

MY JOURNEY FROM NIGERIA TO ROMANIA

A PERSONAL AND INTERCULTURAL EXPLORATION

INTRODUCTION

Moving from Nigeria to Romania has been one of the most transformative experiences of my life. It challenged my worldview, tested my adaptability, and broadened my understanding of intercultural dynamics. This essay reflects on the multifaceted aspects of my journey beginning with my departure from Nigeria, my integration into Romanian society, and the lessons I learned along the way. It also demonstrates my engagement with both reflective and intercultural learning outcomes through a series of deeply personal, social, and academic experiences.

THE DEPARTURE – LEAVING HOME

Leaving Nigeria, a country known for its vibrant culture, expressive language, and strong sense of community, was not a decision I made lightly. I was driven by a desire for personal growth, academic advancement, and a thirst for global exposure. As I boarded the plane to Romania, I was filled with excitement, curiosity, and apprehension.

At that point, my knowledge of Romania was mostly limited to what I had read online, its picturesque landscapes, unique Latin roots within Eastern Europe, and a rich, complex history. I was aware that Romania was culturally and climatically different from Nigeria, but I underestimated the emotional and psychological impact such a transition would have.

THE CULTURE SHOCK – INITIAL CHALLENGES IN ROMANIA

1. LANGUAGE BARRIER

One of the most immediate challenges I encountered was the language barrier. I was not prepared for the day-to-day conversations, especially in administrative settings like immigration offices or healthcare facilities. The Romanian language, although beautiful, is linguistically distant from English and the Yoruba or Igbo languages I was familiar with in Nigeria. In the early days, simple tasks such as shopping for groceries, navigating transportation, or asking for directions became stressful experiences. I often felt isolated in public spaces, unsure of how to respond or communicate effectively. This language barrier affected not only my practical life but also my sense of belonging.

2. WEATHER AND ENVIRONMENT

Romania's climate was another major adjustment. Coming from the warm, tropical weather of Nigeria, I was unaccustomed to the cold winters. My first experience of snowfall was magical yet disorienting. I fell sick the first two weeks I got to Romania. I was mesmerized but also anxious about how to cope with the biting cold, icy sidewalks,

and the need for layered clothing. The urban landscape also differed significantly. Romanian cities, with their blend of communist-era architecture and historical buildings, felt foreign. Public transport was more punctual and structured, but I initially struggled with the systems and etiquette.

3. SOCIAL NORMS AND LIFESTYLE

Romania's social customs and interpersonal interactions were also quite different. I noticed a certain formality in how people interacted, especially with strangers or in academic settings. In Nigeria, conversations are often lively, expressive, and communal. In contrast, Romanian social spaces particularly in professional or academic environments were more reserved. I misread these cultural cues at times, mistaking formality for coldness. I also had to adjust to social norms like giving up seats for elders on the bus, bringing flowers when visiting someone's home, or navigating group invitations with more subtlety and politeness.

ADAPTATION AND GROWTH

1. COPING MECHANISMS

To overcome these challenges, I actively sought ways to adapt. I enrolled in Romanian language courses and practiced daily with mobile apps, television programs, and local friends. I found that people were generally supportive when I made the effort to speak their language, even if imperfectly. I also began journaling regularly, which helped me reflect on my experiences and process my emotions. This habit helped me not only understand the cultural shift but also recognize the personal growth I was undergoing. I joined student groups and community associations where other international students shared similar challenges. Through these networks, I discovered that cultural adaptation is a shared experience and that vulnerability can be a bridge to deeper connections.

2. ACADEMIC AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Academically, adapting to a different education system was initially challenging, but ultimately rewarding. The emphasis on critical thinking, project-based learning, and intercultural teamwork expanded my intellectual toolkit. I collaborated with Romanian and other international students on several presentations, group projects, and discussions that deepened my understanding of global perspectives. One particular project focused on intercultural communication in Eastern Europe, which allowed me to compare Nigerian and Romanian communication styles. This was a turning point in recognizing how cultural backgrounds shape our perceptions, values, and expectations.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

DEVELOPING EMPATHY AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

Living in Romania has significantly enhanced my intercultural awareness. I've learned to suspend judgment and become more curious rather than critical when encountering behaviors or perspectives different from my own. I no longer see cultural difference as an obstacle but as a doorway to learning. For example, during Romanian national holidays or religious events, I made it a point to participate or observe with genuine interest. Celebrations like Martisor (March 1st) or Easter offered a window into Romanian values (family, tradition, resilience) that I deeply respect.

I also had opportunities to share aspects of Nigerian culture through food, music, and storytelling. Some friends hosted a small gathering where they cooked Nigerian jollof rice and played Afrobeat music. It was heartwarming to see my Romanian friends appreciate and engage with my culture. These moments created mutual respect and understanding that went beyond surface-level interactions.

A TRANSFORMED PERSPECTIVE

1. IDENTITY AND BELONGING

My experience in Romania has reshaped how I understand identity and belonging. Initially, I felt like an outsider culturally, linguistically, and socially. But over time, I realized that identity is not fixed; it evolves through experience, reflection, and engagement. I now see myself as a cultural bridge “someone who can navigate between Nigerian and Romanian worlds”, learning from both and enriching each with the other. I’ve developed a sense of "global citizenship," where I feel at home not just in a specific location, but within diverse human communities.

2. RESILIENCE AND SELF-DISCOVERY

The journey has also revealed my resilience. There were times when I felt like giving up frustrated by bureaucracy, misunderstood by peers, or homesick. But each challenge strengthened my adaptability, patience, and emotional intelligence. I discovered strengths I didn’t know I had like the ability to lead a multicultural team during a class project, resolve misunderstandings with empathy, or explain Nigerian proverbs to Romanian classmates in a way that sparked laughter and learning.

CONCLUSION: MAKING THE CASE FOR THE CERTIFICATE

My journey from Nigeria to Romania has not just been about geography; it has been a journey of the mind and heart. I have lived the essence of the two learning outcomes: reflective learning through self-awareness, adaptation, and emotional growth; and intercultural learning through cultural immersion, empathy, and dialogue. I believe I have earned the certificate not only through participation but through deep engagement with the learning process. My ability to reflect critically, adapt thoughtfully, and contribute meaningfully to intercultural spaces makes me a worthy recipient. I have grown into a more competent, compassionate, and culturally aware individual—qualities that I will carry forward in both my personal and professional life.