**Interviewer:** Good afternoon, and thank you for joining me in this interview.

**Participant 30:** Good afternoon. It's my pleasure

**Interviewer:** Thank you and having given me your consent to record the interview. I want to let you know that the interview is in progress and is now being recorded. So, we are going to start right away. But before we start. I also want to explain to you that there are 6 sections in this interview, but we start with section one. Under each section. There are certain number of questions under each section, some 5 questions, some 4 questions some 6 questions. But let's start with Section one, which is about demographic information.

**Participant 30:** Okay. Sounds good.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you. So the 1st question is, can you share your age, your gender, and your country of origin?

**Participant 30:** Oh, yes, I'm currently 39 years old. I'm a male. I'm from Nigeria.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that, number, Second question is. what is your highest level of education, and what country did you obtain your degree from

**Participant 30:** My highest level of education is a Phd. And I obtained it from this country in United States.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much. How long have you lived in the United States? Specifically in Maryland.

**Participant 30:** Oh, specifically, in Maryland. I got here February 2020. So that's roughly 5 years and a few months, added.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that. Let's quickly go to question 4. What is your current profession or job title?

**Participant 30:** I'm currently a research associate here at Johns Hopkins, in Maryland.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that. The last question under this section is, what was your profession in Nigeria before migrating

**Participant 30:** I was a teacher at a nursery and primary school.

**Interviewer:** Okay. thank you for sharing that. We'll get back to that later. We'll get a little more details into that later. Let's go to Section 2.

**Participant 30:** Okay.

**Interviewer:** Section 2 is push and pull factors. We'll talk about push and pull factors. In other words, factors that influence the decision to migrate from someone's country of origin to another country, or from one country to the other generally. So the 1st question under this section is. what motivated your decision to migrate to the United States? Were there specific factors in Nigeria that made you to leave, eg. economic, social, or political challenges?

**Participant 30:** Well, yeah, what actually motivated my own decision to immigrate was the education level in Nigeria. The quality of education was not encouraging for me. Particularly I did my master's in Nigeria, and having obtained a degree, a master's degree, and I looked at all the curriculums. It wasn't impressive, and that was when I started looking into options of you know, what countries can I go to do a better education in my field. And that was actually the strong motivation to start looking outside for that proposition. So, it was the quality of education in my own case.

**Interviewer:** Okay, tha- thank you for sharing that. You already talked about. What attracted you to the United States. So the next question is about what attracted you to the United States in one part, and then the second part of it is why Maryland, in particular?

**Participant 30:** So what attracted me to United States was actually the the quality of the Phd. Program. I believe they have the best Phd program in the world compared to other countries where they spent 2, 3 years, and they are granted their degree. Secondly, what attracted me to Maryland was the position I got here at Johns Hopkins. I was previously in a different state in the United States, and when I got this position at Hopkins that was why I came to Maryland to work for Johns Hopkins.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that. The last question under this section is about the challenges people face when they migrate. This challenges, they come in different dimensions with, with different people. People don't experience these challenges the same way. But in your own case, what challenges have you encountered during the migration process

**Participant 30:** Oh, so if I'm clear about this question, the challenges I encountered after I have gotten to the United States, or during the process of trying to get the visa coming here

**Interviewer:** It can be even before you let Nigeria it can be during the process. It can also be after you've gotten here. It can be any of those 3 stages, or all of those 3 stages

**Participant 30:** Okay, so the challenges I have encountered during the process was, you know, starting from having to pay for i-20 which requires someone in the United States to pay that for you. That was a big challenge that I couldn't figure out for a long time. Getting funding to support my research was a big challenge. And then, when I was able to eventually figure those out and come to the United States the early phase of it, I was homesick, you know, having not to be with family, not to be with your children, your wife, and you basically cannot stay in outside the United States because of the student visa. So, I was, you know, trying to adjust to not being with family which took forever coupled with the rigor of Phd programs. You know the ups and downs. Sometimes things don't work. You feel sad. So loneliness was actually a big challenge. And then I landed in a state whereby there are not so many of people from Africa, very few African descents, and it was hard to socialize and find people of, you know, of like-minded of like mindedness to, to interact. That was my challenge.

