EASTERN, AMANDA C., Ph.D. “Whoa! It has a lot of benefits” The Early Care and Education Perceptions and Preferences of Refugee Mothers. (2021)

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Resettlement can be an overwhelming experience for refugee families with young children but early care and education (ECE) services have been found to help refugees integrate into their new communities. However, refugee families are less likely to utilize ECE than U.S. born and other immigrant families. Although ECE utilization is low among refugee families, it is imperative to contextualize and acknowledge the various factors that influence their access to and engagement with ECE. Grounded in the accommodations model of child care decision-making and the community cultural wealth theoretical perspective, this study aimed to explore refugee mothers’ perceptions of ECE and what characteristics of care they preferred and prioritized for their children. Participants included four refugee mothers with preschool aged children. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and data was studied using interpretative phenomenological analysis methodology. Findings highlighted how mothers’ personal experiences and beliefs as well as support from a local community agency influenced their early care perspectives and experiences. Findings further indicated that mothers perceived ECE as important and beneficial for their families’ development and considered public care with caring teachers that provide culturally responsive enriching environments as important for their preschool-age children. Understanding what refugee mothers value in early care and education provides useful information to ECE programs, resettlement agencies, and scholars; implications of this study and future directions for research are presented.

“WHOA! IT HAS A LOT OF BENEFITS” THE EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES OF REFUGEE MOTHERS

by

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the refugee families I have met on my journey. Your stories and experiences are beautiful. Thank you for opening your homes and giving me the opportunity to get to know and learn from you. You are so resilient and I hope you know that I will continue to advocate and support you and your families for years to come.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States has long been a nation of immigrants, currently with the largest population of immigrants in the world. There are over 44 million immigrants in the U.S., making up 13.7% of the nation's population (Radford, 2019). Currently 25% of all young children have at least one parent who was born outside the U.S. (MPI, 2017b). Of the U.S. immigrant population, approximately three million are refugees (Krogstad, 2019; Radford, 2019). A refugee is

> any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality…who is unable or unwilling to return to…that country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. (Capps et al., 2015, p.347)

Refugees seek safety and are accepted and legally admitted to the United States on humanitarian bases (Bernstein & DuBois, 2018). Although they are immigrants, their experience of migrating to the United States is not voluntary as they are forced to leave their homes making their experiences uniquely different from other immigrants. Since 1980, refugees have resettled in the U.S. and nearly half are families with children. As of 2013, young children of refugees represented 9% of all young children of immigrants in the U.S and 2% of all young children (Hooper et al., 2016). Refugees come from over 100 different countries, speaking over 200 languages, and representing a culturally and linguistically diverse population (Capps et al., 2015; Hooper et al., 2016).

While refugee families may share many of the same characteristics and experiences as other immigrant families (e.g., navigating the educational, medical and legal systems, facing discrimination from unreceptive individuals, and learning to adjust to the new culture and

country), there are also several potentially unique aspects of their experiences, pre and post migration, that have implications for their young children. For example, refugees specifically may have trauma-based experiences such as having been forced to leave their home countries, fear or experience of violence and death, fleeing with little warning and few possessions, living in refugee camps, and moving to a new country with little say in the matter (Crowley, 2009; Henley & Robinson, 2011). Resettlement can be an overwhelming time for families with young children and can influence their integration. Because of their migration experiences, refugee families may significantly benefit from support and access to services that could help them successfully transition and integrate into their communities. A sizable literature exists on developmental risk, protective, and promotive factors for young children in immigrant families more broadly, including the role of early care and education. Early care and education (ECE) is defined as

> settings in which children are cared for and taught by people other than their parents or primary caregivers with whom they live. These include center-based care arrangements (e.g., child care centers, preschools, and prekindergartens) and nonparental home-based arrangements, in which care is provided in the child's or caregiver's home (e.g. care by nannies, relatives, or babysitters and in family child care homes). (Morrissey, 2019)

The term ECE has been used broadly to capture a variety of nonparental care arrangements in both center- and home-based settings but is often used more specifically to refer to formal programs intentionally designed to educate and care for children in a classroom setting. Thus, in this study, the term early care and education (ECE) will solely encompass center-based care arrangements. However, given that families use a variety of early care options for their children, the term child care will encompass the broad set of arrangements that families may use (i.e. family, friend care).

The primary roles of ECE have historically been to provide care for parental labor participation and to promote children's readiness for school by supporting children's development. For refugees, ECE participation has provided children with the foundational skills they need to be successful in school, as well as connected families to others in their community and additional supportive services (Vesely et al., 2013; Ward et al., 2011). ECE participation is also valuable for children whose parents have limited formal education or are not proficient in English (Greenberg et al., 2018; Morland et al., 2016), which is a significant percentage of the refugee population.

Despite established benefits, studies show that young children of refugees are less likely than children of U.S. born parents to access formal ECE arrangements (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Morland et al., 2016). Additionally, enrollment of refugee children in preschool programs is relatively low compared to other immigrant children (Hooper et al., 2016). Low ECE enrollment is a cause for concern given that it could lead to missed opportunities of support for refugee children's school readiness skills. Studies show that refugee children are at risk of poor performance in school and poorer school readiness skills than their U.S. born peers (Park et al., 2018; Morland et al., 2016). Furthermore, low enrollment could also be a concern given that an important goal for refugee parents is to gain employment and family self-sufficiency; therefore, enrollment in ECE is key to some families' success (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011). Yet, despite the importance of ECE, refugee families' access to and use of ECE is understudied.

Although ECE utilization is low among refugee families, it is imperative to contextualize and acknowledge the various factors that influence their access to and engagement with ECE. Parental decision-making around ECE utilization is a dynamic process within a sociocultural

context and involves the balancing of perceptions, preferences, and constraints for families (Myers & Jordan, 2006; Weber, 2011). Recognizing what is most important to families can provide context as to why they choose to utilize care and the certain types of arrangements they select. Preferences are not the only components that shape the decisions parents make about ECE; it is integral to understand parent ECE perceptions more generally as these may structure how parents approach the task of deciding to utilize ECE.

Most of the research on factors influencing ECE access and utilization has focused on middle class, U.S. born parent perspectives. And while there is an emerging literature on the factors influencing immigrant families' use of ECE, it often lumps in refugee families without considering their potentially unique experiences (Park & McHugh, 2014; Greenberg et al., 2018). Given that refugee families' resettlement and integration journeys are different than those of immigrants more broadly, the reasons for which families can and cannot access and utilize ECE may be different. Thus, the field must continue to explore the factors that shape the behaviors and interests of refugee families. Researching their perceptions, preferences, and beliefs in relation to ECE is essential to centering refugee parent voices and understanding the factors that influence their participation in ECE.

Current Study

For this study, I aimed to fill the gap in the literature surrounding refugee ECE utilization by centralizing the voices of refugee mothers. My goal was to understand how refugee mothers perceive early care and education. I aimed to get at their perceptions of ECE and their beliefs on its importance and purpose in their lives. The second goal of this study was to understand what characteristics of ECE refugee mothers prefer and deem important for their children. I also aimed

to explore how their past early education experiences and current community context may have influenced their ECE perceptions and preferences.

To address my research goals, I took a strengths-based phenomenological approach to understanding the ECE perceptions and preferences of refugee mothers. This work was guided by two frameworks. First, the *accommodations model of child care decision-making* (Myers & Jordan, 2006) provided a conceptual framework to help understand the ecological factors that impact refugee parents' perceptions of ECE. This model highlights the importance of family factors such as parent preferences and values as well as their context in the process of child care decision-making. Second, to acknowledge the ways in which refugee families' cultural and community experiences influence their perceptions and preferences, I employed the *community cultural wealth* (CCW) theoretical perspective (Yosso, 2005). The main goal of CCW is to illuminate the various skills, knowledge, and abilities that families of color utilize to survive and thrive within oppressive American institutions. Using those guiding frameworks, the study sought to address the following research questions:

1) What are refugee mothers' perceptions of early care and education?
2) What are refugee mothers' views on the purpose and importance of ECE for their children and themselves?
3) What characteristics of early care and education do refugee mothers deem most important?
4) How are ECE characteristics prioritized?

Overall, research understanding parental perceptions and preferences among refugees is important and can provide useful information to ECE programs, resettlement agencies, and policymakers. The United States has the largest resettlement program in the world, and ECE

could provide valuable support and investment in its newest arrivals; however, current rates of utilization by refugees suggest that child care systems and policies are not as responsive as they could be to families' needs. Therefore, steps are needed to recognize what matters most to families to ensure that educational and policy institutions increase utilization and support families' integration. It is my intention that this study will add to the field to better inform practices and policies that will improve ECE access and utilization for refugee families.

CHAPTER II: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

For this dissertation, I utilized two frameworks, the accommodations model of child care decision-making (Chaudry et al., 2011; Myers & Jordan, 2006) and the community cultural wealth (CCW) theory (Yosso, 2005). I argue that collectively, CCW and the accommodations model provide a cultural and ecological lens that can capture the complexity of studying the ECE perceptions and preferences of refugee parents. The accommodations model is a conceptual model that has been used in the field to acknowledge the dynamic and multidimensional process by which families make decisions about whether and when to use ECE and which types of settings they use. Community cultural wealth is a theoretical framework that can highlight the voices of and acknowledge the historical and racialized experiences that many refugee families face. The CCW framework also shifts the narrative and aims to use a strengths-based approach by taking the perspective of families and viewing their practices, resources, and cultures as valuable and important in shaping the educational experiences of their children (Aragon, 2018). Although CCW has not often been used in the field of ECE, it was used in conjunction with the accommodations model to better understand the parental factors that influence the process of child care selection and utilization.

Below, I will first describe the accommodations model as an overarching conceptual framework that illustrates the various factors that influence the child care decision-making process for parents, highlighting the importance of parent preferences in that process. I will then explain and define CCW as a theoretical framework, which will not be directly tested but rather used to frame a strengths-based approach to studying and centering refugee families. CCW will

aim to capture refugee families' cultural perspectives and voices, as the CCW capitals likely influence ECE decision making and utilization for families.

Accommodations Model

The accommodations model is a broad framework that acknowledges the complexities of child care decision-making for parents and the potential role of multiple factors including concepts such as perceptions, social networks, various barriers, and arrangements available (Chaudry et al., 2010; Weber, 2011). Child care decisions are often made quickly with child and family characteristics and feasibility factors all being weighed and negotiated simultaneously. Created by Meyers and Jordan (2006), the accommodations model posits that child care decision-making choices are contextualized patterns of action that reflect the navigation of opportunities and constrains as well as family needs, cultural preferences, and norms. The accommodations model argues child care decision-making does not include fully informed or deeply reasoned choices nor are they individual 'choices'. Choices are rather accommodations to multiple constraints, with parents choosing the best possible option given their circumstances (Chaudry et al., 2010; Meyers & Jordan, 2006). The accommodations model recognizes that child care decisions take place within and are a product of families' contextual circumstances and assumes that social networks and interactions inform and shape selection. Overall, the accommodations model recognizes child care decision-making as a dynamic process with family needs, resources, beliefs, and family outcomes all interacting within a larger sociocultural context to shape utilization of care for families.

In a complementary brief, Weber (2011) created a graphic description of how context (family, community, preferences), decision-making (opportunities, constraints, barriers) and outcomes (child care arrangement utilized, financial assistance utilized, family and child

outcomes, parental employment), all must be considered when conceptualizing how families choose child care. The graphic depicts a cyclical and bidirectional flow between all factors within the process of child care decision-making (Weber, 2011). For this study, I focused on the context sphere in Weber's graphic of the model. Within the context sphere of the model, the family and preferences sections are the core concepts of interest, shown below (Figure 1).

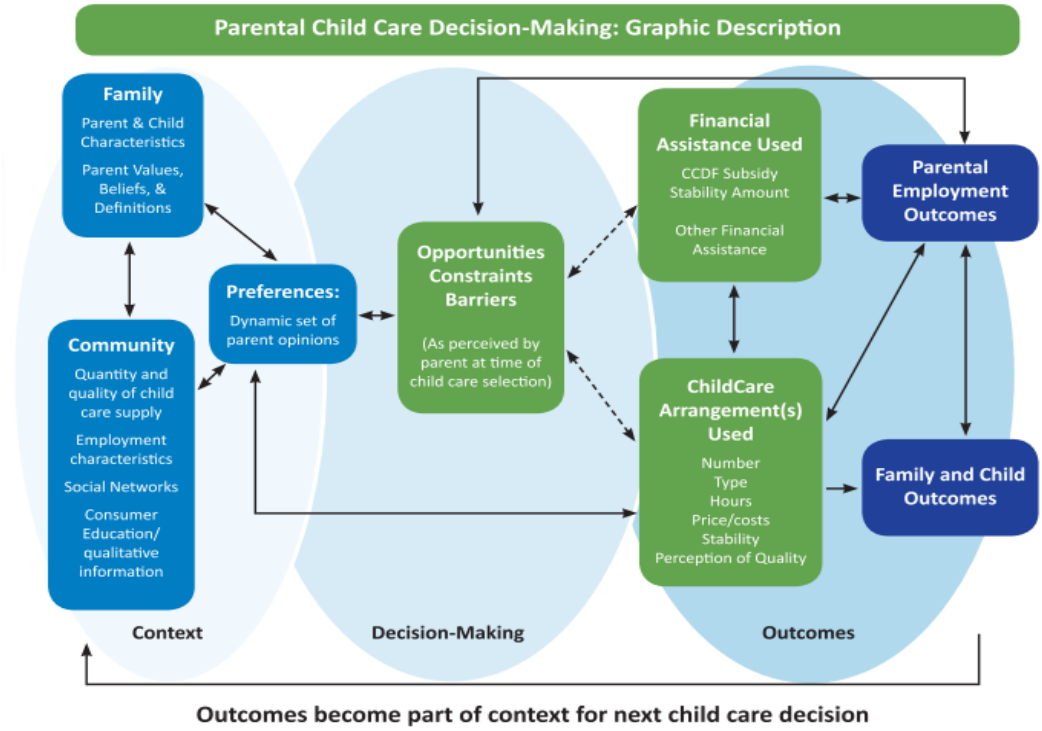

Figure 1. Parental Child Care Decision-Making Model (Weber, 2011)

The family section includes parent and child characteristics as well as parent values, beliefs, and definitions. Parent and child characteristics include parent education, income, age of children, family structure, family culture, race, and ethnicity and if families speak English. For my dissertation, parent values, beliefs, and definitions are categorized as *parent perceptions*. Perceptions are a core construct in my study and include parent views about ECE and describe parent thoughts on the purpose, use, and potential benefits and their concerns of ECE for their

families. The preferences section is the second core construct in my study. *Parent preferences* are conceptualized as the child care characteristics including type of care that parents assign as priorities. ECE preferences often emerge out of parent perceptions (family values, beliefs, and factors). Parents prefer different aspects and characteristics of ECE and within the broad literature, preferences are often distinguished between process, structural, practical, and cultural preferences (Forry et al., 2013; Weber, 2011). The characteristics and factors within these two sections (family and preferences) are crucial in framing parent decision-making and the process evolves differently for all parents depending on their knowledge of child care, personal beliefs, and cultural experiences. Additionally, the accommodations model could examine how the presence of refugee resettlement agencies as a community characteristic could impact parent perceptions and preferences and provide opportunities and information to families. However, it should be noted that even though this study focused on perceptions and preferences, I will likely capture parents' experiences of many factors related to decision-making (opportunities, constraints, and barriers) within this conceptual model.

Extending the Accommodations Model

The accommodations model is helpful, but it may not highlight the refugee specific experiences that come along with the process of selecting child care. For example, Shuey and Leventhal (2018), noted that the decision-making model does not identify which factors are more or less relevant for diverse families or for particular circumstances. They argued that for immigrant families, language preferences are a complicated issue as parents may want caregivers that can speak their native languages but also value English speaking caregivers that could teach their children English (Shuey & Leventhal, 2018).

I agree that the model may not specify which factors are specifically relevant to immigrant and refugee populations, thus additional theories could be helpful to think more deeply about this process for refugee families. I argue that used with a culturally strengths-based theoretical perspective, such as community cultural wealth, the accommodations model could be extended to capture the cultural characteristics and experiences that families bring to child care selection. The process of how families choose the type of care they prefer and use is often culturally bound, which may be different based on families' country of origin, integration experiences, and cultural caregiving beliefs (Chaudry et al., 2011).

For instance, a refugee families' country of origin or ethnic groups' history in the United States could impact their valuing of ECE as defined in the United States as well as their relationship with educational systems in the U.S. In regard to time of resettlement, families who have been in the United States longer may have different connections with child care systems which could lead them to a better understanding of early care and education. Acculturation could also play a role, given that social norms shape preferences, those that have acculturated could value different child care factors than newly arrived refugee families (Chaudry et al., 2011).

Community Cultural Wealth

The community cultural wealth (CCW) theory is a framework that can and has been used to extend the narrative of families of color in the United States. CCW's theoretical history stems from critical race theory (CRT) and acknowledges the cultural wealth within communities of color and aims to challenge traditional and deficit interpretations (Yosso, 2005). The framework of CRT challenges dominant ideology that often ignores the experiences and knowledge of people of color and shifts the narratives from "neutral and objective" research to capture and understand the strengths and stories within these communities (Yosso, 2005). Yosso defines

CRT within education as a framework that "challenges the ways race and racism impact educational structures, practices, and discourses" (2005, p.74, para 4).

As a theory framed with CRT, CCW is a direct critique and challenge of the traditional idea of cultural capital by Bourdieu (Yosso, 2005) that notes cultural capital as an accumulation of cultural knowledge, abilities and skills that is valued within privileged communities and groups of people. Research cites that an issue with the cultural capital approach by Bourdieu is that the approach devalues and misses all the capitals that others possess (Holland, 2017). Yosso (2005) aims to change the way culture is valued and argues that the Bourdieuean way acknowledges White middle class as the norm, and that because they have certain resources, they have more cultural wealth and knowledge. Yosso asserts that in fact other families and communities provide so much for their children and that their capitals are just not valued within society, particularly educational settings. Nevertheless, within CCW, Yosso emphasizes the lived experiences of people of color and focuses on the "array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and utilized by Communities of Color to survive and resist macro and micro-forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005, p 77).

Given its theoretical history and background, a main aim of CCW is to limit and change deficit theorizing about families of color within educational research and the school context. Within research, deficit thinking is the perspective that differences between marginalized groups (low-income; communities of color) and traditionally identified norm groups (middle class; White) is perceived as a gap or problem that needs to be fixed and the view that some groups lack in areas or have limitations (Aragon, 2018; He et al., 2017). In relation to my study, deficit-based thinking about refugee families not using ECE or being prepared for formal schooling still permeates research, which likely limits the outreach, information and opportunities that are

provided to families (Aragon, 2018; He et al., 2017; Holland, 2017). When child care services and systems work from a deficit-based lens, they overlook the perspectives their families have and try to shape their practices and policies from a dominant point of view without taking time to understand their families' cultural backgrounds and experiences (Aragon, 2018; Holland, 2017). Thus, using the CCW framework, which highlights the voices of groups that are often viewed with a deficit-based lens, can promote asset-based knowledge as several of the CCW capitals likely influence refugee parents' ECE decision-making process.

