles were relevant tools for challenges they all faced.

The phrase "They saw themselves in China's story" captured the power of culturally grounded peer modeling. When students share authentic struggles and culturally grounded coping strategies within a supportive community, peers recognize their own experiences reflected in those narratives. This recognition creates opportunities for vicarious learning; students can envision themselves deploying similar strategies in analogous situations. The talk

moves made this recognition visible, transforming individual testimony into collective learning and reinforcing the cultural family bonds that made such vulnerable sharing possible.

As the circle moved on to others sharing, I found myself reflecting on what China had revealed. She had experienced cognitive overwhelm, reaching the point of potential surrender. The academic challenge had triggered an emotional cascade toward disengagement that familiar feeling of wanting to give up. But then something remarkable happened. She used internal dialogue to counter those negative emotions and build resilience. This was proactive self-coaching, an intervention strategy she'd learned and made her own. By invoking her cultural identity "I am Ọmọlúàbí" she found a source of strength during the academic challenge. Her cultural identity functioned as a psychological anchor during that moment of doubt.

She employed specific techniques to regain composure and persist deep breathing, physical and emotional regulation strategies that enabled her recovery from the setback. She reframed failure as temporary, maintaining hope for future success. This cognitive flexibility allowed her to accept her current limitation while maintaining a future orientation, if not this question, then maybe the next one.

What caught my attention was the timing. The phrase "I am Ọmọlúàbí" appeared at the pivot point between crisis and recovery. Cultural identity affirmation was the key mechanism that enabled the shift from "ready to give up" to "bounce back." This was culturally sustaining pedagogy in action providing not just content knowledge but psychological tools for academic persistence. And China had just taught the whole class how to use them.

Reflection and Analysis

China demonstrates autonomous deployment of Ọmọlúàbí principles during academic testing illustrating the internalization of cultural values as functional self-regulation tools. The

coding structure reveals the relationships between student expressions (in vivo codes), conceptual groupings (categories), overarching findings (themes), and their connections to Yoruba cultural values, while tracking the emotional trajectory from frustration and potential disengagement to resilience, hope, and cultural pride.

From a methodological perspective, the in vivo coding reveals the practical, lived application of cultural values within authentic academic contexts, demonstrating the ecological validity of culturally sustaining pedagogical approaches. China's spontaneous deployment of Ọmọlúàbí principles during testing a context characterized by evaluative pressure and limited external support provides evidence that cultural learning has been internalized sufficiently to guide autonomous behavior in naturalistic settings beyond direct instructional contexts.

Emotion coding reveals a significant affective trajectory: from initial confusion and discouragement to active emotional regulation, and finally to hope, perseverance, and cultural pride. This progression suggests that Ọmọlúàbí identity serves multiple psychological functions simultaneously as a cognitive reframe (shifting from "I can't" to "I can"), as an emotional regulator (managing frustration), and as a source of positive self-concept (pride in cultural identity). The convergence of these functions at the moment of academic challenge indicates that cultural identity frameworks can provide integrated support for the cognitive, emotional, and motivational dimensions of academic persistence.

Theoretically, this vignette contributes to an understanding of how cultural identity operates as a protective factor in academic contexts. When students possess culturally grounded frameworks for interpreting difficulty, they can access alternative meaning-making systems that counter deficit narratives. Rather than interpreting academic struggle as evidence of inadequacy, China reframed it through the Ọmọlúàbí lens as an opportunity to demonstrate resilience a

valued cultural virtue. This reframing capacity represents what educational psychologists identify as an adaptive attribution style (Dweck & Leggett, 1988), in which setbacks are interpreted as temporary and surmountable rather than permanent and insurmountable.

Yoruba Cultural Relevance

Araya's story exemplifies the operationalization of culturally rooted educational spaces as sites of identity affirmation and psychological empowerment. The "Treasure Quest" program functions as what cultural psychologists term a "cultural space" an environment deliberately constructed to reflect and validate students' cultural heritage while providing scaffolding for academic and socioemotional development. Such spaces embody core Yoruba values inherent in Ọmọ́lúàbí philosophy: ọmọ́lúàbí (virtue and good character), ifarabale (resilience and composure), and itẹ́lórùn (self-worth and dignity).

This vignette thus contributes empirical evidence for the theoretical proposition that culturally grounded educational spaces function as protective developmental contexts, providing students with psychological resources (positive identity, self-efficacy, cultural pride) that enhance both immediate program engagement and long-term academic persistence in mainstream educational settings.

China's story exemplifies the operationalization of Ọmọ́lúàbí as a cultural-psychological resource for academic resilience and emotional regulation. China's explicit self-reference "I am Ọmọ́lúàbí" functions as "cultural anchor," providing stable cognitive-affective grounding during moments of academic stress and potential disengagement. This declarative invocation of cultural identity at the critical juncture between frustration and recovery suggests that Ọmọ́lúàbí operates not merely as abstract knowledge but as an accessible psychological tool that students can deploy autonomously during high-stakes academic situations.

The behavioral sequence China described experiencing frustration, invoking Ọmọ́lúàbí identity, employing physiological regulation strategies (deep breathing), and reframing setback as temporary demonstrates sophisticated integration of cultural values with concrete coping mechanisms. This process embodies core Yoruba values of resilience (ifarabale), virtue (ìwà), and adaptive perseverance, and translates them into developmentally appropriate self-regulation strategies. The cultural framework provided both the motivational impetus (“I am Ọmọ́lúàbí”) and the procedural guidance (“take a deep breath and bounce back”) necessary for emotional and cognitive recovery.

Furthermore, the vignette demonstrates peer learning and cultural transmission through classroom sharing. China’s articulation of her self-regulation process during family circle time provided peers with a model, who responded with recognition gestures (thumbs up, connection signals), indicating that they identified with her experience and could envision applying similar strategies. This peer-to-peer transmission mechanism suggests that culturally sustaining pedagogy generates multiplicative effects, as students who successfully deploy cultural tools become informal teachers who model adaptive strategies for classmates.