**Interviewer:** Oh, thank you for sharing that perspective. I appreciate that perspective. Let's move to Section 3 professional experiences. I'm going to start with your career trajectory in Nigeria before you relocated to the US. You said, you were teaching in an elementary school

**Participant 30:** Correct.

**Interviewer:** Can you give me a kind of a summary of your career path? From the time you finished your bachelor's to the time you left Nigeria

**Participant 30:** Okay, immediately after bachelor's program, as the practice in my country, we have to do the one-year compulsory NYSC (National Youth Service Corp), which is the service you pay to your country. And I did that, and I was assigned to a school to teach, and that was the beginning of the teaching career. It was in the secondary school, and after I came back to my, you know, state of origin. After completing the service, then I got a job in an elementary school where I would teach and also as part time, go to some other test centers where they write standardized exams. I teach biology. So those were my, you know, research. Those were like my career, you know, basically teaching from elementary to test centers to private own tutoring so that's what's my research, my job was all about back there in Nigeria.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that before I move to the next question. Like, how many years of career did you have in Nigeria before you left?

**Participant 30:** So basically, we count, so the career is starting from the point where you graduated from bachelor. Is that what you would like to hear?

**Interviewer:** Yes, because that national youth service for one year is also an experience too.

**Participant 30:** Yes, basically. So, if I would calculate this, 2010 was when I graduated. And then I left the country 2016. So that's 6 years of, you know. experience there working in Nigeria

**Interviewer:** Okay, thank you for sharing that

**Participant 30:** Oh, excuse me. 2015 was when I left

**Interviewer:** You live.

**Participant 30:** 5 years.

**Interviewer:** For.

**Participant 30:** I left 2015, 5 years after.

**Interviewer:** Okay, thanks for clarifying that. Next question. Let's move to your career trajectory in the United States. So how would you describe your current career trajectory in the United States?

**Participant 30:** Yeah, I believe things are really looking fine. Starting from when I got here, I started with my Phd, and often in the department, the average graduation time is like 5 to 7 years, and I was able to focus on my research. And I got, you know, with luck and hard work, I finished in 4 years, and immediately after finishing, I got hired by Johns Hopkins as a research fellow. And so that has been it, from 2015. So 2020, when I came to Maryland. and so from 2020 up to now. I've been in Johns Hopkins. And currently, I'm in the process of transitioning to having my own independent position. I've got some offers. And I'm negotiating salaries, and you know, you know, responsibilities, and hopefully, by fall, August this year I would start my own independent faculty position.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, thank you for sharing that. That's quite interesting and inspiring.

**Participant 30:** Thank you. You're welcome.

**Interviewer:** The next question I wanted to ask you is about your skills and qualifications and how well you think these skills and qualifications are being utilized in your current position. And why? I'm asking this question being central to the core of my research is that many immigrants, when they leave their country of origin. and the immigrants in focus here, being Nigerians, many highly skilled immigrants like that when they come over here, they are not able to transition to a professional career, that match the skills and experience and qualifications they already acquired before they moved over to the US. But in your case you are in teaching in Nigeria. Now you are in teaching, you are a research fellow at one of the very top universities in the world here in Maryland, here. How well do you think your skills and qualifications are being fully utilized in this, your current position?

