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PSYCHO-SOCIAL EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENT IMMIGRANTS IN GHANA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

Paul Kobina Effrim [1], Esther Wilson [2], Francis Britwum [3], Daniel Appiah [4]
[1] Department of Educational Foundations, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.
Email: original6532@gmail.com
[2] Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.
Email: xtawilson@gmail.com
[3] Department of Education and Psychology, University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Email:
francisbritwum@gmail.com
[4] Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba, Ghana.
Email: appidan78@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This study explored the psychosocial experiences of adolescent immigrants living in Kasoa, Ghana. Guided by a phenomenological qualitative design, semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion were conducted with nine adolescent immigrants aged 15–19 years from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, and Nigeria. Data were analyzed thematically following Creswell's approach. The findings revealed that language barriers, miscommunication, and housing insecurity significantly hindered adolescents' daily functioning and emotional well-being. Participants also reported experiences of stereotyping, discrimination, and verbal abuse, which shaped their perceptions of how they were viewed by community members and contributed to feelings of fear, exclusion, and marginalization. Despite these challenges, adolescent immigrants actively sought alignment with the host community through participation in religious activities, social events, and peer relationships, which provided emotional support, opportunities for language learning, and a sense of belonging. Interpreted through Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the findings demonstrate that adolescent immigrants' psychosocial experiences are shaped by interacting individual, community, and structural factors. The study contributes context-specific qualitative insight into the lived experiences of adolescent immigrants in Ghana and underscores the need for adolescent-sensitive integration policies, community-based language support, and inclusive social protection measures to promote psychosocial well-being and positive development.
Keywords: Psycho-social experience, Adolescent, immigrant, Kasoa-Ghana

Introduction

Advances in technology, globalization, and regional integration have intensified human mobility, making international migration a defining feature of contemporary societies. People migrate in search of employment, education, safety, and improved quality of life (Bartram, 2014), while others are compelled to move due to conflict, poverty, inequality, and limited livelihood opportunities (Ohlsson, 2000). Globally, an estimated 389 million individuals

live outside their country of origin, representing approximately 1.5% of the world's population, with adolescents constituting a significant proportion of this migrant population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UNDESA], 2019). Sub-Saharan Africa hosts the highest proportion of young migrants worldwide, accounting for about 27%, a trend projected to increase in the coming decades (Adepoju, 2000).

Ghana has emerged as an important migration destination within West Africa, largely due to political stability, economic opportunities, and the free movement protocol of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Adepoju, 2000). Immigrants constitute approximately 14.6% of Ghana's population, with a substantial proportion originating from ECOWAS and other African countries (Teye et al., 2015). Ghana has also historically hosted asylum seekers and refugees, many of whom are minors, particularly from Liberia and Togo (UNHCR, 2008). While migration contributes positively to host societies through labor market participation, innovation, remittances, and cultural diversity, the benefits are not evenly distributed, especially for adolescent migrants.

Adolescence represents a critical developmental period characterized by rapid biological, psychological, and social transitions (Kapur, 2015). During this stage, individuals experience pubertal changes, cognitive maturation, identity formation, and increasing social role expectations (Lerner, 1985). These developmental processes make adolescents particularly sensitive to environmental stressors. Migration—whether voluntary or forced—can therefore be a profoundly stressful experience for adolescents, often disrupting established social networks, cultural continuity, education, and family support systems. Such disruptions increase vulnerability to psychosocial distress, including identity confusion, anxiety, loneliness, and emotional instability (Milstein & Luci, 2003).

For adolescent immigrants, these developmental challenges are compounded by acculturative stress associated with adapting to unfamiliar languages, social norms, and cultural expectations (Motti-Stefanidi, 2018). Many migrate unaccompanied or with peers, frequently settling in informal settlements, slums, or marginal urban areas where access to education, healthcare, and social protection is limited (Agarwal, 2016; Bridges & Walls, 2018). Those without pre-arranged employment or family support often face housing insecurity, street living, and exploitative labor conditions due to lack of documentation and social capital (Thieme, 2006).