CCW Capitals

According to Yosso (2005), centering the voices of people and communities of color within their cultural and sociohistorical context exposes the accumulated assets and capitals they possess. Yosso, defined six forms of cultural capital that are encompassed within community cultural wealth. The six capitals within the CCW framework include aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital. *Aspirational capital* is the ability to have continued hope and dreams for a positive future despite difficulties and barriers in life. This capital focuses on the resiliency and positive beliefs of families. *Linguistic capital* is the ability to develop social skills and intellect through experiences using more than one language. This capital focus on the multiple languages and styles of expressions (formal and informal) that families of color possess. *Familial capital* includes the benefits from all the cultural knowledge, language and shared history associated with family, extended family, and fictive kin. This capital focuses on expanding the concept of family and connecting with one's community for support.

Social capital includes a network of people and community resources. This capital focuses on the importance of social connections in advancing one another in systems and institutions. *Navigational capital* is the ability to maneuver and negotiate social institutions that

have historically marginalized communities of color. This capital focuses on recognizing the resilient strategies and agency within families. Lastly, *resistant capital* are the skills and knowledge used to enact oppositional behaviors that challenge inequality. This capital focuses on possessing attitudes and behaviors that challenge the status quo. All six capitals work together simultaneously as part of cultural wealth. The six cultural capitals are not fixed or static, but part of a dynamic process in which all build on one another (Yosso, 2005).

While research using CCW has not often captured the perspectives of parents with younger children in relation to ECE, this framework has been used to highlight the voices of immigrant and refugee families in relation to their educational experiences in the United States (Boit et al., 2020; Guzman et al., 2018; He et al., 2017). Used when focusing on students in elementary and middle school as well as the voices of immigrant and refugee populations and communities, Guzman and colleagues (2018), and He, Bettez, and Levin (2017) used CCW to understand how parents conceptualize their own cultural capitals and identify what they bring to U.S. educational settings and schools. He et al., (2017) used CCW to understand the views of education held by immigrant and refugee communities. The parents communicated stories of navigating school systems in the U.S and using all six capitals. The African refugees spoke of social and navigational capital with the help of local community and refugee agencies. The Chinese and Mexican immigrant groups spoke of their local communities supporting one another as well as creating relationships with teachers to help them negotiate school and support their children's learning.

Guzman and colleagues (2018) examined Latino immigrant parent perceptions of what they contributed to their elementary and middle school children's educational experiences. Aspirational and linguistic capitals were prominent, with parents expressing their hopes for their

children academically, while also motivating their children to see the value in bilingualism. Familial and social capital was expressed as a common capital used as immigrant and refugee families felt instrumental in their child's success, including supporting their child's educational activities and finding them assistance and resources when they needed it (Guzman et al., 2018; He et al., 2018). Within Guzman et al.'s (2018) sample, parents noted that navigational and resistant capitals were often used together to work within and maneuver school systems. Parents spoke about needing to work around school personnel who were often dismissive and not inclusive of parents and their request. However, the dismissive behavior that parents endured was often challenged with parents talking with principals and not stopping until favorable solutions for their children were granted (Guzman et al., 2018).

When CCW is used, it reveals family strengths, knowledge, and experiences that might be often overlooked in research. Community cultural wealth could be useful to understand how to make the process of selecting ECE better for families as the refugee population continues to increase within the United States (Radford, 2019). Additionally, centering the study on the experiences of refugee families aids in revealing the resources and strengths available to them and what they use as they make child care decisions (Yosso, 2005). Overall, for my dissertation, the CCW theoretical perspective helps recognize the cultural wealth that parents possess that influence their ECE perceptions and preferences.

Summary

The accommodations model acknowledges the importance of familial and contextual characteristics and factors during the child care decision-making process. However, the model does not explicitly recognize the sociocultural experiences and knowledge that impacts parents' child care decision-making processes. Thus, the community cultural wealth could enhance the

accommodations model to provide a more socially and culturally conscious and comprehensive picture of the factors that influence child care selection for refugee families. With the lens of CCW, the accommodations model could amplify the family voice and ensure that child care systems begin to recognize that parents' perspectives ultimately inform and shape their child care selection and utilization.

As noted by Yosso (2005), the main goal of community cultural wealth is to "transform education and empower People of Color to utilize assets already abundant in their communities" (p. 82, para 1). CCW centers the lives of families of color and recognizes the value they bring to each space they inhabit. The use of the frameworks of community cultural wealth and accommodations model in this study can be another step towards recognizing the strengths and knowledge that refugee families could bring to informing the strategies that can best support newly arrived families' as well as improve child care systems and policies.

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

Parental decision-making around the utilization of child care is a cultural process with families bringing their own perceptions, practices, and histories into the process. In the last ten years, there has been an emerging literature on early care and education (ECE) utilization and experiences for immigrant and refugee families. Most of the research on ECE experiences of refugee families has been studied within the immigrant population more broadly as they relate to utilization and parent voices; however, given the complexities of refugees' integration processes, their ECE experiences should be understood specifically.

The empirical literature review below aims to focus on the ECE experiences of refugee families with young children and the factors that impact their utilization. First, I will provide an overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the refugee population in the U.S, the refugee resettlement process, and their integration experiences and stressors as new arrivals. I will then highlight the relationship refugees have with ECE, focusing on the benefits of ECE, their utilization, and the contextual influences that impact their access. Lastly, I will summarize what we know about refugee parent ECE perceptions and preferences. Within the literature of ECE access and utilization, there has been a substantial focus on immigrant families' experiences in general, (Matthew & Jang, 2007; Park & McHugh, 2014; Greenberg et al., 2018) however there has been minimal specific attention to the unique aspects of the refugee experience. While refugees are immigrants, they resettle in their host country with completely different experiences and background than most immigrants.

Overall, I aim to emphasize the refugee experience but will capture the immigrant experience more broadly. Methodologically, the literatures focused on ECE benefits, utilization, and parent preferences often include refugees within their sample of immigrants. Few studies, however, explicitly identify the refugee subsample, as many of the large-scale survey studies do not ask about refugee status or include questions other than country of origin and time in U.S. Thus, for the literature review below when discussing a study, I will use the term specifically used by the authors. However, I want to note that when samples included participants from certain countries that historically resettle refugees, I use both the term 'immigrants and refugees' to describe the findings.

Background on Refugees

Refugees in the United States

The United States has the oldest refugee resettlement program and has historically been one of the top ten resettlement sites in the world. Since 1980, 55% of refugees have come from Asia, about 28% from Europe, 13% from Africa, and 4% from Latin America (Krogstad, 2019). Within the last 20 years, the most commonly spoken languages by refugees were Arabic, Nepali, Somali, Spanish, and Sgaw Karen (a Burmese language), with the majority of refugees speaking more than one language (Capps et al., 2015).

Refugee resettlement in the United States has become a political issue. In the past 10 years, on average about 61,000 refugees arrived in the United States each year. Between 2015 and 2017, the United States offered about 70,000 to 80,000 places a year (Capps et al., 2015; Krogstad, 2019). However due to policy decisions by the recent Trump administration, the country is no longer one of the top resettlement countries with only about 22,500 refugees admitted in 2018 (UNHCR, 2019), and about half this number in 2020 (National Immigration Forum, 2020). The recent political climate for refugees and immigrants more broadly has taken

an anti-immigration and anti-Muslim sentiment with legislation and policies restricting migration and singling out certain populations from different countries (Bernstein & DuBois, 2018). However, leading up to and during the completion of the current study, the 2020 election took place which ushered in a new Biden administration that recently raised the refugee resettlement ceiling back up to 62,500 for the year of 2021 (Migration Policy Institute, 2021).

Although fewer refugees have been admitted to the United States in the past four years, there is still a diverse group of refugees that continue to resettle nationally and in North Carolina. In 2019, most refugees resettled from the Democratic Republic of Congo (13,000), followed by Burma (4,900), then Ukraine (4,500), Eritrea (1,800) and Afghanistan (1,200) (Krogstad, 2019). In 2019, most refugees resettled in Texas, Washington, New York, and California (Krogstad, 2019), however North Carolina has been one of the top 10 refugee resettlement states for the past five years (Refugee Processing Center, 2020). In recent years, most refugees resettling in North Carolina have come from Burma, Bhutan, and Iraq (Charlotte Awake, 2015), with about 1,300 refugees resettling in North Carolina in 2019 (Krogstad, 2019).

Resettlement Process in the U.S. The resettlement process is one of the many things that are unique for refugees relative to immigrants. The formal resettlement process once refugees arrive in the U.S. typically includes federal, state, and local components and agencies working together. The process and support for these families covers a fairly short time, usually 90 days, although adjustment for families can take years. Before refugees enter the country, they are first screened by multiple government agencies, undergo multiple interviews and security checks, and a medical check. They then participate in a cultural orientation, are assigned to a domestic resettlement location (certain region and city) and then travel to the United States (National Immigration Forum, 2020; Pope, 2015). Once refugees arrive in the U.S., they are picked up by

one of the nine national resettlement agencies in the country (Fix et al., 2017; Pope, 2015). These resettlement agencies are nonprofit organizations that collaborate with the U.S. government to assist refugees through the admissions process and are often private or faith based. The nine national resettlement agencies include: a) Church World Services, b) Ethiopian Community Development Council, c) Episcopal Migrant Ministries, d) Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, e) International Rescue Committee, f) US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants g) Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services, h) United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and i) World Relief Corporation.

The nine resettlement agencies are crucial to the integration process and place resettled refugees in local communities providing help with finding affordable housing, food and clothing, and enrolling children in school (Fix et al., 2017; National Immigration Forum, 2020). The states aim to place refugees near already resettled family members or in communities that support their cultural and linguistic characteristics. Newly arrived refugees get all their basic needs for the first 30 to 90 days through the Department of State's Receptions and Place Program, and then refugees must work with other nongovernmental organizations and apply for other services and/or begin work (National Immigration Forum, 2020). However, the nine agencies often provide some support services for the first few months (Capps et al., 2015; Fix et al., 2017). The nine resettlement agencies along with many smaller local agencies help families connect to supportive services such as English as a second language courses, employment assistance, and help them apply for social security and other social services including TANF, SSI, SNAP, and Medicaid. Although agencies help families navigate their first few months and sometimes remain connected to them for years, the main goal of the U.S. resettlement program is to get refugees employed and economically self-sufficient as soon as possible. Given that the goal is immediate

employment, the jobs provided to refugees are often underfunded and do not match the skills of refugees, with little means to train them for better jobs as they integrate. Additionally, despite entering the country with legal status and contributing to society, there has been a recent spread of misinformation about refugees which can impact the opportunities they are offered and afforded (Bernstein & DuBois, 2018). Thus, the quick integration process and the sociocultural context in which refugees enter the U.S. can greatly impact their resettlement and integration experiences and can lead to various stressors and challenges for many newly arrived refugees.

Integration Stressors. Research on refugee integration outcomes focuses primarily on health and socioeconomic factors such as their mental health, literacy and English language proficiency, employment participation, and income (Fix et al., 2017).

Mental Health Stressors. Family mental health and traumatic experiences are the most researched stressors known to influence the integration process for refugee families. Refugees endure various adversities during their journey to safety and many develop mental health disorders that may last long after they resettle in their new countries (Crowley, 2009; Henley & Robinson, 2011). Refugee families have been found to have an increased risk of mental health issues because of the conflict and violence they may have witnessed, the loss and deprivation during migration, and the stress of resettlement. Refugees are at an elevated risk of having post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, and a variety of mental health issues (Mental Health Foundation, 2018). The prevalence of mental health issues could impact their ability to integrate into their new communities and lead to difficulties when trying to strive for self-sufficiency and influence their behavior in work, school, and social settings (Crowley, 2009; Henley & Robinson, 2011).

English Proficiency Stressors. Limited English proficiency (LEP) has been found to pose initial challenges during integration, with about a third of all refugees arriving with some English skills, and many others arriving with limited to no English skills (Fix et al., 2017). English proficiency varies greatly by nationality and the countries where individuals were stationed at refugee camps (Capps et al., 2015). The specific languages that refugees speak can also influence their integration, with families who speak rare languages having difficulties finding interpreters, making it hard to communicate and interact with institutions and access assistive services (Hooper et al., 2016). Relatedly, literacy rates also vary by country of origin (COO) and language, with lower literacy rates impacting the foundational skills needed to learn English (Capps et al., 2015). In regard to child care, family language and literacy level can potentially complicate the child care decision-making process and influence parents' preferred child care arrangement and the factors that are most important (Chaudry et al., 2011). Overall, LEP and literacy skills can impact educational attainment and lead to challenges finding employment and navigating U.S systems, however, most refugees improve their English skills overtime (Fix et al., 2017).

Socioeconomic Stressors. During integration, refugees often find employment quickly with men typically having higher employment rates than women. While unemployment and under employment rates are low for the overall refugee population, again there are differences based on their COO. Those that have lower employment rates attribute this to mental and physical health problems before integration as well as caregiving responsibilities for family members and young children (Fix et al., 2017). Therefore, child care is a crucial service that could increase the employment rate for the refugee population. Another stressor that impacts integration is parental education, which varies considerably for different groups of refugees, as a

third of refugees come with a bachelor's degree. Parental education is important as it is associated with employment, income, children's school experiences, and affects parents' engagement and navigation of the systems in the U.S. (Hooper et al., 2016). Additionally, because new arrivals must find jobs quickly or must care for family, there is little time and opportunity to receive the extra trainings and educational experiences needed to improve their education attainment (Capps et al., 2015).

In relation to income, recently arrived refugees are more likely to have low incomes and experience poverty; however, these difficulties improve the longer families are in the U.S. (Capps et al., 2015). Even though refugees are employed, and some come with educational attainment, they are often given low wage jobs and less incomes than U.S. born workers (Fix et al., 2017). Lower incomes can impact the child care that parents can afford and the ECE opportunities within their neighborhoods in which they have access to. Although refugees often have low incomes, they can qualify for educational assistance programs such as Head Start, public preschool programs, and child care subsidies, which provides families with financial assistance to make child care more affordable, that may mitigate some of their current and future economic hardships in relation to child care.

Overall, the resettlement process for families can be overwhelming and ongoing. Integration experiences are influenced by a multitude of socioeconomic factors with families needing to overcome various challenges. Families must adapt and integrate quickly and because of the resettlement program goals and expectations, refugee families may benefit from significant support and access to services to help them successfully transition and integrate into their communities.

Refugee Families and Early Care and Education

One service that can assist families in the integration process is access and utilization of early care and education (ECE), which includes center-based care arrangements. ECE participation could help family employment participation and free parents to work and help them become self-sufficient. ECE participation has also been recognized as a critical service that influences academic success and personal development for refugee children. While in general, ECE is known as a protective experience and has been found to provide families with various advantages, refugee families have a limited yet complex relationship with early care and education. Thus, in this section I will provide an overview of ECE benefits for and utilization by refugee families, as well as the contextual factors that can impact their access.

ECE: A Beneficial and Supportive Service

Early care and education services have often been deemed a support that not only helps young children but parents as well. Research continues to point to the importance of access to high quality and consistent ECE as critical, especially for immigrant and refugee families, in shaping short- and long-term developmental and educational outcomes (Park & McHugh, 2014; Park et al., 2018). Specific outcomes that have been influenced by ECE participation are early academics and preparedness for kindergarten, emotional and linguistic development, as well as children's social integration into their new cultural context. ECE not only provides better developmental outcomes for refugee children but affords parents numerous benefits to help their adjustment and integration into U.S. society as well.

Child Developmental Outcomes. Participation in ECE has been found to have both direct and continued effects on cognitive and non-cognitive development and specifically has been found to benefit immigrant and refugee children's social, emotional, and language

development, and been linked to better outcomes in academic performance (Hooper et al., 2016; Morland et al., 2016; Greenberg et al., 2018). Much of the work on the effect of ECE on immigrant child outcomes has used nationally representative data sets (e.g. ECLS-B and ECLS-K) thus providing a general overview. Yet it should be noted that there is great heterogeneity in outcomes for families based on a host of demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

In a systematic review on school readiness outcomes, Gottfried and Kim (2015) found that when immigrant children attended ECE, they were found to have higher English proficiency as well as math and reading school readiness outcomes compared to children not in formal center-based ECE settings. These findings are consistent with other research that have reported greater gains in immigrant and refugee children's school readiness skills when they were enrolled in center-based ECE settings (Greenberg et al., 2019; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Park 2013). ECE participation for children of immigrants and refugees has also been shown to reduce marginal school readiness gaps between other children of immigrants and refugees and native-born children who do not attend ECE (Gottfried & Kim, 2015; Park et al., 2018). In terms of language development, ECE provides daily language instruction thus helping children learn to communicate in their new home countries (Dolan & Sherlock, 2010; Park et al., 2018). Expressive language skills have also been found to increase with the use of ECE (Votruba-Drzal et al., 2015).

Gottfried and Kim's (2015) systematic review also noted that several studies have found positive results for immigrant children's social and behavioral skills. When immigrant children participate in ECE, they have been found to display better approaches to learning, interpersonal skills, and self-control. Similar positive findings have been reported for internalizing and externalizing problem behaviors, as Votruba-Drzal and colleagues (2015) found that ECE

benefited children's behavioral functioning with immigrant parents reporting fewer externalizing behaviors from their children.

Although much of the research on ECE impacts for immigrant and refugee children has focused on school readiness and academic outcomes, ECE can assist children in their adjustment to their new cultural environment as well. Exposure to ECE settings supports children in learning the norms and rules of school settings, how to interact and play with peers from diverse backgrounds, and understand how to relate to teachers and adults outside their home and community setting (Dolan & Sherlock, 2010; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). ECE has great potential to socialize children for better adjustment not only in formal school settings but within their greater communities.

Benefits for Parents. Research has begun to recognize that beyond child development outcomes, ECE can play a significant role in the integration process for refugee families. Much of the work acknowledging the benefits of ECE for parents is qualitative and may not be generalized to all refugee families, however these studies provide a powerful overview of the importance of ECE utilization for immigrants and refugee families. ECE has been deemed informational, supportive, and as a setting that fosters social connections to help families successfully integrate and adjust to their new countries (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011; Park et al., 2018). Participation in ECE for refugee families can also put them on a path to better educational attainment and workforce participation which could in turn positively impact their economic outcomes (Park & McHugh, 2014). ECE programs can offer services directly, through partnerships with other programs, or referrals that support overall family wellbeing and promote self-sufficiency (Matthews & Jang, 2007; Park et al., 2018). Related to self-sufficiency, ECE has also been found as a supportive setting where refugee parents can gain

human capital and confidence to empower and advocate for themselves (Park & McHugh, 2014; Park et al., 2018; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011). From the perspective of immigrant parents, they noted that ECE could help them further their own educational goals and allow time for them to enroll in English classes and earn certificates and degrees (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Vesely, 2013).