This analysis illuminates a critical dimension of Yoruba cultural relevance in educational contexts: when students internalize cultural values such as Ọmọ́lúàbí, they acquire durable psychological resources that enhance their capacity to navigate academic challenges, regulate emotions, maintain persistence in the face of difficulty, and develop positive academic identities grounded in cultural pride rather than external validation.

Vignette 4: Recipient to Ambassador

“Remember to get your signed permission slip to me tomorrow for our field trip to the college prep school,” I reminded the students during our afternoon circle time. Dusiñ looked up

at me, his expression thoughtful. *“When we were starting, I thought we were going on a bus to a different place,”* he said slowly, working through his realization. *“Now I know we aren’t travelling to different places. Instead, we tell people about the things we learn.”* His voice grew stronger, more confident. *“When I tell people about Ọmọlúàbí, I feel proud, and I want them to know about Yoruba and Ọmọlúàbí so it might spread.”* I smiled at him, moved by his understanding. *“They will see the light in you and want to be like you, and you will see it spread.”*

As I listened to Dusi articulate this realization, I recognized a critical pedagogical moment unfolding. His cognitive shift from literal to metaphorical understanding represented exactly the kind of deep learning I had hoped to cultivate through Treasure Quest. When I initially announced the “field trip” to a college prep school, I intentionally used language that would capture students’ attention and spark excitement. The prospect of traveling somewhere new created anticipation and signaled that something special was happening. However, the true journey I envisioned was not geographic but intellectual and cultural. Students would indeed travel, but their voyage would be one of cultural knowledge acquisition, identity development, and ultimately, cultural ambassadorship.

Dusi’s statement, “Now I know we aren’t travelling to different places. Instead, we tell people about the things we learn,” demonstrated that he had grasped the deeper purpose of our work together. He understood that the most important journey was internal the transformation from cultural learner to cultural teacher, from passive recipient to active transmitter of valued knowledge. This metacognitive awareness indicated a sophisticated engagement with the program’s underlying philosophy: that cultural learning is not merely for personal enrichment but also carries social responsibility and communal obligation.

I was deeply touched by Dusi's articulation of pride in sharing Ọmọ́lúàbí teachings and his expressed desire for cultural dissemination: "I want them to know about Yoruba and Ọmọ́lúàbí, so it might spread." This statement revealed multiple layers of internalization. First, he had developed sufficient cultural pride that he viewed Yoruba knowledge as valuable and worthy of sharing a stark contrast to educational contexts where students learn to view their cultural heritage as inferior or irrelevant. Second, he had assumed an identity as a cultural ambassador, positioning himself as responsible for transmitting knowledge to others. Third, he demonstrated hope and agency, believing that his individual efforts could contribute to broader cultural awareness and appreciation.

This moment exemplified what I conceptualized as the goal of culturally sustaining pedagogy: cultivating students who not only possess cultural knowledge, but who feel empowered and obligated to sustain, perpetuate, and revitalize their cultural heritage within their communities. Dusi was no longer simply learning about Yoruba culture; he had become an active agent in its transmission, viewing himself as a link in the intergenerational chain of cultural knowledge.

My response "They will see the light in you and want to be like you, and you will see it spread" was intentionally affirming and future oriented. I wanted to validate his emerging identity as cultural ambassador while also reinforcing the ripple effects of cultural transmission. By using the metaphor of "light," I drew on both Yoruba philosophical concepts (imọ̀lẹ̀ enlightenment, wisdom) and accessible imagery that positioned cultural knowledge as illumination that naturally attracts others. I was communicating that his cultural grounding would be visible to others not through explicit proselytizing but through the confidence, pride, and strength it generated within his qualities that would naturally inspire peer interest and emulation.

This exchange also reflected my pedagogical commitment to what I termed “organic cultural transmission.” Rather than mandating that students share cultural knowledge, I created conditions where cultural pride and efficacy naturally motivated students to become cultural ambassadors. When students experience cultural frameworks as personally empowering and psychologically beneficial, they spontaneously desire to share these resources with others. This intrinsic motivation for cultural transmission represents a more sustainable and authentic form of cultural perpetuation than external mandates or requirements.

Later, as I reflected on Dusi’s words, I marveled at the journey he had taken. He had arrived at a profound realization about the true purpose of cultural learning, this wasn’t about physical journeys to new places, but about carrying knowledge within himself and sharing it with others. His transformation from a student anticipating a bus trip to a cultural ambassador, understanding his role in knowledge dissemination represented exactly the kind of identity development that culturally sustaining pedagogy aims to facilitate students who see themselves not as passive consumers of culture but as active custodians and transmitters of cultural wisdom.

Reflection and Analysis

Dusi’s story depicts transformation from literal to metaphorical understanding of cultural learning reflects his emergence as a cultural ambassador. The coding structure demonstrates the hierarchical relationships between student expressions (in vivo codes), conceptual groupings (categories), overarching findings (themes), and their connections to Yoruba cultural values, while tracking the emotional progression from anticipation to pride and hope for cultural dissemination.

Dusi’s understanding had shifted from the literal to the metaphorical. The “field trip” he was on was a cultural journey, one where he had transformed from learner to teacher, from

student to ambassador. The pride in his voice when he spoke about sharing Ọmọ́lúàbí revealed something deeper: his cultural knowledge had become a source of strength and identity, something precious he wanted to pass on to others. Dusiń’s hope and vision of spreading his knowledge, becoming an agent of cultural change showed Dusiń had discovered that the light of Ọmọ́lúàbí wasn’t meant to be hidden. It was meant to shine, to spread, to touch others and inspire them to seek their own cultural anchors.

Yoruba Culture Relevance

This vignette demonstrates the internalization of Ọmọ́lúàbí as cultural identity and the emergence of cultural ambassadorship among early childhood learners. Dusiń’s explicit references to Ọmọ́lúàbí and Yoruba cultural teachings provide evidence of successful cultural knowledge integration, manifesting not merely as passive reception but as active desire to transmit cultural heritage to others. His articulated pride in Ọmọ́lúàbí and expressed intention to facilitate its dissemination (“I want them to know about Yoruba and Ọmọ́lúàbí so it might spread”) represent dual outcomes: personal empowerment through cultural affirmation and the development of cultural ambassadorship identity.