Experiences of discrimination, social exclusion, and marginalization further exacerbate the psychosocial vulnerability of adolescent immigrants. Empirical evidence links perceived discrimination to adverse mental health outcomes, including depression and emotional distress (Finch, Kolody, & Vega, 2000). Cultural displacement and the devaluation of migrants' identities can undermine adolescents' sense of

belonging and self-worth, increasing the risk of poor psychosocial adjustment (Sawyer & Bearinger, 2013). Successful integration during adolescence is therefore critical, as it influences key developmental outcomes such as school engagement, peer relationships, identity coherence, self-regulation, and civic participation—factors essential for positive adaptation into adulthood (Motti-Stefanidi & Masten, 2017).

Although international and regional frameworks promote immigrant inclusion and prohibit discrimination (Sargiotis, 2024; Geddes, 2000), implementation gaps persist, particularly in African contexts. While countries such as Ghana provide formal access to public services, including healthcare, many immigrant adolescents experience structural and practical barriers that limit meaningful integration (Nartey, et al., 2025). These vulnerabilities were further intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted education, restricted mobility, and heightened emotional distress among migrant adolescents, especially those living in overcrowded or informal settlements (UNFPA, 2020).

In recent years, the increasing presence of adolescent immigrants in Kasoa, a rapidly urbanizing municipality in Ghana, has generated public concern. Many of these adolescents, primarily from ECOWAS countries, migrate in search of economic opportunities but end up residing in slums and squatter settlements under precarious conditions. Exposure to risky peer networks, unstable livelihoods, and limited adult supervision places them at heightened risk for behavioral and psychosocial difficulties, consistent with evidence that adolescence is a period marked by experimentation and vulnerability to "acting-out" behaviors (Hazen et al., 2008).

Despite Ghana's growing role as a regional migration destination and the increasing visibility of adolescent immigrants in rapidly urbanizing communities such as Kasoa, little empirical attention has been given to their psychosocial experiences, particularly from their own perspectives. Existing migration research in Ghana has largely focused on economic contributions (Awumbila et al., 2008), adult migrants (Anarfi et al., 2003), leaving adolescent immigrants' emotional, social, and developmental realities underexplored. This gap is critical because adolescence is a sensitive developmental period during which exposure to acculturative stress, discrimination, housing insecurity, and social marginalization can have lasting consequences for mental health and identity formation (Coyne-Beasley et al., 2024). The absence of context-specific qualitative evidence limits the ability of policymakers, educators, and social service providers to design effective, culturally responsive interventions that support adolescent immigrants' wellbeing and social integration. Addressing this gap is therefore essential for understanding how adolescent immigrants navigate psychosocial challenges within host communities and for informing policies that promote positive developmental outcomes in Ghana.

Purpose of the study

This study aimed to explore the psychosocial experiences of adolescent immigrants in Ghana through an in-depth qualitative inquiry.

Research Questions

1. What challenges hinder adolescent's functionality in Kasoa community?
2. What is adolescent immigrant's perception of how Kasoa community view them?
3. What activities make adolescent immigrants align themselves with Kasoa community?

Literature

Challenges hindering immigrant adolescents' functionality

Studies consistently demonstrates that immigrant adolescents' functionality is shaped by intersecting challenges across educational, familial, peer, community, and developmental contexts. Within school environments, immigrant adolescents frequently encounter structural and interpersonal barriers that restrict academic participation and psychosocial adjustment. Studies document difficulties related to school admission processes, language acquisition, curricular incongruence, and strained relationships with teachers and peers, which collectively contribute to emotional distress and diminished school engagement (Valenzuela-Vergara, 2025; Lucas, 1996; Stodolska, 2008). These school-based constraints are not isolated experiences but interact with peer dynamics marked by discrimination, ethnic segregation, bullying, and social exclusion, thereby intensifying feelings of alienation and undermining social functioning (Brenick & Titzmann, 2015; Stodolska, 2008).

Beyond institutional settings, immigrant adolescents must navigate complex developmental demands under conditions of acculturative stress. Research suggests that migration disrupts the normative progression of developmental tasks such as identity formation, autonomy, and self-efficacy, increasing vulnerability to maladaptive outcomes when adequate coping resources are unavailable (Jugert & Titzmann, 2020; Reitz et al., 2014). Contextual factors, including acculturation orientations and friendship patterns, further shape adolescents' experiences of acculturative hassles, moderating psychosocial functioning and adaptive capacity (Titzmann & Jugert, 2015). Exposure to chronic stressors has been associated with elevated stress levels, reduced life satisfaction, and increased involvement in physical aggression, signaling compromised emotional and behavioral regulation among immigrant adolescents (Brenick & Titzmann, 2015).