ECE can provide families with the knowledge and skills needed to understand the U.S. educational systems and navigate transitional experiences to kindergarten (Park et al., 2018; Vesely et al., 2013). Immigrant parents have also reported receiving parenting advice and learning about the importance of reading and engaging in school readiness practices at home (Vesely et al., 2013). Moreover, participation in ECE has been shown to help parents learn the importance of participating in activities at their child care centers, which can support their children's development (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Vesely et al., 2013).

Broadly, ECE is integral in helping children and families interact within a multicultural environment. ECE providers help refugee families integrate into their new countries by meeting with families on a regular basis and fostering relationships, which connect them to larger communities (Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011). Additionally, it could potentially help them gain social capital and create trusting relationships among parents and teachers, allowing parents to have social experiences outside of ECE (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Overall, ECE centers can be supportive hubs for refugee families to not only learn from teachers and staff but get to know other families, access services and resources, and become a part of their new communities (Vesely et al., 2013; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011).

Refugee Utilization of ECE

Although the potential benefits and advantages of ECE for refugee (and immigrant) families are well-established, children of immigrants and refugees are less likely to participate in every type of nonparental care than children of U.S. born parents (Matthews & Jang, 2007; Sandstrom & Gelatt, 2017). According to national data in the early 2000s, about 43% of immigrant children between the ages of 3-5 were in parental care and not using any regular ECE services (Matthews & Jang, 2007). However, using ECLS-K 2011 data, it was later reported that 37% of immigrant children were in parental care only (Greenberg et al., 2019). These findings show a slow decline in parental care use only by immigrant families, which could be a result of more free state Pre-K programs (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011).

Between 2009-2013, at least 42% of immigrant and refugee parents had their children enrolled in nonparental child care (Hooper et al., 2016). When families utilize child care arrangements outside the home, center-based ECE is the most common with 32% of immigrant children enrolled, followed by 17% in relative care and 7% in family child care (Matthews & Jang, 2007). In a study of 52 low-income immigrant and refugee parents, families used all types of child care. The majority of families were using informal care, with 23% of the sample using center-based ECE (Chaudry et al., 2011). Using National Survey of Early Care and Education (NSECE) data, Sandstrom and Gelatt (2017) reported that 34% of foreign-born parents enrolled their children into center-based ECE.

Use of ECE changes for refugee families depending on a variety of characteristics from income level to country of origin and language proficiency. According to income levels, refugee groups with higher incomes (Russians, Iranians, and Colombians) are more likely enroll in care outside the home than refugee groups with lower incomes (Burmese, Iraqis, and Laotians)

(Hooper et al., 2016). Using ELCS-K 2011 data, it has been reported that in terms of income, only 12% of low-income immigrants were enrolled in center-based care, while 45% of high income immigrant children were enrolled in center-based care (Greenberg et al., 2019). For children with working parents, 73% of immigrants are in some type of child care, with center-based being used most.

ECE use for immigrants and refugees also looks different by region of origin and English proficiency. Using national data for the early 2000s, multiple studies reported that immigrant and refugee children from regions such as the Caribbean, South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa have high rates of ECE participation, while families from Central America and Indochina (Burma, Laos, Cambodia) have the lowest rates of ECE utilization (Matthews & Jang, 2007; Miller et al., 2013). In reference to English proficiency, using ECLS-B data, Miller, and colleagues (2013) found that parents with more English proficiency are more likely to enroll their child in family child care or center-based than parental care. Reporting NSECE data, it was paralleled that when immigrant children have LEP parents, they are less likely to be enrolled in center-based than parents with English proficiency (Sandstrom & Gelatt, 2017). When children with LEP parents did use nonparental care, parents used center-based care (33%) and relative care (33%) at the same rate (Sandstrom & Gelatt, 2017). Mirroring national data, Chaudry and colleagues (2011) found that with a sample of 52 immigrant and refugee English language learning parents, about 31% of the parents used center-based care, specifically Head Start and 33% using relative care. These studies show that immigrant and refugee families are using multiple types of nonparental care and around a third of the population are specifically utilizing center-based ECE services for their children. To thoroughly comprehend utilization patterns of

ECE, it is important to recognize and identify the factors that influence low levels of enrollment as well as the factors that support access to ECE.

Contextual Influences on Access

Barriers to ECE. Refugee's use or lack thereof of ECE can be explained by a host of factors. Overall, many refugee families face the same barriers to ECE that all low-income families face, from affordability, to lack of convenience, and availability of care options (Matthews & Jang, 2007; Moreland et al., 2016; Park & McHugh, 2014). However, the interplay of other barriers that are specific to refugee populations can exacerbate these barriers for families, such as limited English proficiency, lack of awareness about ECE, and limited social networks (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011).

Affordability is a serious issue for many families as they often engage in low-wage work and have lower incomes making the cost of ECE difficult to handle (Matthews & Jang, 2007; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011). Related to parents' work, hours of operation and scheduling have also been identified as a barrier for use of ECE. ECE hours of operation often do not coincide with when parents need care. Immigrant parents are more likely to work evenings and night jobs that did not require expert English skills, thus leaving families with limited if any options for center-based ECE participation (Greenberg et al., 2018; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Vesely, 2013).

In terms of care availability, waiting lists have also been identified as a hindrance for families who need care immediately to attend work or English classes. Since there are a lack of spaces within families' neighborhoods, parents may have to care for their children or rely on informal arrangements thus reducing the probability and time their children will likely be enrolled in ECE (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Matthews & Jang, 2007; Vesely, 2013).

Transportation and location of ECE is also a burden that immigrant and refugee families must navigate, not only are there less ECE options in their neighborhoods (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Matthews & Jang, 2007), but many families may not have driver's licenses, or cars and potentially have difficulties navigating the limited public transportation available in the U.S. (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Matthews & Jang, 2007)

More specific to the refugee experience, low enrollment could also be due to refugees' restricted understanding, awareness, and connection to ECE services (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Morland et al., 2016; Ward et al., 2011). Families may be unaware that they are eligible or know subsidized care is available to them (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Vesely, 2013). Families are often eligible for Head Start and the Child care and Development Fund (CCDF) but without understanding their rules, parents may not utilize the vouchers or cheaper and free center child care options (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Vesely. 2013). In general, the logistics of the entire enrollment process has been identified as a structural barrier for immigrant and refugee families. Specifically, parents have cited difficulty understanding and filling out complex paper work and collecting all the documentation needed to enroll their child (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Matthews & Jang, 2007; Vesely 2013). This process can be daunting and time consuming especially for families with limited English proficiency and low literacy levels (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Park & McHugh, 2014; Morland et al., 2016).

The enrollment process can make parents feel isolated from educational systems and they may not be able to communicate their questions to understand their options (Park, 2013; Park & McHugh, 2014). Many parents are born and live the majority of their life in refugee camps with limited educational experiences, often causing the feeling of uncertainty and inadequacy when learning or trying to enroll their children in ECE (Park & McHugh, 2014; Ward et al., 2011).

Lastly, for many parents, they learn of ECE through word of mouth and other parents and family members to whom they are connected (Ward et al., 2011; Vesely, 2013). Refugee populations do not often have extended kin or social networks in their communities which impacts their awareness and understanding of the early care and education system. Therefore, due to their location, sometimes isolation, and the quick integration process, refugee parents could greatly benefit from community supports to understand the importance and benefits of ECE and feel comfortable engaging with center-based ECE options (Greenberg et al., 2018; Park, 2013).

Supports for Accessing ECE. There are some supports that promote access and utilization of ECE programs for refugee families. Specifically, refugee serving organizations and agencies are helpful as well as culturally responsive ECE centers (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Matthews & Jang, 2007; Moreland et al., 2016). Programs that are culturally responsive to the families in their neighborhood can be great sources of improved access (Dolan & Sherlock, 2010). When programs make conscious efforts to reach out to families, they can provide parents with information not only about ECE but also increase their enrollment (Greenberg et al., 2018). Research shows that when programs are responsive to parent languages and needs and take the time to educate and provide meaningful support, then parents feel more comfortable and interested in participation (Matthews & Jang, 2007; Moreland et al., 2016; Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016). Refugee resettlement agencies and their collaboration with ECE programs is also essential when helping refugee families access ECE (Moreland et al., 2016). A study conducted in New York and Arizona investigated a collaboration between Head Start and refugee resettlement services (Moreland et al., 2016) and found that when services collaborated, refugee Head Start enrollment increased more than expected.

Another major support for accessing ECE for families is social connections. Parents often learn from one another and help one another with the enrollment process and filling out paperwork (Vesely, 2013; Vesely et al., 2013). However, for refugee families that may not have expansive social networks like some other immigrant groups, families often can rely on refugee resettlement organizations and programs (Moreland et al., 2016; Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016). For example, when interviewing refugee parents in Maine, Ward, and colleagues (2011) found that when refugee agencies provided interpreters to help families fill out complex ECE applications, this led to minimal issues enrolling in child care. Vesely (2013) found that African immigrant and refugee women used social service programs such as the library, pediatricians, and health care clinics to learn about and find ECE for their children.

Organizations and ECE programs serving these populations can make a difference in their access and utilization. Refugee ECE access and utilization experiences are complex and research must continue to strive to focus on access to ECE for families as the benefits are abundant for refugee families with young children. One strategy research can implement to better understand the experiences of refugee families is by amplifying their voices. Knowing parent perceptions and preferences in relation to ECE could help policies and organizations better identify what families need and value to improve their enrollment and utilization. The overall literature of parent ECE perceptions and preferences is limited, however in the next section I will emphasize refugee parent perceptions.

Refugee Parents' ECE Perceptions

As noted in chapter 1, *parent perceptions* include parent values, beliefs, and definitions about ECE and is the term used in this study to describe how they perceive early care and education. When acknowledging the voices and perspectives of refugee families, a few studies

have found families often express many benefits to ECE participation, however majority of this literature is outside the U.S. context (Dolan & Sherlock, 2006; Broome & Kindon, 2008; Mitchell & Ouko, 2012). Dolan and Sherlock (2006) found that a group of Kurdish refugee parents and Nigerian asylum-seekers felt ECE services helped their children's language and educational development, as well as aided their children's integration into their new host community. The parents also stated that participation in ECE gave their children the opportunity to make friends and interact with other culturally different children of diverse backgrounds. Poureslami and colleagues (2013) conducted a qualitative study with immigrant and refugee parents to better understand their perceptions of early childhood development services. The authors interviewed Iranian and Afghani refugees and Chinese and Korean immigrants in Canada and found that many families have different definitions and perceptions of early childhood development. In particular, the Iranian and Afghani families' knowledge of ECE was limited with parents seeing it as services outside the home but being confused about child development. The parents also noted great difference between countries, stating that in Canada there was far more respect and focus on children's development than in their homelands. Some of the parents discussed that participation in ECE helped their children's problem-solving skills and creativity; as well as helped them acknowledge the uniqueness of their children and compare them to others less often (Poureslami et al., 2013).

Broome and Kindon (2008) reported on the ECE perceptions of migrant and refugee families from a variety of countries who resettled in New Zealand. The Eritrean mothers interviewed stated that they thought their children's participation was good because they were able to learn, speak and play with other children. Both the Sudanese and Eritrean parents needed and noted the importance of ECE so that they could further their education (Broome & Kindon,

2008). Mitchell and Ouko (2012) reported on Congolese refugee families' perceptions and aspirations of ECE who also resettled in New Zealand. They found that participation in ECE was a place of belonging and community, given that many parents missed the support that was once available to them in Africa. The Congolese parents also spoke of ECE as a place for their children to learn about and adapt to living in New Zealand and learn English. Overall, these few studies demonstrated that when utilized, parents find ECE beneficial and believe that it can be a place that supports their children.

Refugee Parents' ECE Preferences

Understanding refugee parent perceptions and care preferences is essential to centering their voices and experiences. *Parent preferences* are the characteristics of child care that parents prioritize and deem important for a care arrangement. Parent preferences are not the only components that shape the decisions parents make about ECE, however it is integral to understand parent priorities and why they may or may not enroll in certain child care arrangements. Parental preferences literature often distinguishes between process, structural, and practical preferences (Forry et al., 2013). I will focus on these key areas of preferences and include cultural features that have been found central to immigrant and refugee families. Some of the articles focus on what parents value and find ideal in care before enrolling in child care, while others focused on what parents preferred and what they currently value while already enrolled in care. All the articles reviewed below have immigrant samples with some specifically noting immigrant and refugee parent samples. While majority of the literature is on immigrant parents broadly, it still provides an overview of the preferences literature for refugee families.

Process Features

Process-oriented features refer to what is occurring within the classroom or program. Aspects of process-oriented features that have been identified in the literature include health and

safety, emotional climate and warmth in the classroom, instructional and educational methods, and parent and provider communication and collaboration.

Health, safety, and physical features within child care settings have been identified as one of the highest valued considerations for parents (Forry et al., 2013). A study of Latinx immigrant families already enrolled in an ECE program found that parents valued the newness and cleanliness of ECE facilities as well as the developmentally appropriate and child friendly spaces throughout the campus (Ansari et al., 2018). Additionally, the immigrant parents highlighted the school safety measures as essential to making both parents and their children feel more secure and calm about going to care (Ansari et al., 2018). A qualitative study of low-income families who many were immigrants and refugees, found that almost a third of the sample preferred a healthy and clean setting as many express concerns for the spreading of germs, with about 20% of the parents mentioning the importance of the physical environment (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). In a study of refugee parents in Maine, when asked about positive aspects of child care, parents mentioned that they felt comfortable with their children in care because there were rules and regulations in place to ensure their child's safety (Ward et al., 2011).

The warmth and emotional climate of caregivers and care arrangements to children and their parents has also been found as important in multiples studies (Sandstrom, & Chaudry, 2012; Ward et al., 2011). In general, caregiver and child interactions and caregiver affect have been noted as important to families (Forry et al., 2013). When highlighting immigrant and refugee families, Ward et al., (2011) and Sandstrom & Chaudry (2012), reported that over half of their samples expressed preferring caregivers who would be sensitive and warm to their children.

Curriculums with educational and instructional activities that support children's social and academic development are frequently cited as important to parents. Many studies have

reported that immigrant and refugee parents value the socialization that their children gain from being in ECE settings, as well as the opportunity to interact with other children and learn prosocial skills (Ansari et al., 2018; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Ward et al., 2011).

Parents viewed child care as an enriching and learning environment (Ansari et al., 2018; Shuey & Leventhal, 2018) as well as a setting that help their children foster social and emotional skills (Ansari et al., 2018; Shuey & Leventhal, 2018; Ward et al., 2011). For example, Latinx immigrant parents appreciated that ECE was teaching their child respect and discipline but also emotional regulation and problem-solving skills (Ansari et al., 2018). Specifically, Shuey and Leventhal (2018), found that although the Latino immigrant parents in their sample valued the learning opportunities in ECE, they viewed these experiences not as helping with school readiness but more so as childhood enrichment and valued the aspect of play within ECE. However, when interviewing Mexican immigrants in Colorado, Ward and colleagues (2011) reported that they preferred children to be free of schedules, as structured ECE could lead to a loss of freedom and a childhood. In contrast, when interviewing West African immigrant parents, Obeng (2007) found that some parents did not value play based curriculums but viewed ECE as a place where teachers should be ‘teaching’. The parents explained that the value of children learning and taking direction for teachers was based on trust in their culture (Obeng, 2007). However, they were interested in a balance where parents noted the value of learning by exploration and discovery in their environments.

Various studies have also identified parents’ desire in establishing relationships with ECE providers and the preference for ECE providers that they could trust (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Ward et al., 2011). Ansari and colleagues (2018) found that parents valued being partners with ECE providers in their child's education. Latinx immigrant families with children already

enrolled stated that they appreciated that ECE teachers provided them with information about the U.S educational system, as well as parenting advice on school readiness and childrearing practices (Ansari et al., 2018). Parents also valued being welcomed and respected in the center and being communicated to frequently.

Structural Features

Structural features refer to policy regulated and workforce characteristics. Structural features include teacher education, training, and experience, child to staff ratio, as well as licensing and accreditation. A number of studies have documented parents' preference for teachers to be qualified and educated in child development (Obeng, 2007; Sandstrom, & Chaudry, 2012; Ward et al., 2011). Research with African immigrants (Obeng, 2007) described preference for caregivers with educational background in child development as well as experience with children an important factor.

Child to staff ratio has also been identified as important to families. When highlighting the preferences of immigrants there were some differences in terms of why child/staff ratio was important. For example, African immigrant mothers noted that they were happy with there being multiple teachers (a collective group) that took care of children in ECE because in their culture sharing the responsibility of child rearing is an important community effort (Obeng, 2007). With a sample of ethnically diverse immigrants, Sandstrom & Chaudry (2012) reported that ratio mattered because several parents thought care was too crowded, however both studies stated that parents preferred smaller ratios for that their children could receive individualized attention.

Practical Features

Practical features are not specifically related to values within high-quality ECE settings; however, they still inform parent preferences and choice. Practical features have often been deemed important and have focused on characteristics such as affordability (cost), availability

(hours of program), and convenience (location/transportation). Specifically, cost and limited hours of the center were the most commonly mentioned practical values for low-income, U.S born and immigrant families (Sandstrom, & Chaudry, 2012; Vesely, 2013; Ward et al., 2011). For example, in a qualitative study of low-income African and Latina immigrant mothers, the most desired feature was more flexible hours as mothers often had nonstandard work hours (Vesely, 2013). In contrast Obeng (2007) noted that parents who were college students were happy with the hours their child could spend within an ECE setting during the day because they needed to study. Moreover, families that experienced transportation difficulties preferred a care arrangement located closer to their home or workplace (Sandstrom, & Chaudry, 2012).

Cultural Features

Cultural features of ECE refer to languages spoken in the classroom and the acknowledgement of families and their cultural diversity. Many immigrant and refugee parents value the same features of ECE as U.S. born parents particularly those that are low-income families, however, other parental values specific to immigrant and refugee populations are documented in the literature.

Language preferences have been identified as quite complex for immigrant and refugee families. West African immigrants noted that the main reason for sending their children to formal ECE was for their children to learn English from native speakers (Obeng, 2007), this was also found to be true for Latinx immigrants who valued that centers could help their child develop skills in two languages (Shuey & Leventhal, 2018; Vesely, 2013). However Sudanese and Somali refugee parents had beliefs that children could learn English anywhere and become more proficient in both their native language and English at home (Ward et al., 2011). Those parents also had a fear that their children would begin to lose their native language and culture

thus preferred for their children to stay at home. Some Latinx and Mexican immigrant parents specifically preferred for their caregivers to be bilingual or speak the families' native non-English language (Vesely, 2013; Ward et al., 2011). Parents also stressed the importance of being able to communicate with their child's caregiver in their native language.