The student’s narrative trajectory from initial literal interpretation of “field trip” to metaphorical understanding of cultural knowledge dissemination illustrates cognitive transformation aligned with constructivist learning theories. This conceptual shift reflects deepening engagement with cultural content, moving from surface-level comprehension to sophisticated understanding of cultural learning as both internal development and external social responsibility. Such progression mirrors the process of cultural affirmation identified as central to Yoruba pedagogical values, wherein knowledge acquisition is inherently linked to communal benefit and intergenerational transmission.

From an affective perspective, the emotional progression documented through coding from anticipation to excitement to hope reveals that culturally sustaining pedagogy generates positive emotional outcomes that extend beyond immediate learning contexts. The student's expressed desire to share Ọmọ́lúàbí with others suggests that cultural pride functions as intrinsic motivation for peer education and cultural advocacy. This peer-to-peer cultural transmission represents organic dissemination mechanisms that operate independently of adult-directed instruction, indicating deep internalization wherein students become self-motivated agents of cultural perpetuation.

The emergence of cultural ambassadorship identity has significant implications for culturally sustaining pedagogy frameworks. When students encounter culturally relevant content that affirms their heritage and experience resultant pride, they transition from passive recipients to active cultural stakeholders what Paris and Alim (2017) conceptualize as students who sustain and revitalize cultural practices. This transformation positions students as engaged learners whose academic motivation is intrinsically linked to cultural identity development and as cultural ambassadors who view themselves as responsible for transmitting valued knowledge within their peer networks and broader communities.

Methodologically, the in vivo and emotion coding employed in this analysis illuminate how Yoruba cultural frameworks particularly Ọmọ́lúàbí function as pedagogical tools that simultaneously foster self-esteem, promote active participation, and cultivate prosocial values within early intervention settings. The student's articulation of wanting to "spread" Ọmọ́lúàbí suggests that culturally grounded educational approaches generate outcomes beyond individual achievement metrics, producing students who conceptualize learning as communal responsibility and cultural knowledge as collective resource requiring active stewardship and dissemination.

Vignette 5: Change Within

“Ekaaro ma (Good morning, ma’am),” China said as she walked into the building, her arms already outstretched for a hug. *“Kaaro my dear,” (Good morning, my dear),* I responded warmly, wrapping her in an embrace. She pulled back and looked down at her feet with barely contained excitement. *“Do you like my shoes?”* I admired the new sneakers. *“Yes, they look lovely.”* With another quick hug, she disappeared down the hallway toward the breakfast area, her new shoes squeaking slightly on the polished floor.

Later that afternoon, during our circle time, I posed a question to the class. *“We talked about proverbs on Tuesday and completed our journals. Who can remind us what a proverb is and give the example we talked about last week?”* China’s hand shot up. *“I remember. A proverb is a wise saying that teaches us how to behave and what to do.”* She paused, her brow furrowing. *“Wait, what was the other question? What was... yes, the proverb we talked about on Tuesday. Empty vessels make the loudest noise.”* She took a breath, *“So I changed inside,”* she began, her voice quiet but certain. *“On Saturday. In December, my nana came, and she gave me new shoes, and the next day today I went to school. I did not brag because empty vessels make the loudest noise.”* She looked directly at me. *“Before I knew that, I would have bragged, but now I didn’t because I am Qmǒlùàbí.”*

Pride swelled within me. *“Very good,”* I told her, my voice warm with approval. *“You are being respectful of others and humble. That is having good character Iwa rere. Keep it up!”*

That evening, as I sat at my desk replaying the day’s moments, China’s words echoed in my mind. She had engaged so deeply with that proverb, “Empty vessels make the loudest noise” that it had become more than just a wise saying. It had become a lens through which she understood herself and her choices. I thought about the morning, when she’d walked in with

those new shoes, her excitement barely contained. Any child would want to show off such a gift from their grandmother. The natural impulse would be to announce it, to make sure everyone noticed, to bask in the attention. But China had done something different.

She had changed inside, she'd said. Not just her behavior, but something deeper. The cultural wisdom we'd explored together had created an internal shift that wasn't about following rules or complying with expectations. This was about who she was choosing to become. I was impressed by her awareness of the transformation. She could look back at her former self, the child who would brag and recognized the distance she'd traveled. She had compared past and present, recognized her own growth, and claimed a new identity: "I am Ọmọlúàbí."

In that moment, sitting in our circle, China had shown me something profound. Cultural identity was not something external we were teaching her to wear like a costume. It had become integrated into her self-concept, woven into the very fabric of how she made choices. The proverb had translated into self-regulation, and Ọmọlúàbí had become not just a word, but a way of being. This vignette demonstrates the internalization of cultural wisdom as a framework for behavioral self-regulation. China's engagement with the Yoruba proverb "Empty vessels make the loudest noise (Agbo ofifo loun ho yumu yumu)" transcended mere memorization of traditional sayings; the proverb became a cognitive tool through which she evaluated her own behavioral choices and impulses.

The scenario presented a naturalistic test of cultural learning transfer. China received new shoes from her grandmother a positive experience that typically triggers the developmental impulse to seek peer recognition and social validation. The normative childhood response would be to announce the acquisition, ensuring visibility and garnering attention. However, China demonstrated behavioral modification informed by cultural teachings. Significantly, China

articulated an internal transformation rather than mere behavioral compliance. Her statement “I changed inside” suggests a shift in self-concept rather than external adherence to prescribed rules. This distinction is critical: the cultural wisdom facilitated identity development rather than behavioral conditioning. The proverb functioned not as an external constraint but as an internalized value system guiding autonomous decision-making.