Family systems represent a critical yet frequently destabilized context in immigrant adolescents' lives. Migration-related separations, role reconfigurations, and intergenerational cultural conflicts often weaken family cohesion and emotional support, thereby heightening psychological distress and constraining functional adjustment (McCarthy, 1998;

Stodolska, 2008). While family functioning and acculturation processes can serve as protective resources that facilitate adolescents' mastery of developmental tasks, these benefits are unevenly distributed and shaped by broader structural conditions (Reitz et al., 2014). Structural barriers may diminish the positive effects of parental human capital on adolescents' executive functioning, limiting cognitive and behavioral outcomes despite familial investment (Assari et al., 2020). For vulnerable subgroups, such as immigrant adolescent mothers, reduced social support and heightened parent–child dysfunction further impedes psychosocial and parental functioning (Riccio et al., 2014).

At the community and health-system levels, immigrant adolescents face additional constraints that undermine overall functionality. Limited access to preventive healthcare services and the absence of culturally responsive health promotion interventions restricts adolescents' ability to maintain physical and mental well-being (Durning & Moriarty, 2023). Experiences of racial discrimination, legal insecurity, substance use exposure, and shifting family norms—particularly documented among Somali immigrant adolescents—compound acculturative stress and erode psychosocial stability (Scuglik & Alarcon, 2005). These cumulative stressors contribute to divergent academic and developmental trajectories, with some adolescents exhibiting declining academic performance and increased vulnerability to adverse outcomes, including substance abuse and suicidality (McCarthy, 1998; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010).

Despite these challenges, the literature also acknowledges the potential for resilience and psychological growth among immigrant adolescents. Migration may serve as a context for developing adaptive coping strategies and strengthened self-concepts, particularly when supportive social, familial, and institutional resources are present (Rothe et al., 2011). However, much of the existing research prioritizes outcomes and risk factors over adolescents' own interpretations of their lived experiences. Consequently, there remains limited qualitative insight into how immigrant adolescents make sense of these intersecting challenges and how such experiences shape their daily functionality within specific sociocultural contexts.

Adolescent immigrants' perceptions of how they are viewed by others

Existing studies indicates that immigrant adolescents' perceptions of how they are viewed by others are shaped through ongoing social comparisons, community interactions, and experiences of inclusion and exclusion. These perceptions are not merely reflections of individual attitudes but are embedded within broader intergroup relations and sociocultural hierarchies. Research on implicit and explicit attitudes demonstrates that immigrant adolescents are often aware of negative social evaluations directed toward specific ethnic groups, particularly when these evaluations are reinforced

by dominant societal narratives. For example, negative implicit attitudes toward adolescents with Turkish immigrant backgrounds, held by both native peers and some immigrant groups, illustrate how perceived social devaluation becomes a salient component of adolescents' social awareness (König et al., 2022).

Perceptions of how others view immigrant adolescents are also shaped by the nature and quality of intergroup contact. Calderón-López and Navas (2015) showed that Latino adolescents report more differentiated outgroup images than native peers, simultaneously endorsing positive and negative perceptions, particularly when contact with outgroups is high. This ambivalence suggests that immigrant adolescents' perceptions of social evaluation are complex and context-dependent, shaped by both opportunities for interaction and exposure to negative stereotyping. Similarly, Gonzalez et al. (2015) found that adolescent immigrants differentiate how they believe society views various subgroups within their community, perceiving hopeful futures for themselves, more uncertain prospects for typical peers, and pronounced hopelessness for undocumented adolescents. Such distinctions highlight adolescents' awareness of stratified social belonging and differential social valuation.

Community-level perceptions further inform how immigrant adolescents understand their social standing. Ajrouch (2000) and Young et al. (2007) demonstrated that adolescents' sense of how they are viewed by others is constructed through everyday social ties and acculturative experiences, with community belonging shaped by perceived recognition or marginalization. In some cases, immigrant adolescents interpret community engagement—such as volunteerism—as a signal that their presence and contributions are acknowledged and valued, reinforcing positive self-perceptions and social integration (Jaffe & Sasson, 2014). Correspondingly, Kwak and Rudmin (2014) found that immigrant adolescents often perceive themselves as equally or better adapted than non-immigrant peers, suggesting that positive interpretations of community feedback may coexist with broader societal challenges.