**Participant 30:** Thank you so much for that question, and, also for providing you know, necessary explanation needed to clarify what's required to answer this question. I believe my skills have been well utilized and the time spent in Nigeria the time spent teaching, the time spent you know, getting trained, even for acquiring master's program were not completely a waste. And if I would connect this while teaching in elementary and secondary schools and teaching in tutoring centers, I acquired the skills of, you know, being able to stand in front of people and communicate. I know when I'm doing fine teaching. I know when my students are distracted. So, bringing these cues to my career, even as a PhD Student, I think. there was a time I was awarded the most outstanding teaching assistant. It's because of some of these skills that I was, I was able to utilize. And I got, you know, some some money to compensate my efforts. So my teaching experience in Nigeria really translated here and has helped me to continue in that line and gives me the motivation that I could do it. I also acquired master’s degree in Nigeria and in genetics specifically, and what I learned there was actually a strong background for me to get started in my PhD program because I focus more on genetics. Currently, that's my line of research. So, the research experience in Nigeria was not enough. That was the only limiting part, but the education was not bad. The theoretical background gives me like a steppingstone, to start working on something here, to be able to understand what's being taught here. So that's how my education and how everything is like in line. What I do here at Hopkins is also research related to genetics, so everything is still connected and being utilized

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much for sharing that experience. That's quite interesting and, also inspiring too. Let's go to the next question. Actually, the last question under that this section 3 for professional experiences. People face different barriers when they find themselves in a new professional environment. These barriers range from licensing requirements, recognition of foreign qualifications, and even workplace discrimination. I wanted to hear from you in your own case. Did you face any challenges or challenge in terms of licensing requirements, recognition of foreign qualifications and workplace discrimination? How did you overcome these challenges, or how did you manage these challenges if you faced any?

**Participant 30:** Oh, thank you, that's a very good question. I did face discrimination as regards my spoken English, my accent earlier on. But when I started the Phd. Program even people that supervise me were not happy with the way I, you know, express myself sometimes with the way I tried to, you know, sometimes when I write they get confused. And I felt that. it's not because I can't speak English, because in my country our 1st you know language English language is the former language of communication. So I think my accent was highly discriminated, not

only because I think that people tend to have like a prejudice like no, this one is not from this country, so they won't even pay attention to what you're trying to say, talk less of trying to understand. So that was a challenge I experienced earlier and over time how did I overcome? I took my time to sit down to start learning how to pronounce certain words and how to, you know use the right words they like to use that makes things clearer for them to understand here. The students I taught too, the very 1st semester I arrived also did complain because students can provide evaluations of your you know, teaching. They did complain of lack of clarity in my accent. So, I thought that was a big challenge in integrating into the system. And in many cases I would see opportunities that I think I should be able to get but I would be put aside and people in the country you could tell that, you know the whites, they take the position. Those were some of the things I experienced earlier on, but so far I think things are getting better, maybe personally for me but I don't know for other people.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, thank you for that answer. That kind of emphasizes the challenges people face in trying to integrate and assimilate into the society, to the culture here. And the next section is a little bit more of that too, section 4. It's actually about cultural assimilation and social integration. So, the 1st question here is how would you describe your experience of cultural assimilation in Maryland? Have you experienced any cultural or social challenges since migrating. How have you navigated these cultural differences in both your personal and professional life?

**Participant 30:** Yes. Good question. personally, since I came to Maryland, it's been a different experience positively for me, because culturally, I believe I integrate into the system. And the big plus is that there are so many Africans around, particularly Nigerians, people of my country. So it's been easy to form a community. It's been easy. You know, outside work it's been easy to socialize. I could find my group of people not only in church but people that we, you know we hang around together. So culturally, it's been easy to integrate and especially Maryland, seems very friendly. In my own experience to people of my, you know, people from Nigeria and other African countries. And professionally I haven't experienced any, Should I say obvious discrimination. And it, it appears things are going fine but some of the challenges you could observe sometimes is, you know, the choice of you know, when you decide to have like a party with your group of people, the professional, you know, like a professional gets together, so to say. I often feel that, you know, when people bring dishes, whatever I bring, it's often being discussed. That what type of food is it like people don't really connect. You know what I mean. So it seems a little different from what they eat here. So most times you would have to adapt to the type of food people like to eat here. Those were some of the experiences I have in my professional work that people find it a little strange in the choice of, you know food or or gifts you give people. I don't know if that's how your question.