China exhibited metacognitive awareness of her own developmental trajectory. She engaged in comparative self-assessment, contrasting her current behavioral choices with hypothetical past responses (“Before I knew that I would have bragged”). This reflexive capacity, the ability to recognize and articulate personal growth, indicates self-awareness and demonstrates that cultural learning has enabled her to become an observer of her own transformation. The declaration “I am Ọmọlúàbí” represents the integration of cultural identity into self-concept. Rather than positioning Ọmọlúàbí as an external standard to be achieved, China claimed it as a core aspect of her identity. This integration suggests that cultural identity has become constitutive of her sense of self, fundamentally shaping how she makes choices and understands her own behavior. The proverb translated into behavioral self-regulation, demonstrating that culturally sustaining pedagogy can provide students with psychological tools for navigating social situations and managing developmental impulses through culturally grounded frameworks.

Reflection and Analysis

China illustrates how the internalization of Yoruba proverbial wisdom transforms cultural knowledge into practical tools for behavioral self-regulation and identity development. The coding structure reveals the relationships between student expressions (in vivo codes), conceptual groupings (categories), overarching findings (themes), and their connections to

Yoruba cultural values, while tracking the emotional progression from excitement about material possessions to pride in embodying cultural values.

Yoruba Culture Relevance

This vignette exemplifies the pedagogical function of Yoruba proverbial wisdom as a mechanism for moral development and behavioral guidance. The proverb “Empty vessels make the loudest noise” operates not as abstract cultural knowledge but as an applied ethical framework that China deployed to evaluate and regulate her behavioral impulses. The utilization of traditional proverbs for contemporary self-regulation demonstrates the enduring relevance and adaptability of Yoruba epistemological systems within modern educational contexts.

China’s explicit self-identification with Ọmọ́lúàbí “I am Ọmọ́lúàbí” constitutes evidence of successful cultural identity internalization. This declarative statement represents more than simple affiliation; it signals the integration of Ọmọ́lúàbí as a core component of self-concept, functioning as what developmental psychologists term an “identity anchor” that guides decision-making processes. The student’s narrative demonstrates practical application of Yoruba wisdom in naturalistic settings, as she autonomously applied proverbial teachings to moderate her impulse toward self-aggrandizement when presented with a socially valued possession.

From a methodological perspective, the in vivo coding reveals how proverbs function as cognitive-moral anchors within children’s developing ethical frameworks. The affirmation “I am Ọmọ́lúàbí” embodies what cultural psychologists identify as “identity-based motivation” (Oyserman, 2009; Oyserman & Destin, 2010) wherein cultural identity becomes a psychological resource that shapes behavioral choices and emotional responses. According to identity-based motivation theory, people prefer to act and make sense of their experiences in ways that align with their salient identities (Oyserman, 2007), and when action feels identity-congruent,

individuals are motivated to persist even through difficulty (Oyserman, Bybee, & Terry, 2006). The emotional trajectory traced through coding illuminates a developmental progression: initial affect (happiness and excitement regarding a material gift) transforms through reflective practice (metacognitive awareness and behavioral restraint) into identity-based pride (satisfaction derived from embodying cultural values rather than possessing material goods).

This affective transformation is theoretically significant. It suggests that culturally sustaining pedagogy facilitates a shift in children's value systems from external validation (peer recognition of possessions) to internal validation (alignment with cultural values). Such internalization represents what Vygotsky (1978) termed the movement from interpsychological to intrapsychological functioning: cultural tools initially introduced through social interaction become internalized cognitive structures that mediate independent thought and action. As Vygotsky articulated, "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level; first, between people (interpsychological) and then inside the child (intrapsychological)" (p. 57). Through this process, cultural tools such as proverbs, initially encountered in social contexts, become internalized as psychological resources that guide autonomous behavior.

Furthermore, this vignette contributes empirical evidence for the argument that Yoruba cultural frameworks specifically proverbial wisdom and *Ọmọlúàbí* identity provide functional psychological tools for self-regulation, ethical decision-making, and positive self-concept development within early childhood intervention contexts. The successful transfer of cultural knowledge from instructional settings to autonomous application in everyday situations demonstrates that culturally sustaining approaches can equip young learners with durable cognitive-emotional resources that extend beyond the immediate educational environment.

Vignette 6: Transcending

The second semester began as the first had ended with familiar rhythms. The children filed in, moving through their established routines: snack time, cleanup, and then gathering in a circle for the Ọmọ́lúàbí pledge. Their voices rose together, filling the room:

Treasure Quest Ọmọ́lúàbí Pledge

“With resilience in my heart,

I’ll stand tall, Embracing challenges,

I’ll never fall.

With responsibility, I’ll do what’s right, Guiding my choices,

a beacon of light.

With respect for others, I’ll lead the way,

Honoring each voice, come what may.

As Ọmọ́lúàbí, I vow to be true,

In all that I do, I’ll uplift me and you.”

“I am Me ỌMỌLÚÀBÍ!”

They declared in unison, their voices strong and sure. I smiled at them, full of joy and pride. *“Yes, indeed, you are Ọmọ́lúàbí virtuous souls.”* I settled into my seat, ready to begin our discussion. *“We talked about various aspects of Ọmọ́lúàbí last semester. Can you mention some?”* Hands shot up around the circle. *“Being respectful,”* one student called out. *“Show hospitality and offer people snacks when they visit our class,”* added another. *“Take deep breaths and think of Ọmọ́lúàbí,”* a third contributed. The responses flowed: *“Proverbs, culture*

and traditions, ancestors, be brave....” Shade’s face lit up. *“I liked the brave one,”* she said. I leaned forward, curious. *“Why?”*

Shade: *“Last semester we learned Ọmọ́lúàbí, and it means responsible, resilient and respectful. I use Ọmọ́lúàbí during the lockdown drill at school,”* She paused, *and I could see her remembering. “It made me feel strong and brave. I could be calm and quiet so the people cannot hear us.”*

I felt a chill run through me not from fear, but from the profound weight of what she was sharing. *“So Ọmọ́lúàbí made you feel strong? And brave? How?”*

Shade: *“Because it helped me stay calm,”* Shade explained, *her voice steady. “Because if my friends see I am calm, they too be calm, and nobody will hear us because we are quiet.”*

I was short of words. *“Simply wonderful. You showed akinkanju bravery.”* I nodded at her.