For a few studies, parents' greatest preference was for their children to not be in formal ECE but cared for by their family members or a friend (Obeng, 2007; Ward et al., 2011). Some parents valued instilling cultural beliefs and practices in their children and stated that they wanted their children to be taught the same values as in their Mexican (Ward et al., 2011) and African (Obeng, 2007) cultures. Value of dietary restrictions and exposure to their cultural foods was also important, with parents describing that they would prefer centers to provide certain types and qualities of food (Chaudry et al., 2012; Sandstrom, & Chaudry, 2012; Shuey & Leventhal, 2018; Ward et al., 2011). Another cultural feature deemed important to African and Latina immigrants was the diversity of the families enrolled in the program. Vesely (2013) reported that mothers valued diversity in the classroom and wanted their children to know families of different backgrounds. They suggested that diversity in care would help their children know how to treat others and it could help them fit in rather than being the only immigrant or person from a different country in the classroom.

Conclusion

In conclusion, refugees are a diverse group of people that want to resettle and become a part of their new home countries; however, they need support in their integration process. ECE can be that source of support. ECE is critical for not only refugee children's development and success in school but it can positively impact the transition and integration process for the entire family. Since ECE can play such a crucial role in refugee children's first years, research must

continue to explore refugee families' ECE access and child care decision-making process. Although ECE benefits these families, there are different contextual factors that influence their access to and utilization of ECE. Thus, parents' care perceptions and preferences should be researched so that educators, agencies, and policymakers can be informed about how to best serve and support newly arrived refugee families with young children. With the use of both the accommodations model and community cultural wealth frameworks, this study will capture parent voices as well as the cultural context that shapes their perceptions and preferences.

While there is literature on immigrant family and global refugee family ECE perceptions and preferences, there is limited research on refugees in the United States. Therefore, my dissertation works to fill this gap by focusing on the perspectives of refugee mothers to get a better understanding of what they believe about ECE and think is most important for their children. This study will hopefully add to the literature and capture the factors that may influence refugee family access and utilization of ECE services.

CHAPTER IV: METHODS

This chapter explains the research methodological framework, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis process for this study. The current study used the qualitative methodological framework of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to capture refugee mothers' views on early care and education. The study sought to address the following research questions:

1) What are refugee mothers' perceptions of early care and education?
2) What are refugee mothers' views on the purpose and importance of ECE for their children and themselves?
3) What characteristics of early care and education do refugee mothers deem most important?
4) Which ECE characteristics are prioritized?

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) Methodology

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative methodology that has two primary aims, first to explore in detail the lived experiences and voices of research participants and secondly, to provide detailed interpretation to understand the experience of participants (Larkin et al., 2006; Smith & Osborn, 2008). As noted in the literature review, there is limited information about the ECE perceptions and preferences of refugee parents in the United States (Ward et al., 2011; Broom & Kingdom, 2008), thus this work aligns with the aim of IPA, which is to amplify participant perceptions of a certain phenomenon, which in this case is early care and education.

IPA is a methodology based in the theoretical principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiograghy. Phenomenology refers to the meaning individuals make and have during a phenomenon or experience that is unique for them. Phenomenological research reflects on everyday lived experiences and attempts to uncover and explore an individual's personal account and perception (Smith et al., 2009; Shinebourne, 2011). Idiography refers to providing a complete and in-depth analysis and picture of an individual's perception. An idiographic analysis examines individual perspectives in their own unique context and explains data as single cases before thinking about general statements and patterns (Pietkiewicz, & Smith, 2014). The use of single cases can help provide a better understanding of the context in which participants make meaning and the different aspects that influence their perceptions and actions (Smith & Osborn, 2008; Shinebourne, 2011). The focus on a single case first is important for my study, given the heterogeneity of refugees' experiences pre and post migration and during resettlement.

Hermeneutics refers to interpreting the meaning and comprehending the experiences of others in order to translate their message (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Pringle et al., 2011). Interpretation is influenced by and depends upon researcher's own conceptions. While researchers aim to understand what it is like for their participants, they must take on an active role to make sense of participants' perceptions. This process is described as double hermeneutics or a dual interpretation. First participants make meaning and sense of their experiences and secondly researchers then must make meaning and sense of the participants' meaning making (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). When utilizing IPA, researchers aim to interpret and accept the experiences of individuals (empathic hermeneutics) while also critically questioning the data and stories told (questioning hermeneutics) (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

IPA recognizes research analysis as a dynamic process. IPA stresses the importance of not only interpreting participant experiences and meanings but the task of being reflective, as researchers' perspectives are also part of the interpretation (Smith et al., 1999). Additionally, IPA seeks to capture convergence and divergence within data, not only focusing on patterns and commonalities, but the differences and uniqueness in participants experiences.

Contextualization of Study

To discuss the current study, I must first contextualize and acknowledge the global and national context of the world during the planning, implementation, and completion of this study. In March of 2020, the United States shut down and a stay-at-home order was put into place to address the global spread of the Coronavirus, also known as Covid-19. During this time businesses shutdown and the majority of educational and governmental systems began to work remotely and virtually. The national changes during the Covid-19 pandemic not only impacted the planning and completion of this study, but more importantly the lives of the families participating as well as the principal researcher.

Completing this study during the pandemic was a challenge in various ways. Specifically, due to quarantine and social distance restrictions, my initial plan for recruitment and data collection had to be revised at least twice during the proposal process. I originally aimed to make connections with potential participants as I volunteered at the program site, however because the recruitment site had restrictions on the number of volunteers, recruitment took longer than expected. Additionally, I had to be introduced to parents via text message and Zoom which limited my participants to only those parents with access to the internet and technology for Zoom interviews. Moreover, for qualitative studies, in-person interviews are ideal; however, all

interviews had to be conducted via Zoom which limited the detail and personal interaction between myself and participants.

As related to the research questions, the Covid-19 pandemic not only influenced the study but likely influenced the home, work, and school lives of the participants. The importance of health and safety as well as the change to virtual learning likely changed parents' interest in enrolling their children and the potential options of child care available to families. The pandemic could have also influenced parents' perceptions on what characteristics of ECE are important to their families and how they went about deciding to enroll their children in care. Overall, it is imperative to acknowledge the vast impact that Covid-19 had on the world and to couch this study within unprecedented times. Nonetheless the study was conducted thoughtfully and has important implications for families and those supporting the ECE experiences of refugees.

Program Site

The program site for this study was located in North Carolina at Supportive Services for Refugees* (SSR) which is a nonprofit community agency that serves refugee families and aims to facilitate relationships between refugees and U.S. born families. The agency offers a help center, self-sufficiency workshops, and partners with a local community college to provide English language learning classes. While adult members receive educational services, their young children between the ages 3 and 5 years old can receive care and education in the agency preschool classroom. The site is open daily; however, the preschool classroom is open from 9am-1pm every Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday while the English language courses take place. The agency educational director and teacher in the preschool classroom is Ms. Katherine*. She has worked at the agency for eleven years and started the preschool classroom for mothers who

wanted to attend class but had young children. Seven years ago, Ms. Katherine started taking parents to the local public Pre-K admissions offices to help them enroll their children in Pre-K. She noted that many parents did not know what documents they needed nor had access to transportation to get to the Pre-K offices. She started a relationship with the local public Pre-K offices and their enrollment staff now comes to the SSR three times every spring to help families fill out paperwork and conduct children's developmental assessments. The names Supportive Services for Refugees as well as Ms. Katherine are pseudonyms.

Recruitment Procedures

To recruit participants, I began by making connections at Supportive Services for Refugees (SSR) in the fall of 2019. I volunteered every other Monday at the program site in the preschool classroom between September 2019 and February 2020 and stopped in March when the country began quarantine due to the Covid-19 pandemic. To continue a connection to the center, given the shift to virtual learning and social distancing, in July 2020, I began volunteering weekly to help pass out food and educational kits to refugee families. During that time, I was able to see families and greet them with Ms. Katherine. I helped Ms. Katherine specifically, in order to become more familiar with families with young children that stopped by so that they could begin to recognize that I worked with the center. To increase my presence and connection with parents of younger children, I began attending Zoom meetings that Ms. Katherine scheduled for the preschool aged children. During those Zoom calls, she would sing songs, read stories, and play a few games. After I received IRB approval from my university board, I officially started recruiting parents. After a Zoom meeting in October of 2020, Katherine introduced me to potential mothers and allowed me time to talk to families about my project and their potential interest in participating. Katherine had connection and knew majority mothers, as mothers were

often the parents that attended English classes and thus dropped off and picked up their children from her classroom. Therefore, although not initially intentional, during recruitment I spoke to only mothers and thus this study only includes the perspective of mothers.

Once Katherine helped me identify mothers who were interested and could speak English without the help of an interpreter, she shared their contact information with me. I then reached out to each mother via text message and invited them to a one-on-one informational Zoom meeting session about my dissertation. In the text message I sent to mothers, they received information about the purpose of the project, details about the procedures and their role, as well as their time commitment. Once mothers agreed to participate, I worked with them to set up a time to meet via Zoom call. I aimed for interviews via Zoom because I wanted to ensure that families felt comfortable and safe, health wise when speaking to me about their histories, perceptions, and experiences. I continued to join the agency Zoom calls and helped with the food drive throughout the duration of my study so I could stay connected to the program and the families that participated.

Sampling Criteria and Study Participants

I used purposive sampling to recruit a small group of refugee mothers with young children between the ages of 3-5. IPA samples are usually fairly homogeneous and purposively selected as defined groups (e.g., refugee who recently enrolled in ECE) with shared experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). For this study, mothers had to be proficient in English so that we could speak freely without interpreters. Additionally, mothers had to have at least one child between the ages of 3-5 years old and who were preferably started ECE in the fall of 2020, this includes center-based care, Head Start, or NC Pre-K. Lastly, families had to have internet and computer access, so that they can participate in interviews via Zoom.

I successfully recruited four refugee families with at least one child between the ages of 3 and 5 years old. Given that I had to rely on purposive yet convenience sampling, it was not intentional, but all 4 families were from South Asian countries, including one from Pakistan, two from Afghanistan, and one from Nepal and Bhutan. The sociodemographic characteristics of the four mothers and their families are described in more detail in the findings chapter.

Given the uncertainty of my sampling and recruitment method during the Covid-19 crisis, I was flexible in the type of child care families were providing for their child at that time. In the event that mothers would be postponing their child's entrance and enrollment into ECE programs, I was open to have a mixture of mothers of children that were not yet enrolled, currently enrolled, or had already completed a year in a center-based ECE setting at the beginning of data collection. Although the families were at different stages of the ECE process all their experiences and perceptions were valuable. To account for the different levels of experience with ECE, I noted family histories with the ECE system here in the U.S.

Data Collection Procedures

Once I recruited mothers, at our first Zoom session, I reiterated the purpose of the research, the expectations and their role, the study timeline, as well as their incentive. All mothers were informed that participation was voluntary, and refusal would not involve any repercussions and that that all their information would remain confidential.

I conducted semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, as those are the most used and flexible method in IPA research. To prevent computer fatigue and ensure that both parties during the interviews were understanding each other, I separated my interview questions into two interviews per mother and met more than once on Zoom.

The flow of the interviews is important and can shape what is captured. I used the funneling technique which includes starting with open expansive questions and then moving to more specific questions. This technique fosters rapport and increases comfort between researchers and participants (Alase, 2017; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The interviews first focused on their background and early educational histories. During the initial interview, I wanted to get to know the parents and I first asked demographic and background questions and we then spoke about their time in their countries of origin, as well as their own early child care experiences. This was done so that their story could be told chronologically and that they would first talk about their time before resettling in the United States. During the second interview the questions focused on parents' overall perceptions of ECE and then specific ECE preferences. I also used this time to clarify and get further detail on comments they mentioned in their first interviews. I aimed to come with a degree of open mindedness and suspend my preconceptions and notions in order to not impact the claims of the participants (Alase, 2017).

Data was collected at the end of October through early December 2020. Each interview lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. In February, I conducted follow up and member checking sessions with all four parents. Member check sessions included final clarifications, summarizing statements, and I provided an opportunity for the four participants to provide a pseudonym of their choosing, if they wished. Throughout the study, I spoke with all mothers for an average of 55 minutes. All interviews were audio and video recorded via Zoom. However, I did inform the mothers that while the Zoom would video record them, all the videos would be immediately deleted and not used for analysis. In IPA, it is necessary to audio record interviews and transcribe them verbatim as the voices can only be central to the analysis if all their words and sounds are collected. Thus, to transcribe the interviews, I used Zoom and then went through each document

and ensure that all words, utterances, and sounds were included. While I did not use the video recording in my analysis, I did include additional notes throughout the transcript to provide context and included non-verbal communication and a visualization of the parents during the interview. Because IPA is a participant-oriented approach, to protect and secure their voices, all the data collected (audio files, notes, and transcripts) were stored in a folder on the password protected UNCG Box platform.

Data Analysis

Overall, IPA begins with focusing on one individual participant (case) and listening to an interview a few times, then completing a close line-by-line analysis and coding of the transcript. At this initial stage, I made notes and reflections about the claims and understandings of each participant. This was completed within the margins of the transcript in the Atlas.ti platform to stay as close to the data as possible (Smith et al., 1999). Next, I identified emerging patterns or themes for each mother (Larkin & Thompson, 2011). I then clustered their themes and find connections within the first mother and then moved on to complete this same process for the remainder of the mothers (Larkin & Thompson, 2011; Smith et al., 1999).

I then created documents with all the master themes and began the interpretive process of searching for patterns, connections, and tensions within and between each family. Next, I created a table to capture the demographics and relationships between the main findings and families (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith et al., 1999). I engaged in several rounds of interpretation from general to highly detailed and theoretical (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Lastly, throughout the analysis process I reflected on my own perceptions and conceptions which were captured in my dissertation journal (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

To ensure quality of my interpretive analysis, I aimed to follow the four principles created by Yardley (2000): sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. Sensitive to context refers to thoughtfulness of the sociocultural context of the study and to the participants (Shinebourne, 2011). To ensure I was being sensitive to the context, I extracted numerous quotes verbatim so that the mothers' voices were central thus making my interpretations grounded in the data. Commitment and rigor is demonstrated by close engagement and immersion in the data. After each interaction with the mothers, I devoted time to review the interviews and had follow up questions and conversations with parents. Transparency and coherence refer to clarity in the research process, which I guarantee by providing specific and explicit details about the research process, from deciding on a sample, to the data collection process and the stages of analysis (Yardley, 2000; Shinebourne, 2011). Lastly, impact and importance, which refers to the transferability and utility of findings either theoretically and/or practically which will be accomplished by completing and sharing the findings of this study with scholars and professionals in the field of early care and education.

In addition to the four dimensions that assess quality, I worked with another graduate student to analyze the data. The graduate student coded all the interviews and we engaged in multiple debriefing meetings about the interviews. Being that the graduate student was a recently former early care and education teacher, their insight was valuable and provided me with a teacher perspective on characteristics and features of ECE. This collaborative work aided in establishing consistency and allowed for additional reflections on my part as the principal investigator.

Positionality and Reflexivity

Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated

> we cannot sperate ourselves from what we know. The investigator and the object of investigation are linked such that who we are and how we understand the world is a central part of how we understand ourselves, others, and the world.

I strive to think and conduct work within an interpretivist framework, which provides me with the understanding that who we are and how we conduct research is based on our positions, interactions with others, and our surroundings. This quote demonstrates to me that the experiences that I have had are weaved with the reality in how I interpret this work, why I ask the questions I do, and how I progress through a study.

The demographics of the United States show that although the presidential administration during the current study drastically cut the number of refugees and immigrants entering the country, those populations are still large and ever-growing. In early care and education programs and institutions, my experience has been that the perspectives of White U.S. born families are central when defining and describing ECE experiences. While I have been trained and educated in what I deem as high-quality teacher prep and child development programs, often literature and policy on ECE experiences have not focused on the needs of ethnically diverse families nor do they center the lives of particularly immigrants and refugees. Thus, as an emerging Black scholar, it is important for me to be thoughtful and amplify the experiences of accessing ECE for fellow families of color. Culturally as a Black woman, I know that it can be hard for U.S. born families of color to access to services and be ready for school that is often grounded in a White dominant worldview; so, through personal and professional experiences I know that it is likely even more daunting for those that are foreign-born. I believe I need to continue to learn how families of color and those of foreign backgrounds manage to navigate ECE systems and

highlight their experiences. Immigrant and refugee children make up a large percent of the population and I believe when you amplify the voices of some marginalized populations, then all populations can and will be uplifted.

However, while I want to research the experiences of refugee families, I must recognize my privilege as a U.S. born citizen, a former early education teacher, and a highly educated researcher who can research these experiences. I recognize that I do not understand the specific perspectives of the parents I interview or have a true idea of the struggles they have and will continue to face. While I am educated on the importance of ECE from the perspective of the United States, I aimed to remain open and work to center their perceptions without trying to fit their thoughts and experiences into my lens. Nevertheless, given my position as an emerging scholar in the field of human development and family studies, I have been taught to be reflexive and reflective in my thoughts and actions. I kept a dissertation journal throughout the study to record how my thoughts and position as a researcher affected my interactions and interpretations of the families. I also reflected on my own perceptions and cultural understanding of ECE and understand that my perspective of ECE may not be what families from other countries view as a priority for their children. I know that my position and previous experiences affect my study, however I aimed to be critically reflexive and conscience throughout this research process.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

To provide a culturally comprehensive picture of mothers' early care and education perceptions and preferences, their histories and experiences must be acknowledged and addressed, as sociocultural context shapes values and beliefs. Therefore, given that this study is informed by community cultural wealth and the child care accommodations model, families' experiences, views, and their understandings of ECE were captured to learn about how their perceptions and preferences influence the child care decision-making process. The findings below first introduce the participants, providing background information about their early child care experiences from their perspectives, including the norms around caregiving and early education in their home countries and their current ECE experiences in the U.S. The results are then organized and discussed in relation the two main constructs of the research study.

Parents' Early Care and Education Experiences

Nabeeha

Nabeeha is a 26-year-old mother from Afghanistan. She is married and has two children, a 4-year-old son born in Afghanistan and a 2-year-old son born in the United States. She is currently a stay-at-home mom and her husband works as a mechanic. Their family speaks Dari at home and they have been living in the United States for 3 years, since January 2018. Nabeeha has a high school diploma and attends a local community college where she currently takes English classes online. Her older son attends North Carolina Pre-K and her younger son stays at home with her.