However, a substantial body of research underscores the central role of perceived discrimination in shaping immigrant adolescents' perceptions of how they are viewed. Studies consistently link perceived negative social evaluation to adverse psychological outcomes, including depressive symptoms and reduced collective self-esteem (Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013; Rousseau et al., 2008). Jasinskaja-Lahti and Liebkind (2001) further demonstrated that the effects of perceived discrimination on adolescents' self-perceptions are mediated by protective factors such as self-esteem and parental support, indicating that family resources can buffer the internalization of negative societal views. In contexts characterized by racism, violence, and social exclusion, immigrant adolescents may develop negative perceptions of

the host community while simultaneously strengthening positive identification with their cultural or ethnic communities as a form of psychological protection (Fournier et al., 2014).

The literature suggests that immigrant adolescents' perceptions of how they are viewed by others are dynamic, relational, and deeply contextual. While quantitative and mixed-method studies have documented associations between perceived social evaluation, discrimination, and psychological outcomes, there remains limited qualitative insight into how immigrant adolescents actively interpret, negotiate, and assign meaning to these perceptions in their daily lives. In particular, little is known about how adolescents reconcile contradictory signals of acceptance and rejection, or how these perceptions shape their sense of self, belonging, and functionality within specific sociocultural contexts. Addressing this gap requires qualitative inquiry that foregrounds adolescents' voices and lived experiences, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how perceived social views are constructed and experienced.

Activities that make adolescent immigrants align themselves with people

The literature indicates that immigrant adolescents' alignment with others is actively constructed through participation in social, cultural, recreational, and relational activities that foster belonging, recognition, and shared meaning. Rather than occurring passively, social alignment emerges through engagement in contexts that enable interaction, identity negotiation, and mutual understanding within host communities. Cultural and value-driven activities constitute a central pathway through which immigrant adolescents establish social connections. Jensen (2008) demonstrated that culturally rooted practices, including traditions of service, serve as important motivators for civic engagement, enabling adolescents to connect their cultural heritage with participation in the broader community. Similarly, engagement in culturally aligned activities—such as bilingual programs or church-sponsored initiatives—has been shown to facilitate social alignment by affirming cultural identity while addressing experiences of ethnic discrimination (Simpkins et al., 2013).

Volunteerism and community service represent another prominent avenue through which immigrant adolescents align themselves with others. Volunteer activities provide structured opportunities for social participation, shared responsibility, and interaction with community members, thereby reducing alienation and fostering integration (Calabrese & Schumer, 1986; Jaffe & Sasson, 2014). Through these activities, adolescents often interpret their contributions as socially valued, reinforcing a sense of belonging and mutual recognition within the host community. At the same time, not all forms of civic engagement yield equivalent outcomes. Marzana et al. (2020) found that social activities are more effective than formal civic participation in promoting integration,

as reflected in stronger ethnic and national identity development among immigrant adolescents.

Recreational and leisure activities also play a critical role in facilitating social alignment. Alfieri et al. (2022) found that recreational activities are particularly effective in enhancing adolescents' sense of community and self-esteem, often surpassing the impact of prosocial activities. Stodolska and Yi (2003) further illustrated that participation in leisure and work-related activities allows immigrant adolescents to align with community norms through processes of self-discovery, in-group comparison, and responses to external labeling. These activities provide informal settings in which adolescents negotiate social identities and gain social acceptance.

Peer relationships constitute a central mechanism linking activity participation to social alignment. Despite evidence that immigrant and racial/ethnic minority adolescents tend to report lower levels of friendship engagement compared to third-generation White peers, schools and adult facilitators play a critical role in creating environments that encourage interaction and relationship building (Cherng et al., 2014). Activities that promote peer collaboration and open discussion of culturally relevant issues enable immigrant adolescents to form meaningful social ties and navigate cultural differences more effectively (Malott & Paone, 2013). Engagement in peer-based activities, including romantic and sex-related experiences, has also been identified as a means through which immigrant adolescents align themselves with native-born youth norms, particularly when such engagement is mediated by peer group involvement (King & Harris, 2007).

Family- and school-mediated activities further support immigrant adolescents' social alignment by linking private and public spheres of belonging. Activities that promote ethnic identity development within family, peer, and school contexts strengthen adolescents' capacity to connect with others and navigate social expectations (Gonzalez et al., 2014). Likewise, coordinated school–family–community initiatives and culturally sensitive approaches to parental involvement create supportive environments that facilitate adolescents' social integration and alignment (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010). Leisure activities shared with family members and peers also function as relational spaces where adolescents develop trust, mutual support, and a sense of communal belonging (Arnon et al., 2008).