“That’s wonderful.” Shade’s expression brightened, and she added, *“Ariel and Janice want to be Ọmọ́lúàbí too. I told Ms. Jamian she said she will tell you.”* They did? Mhmm.

“Thank you for letting me know,” I replied warmly. *“I will talk to Ms. Jamian about that tomorrow.”*

This vignette demonstrates the application of cultural knowledge as a psychological resource during a high-stakes emergency. Shade’s deployment of Ọmọ́lúàbí principles during a lockdown drill reveals the depth of cultural learning internalization and its translation into functional coping mechanisms under conditions of acute stress.

Lockdown drills represent a contemporary reality in American schools, creating scenarios where children must suppress natural fight-or-flight responses and maintain silence in potentially threatening situations. These drills generate genuine physiological stress responses despite being

practice exercises. In this context, Shade's ability to access and apply cultural teachings demonstrates remarkable emotional regulation capacity.

Shade's articulation "*It made me feel strong and brave*" indicates that Ọmọ́lúàbí functioned as more than a memorized concept. The principles (responsible, resilient, respectful) were deployed in real-time as cognitive tools for managing fear and maintaining behavioral control. This represents successful transfer of cultural learning from instructional contexts to authentic high-pressure situations where personal safety is perceived to be at stake.

Particularly significant is Shade's awareness of her social influence and collective responsibility. Her statement "If my friends see I am calm, they too be calm" demonstrates a deep understanding of emotional contagion and peer modeling. At a developmental stage where egocentrism typically dominates, Shade exhibited collectivist thinking prioritizing group safety over individual emotional expression. She positioned herself as a leader, embodying Ọmọ́lúàbí emphasis on maintaining dignity under pressure and considering communal welfare. Her courage manifested not as fearlessness but as purposeful action a mature conceptualization of bravery.

The cultural framework provided what trauma-informed practitioners call a "psychological anchor" a stable cognitive reference point during chaos. When autonomic nervous system activation might have triggered panic responses, Ọmọ́lúàbí offered alternative neural pathways: structured self-regulation strategies grounded in cultural identity. Abstract concepts discussed in safe educational contexts successfully translated into protective psychological tools during an emergency, demonstrating the pragmatic value of culturally sustaining pedagogy beyond academic outcomes.

The ripple effect extends beyond Shade's individual experience. Two peers (Ariel and Janice) observed Shade's composure and explicitly requested access to Ọmọ́lúàbí teachings. This

peer-driven cultural transmission suggests that students recognize and value the emotional regulation capacities that cultural grounding provides. Cultural knowledge becomes socially desirable not through adult mandate but through witnessed efficacy of students seeking the psychological resources they observe in their peers.

This vignette illuminates a critical dimension of culturally sustaining pedagogy: it provides students with cultural tools that function as psychological resources during moments of crisis, enabling them to access ancestral wisdom and cultural strength when confronting contemporary challenges that require emotional fortitude and behavioral self-regulation.

Reflection and Analysis

Shade's deployment of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* principles during a school lockdown drill illustrates the application of cultural values as functional psychological resources in high-stakes crisis situations. The coding structure reveals the relationships between student expressions (in vivo codes), conceptual groupings (categories), overarching findings (themes), and their connections to Yoruba cultural values, while tracking the emotional progression from potential fear and anxiety to strength, bravery, and leadership.

Yoruba Cultural Relevance

This vignette exemplifies the operationalization of Yoruba cultural principles within contemporary educational contexts and their pragmatic application during high-stakes scenarios. Shade's deployment of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* during a lockdown drill constitutes empirical evidence of successful cultural transmission and internalization within early childhood intervention frameworks. Her ability to access these principles under acute stress conditions demonstrates that culturally sustaining pedagogy can provide students with functional psychological tools that extend beyond academic contexts into crisis management situations.

The affective responses Shade articulated calmness, strength, and bravery were explicitly attributed to Ọmọ́lúàbí, establishing a direct causal relationship between cultural grounding and emotional regulation capacity. This attribution is theoretically significant: it suggests that cultural identity frameworks can serve as cognitive scaffolding for self-regulation, particularly when students face scenarios that activate threat responses. Shade’s words reflect not merely conceptual knowledge but embodied praxis the active integration of Ọmọ́lúàbí virtues into behavioral repertoires during authentic challenges.

From a developmental perspective, this vignette illuminates how culturally grounded frameworks can support children in navigating the contemporary realities of American schooling, including preparation for potential violence. The Ọmọ́lúàbí framework provided Shade with culturally congruent coping mechanisms that align with collectivist values (maintaining group safety) while simultaneously addressing individual emotional needs (managing fear). This dual function serving both communal and personal psychological needs distinguishes culturally sustaining approaches from decontextualized social-emotional learning curricula.

Furthermore, the peer-driven interest in Ọmọ́lúàbí teachings (Ariel and Janice’s request) demonstrates organic cultural transmission through observed efficacy rather than institutional mandate. This suggests that when cultural frameworks demonstrably enhance students’ capacity to navigate challenging situations, they become socially valued resources that peers actively seek. Such peer-driven cultural transmission may represent a particularly powerful mechanism for sustaining cultural practices across generations, as students become both recipients and agents of cultural knowledge.

This vignette thus contributes to the understanding of culturally sustaining pedagogy by demonstrating its protective psychological functions, its capacity to provide developmentally appropriate coping strategies, and its potential for organic dissemination through peer networks when its practical value is witnessed and recognized.

Interconnectedness of the Themes

Seven prominent themes were identified in this study: Theme 1 Alienation to Engagement, Theme 2 Cultural Relevance, Theme 3 Metacognitive Awareness, Theme 4 Emotional Management, Theme 5 Ambassador, Theme 6 Home-School cultural alignment, and Theme 7 Cultural Identity. The interconnectedness of the themes identified in this study illustrates how they mutually reinforce and build upon one another, creating a holistic process through which Yoruba cultural values shape both the academic and personal development of marginalized students in early intervention programs. Rather than functioning in isolation, each theme acts as a link in a chain, contributing to a dynamic system that supports students' growth.