Early Educational Experiences in Country of Origin. Nabeeha spoke about the norms of care for children before starting school and shared that in Afghanistan, children start to go to school at "*seven years old. but someone grow a little bit faster and parents know they are a little bit smart, [so] they [may] go [at] six years old. So yeah, six and seven.*" However, before children start public school, she mentioned that most young children stay at home with their mothers and that "*the kids don't go to a child care or daycare somewhere else, they have mom to take care of them.*" She stated that this was because child care "*cost more money, not public*" and that many families could not afford care and only those that were "*rich can go*" and because "*in Afghanistan, woman, most of them doesn't work*". However, if young children between the ages of four and five did go somewhere for educational purposes before starting school, they would sometimes be able to go to a local mosque for about an "*an hour or 30 minutes*" a day, where they would "*have to learn Quran."* Nabeeha continued and remarked that *"when the student go to mosque before school, then they [will] be ready to go to school because they already know alphabet. They know how to pronounce; they know how to write*", thus showing that she saw the value in early educational opportunities before starting formal school.

ECE Arrangements and Pre-K Application Process. Nabeeha's family had experience with familial care, center-based care at SSR, and NC Pre-K. When Nabeeha moved to the United States, she would sometimes take her children to Supportive Services for Refugees (SSR) where her older son would go to the preschool classroom and her infant son would stay with her in class. Nabeeha and her older son were able to get exposure to a center-based child care experience at SSR, where her son would attend twice a week while she took English classes. Once her son became of age for Pre-K, she shared that "*Ms. Katherine really helped me. Because when I went to SSR, Ms. Katherine know maybe after one years, [my son] would be 4 years old,*

she told me how to, how was this process [of enrolling in Pre-K]." When asked about the enrollment process, she mentioned that she did not have to do anything and that she had help from Ms. Katherine, as well as Janice, a friend from SSR who was connected to support her and her family. She stated:

> If I told you the truth, I didn't do anything. Just Janice take care of the paperwork and gave it to Ms. Katherine and do everything for me. I don't know. Maybe it's because of COVID, it makes it a little bit easy. I didn't do anything just Ms. Katherine and Janice has helped me to do every[thing].

ECE allowed her husband to work but also gave her the opportunity to attend classes and further her own goals. Once her son was enrolled in Pre-K, Nabeeha also hoped to go to school as well saying,

> my husband think because I want more, I really try hard to learn. And he said, 'when I came in [from] work six to nine[pm], I will take care of the kids. You can go see [community college] and go learn English.

So, her husband helped with child care so that she could attend "*[community college] in the nighttime*". It was clear that Nabeeha and her husband mutually cared for their young children at home, however they have had multiple ECE experiences.

Sanal

Sanal is a 27-year-old mother with a 3-year-old daughter. She and her husband are from Nepal, originally Bhutan and her husband's parents live with them. Sanal received her high school diploma in Nepal and has completed some community college courses in the United States. She currently works in a restaurant and her husband works at a store factory. She has lived in the United States for six years and her husband eleven years. She lived in Oklahoma for 6 months and then came to North Carolina. They speak Nepali at home and her daughter stays at home with Sanal's in-laws.

Early Educational Experiences in Country of Origin. Sanal spoke about schooling in Nepal quite often and noted many of the differences in early care experiences for young children. She shared that "*the education is little bit backward in Nepal, here like everything is free. So all of the children, they can learn, but there in our country, there are some children who don't, don't even go to school*." When asked about her experience, she described the different types of school in Nepal. She explained that "*governmental school is like, it's almost like free. You only have to pay like certain amount"* and then there was *"boarding school, it's, it's expensive, you have to pay everything by yourself*." She shared that ECE options in Nepal were different than in the United States. Sanal specifically explained that,

> in Nepal, it's like children, they never get chance for child care because I started going to school when I was two, three years old. So there… when you start to speak when you start to do things for yourself, the parents they just send kids to school. So there, they don't have to wait until five years.

And while some families could send their children to ECE it seemed as though the cost influenced parents' choice between government 'public' schools and private with Sanal sharing that "*very [few] parents send their children to child care and normally people send to the [government] schools because schools are a little bit cheaper than the child care*."

In terms of overall childhood experiences, Sanal spoke about how different her experience as a child was compared to her daughter. She described her life as a child:

> Like in in our country like parents they are so busy. They don't have time for the kids, but here like even though we are busy, we take out some time for the kids…I had a brother and a sister, I was the elder child, and I had to take care of my brother and sister. I had to cook, I had to, I used to be busy whole day.

Additionally, when talking about her early school experiences she said, "*I used to have a lot of homework. No playing at school."* Sanal described her daughter's early care and

educational experiences in a completely different light exclaiming "*here with my daughter she like, like playing all day. Its, its good here. I like it here*."

ECE Arrangements and Pre-K Application Process. As a family they have limited ECE experiences, with Sanal stating that her daughter stays at home with relatives and that her "*in laws, they are here. So they take care of her when I go to work and when I'm at home she will be with me*." When her daughter is at home with her grandparents, Sanal described the activities that they do at home. She shared: "*She plays on the garden and then she had cousin to play with…and most of the time she plays with her grandmother. Yes, she loves to spend time with her grandmother."* However, she and her daughter have been exposed to center-based ECE, with Sanal explaining that "*she used to go to [SSR] center and she learn like lots of things from there*, and that her daughter "*enjoy going over there, like every time, she used to go there every Wednesday and then she used to be so excited. She could play over there and she could see her friends.*" Her daughter went once a week for a few months while Sanal's husband went to SSR for services and classes. While Sanal may not have much experience in center-based care arrangements, she seemed happy about the time spent at SSR stating,

> they did it very nicely like everything is good over there. Like teachers are very nice they treat student very nicely. And then they also do like some outings. Like, I went to a theater, theater with my daughter, and it was good. I enjoyed, all the parents, they were so nice.

At the initial interview, when asked about what she knew of the Pre-K application process, she shared:

> I don't know what's needed to enroll in the school. So, if anything if I could get any help, that would be better. That would be good. I don't know any idea like, I haven't been to school in here. I went to college, but I don't know anything about the schooling here.

When asked if she had been in contact with Ms. Katherine like the other parents who went to SSR, she said*: I think [Ms. Katherine] will [help] because some of my friends' kids, they*

get help from there. So I think she will. Now my daughter, she's only three. So maybe when time comes, Miss Katherine will help." At a quick conversation about two months later, Sanal mentioned that they were starting the NC Pre-K application process and receiving help from Ms. Katherine with filling out the paperwork and providing the correct documents.

Sadia

Sadia is a 28-year-old mother who was born in Pakistan and now lives in North Carolina with her husband and two children. Her son is 4 years old and was born in Sri Lanka, while her 7-month-old daughter was born in the United States. She received her master's in history in Pakistan. She and her husband fled to Sri Lanka as asylum seekers and lived there for four years before becoming refugees and resettling in the United States 1.5 years ago in May of 2019. Sadia is currently a stay-at-home mom and her husband works in agriculture (farming). They are Muslim and speak Urdu at home. Her son attends virtual NC Pre-K due to COVID-19 and her infant daughter stays at home with her.

Early Educational Experiences in Country of Origin. Sadia described that the concept of early care and education was quite different for young children in Pakistan and shared that:

> they have a different concept of education. They are not like in America, in [my] country…I think 40 to 50% people they not send their kids in school because they are not afford…They cannot send their kids to school. We can send him like a for labor. Like eight- or seven year-old-kid… they are doing some work.

However, the remaining young children who did attend some form of early care and education either attended private and government level (public) school sectors. According to Sadia, when describing the private sector, she noted, "*they have a good school and good educational high quality education,"* while the government public schools *"provide that is not so satisfied, it's just if you say umm poor quality*." In the private sector, children start school "*when they are three-and four-year-olds*" but in the public sector, children "*starting at six*". When she

was a child, Sadia stated "*when I am so so young, in my like kindergarten or primary I just play in public schools. But after that, I joined, different I study in both*." When asked about what children did and who cared for them before attending school, Sadia explained that "b*ecause most of the women, I think 90% are housewife, so generally they spend their time with their moms and just fun, no other extra activities*."

ECE Arrangement and Pre-K Application Process. When asked about her initial thoughts on ECE in the United States, Sadia mentioned, "*I not experience child care center because when we come I just stay home because I am pregnant. So, I have no idea about child care and this, but I [now] have an idea like my son start school this year."* Sadia only noted experience with familial care, however at the time of the interview her son had been in public Pre-K virtually for 3 months. She really liked virtual learning for her son stating: "*he start Pre-K, but he starting Zoom, like remote. It's very, very nice*". Thus, her current ECE arrangement consisted of caring for both her children at home while her son attended daily two-hour Pre-K class sessions in the morning via Zoom. When asked about the Pre-K application and enrollment process, Sadia spoke about the ease of the process and how helpful SSR was in helping her complete the paperwork. She learned about Pre-K from a neighbor who also had a child the same age as her son. Sadia shared her experience of how her son had to first complete the Pre-K entry developmental assessment and provide all needed documentation. With the help of Ms. Katherine, they were about to successfully apply and enroll, with Sadia explaining:

> [My neighbor] telled me that we have to apply for test or like a discussion type. So you would go to [local school system] office and apply online like… So I do this and they send me an interview, like in February. So when we go then that time my son fail but in March, we go to SSR… and we go to the center where Katherine works and they help us… It's very nice and very pleasant… they are all helpful, so it's very good experience.

Manali

Manali, who was born in Afghanistan, is a 24-year-old mother of two children, one 5-year-old daughter and a 4-year-old son, both born in Afghanistan. She is married and her husband works at a retail and home store. She is currently a stay-at-home mom and is now going to school to be a medical technician. She has a high school diploma and went to college for two years in Afghanistan before having to migrate to the United States. She and her family have been living in the United States for 3 years and speak Persian, either Farsi or Dari. Her daughter attends kindergarten and her son stays at home with her.

Early Educational Experiences in Country of Origin. Manali explained that in terms of early care and education options in Afghanistan they "*don't have preschool and kindergarten public in Afghanistan*" but that there were "*private*" ECE opportunities. However, ECE was "*not for poor family*" and only for those families that had "*good condition and life*" and who "*should pay*" could go to preschool and kindergarten. In Afghanistan, most children started public school at age 6 or 7. Before going to public school, Manali stayed with her parents, however her mother paid for her to go to something she called "*afterschool care*". She talked about how her mother paid for one year of private school, somewhat like tutoring and that "*it was like umm school, like school learning*" and that they learned "*math and Dari.*" She spoke about how it helped her and her siblings get ready for school. She commented that for "*some of, their children they starts from [public] school and it's little bit hard for them…but we start before school like one year before school, like here is kindergarten*."

When comparing the ECE experiences between Afghanistan and here in the United States, Manali commented on the benefits that her daughter has over her own experiences. She remarked that she learned the classroom sizes in terms of the number of students were completely different in Afghanistan from her sister where sometimes "*in one class is 40 kids, 30*

or 40 kids! Yes, one teacher, one teacher!" She also shared that teachers in Afghanistan sometimes hit the children and do not have the best behavior with children and explained that it overwhelmed her and she would *"sometimes get headaches*" just hearing about school in Afghanistan. She was quite thankful and stated that her daughter's teachers have "*good behavior*" with children and that her daughter loved going to school. Manali wished she were born here, exclaiming, "*I wish I… you know, sometimes I told my husband. I wish I born in here. Yeah, because here is good opportunity."*

ECE Arrangements and Pre-K Application Process. Manali had experience with familial care, center-based care at SSR, NC Pre-K, and now kindergarten. Before her daughter started Pre-K, she attended SSR for a few months and noted, "*they are awesome, so awesome. I love them. Yeah, because they're good principal and all the teachers, they are very good. They take care kids. I love them*." When both Manali and her husband worked, they would switch shifts for caregiving so while she went to work during the day, her children would stay with her husband and then in the afternoon he would go to work while she cared for the children in the evening. She described their situation when her daughter was in Pre-K and said:

> before Covid I was working. I have a job on there at the [retail store], in the morning... In the night, I ready my daughter's clothes and everything and my husband in the morning I went to my job and my husband, take care [of]my daughter and she went to the school, when she came back I was at home and I cooking for her and everything was okay.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, her daughter attended kindergarten in person, while Manali stayed home with her 4-year-old son. She tried to get him enrolled in NC Pre-K but because his birthday was after the age cut off, she was upset that he could not start attending school. She commented that:

> the [local school system office], they said he's not okay for preschool this year, because in the September was his birthday… and now he's at home. He doesn't have to go

> anywhere. You know, school, like a library, nothing, he stayed just [at home] it's hard for him.

When asked about the support she received during the Pre-K application and enrollment process for her daughter, Manali exclaimed:

> Nooo, we don't have any support in here. Yeah, just my husband, he asked, like from his job, some people, some his friend, they had a preschool daughter and then they said, 'Go to [local school system office]' and one time I asked from Supportive Services for Refugees, Grant center and they say, 'you should go [local school system office] or we can apply for you.' And then my husband went to [local school system office] and nobody help us. Everything I did by myself. My husband just apply and everything I did… everything I did.

She shared about the difficulties of enrolling her daughter but demonstrated her determination despite not having support. She communicated her frustrations stating:

> Yeah. It was hard, real hard, because you know it was far from my house. It was far and my house was too long and I was driving like not too long. I'm driving and I got my [driver's license] before three months or two months ago and I was scary about my kids. Yeah, nobody helped us, nobody, it was horrible.

In summary, it was evident that mothers' early educational experiences in their countries of origin were different from what their children were experiencing here in the United States. Additionally, their community context and connection to Supportive Services for Refugees and Ms. Katherine influenced their ECE experiences and utilization of Pre-K. Their experiences in their countries as well as the ECE experiences Ms. Katherine helped them cultivate likely influenced their perceptions of care and what mothers preferred in the ideal ECE setting for their children.

Parent ECE Perceptions and Preferences

First, I will discuss parents' perceptions, which include their thoughts on familial versus non-familial care arrangements, and their perceptions on the importance, benefits, and concerns related to ECE. Secondly, parents' ECE preferences will be discussed which include the

characteristics they deem important for the ECE settings in which their children currently or eventually will attend.

Familial vs Center-based Care: "I always think, who will watch [and] take care of my kids?"

The purpose of this study was to understand parent perceptions and preferences related to ECE, however, to understand parent perceptions of ECE, we must first understand how parents feel about the differences between ECE and familial care. As a reminder, in this study ECE is defined as "settings in which children are cared for and taught by people other than their parents or primary caregivers with whom they live. These include center-based care arrangements (e.g., child care centers, preschools, and prekindergartens)" (Morrissey, 2019). Therefore, how parents perceive ECE can greatly depend on their perceptions around caregiving and their preference for familial care. As stated in the introductions of parents, all families had been exposed to and used some type of center-based ECE arrangement. The comments they shared, documented below, show that their caregiving beliefs, their desire to have their young children with them as well as their children's ages impacted their perceptions and preferences on how their children should be cared for and by whom.

During the interviews, parents spoke about all their children as well as talked about the care of their preschool aged children when they were younger. It should be noted that the age of the parents' children ranged from 7 months old to 5 years of age. Sadia and Nabeeha both had one child in the preschool age range (3-5) and one child in the infant/toddler age range (0-2), Manali had 2 preschool aged children, and Sanal had one preschool aged child. In terms of the age of their children going to care, the parents' comments suggested that they perceived that their children, even at preschool age, were too young to be enrolled in an ECE arrangement and away from their parents. The age of going to ECE here in the US was a bit overwhelming for Nabeeha,

with her declaring that the first thing she thinks about when "*kids go to child care, [is that] they are not big enough to learn something because they are small*." When her son first started to attend, she stated:

> it's really hard for me and for my son because he is four years. The first day, he go to school I crying a lot…I talked with my mother and I say, 'my baby is scared by himself going to school, he by himself,' it is really very scary… she said 'its ok he can go. He can do it, he will learn'. But it is really hard [for me].

She noted that in Afghanistan children did not start to go to school until they were six or seven years old and she liked that children went when they were older saying, "*it's a little bit easy for mom and for kids*." She saw her four-year-old son as too young to be away from her all day going to Pre-K, laughing while reiterating *"[It's] a little bit hard because they are baby going to school."* Sadia also mentioned that the age of her son made her want him to stay with her. She noted that her son was "*a young boy*" and that because "*he is like a five-year-old now*" she wanted her son to "*just stay with [them]*."

Manali also voiced her thoughts that young children were better off at home. For example, when asked if she would have wanted her children in ECE when they were toddlers, she stated that she wanted them "*at home*" because she "*breastfed him [for] two years*." She remarked that even after her son was older, she wanted them to "*stay at home because they was too young, they baby*." However, Sanal the only mother who went to school starting at three years old, seemed to have a different reason for not wanting her daughter to attend ECE at such a young age and clearly demonstrated that her educational experiences impacted her preference for keeping her daughter at home. She explained: *"I want [my daughter] to enjoy her childhood. Like, I don't want her childhood to be burden as I had mine like no, like, no, lots of homework. No more loads so I want her to enjoy her childhood."* These comments showed that age was a factor in parents' preference for keeping their children at home and in the care of family.

In terms of familial care, Sanal shared multiple benefits of family caring for her daughter. Sanal's parents-in-law cared for her daughter and when talking about the care they provided, she stated, "*Oh yeah, they are more than parents to her. They take good care of her, and they love her more than me. So I'm happy to keep my child with them."* When asked about who is best equipped to care for her daughter Sanal shared:

> Yeah, grandparents they are more… They have grown up their own child, I think they are more experience with kids and they knows a lot because she is my first kid and I don't know much much more about child care, but they teach me a lot like they they teach me to do this, not to do that. So like what is good for kids, like what kind of food, what kind of environment. Yeah, sometimes I might lose my temper, but they they teach me like not to like to be very gentle kids.

Sanal clearly appreciated her in-laws experience and believed that they knew what as was best in terms of her daughter.

When asked about child care for her infant 7-month-old daughter, Sadia stated she would want her daughter at home until Pre-K "*because I'm not working woman. I stay at home. It's okay for me, it's like good to stay with me."* Clearly from this statement, at least for her young daughter she saw the benefit in parental care. She continued declaring:

> I think, I think being a mom, I like it. I cannot believe anyone… I think…I just watched some videos or like this or I have some different image in child care because, sometimes they cannot give attention to kids. How like the attention they need…I am not a working woman so it's my responsibility to take my kids. But its good thing for those ladies who are working womens or who are single parents.

This statement seemed to suggest that Sadia saw caregiving as her responsibility and that ECE would not provide the type of individual and loving attention that her children could only get from her as a mother. When asked about what she thinks of ECE Sadia indicated:

> It's not easy for me. It is helpful for a working woman. It's a good thing for those ladies who are working ladies, but because I am like housewife. So I am not like... like it. Yeah, but it's helpful.

Here it seemed as though she was expressing that it would not be easy for her to allow her children to go to child care and she would not like to use that for her children before Pre-K, but that she could see the benefit for other parents. However, Manali shared that she "*really like [child care] but also it is so hard [to be away from them and that] it is nice to be with them when I'm at home*." She did not seem to strongly believe in primarily familial care like Sadia and Sanal but that having her son at home with her was enjoyable.