Collectively, these studies suggest that activities facilitating immigrant adolescents' alignment with others operate through multiple, interconnected pathways, including identity affirmation, peer interaction, social recognition, and institutional support. However, much of the existing literature emphasizes participation outcomes rather than adolescents' lived interpretations of these activities. There remains limited qualitative understanding of how immigrant adolescents subjectively experience alignment through everyday activities,

how they navigate inclusion and exclusion within these spaces, and how sociocultural contexts shape the meanings they attach to participation. Addressing this gap requires qualitative inquiry that foregrounds adolescents' voices and explores the processes through which activities foster social connection and belonging.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) explains adolescent development as the product of ongoing interactions between individuals and multiple, interconnected environmental systems. The theory emphasizes that adolescents' psychosocial functioning is shaped not only by personal characteristics but also by immediate relationships, institutional contexts, and broader social structures. In the context of Kasoa, adolescent immigrants' daily experiences are influenced by microsystem interactions within families, peer groups, schools, workplaces, religious spaces, and leisure settings, where challenges such as family separation, peer discrimination, and limited school engagement directly affect functionality. The theory further accounts for mesosystem processes, including the quality of connections between family, school, and community institutions, which can either constrain or facilitate adolescents' social alignment and sense of belonging. At the exosystem level, structural conditions such as immigration regulations, housing insecurity, limited access to healthcare, and economic precarity indirectly shape adolescents' psychosocial experiences in Kasoa. Macrosystem influences, including societal attitudes toward immigrants and prevailing norms around belonging, inform how adolescent immigrants perceive how community members view them. Finally, the chronosystem highlights migration during adolescence as a critical life transition occurring within a rapidly urbanizing context, shaping psychosocial adjustment over time. Together, Ecological Systems Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how challenges, perceptions, and alignment activities among adolescent immigrants in Kasoa are embedded within layered social contexts.

Methodology

The study adopted phenomenological design under the qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the psycho-social experiences of adolescent immigrants living in Kasoa. The population of the study comprised all the adolescent immigrants residing in Kasoa. However, the accessible population included all adolescent immigrants in the age range of 15-19 years. The researcher adopted the maximum variation type of the purposive sampling technique for the study in order to obtain diversity, account for the selection of adolescent immigrants from Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger and Nigeria and also to deal with the lived experiences, (Dudovskiy, 2017). Nine participants made up of

seven males and two females were used based on data saturation. Semi-structured interview schedules made up of open-ended items were used for data collection. The items which aligned with research objectives also included the demographic items of the participants. Interview with the participants were recorded after following the ethical protocol.

The step-by-step analysis described by Creswell, (2014) was used to analyse the data. Recorded data from participants were transcribed into text using MS-word which was sent back to participants for validation. Each transcript was coded separately, and the coding process was approached in an orderly manner by identifying structural codes, then attribute codes and descriptive codes. The initial codes were used to find connections and patterns guided by the research questions. The emerging themes were used to capture the subject matter of the participants' lived experiences. Themes were organised by searching for connections within themes. The major themes that emerged from the study were used to analyse the data and findings were compared with theories and the general literature on the topic.

To ensure the credibility of the data collected, participants were made to support with examples and confirmation statements. Site visits to participants to crosscheck data after transcription from interviews to ensure reflection of experiences from the interpretations were also made. Steps were also followed to ensure that research findings were replicable and other researchers could have the capacity to produce similar results. For the level of confidence in findings, the researcher's values and interests were "bracketed" and the process of data collection, analysis, and interpretation systematically done. The demographic of the site was properly described, and a vivid description of the participants were also done to ensure transferability of the result.