Across the vignettes, students exposed to Yoruba cultural values, especially the teachings of *Ọmọlúàbí*, demonstrated stronger self-concepts, increased academic motivation, and greater resilience. For example, intergenerational dialogue was fostered through program activities, while storytelling enhanced both cognitive skills and cultural pride. Emotional regulation techniques grounded in Yoruba proverbs and identity provided students with practical tools to manage stress and setbacks, demonstrating how cultural resources can be applied to everyday academic and personal challenges. The vignettes collectively trace a seamless journey of transformation, where each theme builds upon and amplifies the significance of the previous one. The narrative begins with Jayden's experience of alienation, marked by a sense of disconnection

and lack of belonging within the academic environment, a challenge faced by many students whose cultural backgrounds are not reflected in mainstream educational settings (Tinto, 2012; Kahu, 2013). This initial distance is not simply a barrier but serves as the catalyst for growth and change.

Transformation begins with the introduction of cultural relevance. When the curriculum, teaching methods, and peer interactions acknowledge and celebrate students' cultural heritage, a new sense of belonging emerges (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2010). CRP validates students' identities and serves as a bridge from alienation to engagement, motivating learners to participate more fully and confidently in their academic journey. As students engage, they begin to develop metacognitive awareness, reflecting on their own learning, thoughts, and emotions. This self-reflection is grounded in cultural frameworks, such as Yoruba values and the principle of *Ọmọlúàbí*, which encourage students to identify effective learning strategies and areas for growth (Flavell, 1979; Zimmerman, 2002). This metacognitive skill set supports self-regulated learning and academic resilience.

With growing self-awareness, the importance of emotional management comes to the fore. Students learn to recognize and regulate emotions, drawing on cultural wisdom and affirmations, such as invoking “*Ọmọlúàbí*” in times of difficulty. This ability to manage stress and persist through setbacks is crucial for academic achievement and well-being (Salovey & Mayer, 1990; Zeidner, Matthews, & Roberts, 2004). A key factor in sustaining this transformation is home-school cultural alignment. When the values and practices celebrated at school resonate with those upheld at home, students experience continuity and affirmation of their identity. This alignment strengthens the integration of cultural values into daily life, further supporting students' confidence, motivation, and sense of belonging.

As students' confidence and self-awareness deepen, they undergo cognitive reorientation shifting from a fixed mindset focused on limitations to a growth mindset that welcomes challenges as opportunities for learning and self-improvement (Dweck, 2006; Yeager & Dweck, 2019). This reorientation fosters adaptability, motivation, and a proactive approach to academic and personal development.

Through this process, students transition from recipients of support to active ambassadors of their cultural values. They begin to model and share the virtues they have internalized, offering guidance to peers and fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment (Freire, 1970). This ambassadorial role not only consolidates their own growth but also contributes to the transformation of the community.

Central to this journey is the formation and affirmation of cultural identity. By embracing and expressing their heritage in both academic and personal contexts, students develop a profound sense of pride and purpose (Phinney, 1990). This empowered identity sustains engagement, inspires others, and creates a ripple effect of positive change throughout the school community.

In summary, these interconnected themes, alienation to engagement, cultural relevance, metacognitive awareness, emotional management, home-school cultural alignment, cognitive reorientation, ambassador, and cultural identity, form a dynamic cycle of transformation. Each stage is essential not only for individual growth but for the collective empowerment of the community, illustrating how culturally grounded education shapes resilient, reflective, and confident individuals

Chapter Summary

This chapter demonstrates how culturally sustaining pedagogy, grounded in Yoruba principles like *Ọmọlúàbí*, transforms student engagement and development. Through a series of vignettes, it shows students moving from cultural disconnection to embracing and applying cultural values for academic success, emotional regulation, and resilience. The narratives highlight that when education centers on students' cultural identities, it fosters psychological resources such as self-regulation, confidence, and intrinsic motivation. These benefits extend beyond academics, supporting students in challenging situations and providing protective factors against academic inequities.

As this chapter closes, the voices of these students, Jayden finding connection through Maya Angelou, Jordan teaching his brother about *Ọmọlúàbí*, Araya describing her transformation from nervousness to confidence, China exhibiting resilience during testing and humility in everyday decisions, Dusi embracing cultural ambassadorship, and Shade maintaining composure during a crisis, echo with meaningful implications for educational practice. They show us that culture is not decoration or supplement but a foundation. They demonstrate that identity is not an obstacle but an asset. They prove that when we honor students' cultural heritage and provide explicit instruction in cultural wisdom traditions, we equip them with psychological resources that serve them far beyond classroom walls.

Chapter 5 - Discussion

This final chapter feels like both an ending and a new beginning. It gathers the insights I have gained from my journey through Yoruba-centered early intervention programs and looks ahead to what might be possible for educational equity and cultural responsiveness. As I reflect on the path from personal stories to theory, from careful analysis to lived experience, I now pause to consider what these moments and lessons mean for the wider world of education.

In these pages, I have traced a path from my own lived experiences to broader ideas, showing how Yoruba cultural values, especially *Ọmọlúàbí*, can breathe new life into educational interventions. The stories I shared in Chapter 4 are not just isolated moments of change; they are glimpses into what is possible when culture and education meet. These transformations are reminders that our traditions and values can shape not only academic outcomes, but also the hearts and spirits of students who have long been overlooked.

But the meaning of this work goes beyond the changes seen in individual students. My autoethnography asks deeper questions about what it means to create equity in education, and how culture shapes the ways we learn and grow. It challenges the idea that minoritized students are lacking and instead lifts the power of cultural heritage to transform how we teach and learn. This work invites us to rethink whose knowledge matters, whose voices are heard, and whether our schools will continue with old patterns or become places of real change.