Even though parents may have seemed to prefer familial care and liked having their children at home with them, they still noted the importance of center-based ECE experiences for their children. When asked about the best setting for her daughter, Sanal preferred at home familial care, however she would not be opposed to some exposure in a center-based ECE for her daughter. She stated: "*Ummm I think home is better, but by the meantime if I could send her a few hours at school. That would be also better because this is the age is for her to learn new things.''* Manali too believed that children could and should have both familial and some ECE experiences stating that children, *"need teacher and parent, [because] they learn things at school that are different and they learn some things only at home*." As the only mother with a child already in kindergarten and multiple years of ECE experience, she seemed to believe that neither home- nor center-based care was better but that "*we have to have both, [because] that is best for children, they need school and home together*." She continued, driving home the point that "*[teachers]cannot do it alone. Teacher cannot teach everything because sometimes mom teach things and mom can not teach everything*." So, although all four mothers shared different perceptions on caregiving and familial versus center ECE arrangements, it was evident they all had strong opinions and views on the purpose and best features of ECE arrangements.

Parent Perceptions of ECE: "I think it's really important for kids to [go to] preschool"

While mothers did acknowledge that they liked and at times preferred familial care for their children, they all noted the importance of ECE in the lives of their children. While the ECE experiences and arrangements differed between each family, the mothers shared a) their views on the importance of ECE b) the benefits of ECE for children and parents, and c) their concerns and worries related to ECE.

Importance of ECE: "Important for my son to learn very early"

When asked about the purpose of Pre-K, Sadia mentioned its importance for her son's future and that it was good for him to start learning the rules and things that would make him feel comfortable and successful in school as early as possible. She stated:

> I think because we come here [to the United States] and we need to like, we spend our whole life and future here. So it's very important to my son to learn very early what is the rules and regulations are, like, you know, basic things when he go to school that it's very comfortable. He feels very comfortable if he knows early.

She continued on explaining that ECE was important for her son's future, declaring:

> So that's the reason is because I want my, if we are not a successful person, we are like a common human person. I need my son, like a bank man, a banker or maybe a doctor, like I have many dreams for my son.

This statement showed that Sadia acknowledged dreams for her son and connected this to his learning of basic skills while in child care and that to reach her dreams for him, ECE participation would be the first step to a career Sadia hoped for her son.

In regard to the importance of ECE for immigrant and refugee parents specifically, both Nabeeha and Manali mentioned that it was important for their children to enroll in ECE because it could further their entire families' goals. Nabeeha shared that she would tell other friends and parents about the importance of ECE. She said:

> I [would] tell for the parents, especially for the immigrant, when they came here, they NEED to have a time instead of take care of our kids, they have to go and learn something else. Maybe they can work, maybe they can have a job. Somebody else, you have somebody else to take care of your kids. You can do anything, something else.

It was evident that to Nabeeha, one purpose of ECE was to help parents have time to further their goals, especially those coming from different countries. Manali, too specifically said that enrollment in ECE was essential for children from different countries, stating that Pre-K is "*really need for kids and [especially if] they are refugee, they are from other country."* Manali remarked that "*Pre-K is really, really need for kids*" and described that she believed that when her daughter and other children attend Pre-K "*their mind grow up [and that] it's nice for them, [because] they learn everything like the basics… [and] they learn good thing*." From the comments above, obviously the mothers saw the importance and proclaimed the necessity of the service for themselves and other families. As interviews continued mothers provided more in-depth perceptions on ECE and shared the specific benefits and concerns that they associated with participation in ECE.

Benefits "*It is really benefits for him!"*

Benefits for Children. Mothers mentioned that ECE provided various benefits for their children's communication and self-help skills as well as prepared their children for kindergarten. Sanal and Manali mentioned that a potential benefit of ECE was the enjoyment their children would likely have from school. Manali simply stated that "*if they at school then they learn and play and then come home and be happy.*" Sanal deemed school as fun and easy for children compared to her experiences as a young girl and shared that she is glad that her daughter has the opportunity to go to school here. She stated: "*here like kids… they have lots of fun in school…I'm happy for them, now I'm happy for my daughter*." She continued on to discuss how she liked that her daughter would "*get [a] chance to make many friends*" while going to school. Sadia also

talked about how Pre-K would help her son learn to socialize and speak with others. Sadia noted that before he started school "*he had no friends or he [only] speak our local language. [And] before [starting school, he] cannot speak like [to] a stranger or like any person, just mom and dad, but now [he] can speak with other person*." Manali also shared that before starting Pre-K her daughter could not speak English. She described this story,

> my daughter... her speaking. Oh my goodness. When I went to the Pre-K [office]… they say, 'your daughter she cannot speak English!' But wait, after four or five months she was in the pre-K. She speak [just] like that! (Snaping her fingers)

Not only did Manali share that her daughter learned English quickly but also,

> she learned to respect to her mom and dad, family, she can eating good, she pray before the eating and when she finished, she put her plate on the sink. They [learn] from school and she learned. 'Sorry; Thank you; Excuse me'… It's nice for me, you know, because they're polite.

It was clear that her daughter learning respect and self-help skills pleased Manali and that she saw those lessons as a positive from her daughters' enrollment in Pre-K. Sadia and Nabeeha, both mentioned the benefit of ECE teaching their children's self-help skills. Particularly, Nabeeha noted was that her son become more independent and learned to be away from his mother when he started Pre-K. Nabeeha exclaimed:

> Whoa! It has a lot [of] benefits for him because I don't know, maybe [because] he was my first child, he was really shy. He doesn't want to play with another kids, the most benefits for him is he [used to] never wants to be far from me, for even one hour! He never want, when I went in SSR and I go in the English class, he will be with Miss Katherine in the child care but he is really crying 'I want my mom'. Right now he is, he is learned how to be far from mommy, how to play with another kids. Yeah. It is really benefits for him!

Preparing their children for kindergarten was also a benefit mothers noted when talking about ECE. When asked about what advice they would provide to other mothers about ECE, both Sadia and Nabeeha mentioned the importance of Pre-K as foundational for benefiting their children as they continue in school. Sadia perceived ECE has a place where both children and

parents can get ready for school. Specifically, Sadia said Pre-K, "*it's very helpful for kids. And it's, it's also helpful for parents. They are like practicing what is going in future. So most parents should send their kids to the Pre-K because this is our advantage."* She mentioned that when parents *"send their kids in Pre-K…kids learn basic things and [that] they are prepared for, go to school like properly, so it's very easy for kids."* Demonstrating that Sadia viewed Pre-K as an environment that would make the transition to formal schooling easier for children as well as their parents. Similarly, Nabeeha noted the need for ECE and expressed that when "*kids to go in the Pre-K, it is a good chance our kids, learn how to communicate with another kids, how to listen for his teacher."* These foundational social skills children learned in Pre-K seemed important to Nabeeha *"because when they miss one year, the next year, maybe they doesn't have this chance to learn. Maybe the next year, they have to learn something else*." With this comment, Nabeeha seemed to understand the importance of each level of schooling and that if children do not attend ECE, then they may get behind and not be prepared for the next level of schooling. Manali, the only mother with a child already in kindergarten reiterated the same sentiment and asserted that:

> if [children] start from kindergarten, they miss too much good things. When they [start from Pre-K it's] good, Pre-K I love. My daughter, my son, my future kids, they go to the Pre-K and they will learn good things, everything, and they will improve for and they are they getting ready for kindergarten and the school.

She noted that time before formal schooling was important and that "bo*th Pre-K and kindergarten good but I think Pre-k get her ready for school."* The mothers acknowledged that ECE experiences are foundational for their children's success and perceived many benefits for their children.

Benefits for Parents. According to these mothers, enrollment in ECE not only benefitted their children, but also provided them with time for themselves. When asked if and how ECE

benefitted them as parents, Nabeeha, Manali, and Sadia all spoke about the free time it allowed for them to take classes, further their goals, and just time to relax and rest from caring for their children. Throughout the interviews, mothers echoed the sentiment that the time they gained while their children were in an ECE setting was a good reason for parents to enroll their children. For instance, while it was hard for Nabeeha to be away from her older son and to take him to school, she had a huge motivation to learn English and she could only do that if she had time to study and take English classes. She described this by saying, "*it is really hard [and I] never want to be a part from [my son] or [for him to be] really far from me."* However, despite her hesitations about enrolling her son in Pre-K, she declared:

> But still I bring them to Pre-K to have, to find time to study my English because it is important for me too, to learn. When you live in another country you, the first thing you have to learn it is the language.

Even though she still had to care for her younger 2-year-old son at home while her older son was enrolled in Pre-K, having one child in ECE was clearly a positive and easier for Nabeeha as she mentioned:

> for me the benefit is for me because I can right now, I can find a time, FREE time to study because right now I take care of one kid. I can make him busy with the phone and the toys. No one is here to fight with him. I have time to study.

However, for Manali, who had a daughter in kindergarten and had her son at home, remarked that it was not enough that only her daughter was in school but that "*it so hard to work and focus because he want my attention so I ready for him to go to Pre-K."* She wanted her son in an ECE arrangement as soon as possible because she was starting "*school for medical technician*" and having both children in ECE would give her the ability to focus on her studies. She mentioned that when her son is "*always at home, he say, 'I'm bored and it boring'*" and said

that "*Pre-K is good for the children and the parents because I can work and do things for me while he learn and play. He [would] not be bored at school*."

Although Manali and Nabeeha noted that participation in ECE allowed them time to work and study, Sadia shared that she saw benefits of ECE for parents that stayed at home like her, stating, *"it's very helpful for the ladies, who are working ladies and also for the housewives because it gives you a little bit of relaxation."* Manali too shared this sentiment saying: *"when they at school it help me. It give me time to relax and work and do things for me. It is nice."* She seemed to need the relaxation because she exclaimed *"when I am home, they say 'mommy this and mommy that', I can't do or sit. It's go, go, go. It's hard."* Nabeeha too shared that parenting could be overwhelming and that it was hard to care for her two young sons at the same time "*[because] before my kids go [to] the Pre-K, sometimes I really crying…I am so tired when they go to sleep or take a nap, I go and take a nap and sleep with them."* However since her older son was enrolled in Pre-K, she remarked " *right now, I'm really happy [and] have time to do something else."*

Sadia, a stay-at-home mother who was not working or taking classes saw ECE as an important service that could teach her son English which could then be a great help for her family. Sadia hoped that her son could help speak for his father, as she noted: "*my husband cannot speak a single word or like English and he cannot understand. So if my son learn very quickly, he can translate for my husband also*." Overall, mothers perceived enrollment in ECE as a time saver or a time creator, as well as an environment in which they could benefit from their children's participation.

Concerns. *"So [these] little things make me worried"*

Although mothers perceived various benefits of ECE for their families, they still shared many concerns related to their children attending ECE. Specially, the treatment and comfort of their children, cultural acknowledgement from teachers, and online learning were anxieties that mothers identified during interviews.

While both Nabeeha and Manali had children already enrolled in an ECE environment, they shared that before their children enrolled, they were nervous about their children's comfort level and treatment. In terms of comfort level, Nabeeha's son had concerns about riding the bus and he would say "*'Mommy, can you drop me off there please. I want to go with you.' S*o to help his nerves and because she *'don't want him give up [on] school,"* she stated, *"I don't push him to go in the bus just I dropped him off every morning but he can came back in the bus*." While the bus riding was not a concern for Nabeeha, it was clear that her child's concerns had to be acknowledge so that he would enjoy going to ECE. This concern was also mentioned by Sadia who was nervous about her son taking the bus when he started kindergarten.

With regard to treatment of children, Nabeeha declared apprehensions about teacher behavior towards her son and that "*if the teachers be a little bit… angry at the kids, if not patient, then the kids never want to go to the child care."* Manali too had some trust issues and was nervous about enrolling her daughter in child care because of a personal experience she had at a private child care center. When asked about concerns of ECE, she narrated an upsetting story:

> I want to share one thing with you... Two years ago, I went to [work at a] private Pre-K, like, you know, Pre-K like a KinderCare um KinderCare, you know, Pre-K, kindergarten and I never tell to all people, this just I want to tell you. And that's what I was so nervous about my daughter when she went to Pre-K. At that school (KinderCare) all the teacher they hit the kids! Yes! They hit the kids when the child cry, they take from here and put it up and put them down. (Demonstrating pulling a child at the collar and picking them up.) I just work one month on there. I cry, I left there. Yes, and that's why when my daughter

> went to the Pre-K, the first day all the day I cry. I think you know; I think maybe they do something like that with my daughter.

It was clear from this experience that enrolling her daughter in ECE was a concern for Manali and showed that positive teacher treatment and behavior towards children was important for Nabeeha and Manali.

Another concern that Nabeeha and Manali, both Muslim mothers, shared once their children were enrolled was the lack of acknowledgment for their Halal food preferences, which included no meat, by their children's teachers. Nabeeha mentioned that she hoped the teachers *"don't allow him to eat meat or something" a*nd that she *"want[ed] them to give him real lunch, just no meat*." However, she did not seem confident that the teachers provided her son with "*the gift [of] perfect lunch*". She believed that the teachers were not adhering to the food needs of her son and seemed unsure that they were following what she asked them to do. She stated: "*I told for his teacher about my religion. I hope they do it for him."* Nabeeha further proved her point that the teachers were not acknowledging her request for certain foods when she mentioned that her son would sometimes say, "*'Mommy, I can't get this one because all the time they gave me a snack, they don't give me real lunch."* Manali described a similar experience when her daughter was in Pre-K and that the food needs for her daughter were not being meet and thus, she had to make sure her daughter brought her own food to school each day. She explained that:

> Mm Pre-K, was okay. It was okay but I have just problem with food. Because my daughter she doesn't eat food that is school food. Yeah, she just um last year when she was in the pre K. She doesn't drink cold milk, little bit warm. And when I call her teacher, she say we are not allowed to put on the microwave for her. Yeah, and she, in the morning until she came at the home like the first day, she doesn't eat anything. It was hard. It was hard for me, too, because you know it's like four years old. And at this school I gave her every day a breakfast, lunch and snack because she doesn't like to eat and we have a religious, you know we are Muslim.

Related to cultural concerns, Sadia, a mother from Pakistan, worried about her son's language and cultural differences. Sadia whose son is currently enrolled in virtual Pre-K, shared concerns about his language skills when he finally starts to go to school in person. She stated:

> I am just little bit confused when he go to school, maybe he cannot speak his words very clearly [and] he take time. So this is a little things make me worried but I am hopeful that within few weeks or a few months, he can learn.

Not only was she concerned about her son learning English quickly but also about how he and his peers would differ due to their culture. She mentioned worries about being in school with American children and families. She remarked:

> So we are like a different and we have our different language, different culture. So I just worried when he go to school, maybe the other kids who are like born in America. Yeah, they have American parents, they are different.

She seemed worried about how her children might be treated as she was unsure of how teachers would accommodate and treat her family as refugees. She thought that treatment was not always the same and hoped that teachers would be respectful. She commented:

> So when we told that we are a refugee some people are very kind with us, and some people are not. So I just hoping and just wishing that when [the teacher] know we are refugees, they treat us like students and not treat us like a refugee.

Given the context of school during the Covid-19 pandemic, Manali and Sadia had experience with virtual learning and shared their concerns about learning via Zoom. While Manali's daughter attended most of her Pre-K and kindergarten years of schooling in person, they did experience some virtual learning that Manali did not like. When asked about her experience she shared:

> The teacher was good but for my daughter, NO because she was, she was bored, you know, is what like from 8 or 830 to 2pm, 2 or 3. It was hard for her because I should stay with her, you know, because sometimes she doesn't know what she said, what the teacher saying sometimes it was so hard for her and sometimes she put her Ipad down and she go play.

Sadia only had experience with virtual Pre-K and she spoke about her concerns of what she thought her son was missing because of "*zoom Pre-K."* She expressed concerns for her son's future for when he would finally go in person. She shared her opposition to zoom by stating:

> if you go in person, he made friends, he learned more things like educates like how to, like he feel more independent. Now, it's like two hour Zoom class. And after that, he all done [and] depend on me, mom. So if we go to outside like he go schools, so he learned better, like how to spend a day without mom.

She continued sharing worries about her son's social skills or lack thereof before he starts kindergarten. Sadia commented:

> I just worried about my son when he go in school, [because of how] he [has] spent his time in [his first] five years. Now, when he turned five, he whole time stay at home. So it's very different for him. So I'm just worried about my son.

Parent ECE Preferences: "Parents should feel like, okay I'm satisfied sending my child to child care"

After mothers shared their overall perceptions of ECE, they then spoke about the specific characteristics and aspirations for the type of ECE environment and experience they wanted for their children. Mothers identified practical, process, and cultural features that were the most important characteristics of ECE arrangements for them. Specifically, all four mothers mentioned the importance and their preference for a) public and free ECE arrangements, b) trustworthy, caring, and culturally respectful teachers, as well as c) an educational and social environment for the ECE arrangements that they children have and will attend.

Affordability: "If I find a public or free child care"

Nabeeha, Sadia, and Manali all said that public or free child care opportunities were important and essential if their children were to be in an ECE arrangement. When Manali was asked about if she had ever looked for a center-based ECE arrangement, Manali replied:

> No I didn’t because I don't know this neighborhood now. Yeah, and I think it's, it's not public. Right?... But if I find a public or free child care, I will take him like half a day, you know, because he go on there, he learned too much. He will be busy and it's nice for him. Yeah, but for pay, I can, we cannot just expensive for us.

Additionally, Nabeeha too noted that the availability of affordable public care was an important consideration when she was looking for care. Nabeeha explained:

> I looking for a child care if it be public, not private. Because I cannot make money. Even the private child care is close to my house, but it costs a lot of money. Right now just my husband working and my income is not a lot. I cannot put him in the private child care , just I wait for public.

It was clear that Nabeeha preferred ECE to be affordable and that the cost influenced their child care engagement and showed that while it may have been close, the cost outweighed location and she had to wait for public Pre-K for her son. When asked about ECE plans for her younger son she exclaimed “*Ohh no… I have to wait for the public child care.”*

However, Sadia showed that she appreciated the public ECE options in the United States and was glad that public free care was an option for her son. She spoke about how amazing it was that her son could go to school for free and how good Americans have it as that was not the case in her home country. She shared:

> when I saw my son have a facility like they give importance to my son… my son in early years he is starting school so like without [having to pay] any money, without any money. So it's very good thing because in our country, parents should pay some money to go to school if their kids need a basic education so American people.