**Interviewer:** Yes, very well, very well, thank you for sharing that. I think. Yes, I think people over time understand better and find a way to navigate these differences better. Yeah, thank you for sharing that. I have one more question under this section. People, when they get to the US, when they come from Africa, immigrants from Africa, from Nigeria, they talk about some type of (inaudible), some type of challenges they face in navigating the environment in terms of integration, in terms of advancing in their career. Some people talk about not having the right information when they come, or not having the right support system from families and friends. But then there are other people who have talked about finding resources and finding help from organizations, not just individuals. People, one example people mention a lot is churches, Nigerian churches. I wanted to know that in your own case when you came, were there any specific community networks or organizations that supported your integration when you came? And how well have these organizations supported your career advancement?

**Participant 30:** Good question. When I came, what really helped me to integrate here was my church in my case as well. I belong to a multi-denominational church that, you know, there are branches almost everywhere, globally. So, I was able to connect to people that belong to the same denomination. The 1st few days of my arrival I was leaving with one of the members and until I got my own accommodation, so that made it easy for me to integrate. And when I started it took a while for me to get paid because I had to work on my social security and all the you know, basic requirements before you can receive money in the United States. What was surprising was my own supervisor, who is a latino decided to, you know, support me with some cash all through this time until I started receiving my own money, so that did help me to get settled in into the United States and specifically careerwise I've been lucky to be a beneficiary from an organization specifically, Howard Youth Medical Institute is their name. Since I started my research associate program they have been funding my salary. So my salary is not even funded by my mentor here and they have also invested over 1 million dollars for my research for the next 4 years. So these are the people that I feel helped me and are still helping me to get integrated into the system.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, thank you so much for sharing that very, very interesting and also inspiring story about your the kind of about the kind of support you got from an organization while you were trying to advance your career in the U.S.A. That's quite inspiring. I appreciate you for sharing that.

**Participant 30:** Thank you.

**Interviewer:** Let's go to Section 5, dual cultural and economic challenges. The1st question here, you may have touched on it a little, but let me still ask, in case you want to share it in another perspective, or you have something else to add to. It is about cultural expectations. And let me ask the question, maybe let me ask the question first. I may have to provide an example for you to understand the question very well, but the question is do you feel torn between the cultural expectations of Nigeria and the United States? How do you navigate this?

**Participant 30:** Okay? So, do I feel torn between the cultural expectations of Nigeria and the United States? Yeah, culturally, I believe the expectations differ careerwise, moving forward in Nigeria was really very hard because I couldn't reach the height that I wanted to reach. I think back in my country for the most part you need the connections, the network to move forward. Whereas in the United States the expectations are super clear. If you stay focused in your endeavor and you are outstanding you move forward, even if you don't know anybody so that has been like a a big disparity in the way things are structured in these 2 different countries, and being able to navigate and move forward in the United States, It's easier compared to Nigeria, and the expectations I feel are completely and strongly opposite.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, thank you. Thank you so much for answering that question. The next, the last question actually under this section is, have you faced economic challenges related to remittances or supporting family members in Nigeria. What strategies do you use to balance these dual responsibilities?

**Participant 30:** Well, yeah, this is almost a big challenge of any Nigerian that immigrated here because their mentality is as soon as you get here they believe there's dollar everywhere on the road that you should just pick some for them and send down over there. Although, the system here is very helpful, and, like you work hard you receive your money but it's not easy, and when you use that phrase, it's not easy they don't believe it. They say it's not easy but you are making it, and some of the things that people have here, many of them are people who have houses are mortgage. Many are on loans, not even everybody have really make it so to say. So. It's the system here, helps people to move forward if you want to, but it's harder in Nigeria acquiring things, it's supporting family, especially for a student doing. When I got here my stipend was just sufficient to pay my rent and to just buy my food and I barely saved anything significant but there are still expectations from everybody. So my strategy, I guess you asked that question too, how did I cope with that? 1st of all, I left social media. The last time I opened my Facebook..