In this chapter, I move from telling stories to making meaning, from sharing what happened to asking what it all means for others. Here, I gather the lessons learned and consider how they might guide teachers who want to change their classrooms, administrators who shape programs, and families who strive for their children's right to learn and belong.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this autoethnographic study was to explore and critically reflect on my personal experiences with early intervention for marginalized students situated within the broader social, cultural, and institutional contexts of elementary education. By grounding this exploration in the Yoruba cultural concept of *Ọmọlúàbí*, I examined how these interventions could empower students and facilitate their pathways to success while considering the unique challenges they faced. This study provided insights into the experience with tailored support systems that underscored the relevance of Yoruba cultural understanding in promoting educational equity.

Research Question

This study set out to examine how my experiences with early cultural intervention programs for marginalized students show the potential of leveraging Yoruba culture within educational settings. Through detailed documentation, the research revealed that embedding Yoruba culture in early intervention programs shaped transformative experiences across various interrelated domains: alienation to engagement, cultural relevance, metacognitive awareness, emotional management, cognitive reorientation, ambassadorship, and cultural identity. Collectively, these themes demonstrate that the deliberate integration of Yoruba culture in educational interventions cultivates far more than academic achievement; it nurtures identity, resilience, and leadership, equipping marginalized students to bridge the values between home and school and acquire essential skills for lifelong success. This model offers educational leaders a framework to implement in their own contexts. This way, the study provides a direct response to the research question, offering authentic illustrations of the profound impact culturally grounded early intervention can have for marginalized students.

The observed transformations align closely with culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and related models. For instance, Jayden's journey from alienation to engagement exemplifies the cultural discontinuity described in Ogbu's (1983) CET and validates the importance of bridging this gap through culturally relevant teaching, as outlined by Ladson-Billings (1995) and Hammond (2015). The intervention's use of Maya Angelou and Bruce Lee as cultural bridges operationalized Hammond's (2015) framework, which calls for utilizing students' cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect prior knowledge to new concepts. This conceptual connection is further reinforced by Jayden's narrative, which demonstrates the power of culturally relevant instruction to reconnect students who have felt marginalized by traditional curricula.

The study also extends theoretical understandings of the *Ọmọ́lúàbí* concept, as discussed by Azenabor (2023) and Fayemi (2009), by providing empirical evidence of its function as an internalized regulatory mechanism. For example, Jordan's use of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* for self-soothing, "When I'm upset, I close my eyes, and I say I am me, *Ọmọ́lúàbí*, and I feel myself calm down," bridges African philosophical thought (Banjo & Afolaranmi, 2023) and present-day educational psychology. This instance illustrates Hammond's (2015) emphasis on developing cognitive skills and habits of mind, anchoring emotional regulation in culturally meaningful practices.

Moreover, the vignettes challenge deficit perspectives that attribute underachievement to students' cultural backgrounds. The transformation of students like Jayden from disengagement to high achievement contradicts narratives embedded in Ogbu's CET and critiqued by scholars such as Carter (2003) and Foley (2005). Instead, the findings reinforce Delpit's (1995) call for affirming students' cultural identities within educational systems and further clarify the

mechanisms by which such affirmation fosters engagement, self-efficacy, and intrinsic motivation.

The research also brings to life Kramer's (2019) theory of cultural fusion, highlighting how students navigate and integrate Yoruba values within the broader American educational context. Araya's expression of pride in sharing *Ọmọ́lúàbí* illustrates Paris and Alim's (2017) conception of culturally sustaining pedagogy. Importantly, the data reveals that students are not only recipients of cultural knowledge but also become active ambassadors, shaping and sustaining their own cultural identities.

Emotional regulation and resilience also emerged as significant outcomes. The repeated use of *Ọmọ́lúàbí* principles as coping strategies, seen in China's and Shade's vignettes, confirms and extends research on culturally grounded coping mechanisms and a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006; Hammond, 2015). These findings suggest that resilience is most effectively cultivated when rooted in students' own cultural heritage, rather than through generic motivational approaches.

Finally, the use of proverbs as pedagogical tools, as demonstrated in China's "Change Within," validates scholarship on the moral and educational function of storytelling (Darko et al., 2021, Fasoro, 2012). The application of proverbs to real-life situations shows that these traditional forms are not merely cultural relics but serve as living ethical structures, challenging Western paradigms of moral education (Kohlberg, 1981) and emphasizing the efficacy of contextually embedded, culturally grounded moral reasoning.

In summary, this study not only answers the research question but also affirms and extends the theoretical frameworks underpinning it. The data reveal that intentionally grounded, culturally rooted interventions ingrained in Yoruba practices can transform marginalized

students' academic, social, and emotional trajectories, providing a robust model for culturally responsive and sustaining education.

Implications for Practice

Reflecting on the implications for both practice and research, several crucial and interconnected areas emerge from my experience and findings. The first implication is the operationalization and practical application of cultural values within educational settings. By moving beyond conceptual discussions, my work demonstrates how Ọmọ́lúàbí values can be translated into concrete interventions, offering practitioners a replicable model. This operationalization is not limited to academic content but also fosters respect, communal responsibility, and a sense of belonging, elements central to both classroom achievement and broader student well-being.

The second implication centers on the role of cultural values as foundational tools for both emotional self-regulation and resilience. The research shows that integrating concepts like Ọmọ́lúàbí and traditional proverbs into daily practice bridges the gap between cultural pedagogy and social-emotional learning. These culturally grounded practices equip students with practical strategies for managing emotions, coping with adversity, and “bouncing back” from setbacks, thus enhancing their emotional intelligence and resilience. In doing so, they also provide students with lifelong tools for personal growth.

A third implication relates to the rapid and transformative potential of culturally aligned interventions. Evidence from experiences such as Jayden's reveals that when educational approaches resonate with students' cultural backgrounds, positive changes can occur much more swiftly than traditional remediation models often predict. This transformation is not merely

academic; it encompasses the strengthening of identity, self-efficacy, and motivation, leading to increased engagement and a stronger sense of self.

The fourth implication addresses the fusion of multiple cultural frameworks within the classroom. Observations demonstrate that students can successfully navigate and integrate different cultural systems, developing hybrid identities that draw strength from both Yoruba heritage and the broader educational context. This process is further enriched when families and community elders are engaged, bridging the home and school environments and reinforcing continuity in students' learning experiences.