Given the option of having public care for her children, it seemed as though that characteristic of care was preferred by Sadia as it was clearly a “*blessing*” for her to be able to provide that for her children. As she exclaimed “*I am also American. I think... we are like now American people; we are blessed that we have more things.”*

Caring Teacher: "The teacher will be really kind for the kids"

It was clear that trust and safety were important child care feature for the mothers. Nabeeha said that she "*would put him with my friends, with anyone. I just, I have to trust them,[and make sure] that know him. What kind of people [are they]?"* She continued stating that she would *"put them in the child care"* and *"would work if someone take care of my kids, [if] they are good person*" therefore revealing that trustworthiness was an feature that she prioritized. Given that Nabeeha did not work, she had not found a non-parental ECE arrangement for her younger son, thus no one had met her required characteristic yet. When asked to elaborate about the importance of trust Nabeeha stated,

> Especially for the kids. Do you know what I never trust no one to [keep] our kids because kids, this is really, really, really important and sometimes I say my kids is more important for me than my mom and my father, everything, my life, than my husband… I can't trust easily for someone to take care of my kids.

Not only was trusting the caregiver important but mothers also noted kindness and the caring nature of the caregiver and the environment that caregivers created for children as an important feature. Sanal, who had limited experiences in a center-based child care arrangement shared her thoughts on what she thought ECE would and should be like. When asked to think about ECE and what it means to her, Sanal described it as a place where children and parents would be happy to attend. She stated:

> To me child care is [a place where] child would be happy like whenever [parents] say like okay let's go over there, they would be excited instead of like,' Oh no, I don't want to go over' there. Like child should have fun and then they should also learn something over there. And parents, parents should feel like, okay I'm satisfied sending my child to child care, like [the] teachers would be nice to the children.

This statement confirmed that Sanal would want an environment where she could trust sending her daughter daily and where her daughter would feel comfortable as well. She went on to state, "*I just think yeah like children, this would be like, 'Oh, Mom, I want to go over there'*

like this would be very happy and the teachers to be really nice." The importance of teacher kindness and caring nature was echoed with the other mothers who already had children enrolled in ECE.

When asked about the perfect ECE situation for her children, Nabeeha noted because of the young age of her children, she wanted the teachers to be kind and for the teacher to provide a motherly atmosphere for them. She said:

> the teacher will be really kind for the kids. The teacher will be patient for the kids because [for] the kids, [it is] really hard to be far from a mom. But if the teacher gave him, um feeling like a mom. That will be great because the kids [would] never gave up [on] child care.

It appears Nabeeha believed that the atmosphere the teachers created and their attitudes in the classroom shaped the comfort level of children. Related to motherly environment for children, Manali was happy that her daughter's Pre-K teacher showed compassion for her and cared for her basic needs. When talking about her daughter's teacher, Manali shared,

> She was good but my daughter loves her, and she take care [of] my daughter too long because you know my daughter when she sleeps she doesn't go to the bathroom and she wet her clothes. [The teacher] change for her, she take care soo much my daughter.

Not only did mothers want trusting and caring teachers, but patience and respect from teachers were important charcteristics mothers continully mentioned throughout the interviews.

Patience and Fairness. Mothers repeatedly brought up that good ECE included teachers that were patient and treated their children fairly. When asked to describe the best ECE situation, Nabeeha, a mother from Afghanistan, said that for her "*the teacher is the first thing to be patient and kind to the kids*." Patience and kindness towards her children seemed to be most important for when her children would be in an child care arrangement with someone other than herself. Sadia also mentioned that she liked the patience that her son's teacher had shown them both. When asked to elaborate on how the teacher demonstrated patience, Sadia provided the example:

> Like if my son, like when the other kids give answer and my son not give answers, so teacher not forcing him give the answer, like the teacher every time [I] appreciate them, like [they would say] 'you can try, you can try' like this. So, this feels so comfortable for my son and for me.

The mothers also appreciated how the teachers communicated with and showed compassion towards their children. Manali shared that her daughter's teacher *"was the best…and had good communication with kids*." She believed that the teacher's tone *"was so polite"* and she loved that the teacher "*didn't talk too loud with kids, which was great*" for Manali.

Not only did mothers identify the importance of patience, but also noted that having cooperative teachers who treated their children fairly was important in an ECE environment. When Sadia talked about her son's teachers, she liked that they were "*so polite and so cooperative*" and that it made her "*feel so happy*", indicating that teacher treatment of parents was just as important as the treatment of their children. Sadia shared that her son's two teachers were "*both very amazing teachers*" and that "*they are very cooperating"* and that she liked that the teachers not only treated her son well but also that they treated "*all kids equally and gave [them the] opportunity to speak."* Manali also shared that she wanted her son's future *"teacher to teach the children the same."* She mentioned that her son was *"active and [always] moving"* and did not want the teachers *"to fight"* with him but wanted *"them to be patience with him"* because *"he will learn [how to behave] but [that he] need to be treated nice and give time."* Manali shared that she was nervous about the treatment of her son because *"sometimes teachers treat one child like one way and another child like one way"*, whereas she shared her need for the teachers to treat all children fairly and be patient with their behaviors. Given her previous statement about how she was concerned that teachers would hit children, it was clear that she would prefer teachers that were patient and would not single her son out for being active in the classroom. She shared a sentiment stating that she needed the teachers to "*pay attention*" to her

son because "a*ll children are different and I want [the teachers] to help them like they need. They need to focus on children because they are [all] different*." It was clear that she wanted individualized attention and for children to be respected and met where they are.

Acknowledgement and Respect of Food and Language. Additionally, mothers noted that they preferred teachers and ECE arrangements that their children attended to value and acknowledge their religious food practices as well as provide support and accommodate their children's learning of the English language. As mentioned in the concerns section above, acknowledgement of their Halal food practices was a concern for both Nabeeha and Manali, who are Muslim. With continued conversations during the interview, it was evident that they preferred teachers who accepted their families' religious practices. Nabeeha shared she would like for the teachers to acknowledge their religion and the eating customs of their family. She spoke about this preference stating:

> The things I wish in Pre-K the teacher do, that the school do for him [are] about my religion. Because in my religion, [we] don't allow [the eating of] pork or any other meat without Halal because when I eat the meat, they killing the different way. Yeah, but when my kids go to Pre-K I wish they know about it.

When Manali spoke about her daughter's teachers, she *"want[ed] them to pay attention to her food."* Manali shared an example of what she wanted the teachers to do for her daughter stating:

> I make food for her every day and snack but she have a dentist appointment yesterday so I did not make her food. We eat Halal and they give her hamburger and my husband tell them [not to], they say ok but then do not pay attention and still give her meat. I do not like that. I want them to pay attention to her more. Why they do not listen?

This example clearly suggested that Manali and Nabeeha would prefer teachers and ECE arraignments to acknowledge the parents' wants for feeding their children and to respect their religious practices.

Providing language support and patience for their children as English as a second language learners was also deemed important by the mothers. Sanal, Manali, and Sadia discussed how they wanted teachers to give their children time to comprehend and learn English. When asked what the most important thing she could want child care to do for her son, Sadia replied:

> my… the basic problem is our language, so sometimes if my son cannot understand a things and he cannot participate in the things, like activities, the [teacher] should give, give him some time or like, treat him politely, so he can do it very good.

This comment suggested that having teachers that were responsive to her child's linguistic needs was a preference she would want for her son. However, it seemed as though her son's current teachers, while only virtually were meeting that need. Sadia shared that when she *"told the[teachers] that we are refugee and my son cannot speak English very well"* she was grateful that the teachers were *"cooperate and give extra attention [to him]."* Teachers seem supportive and gave Sadia some hope about her worries. She recounted a conversation that she had with her son's teacher, remarking:

> I told his teacher that we are just new here, like one year before we come here and we have no friends. Actually, we have no family or friends…So I discussed with the teacher that I, we have this problem. So she say in schools, they have many people, like many kids from different places and they learn very quickly, so she gave me a hope that they have passed when he go to school... If he cannot understand in something, so they give him time to understand.

Similarly, when asked about how she would like teachers to support her daughter when she starts school, Sanal, a Nepalese mother, described a specific preference for someone to support her daughter's English acquisition. She commented:

> our kids like they don't speak English, they don't speak English well so they might have a problem while going to school. So if there could be somebody who could like, like they don't need a translator, but who could teach them like very slowly and nicely. That would be more better, because there are many kids [that] might have problems. In the first (grade) like while to begin our school, if the kids are from Spanish family like they might not understand English and in our case, like we don't teach them English thinking that they might forget our language. So they might have some problem while going to school,

> in maybe first or second [grade]. So in that time if there would be somebody to explain them nicely, that would be better.

When speaking about her kindergartener, Manali too, reported that "*English is her second language. And sometimes the teacher say they cannot understand her because she talk too fast."* However, despite her daughter talking fast Manali wanted the teachers *"to take time for her and to focus to help her more."* She noted that her daughter, as a refugee, is *"not like other kids because she is learning English"* and that the teachers *" need to pay attention and focus on her."* Manali commented that her daughter's *"talking is ok but she no good at grammar,"* so she wanted the *"teacher to take time to help her English"* because *"that is important [and] she need to learn it."* The mothers indicated that it is important that child care be a place where teachers were sensitive to their cultures and their children are accepted even if English was not their first language.

Learning and Enjoyable Environment: "Child care is [where my] child would be happy"

Mothers' desires and aspirations for their children, both short and long term, highlighted that they wanted their preferred ECE settings to provide their children with school readiness and socialization skills. This section first highlights their preferences for educational and pre-academic activities followed by a socially supportive setting.

Educational Environment. The findings in this section while communicated as mothers' desires for what they want their children to learn, actually demonstrated the process features of care they preferred. It was clear that instructional activities and an academic curriculum were important for mothers as they all mentioned wanting their children to learn how to read and write in ECE.

Manali, a mother from Afghanistan whose daughter was currently in kindergarten, reiterated the importance of her daughter learning to read and write multiple times throughout the

interview. Manali shared that her daughter "*learned animals name, food names, letters, numbers"* and that she can *"write and she can read like simple things,"* and that whenever her daughter is home, she always has *"a book, notebook, and pen."* However, Manali also declared that she wanted her daughter *"to learn more math and really read and write."* She explained that *"reading is no good"* and that *"writing is ok"* but she *"want more learning*." In order for that to happen, Manali suggested that she needed the teachers to *"pay more attention"* to her daughter so that she could improve her reading and writing. It seemed as though Manali was really focused on her daughter getting ready for 1st grade because she mentioned *"they exercise a lot, like go P.E. and art but that is nice, but I want more math and reading, because next year is 1st grade, she has to be prepare for school next year."*

Sanal, who did not have much center-based experiences, compared her own early educational experiences and hoped that the environment in which her young daughter was placed would be much different than her experience in Nepal. She explained that: "*[in Nepal] we used to study a lot and it was not even like nothing was implemented in our life, like I want her to get practical courses like practical do everything."* Sanal really valued independence and self-help skills and hoped that when her daughter started school, she would be taught those skills. Sanal explained in detail what she wanted her daughter to learn stating:

> I want her to learn things like practical things like which she could implement in her life…The things we could be implemented on our life like to be [in]dependent, like doing her small stuff like umm... maintaining herself, like maintaining the room, making the room tidy. And the simple things like…how to fix little toys, [and] if they if they started doing that, like later on when she gets big, she might be doing her own work. Fixing her own work, fixing like little things is [a] daily life daily necessary… I want to get her developed in all of those things. But I, I know like you won't be learning everything now. But I want her to learn, little by little.

It seemed as though Sanal preferred for ECE to not only provide her daughter with preacademic skills but also incorporate practical and applied learning skills within their curriculum.

Social Environment. A social environment was discussed as important by all four mothers. Sanal spoke about wanting her daughter to be in a place where she could "*learn how to make friends and then how to treat with the friends [as well as]* get *[a] chance to enjoy with [her] friends."* Sadia also seemed to demonstrate that an important characteristic of ECE is the opportunity for socialization and making friends. When asked about what she wanted her son to learn in Pre-K, Sadia focused on his social skills saying, "*I just want that… um he is not so talkative, like [he] so shy boy, so I am just want my son [to] start more talking, more active."* Not only did Sadia see ECE as a way for her son to be active but also wanted it to be a place where "*he learn how to communicate with other kids… and social and emotional things*." Even though her son participated in virtual Pre-K, she was still happy that even through Zoom he was becoming *"more active, more social…because he had some friends."*

Manali expressed her delight in the fact that her daughter's Pre-K experience did teach her daughter "*good communication with other children*" and that it was "*fantastic*" for Manali. Manali mentioned how her daughter also developed better emotional regulation and communication skills in Pre-K because "*before she was angry from something [but] now after she go to Pre-K, she speak nice*." However, when discussing her daughter's current kindergarten arrangement she shared that she wanted the teachers to "*be more friendly*" and to "*be her friend*" as well as the other "*children to be more friendly*." She explained that her "*daughter is so friendly and happy so that would make it better for her*." This comment indicated that mothers preferred a social and friend oriented ECE setting for their children. Overall, Nabeeha nicely

summed up the care characteristics that the four mothers' thought were important for the ECE arrangement that their children attended, by stating:

> For me, perfect child care is even the toys are helpful for the kids… [and] the things I want to him to learn before his a school to start is... how to play with another kids, how to listen for his teacher. It is important things that he learn before his really school start.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Early care and education has been found to have potential benefits for refugee children and their families including promoting positive developmental outcomes and helping families adjust and integrate into the United States (Vesely et al., 2013). However, refugees are currently underrepresented in ECE programs, underscoring the need for research that contextualizes their experiences and acknowledges the factors that might imped or facilitate their use. Using the accommodations model of child care decision-making and the community cultural wealth (CCW) theoretical perspective, this study sought to centralize the voices of four refugee mothers of young children and provide a nuanced understanding of their early care and education perceptions and preferences. Parent ECE perceptions and preferences are often driving factors for why and how parents make decisions on child care arrangements (Chaudry et al., 2010; Forry et al., 2013).

Specifically, I explored mothers' perceptions of ECE and their thoughts on the importance, potential benefits and disadvantages of enrolling their children in ECE as well as the features of care they preferred and prioritized for their children. Overall, findings demonstrated that refugee mothers see value in ECE for their preschool-aged children's development and viewed ECE as a social environment that prepared their children for formal school settings. In terms of the type of ECE setting they wanted for their children, mothers preferred caring and fair teachers that created socially and academically enriching environments where their cultural and linguistic backgrounds were respected.

In this chapter, I will reiterate the frame and context of this study, discuss the findings, identify implications, and lastly acknowledge limitations and how they can be addressed in future research. I will preface this chapter by noting that all studies should be situated with the sociohistorical context. Therefore, it should be restated that this study was conducted during the Covid-19 global pandemic, which not only shaped the completion of this study but also influenced family experiences. The Covid-19 pandemic affected the research process from the potential sample, the recruitment plan, to the data collection procedures. More importantly the pandemic likely impacted the participating families in various ways. The pandemic possibly impacted their home, work, and school lives and specifically could have influenced the child care options available to them and their priorities and practices likely shifted to ensure the health and safety of their families.

The two overarching perspectives that provided an ecological and cultural lens for this study were the *accommodations model of child care decision making* (Myers & Jordan, 2006) and *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005). The accommodations model of child care decision-making shaped the research aims and helped demonstrate that child care decision making is a dynamic process. This model was helpful in addressing the various aspects that influence how parents come to engage with and choose care for their children. The finding that mothers' connection to and understanding of ECE were heavily influenced by their characteristics and community context, provided support that child care decisions are not always rational choices or fit within an economic model as previous research has noted but are more so accommodations they were making based on their familial needs and contextual circumstances (Chaudry et al., 2010; Myers & Jordan, 2006).

Community cultural wealth nicely complemented and extended the accommodations model by acknowledging how mothers' culture and different forms of capital impacted their perceptions, preferences, and experiences which guide the entire decision-making process. To my knowledge, the use of CCW as an overarching framework was not only novel but moves the field forward in capturing how family culture and context influence their child care decision-making experiences. Given that a dominant and deficit-based narrative is that immigrant families, and especially refugees, are not enrolling their children in ECE nor are they prepared for school, I explicitly framed this study within community cultural wealth to displace that narrative and get at some of the reasons why and how refugee parents decide to utilize care. Using the accommodations model along with CCW demonstrated that refugee mothers' caregiving values, their cultural experiences, as well as their community context were all factors that influenced their utilization of child care.

While I did not aim to specifically test for or identify the six cultural capitals established by Yosso, it was clear that mothers exhibited many capitals that influenced their ECE perceptions and preferences. The six capitals are aspirational, social, navigational, familial, resistant, and linguistic and all six were evident in the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences shared by these four mothers. All four mothers aspired for their children's success and it was evident in their telling of the importance of ECE as well as helps explain why they preferred an academic and social setting for their children. Sadia, Sanal, and Nabeeha demonstrated social capital by seeking and receiving help from SSR, Ms. Katherine, and neighbors to help them enroll in Pre-K, while Manali exhibited navigational capital by completing the Pre-K enrollment process without support. Familial capital was displayed by multiple family members and fictive kin helping mothers and caring for their children when needed. While resistant capital was not

common, Manali showed some resistance in telling the teachers about what to feed her daughter. Lastly, in terms of linguistic capital, it was clear that mothers wanted their children to know their home languages but also wanted their children to learn English with the help of patient teachers.

Community Context

Given the importance of community context in the accommodations and CCW frameworks, before even addressing mothers' ECE perceptions and preferences, it was important to explore how the mother's previous experiences and community context shaped their engagement with early care and education. In relation to the importance of community context, Supportive Services for Refugees, a refugee community agency that provides post-resettlement services to families was instrumental in the ECE experiences of the families in the study. Collectively, all four mothers' introduction to ECE was influenced by Ms. Katherine, the educational director of the agency and the ECE teacher of their preschool classroom. She provided families with not only exposure to center-based child care, but also helped them register and enroll in the North Carolina Pre-K program.

From conversations, mothers shared that they had limited understanding of the Pre-K enrollment process, however it was clear from Nabeeha, Sanal, and Sadia that without the help of Ms. Katherine, the Pre-K application process would have been much more difficult and potentially would not have happened without her support. During interviews, Sanal shared that he daughter would not be going to Pre-K and just waiting for kindergarten, however a few months later when speaking with both Sanal and Ms. Katherine, they said that they were starting the Pre-K application process. This demonstrates that Ms. Katherine and the support SSR provided was critical in helping families through the process. Both Nabeeha and Sadia who had SSR support shared that the process was easy and pleasant where, while Manali who completed

registration alone shared that the experience was horrible and quite time consuming. This is similar to other studies that have noted the important role refugee agencies play in helping families access early care and education opportunities (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Morland et al., 2016). Overall, it seemed as though engagement with SSR likely greatly influenced families' child care decision-making process and potentially influenced their perceptions and preferences of care as the SSR preschool classroom was Nabeeha's, Sanal's and Manali's first reference to what ECE looked like in the United States.

Perceptions

As a reminder, in this study, *parent perceptions* are parent values, beliefs, and definitions about child care and were used to describe how mothers perceived early care and education. Different from other studies focused on refugee experiences around child care decision-making (see Ward et al., 2011), this study captured mothers' own ECE experiences but also how they defined and identified the purpose of ECE for their families. Often, research has focused on how parents choose care and the external factors that impact their access to ECE (Rose & Elicker, 2008; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Vesely, 2013). To my knowledge, this is one of only a few studies (all others have been conducted outside the U.S context) to ask refugees specifically how they conceptualize and view early care and education (Broome & Kindon, 2008; Mitchell & Ouko, 2012). This is important because knowing how refugee mothers understand and perceive ECE can help illuminate how they enter the child care decision-making process and ultimately choose to utilize ECE.