Table 1: Description of participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Country	Length of Stay in Kasoa	Language
1	18	Male	Mali	3 years	Bambara, French
2	19	Male	Mali	2 years	Bambara, French
3	15	Male	Mali	3 month	Bambara, French
4	18	Female	Niger	7 months	Hausa, French
5	17	Female	Niger	3 months	Hausa, French
6	19	Male	Burkina Faso	1years	Mossi, French
7	18	Male	Burkina Faso	1 year	Mossi, French
8	18	Male	Nigeria	9 months	English, Yoruba
9	17	Male	Nigeria	5 months	English, Yoruba

Source: Field Data, 2020

Research Instrument

The researcher served as the primary instrument by interviewing participants. Face-to-face interview was used to collect data from the participants. According to Heppner, Wampold and Kivlinghan, (2018), one of the best ways of capturing the participants' point of view is through interviewing. Interviewing is a technique that best helps to find out those things we cannot directly observe such as feelings, thoughts, and intentions. Interview is more appropriate method for data collection for this study since more information can be elicited from participants than can be obtained through the quantitative method of questionnaires, and this gave more information on the phenomenon.

Open ended questions were used as interview guide to enabled each participant the opportunity to answer freely and explanations where it seemed fit whilst still having questions written down for the researcher to guide the conversation, (Creswell, 2014). The basic checklist for the questions were developed guided by the literature for the study to answer the research questions. To ensure that interview questions perfectly align with research question, the purpose of study, and statement of the problem, the researcher sought expert review from the supervisor who gave his inputs on constructions, wordings, and propriety of questions. The questions included demographic which helped to get brief background information from the participants.

Data collection procedure

Data were collected through a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion to explore the psychosocial experiences of adolescent immigrants in Kasoa. The researcher first visited the study site with an introductory letter from the University of Education, Winneba, and engaged a community leader to identify eligible participants. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed, with each participant recommending others who met the inclusion criteria. Participants were selected based on their ability to provide rich, experiential insights into the phenomenon under study. Prior to interviews, participants were briefed on the aims and procedures of the study and informed that participation was voluntary and could be discontinued at any time. Verbal consent was obtained, and participants were encouraged to ask questions. Privacy and confidentiality were assured. Interviews were conducted in Twi and English, with a translator assisting participants who were less proficient in either language. Each interview was audio-recorded, lasting approximately 30 minutes on average, using a Motorola e6 Plus 6589 devices. Data were transcribed verbatim into English to capture participants' authentic accounts. A focus group discussion involving all nine participants was conducted to complement the individual interviews. This provided opportunities for participants to share and compare experiences, allowing for the identification of similarities and differences in perspectives. Ethical

procedures were strictly followed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose and nature of the research and assured of their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained, with identifying information excluded from transcripts and reports (Walford, 2005). Participants were informed that data would be used solely for academic purposes, and privacy was preserved throughout the research process.

Data management and recording

To ensure data security and retrievability, all audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password-protected personal computer. Transcripts were carefully cross-checked against audio recordings for accuracy. A colleague assisted in validating transcripts by reviewing the recordings, ensuring that all information accurately reflected participants' responses. This systematic organization of data facilitated subsequent coding, categorization, and thematic analysis, while maintaining confidentiality.

Data analysis procedure

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, as described by Creswell (2014), which allows for in-depth exploration of qualitative data and identification of patterns across participants' experiences.

Results

What are the challenges that hinder adolescent immigrants' functionality?

The themes that emerged from the data collected regarding this research question include Lack of understanding of local the language, Miscommunication, Inability to express oneself in the local language, taking long to understand the local language and Lack of decent accommodation.

> *"…Because I don't understand the language, some clients refuse to hire me to carry their loads and this affect how much money I make in a day, I feel unhappy about this situation. I have been here not long ago and I am doing my best to learn the language."* (Participant 3).
>
> *"…I do money transfer and I once did a wrong person because I could not understand what the person was telling me well.''* (Participant 8).
>
> *"…I am learning the language but is a problem for me. I still find it difficult to speak Twi well, this make people unable to understand what I am saying properly because I can't speak it well."* (Participant 8).
>
> *"…when first came here, I didn't have money to rent a room so I was sleeping in the market, in front of shops that their owners have close. When it rains that*

is when things become difficult. Most of the time I don't have any better sleep at night which affect my day and I can't do any good work." (Participant 1)

It is important to note that, the findings from the study showed various forms of language related challenges faced by adolescent immigrants in Kasoa.

What are adolescent immigrants perception of how Kasoa community view them?

Interestingly, the themes that emerged from the data gathered from the interview include; Stereotype, Discrimination and Verbal Abuse. Participants complained that the local folks see them as foreigners who bring crime to the community. The following verbatim quotes supported experiences they shared:

"...since I came here, I have never involved in stealing or bad things but these people's behaviour to me is very bad, which make me fear sometimes. We are often accused of being criminals and thieves and whenever something gets missing where I am, I become the first suspects." (Participant 4).