**Interviewer:** laughs

28.54

**Participant 30:** …I'm telling you, the last time I opened my Facebook was when my second year of Phd student. So, I left Facebook complete because I can't just log in and say hi to somebody they would like, send money, send money, even people that are doing fine, who it's been... So, that's really helped me to narrow down and over time, I've now narrowed down to just my family and my wife's family, and every other person is secondary, and depending on how I am led by my spirit, by the Spirit of God to help. So, because it's really, I've come to the realization that it's impossible to help everybody. So I think you know my parents because they are the one that have helped me this far as the priority, and the people very dear to me stop priority and stop trying to help everyone to make it while I'm even trying to get my feet on the ground here. So yeah, that's my answers to that question.

**Interviewer:** Yeah, thank you so much. We move to the last section of this interview, which is section 6 and this section is about recommendations. I have 2 major questions for you under this section. I want to frame the question in a way that you understand my… you understand the points very well. You, being an immigrant here, immigrant from Nigeria, from Africa, who has had years of experience in Nigeria and you've come to this country. You've acquired education at the highest level and now working as a research assistant.. Sorry, is it a research assistant?

**Participant 30:** Associate.

**Interviewer:** Okay I’m sorry yes I want to be clear, yes research associate…at one of the topmost universities in the world. I want to believe that you also have exposure to other African immigrants, and immigrants from Nigeria, and you are also aware, or you know, that people's experiences are not the same. Some people have it easy. Some people have it hard. Let me use those 2 words. People struggle with different things as immigrants when they come. One common pattern that is very obvious is that a lot of people when they come like that they have to more like start all over again. Everybody start all over again but the navigation is different. The the curve is not flat for everybody. Some people have had like a years of experience back in Nigeria and they have to abandon that career because they can't transition to those kind of professions here. They have to start in a new professional environment completely. They have to start acquiring new skills. It's more like starting from this scratch. These are challenges. People come and they don't have access to the same kind of support system.

**Participant 30:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** But the question I want to ask is, having lived here with all these experiences, exposure, and understanding of the realities for immigrants in this country in this state in particular. Do you think there are policies, practices, programs that are already in existence that serve…that help immigrants like you to succeed in their careers. On the other hand, do you also think there are policies, program, and practices that are already in existence that also slow down immigrants in your category, highly educated people like that to succeed in their career when they come over here. I know it's a loaded question, but I just want to break it down that way so that you can understand what I’m driving at.

**Participant 30:** Yeah, that's a very big question. I, you know, looking back. Are there things that have really slowed me down? I can't pinpoint on any of the system that slow me down other than being a legal, permanent resident, or a citizen in this country. I can only speak for people in academia. People are into industry, people work in management, and may have a different experience. But I would speak, you know, speaking for what I have experienced personally, I believe that when non-immigrants arrive here and try to, you know, benefit some of the things from the government, it becomes difficult, especially in academics. All the funding for research from the National Institute of Health are almost all open to only the permanent residents or citizens of this country, and that limits success in, especially for people who want to go into research. Even for Phd program, there are funding from NIH that supports, you know, little little things, but only for their residents. So, these are a huge limitation for people to make progress, because you would now have to be competing with someone who has money to do whatever they want to do, and have bigger publications, because there's more money invested in the research versus the person who is non-immigrant that couldn't acquire any grant. So that was a strong limiting factor for people to move forward in this country, especially if you are into academia. Now, getting a job, a faculty position, especially if people want to stay in academia. It's also very hard, especially in certain states where they are predominantly white, and if one end up getting a position, they are probably, you know, using you as like a face in the department, or whatever like. You know, we have a non-immigrant that, that's working for us just for them to know that you know others to feel comfortable, to see you as someone that they can talk to. So I would say it's been hard in all ways being black and depending on the government which is currently ruling, that determines if you get support for diversity or not. So these are some of the roller coaster here for non-immigrants, to integrate easily into the United States. The challenges are there and it varies from one career to another. But in my own case things turned around when I got my green card. It opened opportunities to other grant sources, and other people I could work with other potential job positions because some positions they are not willing to go extra mile in filing immigration documents for you. So that's all I could say for that…

**Interviewer:** Thank you for that very elaborate response to that question. I just want to clarify something before we move forward. I think when you said non-immigrant, I think you meant non-citizens and non-resident.