Another significant implication is the emergence of leadership and cultural ambassadorship among students who participate in culturally grounded programs. These students often become ambassadors and change agents, advocating for themselves and their communities, and actively transmitting cultural knowledge. This development challenges deficit narratives and affirms the potential for culturally sustaining pedagogy to nurture leadership and advocacy skills.

Finally, the interconnectedness of cultural, academic, and personal development forms a foundational implication for both practice and research. The findings suggest that when these domains are mutually reinforced through the use of traditional wisdom, storytelling, and ethical frameworks, students not only perform better academically but also acquire essential life skills that serve them beyond the classroom. By documenting these connections, this research extends existing theoretical frameworks and affirms the transformative impact of embedding cultural values at the heart of educational practice. Such an approach offers significant benefits for educational leadership, providing a roadmap for school leaders to invest in people, through professional development, training staff, and implementing culturally responsive and impactful

curricula. This transformative process equips educational leaders with key principles founded in Yoruba cultural values to foster meaningful growth at every level of the school community.

Recommendations for Future Research

Several promising directions for future research arise from these results. The first recommendation is to investigate the adaptability and scalability of Yoruba-based interventions across a range of grade levels including high schools as well as diverse cultural groups and instructional settings. Exploring how these strategies function in different contexts can clarify their broader impact and highlight potential benefits for other marginalized student populations.

The second recommendation is to conduct longitudinal studies that examine the long-term effects of implementing culturally grounded practices, such as Yoruba-based interventions, on both academic and life outcomes. Such studies would offer valuable insights into the sustained influence and effectiveness of these approaches over time.

A third area for future research involves adopting participatory research methods that center the voices and experiences of students, families, and community leaders. Prioritizing these perspectives helps ensure that interventions remain culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of those most directly impacted.

Additionally, future studies should investigate the specific mechanisms by which cultural values such as those underlying the *Ọmọlúàbí* concept influence emotional self-regulation, resilience, and academic achievement. Utilizing mixed-methods research would allow for a comprehensive exploration of both qualitative and quantitative dimensions of these processes.

Finally, examining the impact of professional development in culturally responsive pedagogy on instructional practices and student outcomes particularly when such training draws

from heritage culture frameworks can further refine and strengthen educational interventions, ultimately contributing to more equitable and effective teaching practices.

Reflection

As I reflect on the lessons from my journey, the implications for education seem to become clear, both practical and theoretical. The path forward, I realized, was not only about what had been discovered but also about how these discoveries could serve as a compass for others invested in culture, equity, and educational transformation.

From a practical standpoint, the findings demonstrate how educational leaders could breathe new life into early intervention curricula by weaving Yoruba cultural values and practices throughout. Classrooms where storytelling, proverbs, and communal learning are not afterthoughts, but central pillars. In these spaces, students who had once felt invisible would see their identities affirmed, their resilience nurtured, and their sense of belonging deepened.

Teachers, too, could transform their relationships with students by recognizing and celebrating cultural backgrounds. Educators reaching beyond the classroom walls invite families and community elders to become active participants in the learning process. District and school leaders could drive this change through professional development rooted in culturally responsive strategies, especially those that draw from students' own heritage cultures. Additionally, encouraging accountability systems that measure not only academic achievement but also the flourishing of cultural identity, well-being, and community engagement ensures a more holistic approach to student success.

Putting my ideas into practice was a leap of faith. I remember the first time I introduced the *Ọmọlúàbí* concept to my high school freshman students. It wasn't just another lesson plan; it became a living philosophy that shaped the rhythm of our grade level and the way students

approached their academic journey. With each passing week, I watched as this foundation began to empower them, not only in their studies but also in how they carried themselves beyond the school walls. As the research unfolded, I looked forward to the possibility of Yoruba-based interventions reaching even further. I pictured these approaches being tailored and expanded to support other marginalized groups, wondering what new stories and successes would emerge. It became clear to me that understanding the true impact of culturally grounded practices would require time, long-term studies that follow students through the arc of their lives. I hoped that future researchers would place the voices of students, families, and cultural leaders at the center, so that those most affected would help shape the path forward.

Reflecting on the journey, I recognized how deeply the work resonated on a theoretical level. My findings didn't just support existing ideas about culturally responsive pedagogy; they revealed the transformative potential of embedding cultural values at the heart of educational practice. I began to see identity, resilience, and achievement not as separate goals, but as an interconnected whole, each reinforcing the others. This realization inspired me to look more closely at how cultural frameworks, such as those in Yoruba tradition, could fundamentally reshape how we understand learning, motivation, and well-being.

Conclusion

The synthesis of data analysis and literature review reveals that this autoethnographic inquiry both validates and extends existing scholarship on CRP, while challenging deficit-oriented frameworks. The personal narratives provide empirical grounding for theoretical claims about the importance of cultural responsiveness, while revealing new dimensions particularly around emotional regulation, student agency, and the speed of transformation not fully explored in existing literature.

Most significantly, this work demonstrates that Yoruba cultural values, particularly Ọmọlúàbí, offer a robust, practical framework for early intervention programs serving marginalized students. The transformation documented across vignettes from alienation to belonging, from frustration to achievement, from dependence to agency illustrates the transformative potential of leveraging cultural heritage in educational settings. This contribution extends beyond the Yoruba context to suggest that all culturally responsive interventions must move beyond surface-level representation to deep engagement with students' cultural values, epistemologies, and ways of being because *Agba ki wa loja ki ori omo tuntun wo*.

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Appendix A

Institutional Review Board Exemption Letter



Office of Research Integrity,
Compliance and Security

TO: Donna Augustine-Shaw
Educational Leadership
Manhattan, KS 66506

Proposal Number: IRB-13424

FROM: Lisa Rubin, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 12/19/2025

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Fostering Success Through Cultural Fusion: A Critical Autoethnography Exploring Omolúàbí-Inspired Interventions for Marginalized K-5 Students."

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written - and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §104(d), category: Exempt Category 2 Subsection ii.**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

Electronically signed by Lisa Rubin on 12/19/2025 2:00 PM ET