Another participant added:

"...Some of the local boys doing the same job like I do, will be fighting with me because I am not from Ghana. They see us taken away their work." (Participant 2).

"...sometimes when you are selling something to people, they feel you will cheat them by given them the wrong product" (Participant 9)

Additionally, another participant remarked;

"...It very sad when some people tell you, you are not Ghanaian so I am sorry and refuse to do business with you just because you are from Nigeria. They say 'Nigeria people are this and this and that, which is very bad" (Participant 8).

"…*When you are carrying load in the market, some people will be insulting as you pass by them. gyimii, kwasia. They make you feel like you are not a human being."* (Participant 1).

What activities make adolescent immigrants align

themselves with Kasoa community?

The themes that emerged from the data collected from this section includes taking part in religious activities, taking part in social activities, and making friends.

Another participant added

> **"…***I make friends when I go to the mosque to pray. At the mosque, everybody is your friend. If I want help, I ask and sometimes I get the help. I don't know how to describe, it's just a feeling that I get, I feel happy around the local people at the mosque."* (Participant 2).

Another remarked:

> *"…I am a Catholic and I go to church here and I feel happy when I am there."* (Participant 6).

Another stated;

> *"…because of the work I do, local people invite us for baby naming, birthdays and weddings. Sometimes we are their ones who cook for the program."* (Participant 4)

A participant added;

> *"…Some of the people became my friend when I started greeting them. These people are helping me to learn Twi. When I say something to them and it is not correct, sometimes they laugh at me but they teach me how to say it well." (Participant 1).*

Discussion

The findings indicate that language barriers and housing insecurity are central challenges undermining adolescent immigrants' daily functioning in Kasoa. Participants consistently described difficulties in understanding and speaking the local language (Twi), which negatively affected their ability to secure work, communicate effectively with clients, and express themselves confidently. These experiences align with existing studies demonstrating that language difficulties restrict immigrant adolescents' educational, economic, and social participation and heighten emotional distress (Lucas, 1996; Stodolska, 2008; Valenzuela-Vergara, 2025; Xia, 2015).

From an ecological perspective, language barriers operate at the microsystem level, directly affecting adolescents' interactions with employers, peers, and community members. Miscommunication and fear of making mistakes further reduced participants' sense of competence and agency, echoing Jugert and Titzmann's (2020) assertion that acculturative

stress can disrupt adolescents' developmental tasks related to autonomy and self-efficacy. The present findings therefore extend prior research by illustrating how language barriers constrain not only academic engagement, as emphasized in much of the literature, but also economic survival and emotional well-being within informal urban settings.

Housing insecurity also emerged as a significant functional constraint, with some participants reporting sleeping in markets and shopfronts, particularly during their early months in Kasoa. This finding corroborates studies highlighting that immigrant adolescents often reside in precarious living conditions that undermine physical health, sleep quality, and psychological stability (Agarwal, 2016; Bridges & Walls, 2018). In line with Bronfenbrenner's exosystem, structural factors such as poverty, lack of documentation, and limited access to formal housing indirectly shaped adolescents' daily experiences and reduced their capacity to function optimally. These cumulative stressors reflect Brenick and Titzmann's (2015) argument that chronic exposure to environmental stress compromises emotional regulation and adaptive functioning among immigrant adolescents.

The study further revealed that adolescent immigrants perceive themselves as being stereotyped, discriminated against, and verbally abused by some members of the Kasoa community. Participants described being labeled as criminals, thieves, or economic competitors, experiences that heightened fear, mistrust, and emotional distress. These findings are consistent with a substantial body of literature linking perceived discrimination to negative psychosocial outcomes among immigrant adolescents, including anxiety, depression, and diminished self-worth (Finch et al., 2000; Rousseau et al., 2008; Tummala-Narra & Claudius, 2013).

Importantly, participants' narratives demonstrate an acute awareness of how group-based stereotypes shape everyday interactions, supporting König et al.'s (2022) findings that immigrant adolescents are highly sensitive to implicit and explicit negative evaluations. The tendency for participants to become "first suspects" when items went missing reflects Gonzalez et al.'s (2015) observation that immigrant adolescents perceive stratified social valuation within host communities. These perceptions were reinforced through verbal insults and exclusion from economic exchanges, intensifying feelings of social marginalization.