**Participant 30:** Yes.

**Interviewer:** Okay, yes, I got that. I wanted us to be clear on that, because I've spoken to a few other doctoral students, and they told me the same thing you just shared with me that they feel like it is not a fair system when you have a group of PhD Students in a class and half of that class are immigrants, and the remaining half are either legal permanent residents or citizens but when the opportunity to apply for grants and scholarships and funding comes, they are excluded from that process because they are not citizens, and they are not permanent residents, even though they are also qualified PhD students so, I appreciate that perspective and I think it's a very, very important element of the experiences people have as immigrants in the in this country, especially people that are in academics. I appreciate your perspective on that.

**Participant 30:** You're welcome.

**Interviewer:** One more big question, then we round up with a very soft one. So, this question I want to ask you is also, I don't want to go back and talk about your experience and background but let me just say as an immigrant, just as I provided that background before I asked you that question that you just answered. As an immigrant, and having all these exposures and understanding and experiences here in this country, in this state, what changes or support systems would you suggest, if they are put in place, it can help highly educated Nigerian immigrants succeed more in their careers in the US, In this State?

**Participant 30:** Hmm! There is one, should I say a group that we started 2 or 3 years ago. It's called African Graduates and Postdoctoral Community, AGPC. It encompasses all other parts, every part of Africa, members. And who are this group of people? They are graduate students and postdoc people who have acquired their PhDs. They formed a network. And I'm lucky to be one of their mentors. I guide them on, you know certain milestones on how to move forward in their Phd. Because there are Nigerians here that come and drop out in the middle of the PhD and go to Amazon to work and like make the quick money. So sometimes people need mentorship and motivation. So, it’s one of the things that we do. And I hope there could be more of such a group, particularly, maybe, for Nigerians to be able to integrate all Nigerians together and see how we could support ourselves further, and many times have been thinking, how I wish there could be like a Naira land an online platform that's in Nigeria, where people just come in and ask questions and you get other members who have experienced the same thing to help you. I wish there could be something like that like popularly called Reddit. There's another one called Reddit, you know, that's known almost worldwide. I wish there could be one that we have here in the United States that would comprise many Nigerians of different fields and people can help ourselves. So these are my thoughts.

**Interviewer:** Thank you so much. I appreciate your insight. I appreciate your perspective and the time you have set aside to be with me in this interview today.

**Participant 30:** You're welcome. The pleasure is actually, mine, too.

**Interviewer:** Yeah. Thank you so much. The only question I have at this time is more like a closing question, and the question is, if you have any additional comments or insight you would like to share. Maybe something you forgot, or something that just jumped to your mind now.

**Participant 30:** I would just say, yeah, nothing other than an insight into what has helped me particularly anyone who is in academia. It's a top priority for us to stay focused in whatever we do and not get distracted. Things can be tough in the beginning, and as soon as we stay, we stay focused. One thing that is certain in this country is that, there is a reward system for people who are hardworking and productive, and to tap into such system and the rewarding part of it, we just have to stay focused. It's helped me just, in fact, the fellowship I told you that I received over 1 million dollars I was the 1st Nigerian to receive that. And and ever since many Nigerians have been contacting me, and I've been trying to help them to get one. I would like, if there are more Nigerians to tap into such, because such kind of money really sets you aside and makes you very competitive and successful in the country. So, those are my insights.

**Interviewer:** Oh, once again I want to thank you for your time for the beautiful story you shared with me, for the very inspiring story, your career journey in the US. And thank you for giving your voice to this research, and I know people will listen, and will find some inspiration in it in terms of what you 've been able to achieve since you came over to the US. If you would like me to send you a copy of this research summary when everything is completed, please let me know. I'm going to provide you with one via your email address.

**Participant 30:** Yeah, that sounds good. I would like to see other people's opinions. And maybe we could learn from one another.

**Interviewer:** Yes, thank you so much. I'm going to stop the recording now.

**Participant 30:** You're welcome.

**Interviewer:** Thank you.