Within Bronfenbrenner's macrosystem, prevailing societal narratives about immigrants—as criminals or economic threats—appear to inform community members' attitudes and behaviors toward adolescent immigrants. At the same time, the findings resonate with Fournier et al.'s (2014) assertion that experiences of discrimination can coexist with efforts to maintain psychological resilience, as some participants emphasized their non-involvement in crime and their desire

for peaceful coexistence. This highlights the dynamic and relational nature of perceived social evaluation, underscoring how immigrant adolescents actively interpret and respond to stigmatization rather than passively internalizing it.

Despite these challenges, the study found that adolescent immigrants actively engage in religious participation, social activities, and friendship formation as strategies for social alignment and emotional support. Religious spaces, particularly churches and mosques, emerged as inclusive environments where participants experienced acceptance, shared identity, and mutual assistance. This finding aligns with Simpkins et al. (2013) and Jaffe and Sasson (2014), who emphasize the role of faith-based and community activities in fostering belonging and social recognition among immigrant adolescents.

Social participation in community events such as naming ceremonies, weddings, and communal cooking further facilitated alignment by creating opportunities for interaction and cooperation with local residents. These findings support Marzana et al.'s (2020) argument that informal social activities are often more effective than formal civic engagement in promoting integration. Recreational and work-related interactions also served as spaces for friendship formation and language learning, consistent with Stodolska and Yi's (2003) assertion that leisure and work contexts enable immigrant adolescents to negotiate social identities and community norms.

At the mesosystem level, the interaction between religious institutions, peer networks, and community activities played a crucial role in supporting adolescents' psychosocial adjustment. Learning the local language through friendships reflects Titzmann and Jugert's (2015) view that peer relationships moderate acculturative stress and facilitate adaptation. These findings extend the literature by providing qualitative evidence of how adolescent immigrants themselves interpret alignment as a process of mutual engagement, learning, and emotional connection, rather than mere behavioral conformity.

Theoretical Implications

Overall, the findings strongly support Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory by demonstrating that adolescent immigrants' psychosocial experiences in Kasoa are shaped by interconnected influences across multiple ecological levels. Language barriers and housing insecurity operate within microsystem and exosystem contexts, perceptions of discrimination reflect macrosystem values, and alignment activities emerge through supportive mesosystem interactions. Migration during adolescence, as highlighted in the chronosystem, represents a critical developmental transition that amplifies vulnerability while also creating opportunities for resilience and growth.

Policy Implications

The findings underscore the need for coordinated, adolescent-sensitive migration policies that address

language barriers, housing insecurity, and discrimination faced by immigrant adolescents in urban Ghana. Municipal authorities and social welfare agencies should support community-based language integration initiatives to enhance communication, reduce misinterpretation, and improve economic and social functioning. The reported experiences of homelessness highlight the importance of temporary shelter and social protection measures for newly arrived adolescent immigrants, particularly those without family support.

Additionally, policies promoting social cohesion and anti-discrimination at the community level are essential to counter negative stereotypes and reduce psychosocial distress. Supporting faith-based and community organizations as partners in youth development can strengthen social alignment, belonging, and resilience among immigrant adolescents. Overall, integrating adolescent immigrants into existing child protection, education, and youth development frameworks is critical for promoting their psychosocial well-being and positive developmental outcomes.

Conclusion

This study explored the psychosocial experiences of adolescent immigrants living in Kasoa, Ghana, highlighting the challenges that shape their daily functioning, perceptions of social evaluation, and strategies for social alignment. The findings reveal that language barriers, housing insecurity, and experiences of stereotyping and discrimination significantly undermine adolescents' psychosocial well-being and sense of belonging. At the same time, participation in religious, social, and peer-based activities emerged as important protective pathways through which adolescent immigrants foster connection, emotional support, and integration within the host community.

Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the study demonstrates that adolescent immigrants' experiences are embedded within interconnected ecological contexts, where individual adaptation is shaped by community interactions, institutional structures, and broader societal attitudes. By foregrounding adolescents' own voices, this research contributes context-specific qualitative evidence to the limited literature on immigrant adolescents in Ghana and sub-Saharan Africa. The findings underscore the need for inclusive, child-centered policies and community-based interventions that address structural barriers while strengthening social support systems to promote the psychosocial well-being and positive development of adolescent immigrants.

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