In terms of mothers' histories, the education and care norms in their home countries and their own experiences seemed to influence their perception of when children should go to school and who should care for their children. It was clear from the conversations with mothers that the

age of their children influenced their views of care. For infant and toddler aged children, mothers prioritized and preferred for their children to be cared for by them or to be with family members. Given mothers' home country early education experiences where children did not go to school until age six or seven, the age at which their children would be away from them was an issue. Manali and Nabeeha from Afghanistan and Sadia from Pakistan, spoke about how even when their children started Pre-K at 4 years old, they were still 'young babies' and from the mothers' perspectives if was hard for their children to be away from them as well as for them to be far apart from their children. For Sanal, who did go to school at a young age in Nepal, her dislike for her early educational experiences impacted her preference for familial care. Given her experiences of homework heavy school experiences and having to care for her siblings at a young age, it seemed as though Sanal did not want her daughter to have too many responsibilities. She preferred her daughter to be at home because she wanted her daughter to enjoy her childhood, thus a possible reason why, she did not prioritize utilizing ECE.

Additionally, mothers' caregiving beliefs also impacted their perception that infant and toddler aged children should stay at home with their family. Sadia spoke about how as a mother she could give her infant daughter the attention she needed, which ECE could not provide, and that she enjoyed being at home with her children. As for Manali, breastfeeding and having the bond with her children throughout toddlerhood was important to her and thus influenced her preference for infants and toddlers to not participate in ECE until they were older. Sanal, who could not be at home with her young daughter because she started working when her daughter was only 4 months old, saw her in-laws as parental figures that knew how to care better for her daughter than anyone else, including herself.

This set of findings that mothers' caregiving beliefs and their own early educational experiences impacted their preference for familial vs. non-familial care for their younger children is similar to previous literature noting that child age and parental caregiving beliefs influence the type of care parents prefer (Chaudry et al., 2011; Rose & Elicker, 2008). However, it is likely that their early educational experiences of going to school at age six and historically having parents care for younger children in their home countries helps explain their preference for familial care at a younger age. Nonetheless, all four mothers did share that they valued the opportunity for their preschool aged children to participate in early care and education.

Collectively, all four mothers perceived that the purpose of early care and education was to ultimately help their children in feeling comfortable in a school setting as well as help their families adjust to the United States. As refugees, mothers shared that ECE was important because it exposed their children to the basics so they could be prepared for school. Additionally, mothers shared that having children in ECE would give newly arrived parents the time to work or learn something for themselves. While these mothers were from different countries and their ECE experiences were different, their thoughts on the importance of ECE aligned with the historical role of ECE in the U.S which is to promote children's school readiness and parental employment. At the same time, mothers' reasons for why these were important seemed to stem from their understanding that ECE would help them as refugees, integrate and settle into the US, whether by being able to work and take classes or knowing all they can so that their children could have a successful educational start in their new country.

Given the national goal for refugee families to be self-sufficient and employed, it was not surprising that mothers noted a benefit of utilizing ECE as allowing time to work and go to college. The families in this study, just like many other immigrant and refugee parents,

recognized that utilizing ECE would also help their families get better connected in their new communities (Broom & Kindon, 2008; Ward et al., 2011). They also explicitly noted the beneficial impact of ECE on their children's social and language development and preparedness for kindergarten. This is similar to other studies that have found that refugee parents prioritize and aspire for their young children to be academically and socially successful in their new countries (Boit et al., 2020)

With reference to their concerns about utilizing ECE, mothers spoke about worrying about the treatment and comfort of their children, a lack of cultural acknowledgement, and the impact of online learning on their children's social development. It was interesting that their concerns were focused more so on social and emotional aspects of ECE rather than practical and structural features of care such as cost, hours and safety concerns, which are noted as common considerations elsewhere in the literature (Ward et al., 2011; Weber, 2011). While parents in general are invested in their children's social development, this seemed to take precedence for these mothers because they wanted their children to be acclimated and integrated with U.S born children. This is a common finding among foreign-born parents as they would like for their children to make friends and feel connected to their teachers and peers (Obeng, 2007; Vesely, 2013; Ward et al., 2011).

Preferences

Mothers' understanding and preferences for certain types and characteristics of ECE were rooted in their upbringing, beliefs, and current circumstances. In terms of type of care, mothers preferred familial care for their infants and toddlers, then free and public Pre-K once their children were preschool aged. Regarding, the care provided in ECE for their preschool-aged children, mothers preferred a trustworthy and caring teacher and a center where their children

could enjoy themselves and socialize with others, while learning the skills needed to get them ready for kindergarten.

There are different features of care that may be important to parents and have implications for families and parent preferences for those features can be complex and impact their choice of child care. Child care features have often been categorized into four types within the literature including process, structural, practical, and cultural features. Process-oriented features include ECE environment characteristics such as caregiver warmth and trust, support for children's development, emphasis on children's health and safety as well as communication between parents and caregivers (Forry et al., 2013). Practical features include cost, location, and hours of operation (Forry et al., 2013). Structural features include program qualities and workforce characteristics such as teacher training and child-to-staff ratio (Grogan, 2012). While not officially defined in the literature, culturally oriented features of ECE include acknowledgement of culture, diversity, and language in the ECE environment. When asked about what characteristics of care they preferred, the mothers in this study mentioned process, practical, and cultural features.

Process Features

The mothers in this study almost solely highlighted the importance and their preferences for process-oriented features of ECE. The process features that mothers claimed to prefer included a trustworthy and emotionally warm environment, educational activities, as well a social and enjoyable setting. Mothers continually noted that they wanted a nice, kind, and trusting teacher for their children, with Nabeeha sharing that she wanted the teacher to be like a mom to the students. A warm care arrangement and specifically caregiver's emotional affect have been ranked, rated, and shared as the most important characteristic of a child care

arrangement in multiple studies (Barbarin et al., 2006; Rose & Elicker, 2008; Shlay et al., 2005; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). In one study focused on immigrant mothers choosing child care, over half of the mothers expressed a preference for a sensitive and nurturing caregiver as well as someone who they could trust where their children would be safe from neglect and abuse (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012).

Additionally, mothers mentioned the importance of having teachers that were patient with their children which from my knowledge has not been identified in the literature. The mother seemed to want teachers to be patient because ECE would be their children's first experience outside the home and any from their families. Specifically, Sadia and Manali mentioned that they hoped teachers would recognize that their children when slowly learn how to behave and be in a school setting with the help of teachers that were polite and treated their children fairly.

Beyond warm and caring teachers, it was clear that mothers wanted a setting that was supportive of their children's academic and social development. Specifically, an academic based curriculum was very important to Manali whose daughter was currently in kindergarten. Her preference for more focus on reading, writing, and math work could have been due to the fact that academics are much more of the focus in kindergarten in preparation for 1st grade than in ECE settings (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). However, the other three mothers did note that they wanted their children to be reading and learning to write when going to Pre-K.

Different from the other mothers, Sanal who had extensive studies as a young child in Nepal shared that she preferred that her daughter learn practical skills in school. She shared that she wanted an ECE setting that emphasized independence, creativity, and self-help skills in their curriculums. While preferences for type of care have not highlighted teaching pedagogy, it seemed as though without knowing the specific type of pedagogies, that Sanal would prefer her

daughter to be in a Montessori program which highlights hands-on independent and self-guided learning (Meinke, 2019).

All four mothers also preferred an ECE environment that fostered their children's social and emotional development and allowed for social interaction and play time for their children. Mothers also preferred for teachers to create a friendly atmosphere and provide a setting that helped their children learn how to communicate with peers and respect adults. Various studies have also found that parents deem an ECE setting that fosters social connections an important characteristic as it teaches children emotional regulation, prosocial skills, and helps them feel more connected to other children (Ansari et al., 2018; Obeng, 2007; Ward et al., 2011). This was likely very important to the mothers in this study given that they described the purpose of ECE as helping their children feel more comfortable in their new settings.

Practical Features

Similar to what has been found in much of the literature, having child care that is public and accommodating to families that have financial hardships appeared to be an important characteristic for mothers (Forry et al., 2012; Greenberg et al., 2018; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). The generally low income of refugee families, especially during their initial years in the United States and when children are young, likely impacted the child care parents could afford as well as the ECE options available to them in their neighborhoods (Chaudry et al., 2011). Additionally, all four mothers noted that early education and care was expensive in their home countries and that they did not attend until they were eligible for public or government school when they were children. This could have potentially influenced their preference for public education, given that that is what they experienced.

Flexible and part time ECE experiences seemed to interest the mothers and having a balance between in home- and center-based care was an idea that both Sanal and Manali shared. This was an interesting finding and different from other studies that focused on low income and immigrant families who wanted child care options that had flexible hours. Other studies found that parents wanted flexible hours to insure their children could attend care later in the day or longer due to their nonstandard work schedules (Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2018; Vesely, 2013). Potentially this is different as the mothers in my study, may have wanted to work but did not show a need to work and could care for their children when needed.

Cultural Features

All four mothers preferred teachers and ECE environments that valued and acknowledge their religious food practices as well as provide support and accommodated their children's learning of the English language. In terms of food practices, specifically, Manali and Nabeeha who are both Muslim follow Halal dietary standards and shared the importance of their children eating Halal. However, they shared concerns that teachers were not providing their children with full meals or acknowledging that their children should not be served meals with meat while at school. Both mothers stated they wanted teachers to value the importance of their children eating full meals and to not only provide their children with snacks. Because they were unsure teachers were valuing their dietary restrictions, they both made their children's lunches each day.

Thus far, literature has not focused on how important the food choices and options at centers have been viewed by refugee parents. However, similar studies have briefly found that ethnically diverse and immigrant parents have mentioned wanting centers to value dietary restrictions and expose their children to their cultural foods and provide certain types of food (Chaudry et al., 2012; Sandstrom, & Chaudry, 2012; Shuey & Leventhal, 2018; Ward et al.,

2011). While Manali and Nabeeha did not explicitly state they wanted their children's ECE settings to provide Halal options, it likely would be preferred that they at least provide full vegetarian meals or other options so that their children would not be accidently served meat.

Furthermore, all four mothers mentioned their preference for teachers to treat their children fairly and show patience for their children as they learned English as a second language. For instance, both Sadia and Manali wanted teachers to provide fair and just treatment to their children and wanted teachers to meet their children where they are and allow them the ability to get acclimated and feel comfortable in the classroom. The reason mothers wanted fair and just treatment seemed to stem from their fear that teachers may "other" their children and not respect or care for them in the same manner as native U.S. born students due to their cultural and linguistic differences.

In terms of language support, Sadia, Manali, and Sanal communicated the importance of teachers being patient with their children while they were still learning English. Sadia noted that she liked that the teachers acknowledged that her son could not speak English well, they provided him with more attention to help him learn English. In contrast, Manali felt as though teachers did not focus on her daughters' English enough and she feared that her daughter was falling behind grammatically. On the other hand, Sanal whose daughter was not yet in care, hoped that someone would be in the classroom that would slowly and nicely work to support her daughter's English acquisition.

Although the mothers did want teachers to be patient with their children as they learned English, Sadia and Sanal did not want translators or people that spoke their language in the classrooms with their children. They saw ECE as a place for their children to learn and use the English language and for the home language to be taught by family. This finding was interesting

and different from other studies because many others have found that Latinx and African immigrant parents preferred bilingual settings or someone that could speak their home language in the ECE setting (Ansari et al., 2018; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012; Vesely, 2013).

Priorities

Although the mothers did not share how they prioritized their care preferences through a ranking system, their actions and the emotions they evoked when speaking about certain aspects of care did demonstrate that some features were prioritized and more important than others. From the conversations, it was clear that affordability was the most prioritized characteristic.

None of the families had ever experienced paying for child care and both Manali and Nabeeha were clear that they would only have their children in care if it were public and free. This is not surprising because many studies have found that the practical features of care, specifically affordability and location, are driving factors for when and the type of care families (Forry et al., 2012; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012). Moving past the practical features of care, the need for a trusting and caring teacher was prioritized by the mothers. In a majority of the interviews, mothers focused on how their children were treated by their teachers and how the teachers taught and respected their children as well as them as parents. Again, this is similar to other studies as several studies have noted that parents prefer teachers that create a safe and warm environment for their children (Rose & Elicker, 2008; Sandstrom & Chaudry, 2012).

The refugee mothers in this study not only wanted caring teachers, but also teachers that were particularly considerate of their children's learning of English and religious dietary needs. Given that their children would likely be culturally and linguistically different from U.S. born children in their classroom, the mothers wanted teachers that not only respected their children but treated them fairly and without judgment. However, Ward et al., (2011) found that Sudanese

and Somali refugee parents prioritized their children being with caregivers that recognized and taught their culture and language to a point where they would rather just have their children at home or taught by someone in the community. Thus, while the mothers prioritized teachers that were polite in terms of their children's language and culture, it did not entirely deter them from enrolling their children in Pre-K even though their preferences were not being completely met.

Lastly, mothers prioritized the developmentally appropriate and learning aspects of ECE. They shared their aspirations for their children and highlighted their hope that enrollment in ECE would not only prepare their children for school but teach them practical skills and how to be a part of their new school and community settings in the U.S. This has been found as a priority for refugee mothers in another study where parents with preschool-aged children aspired for and prioritized wanting their children to be academically and socially prepared for formal school settings (Boit et al., 2020).

Summary

The findings in this study do share similarities with those from previous research, however they also extend that research and offer a richer look into the child care decision-making process for families and the specific perspectives of refugee mothers. These findings demonstrate that refugee mothers recognize and know the importance of early care and education experiences for their families and consider various aspects of care to be important for their families. Moreover, although mothers shared similar care perceptions and preferences, their own early educational experiences and cultural beliefs potentially influenced how they exhibited their perspectives and priorities for their children. The perceptions and preferences shared in this study provide a glimpse into what refugee mothers know and think about ECE and the care characteristics that they prioritize for their children. Overall, the findings demonstrate that it is

integral to understand the personal perceptions and the community context of refugee mothers, as these factors can influence how refugee families approach child care decision-making and thus inform educational and policy institutions on how to support their utilization of early care and education.

Implications for Practice

Given the impact that Supportive Services for Refugees had on introducing and helping these families enroll in early care and education, this work demonstrates the need for collaboration and connection between resettlement agencies, refugee community agencies, and local ECE centers such as Head Start or public Pre-K offices to help families learn about and enroll in free and affordable care. Resettlement agencies are often focused on family basic needs and parents' ability to work and become self-sufficient in society. Agencies often prioritize their efforts on housing, learning the language, work support and older children eligible for K-12 public school (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016). However, understanding the importance of connecting families to ECE services and taking the time to help families find quality child care quickly and effectively is likely a challenge for resettlement agencies as they are often overwhelmed with securing basic needs for families (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Hopper et al., 2016).

While agencies do have challenges helping families access ECE, my findings show that it is possible to help families access free and affordable ECE options with collaboration between agencies and ECE services. Supportive Services for Refugees' educational director, Ms. Katherine was able to help all four mothers learn about ECE and get enrolled in NC Pre-K. The mothers noted that without the presence and support from the agency they likely would have not been able to access ECE so easily. The connection Ms. Katherine had with the local public Pre-K

office greatly influenced the Pre-K registration process for families, and her knowledge of the documentation, paperwork, and the skills children needed to pass their interview helped families successfully enroll in NC Pre-K.

Thus, firstly, this work indicates that it would be important for refugee focused agencies to recognize the importance of connecting with ECE offices and learning about the child care systems and services available, so that information can be shared with the families they serve. Secondly, this work implies that not only should agencies know about the importance of ECE for families' self-sufficiency and children's development but also the need to connect with ECE services and serve as a resource to get families enrolled and knowledgeable of the ECE options available to them. Additionally, this study demonstrated the need for more access to free and public ECE arrangements for families. It was evident that public Pre-K programs were the main source of ECE experience for families and without the public option, the children would have likely been at home and not in formal educational environments until kindergarten. This study asserts that given free ECE access was important to parents, refugee agencies should also aim to create connections and direct families to Early Head Start, Head Start, and public Pre-K programs.

A few potential practices for refugee resettlement and community agencies could include:

1. Having workshops for staff and refugee families with early education professionals on the importance of early care and education and the benefits it provides for both children and parents.
2. Collaborate with Child Care Resource and Referral agencies to help parents understand and identity early care and education options.

3. Building relationships with ECE options (e.g. Head Start programs, Pre-K offices, home- and center-based care) in the neighborhoods to help families apply for enrollment slots or getting registered as soon as possible.

Given that this study was framed using a community cultural wealth perspective, this work can also support centers, teachers, and administrators in recognizing and amplifying the needs for refugee families in their centers that come with different languages, cultures, and religions. The more ECE professionals know about what is important to parents, the better they can support their students and create partnerships with parents that are needed for teaching young children (Tadesse, 2014). Providers should be equipped with the knowledge and tools to know about refugee families, their potential experiences, and how their current circumstances may impact their engagement and needs when enrolled in ECE.

The mothers wanted teachers that were respectful of and patient with their English language learners, however Pre-K and kindergarten teachers need to be supported and provided with the necessary resources so that they can be prepared to support families. Therefore, this work highlights the need for and importance of professional development for the ECE workforce. One practice that ECE and school systems could ensure is training to help teachers and providers feel more prepared to work with children that may speak another language at home and need extra time and guidance as they learn English. Specifically, Sanal and Manali suggested the need for additional teachers or support staff in the classroom so their children could be provided the time and focus needed to learn English. While supplying extra teachers may be difficult, trainings to gain cultural and linguistic competence and increase sensitivity, might positively influence teachers' instructional approach to ELLs and make parents and children feel more comfortable and welcome in programs. Additionally, to make sure the needs of all refugee

children are met in classrooms, incorporating trauma informed practices within ECE services should also be considered. Although the families in this study did not specifically speak of traumatic experiences, recognition of the importance of supporting children's mental health could increase sensitivity within classrooms creating the caring environment that the mothers in this study wanted for their children.

Implications for Policy

The findings for this study demonstrate that policy implications for refugee families must address the affordability of child care as well as their cultural needs. One policy recommendation would expand funding for universal Pre-K in communities with high concentrations of refugee families. Integrating more Pre-K classrooms into local child care centers as well as elementary schools would allow families that must have free and affordable care to participate in high quality ECE services. Providing more funding to expand Pre-K would allow for more children to have access to early learning opportunities, helping them get prepared for kindergarten.

As it relates to food and dietary restrictions, acknowledging and respecting their religion, and culture would go a long way for parents as well as their children. Another recommendation to recognize parent priorities, is to make the process for providing modifications to food program meals easier for center administrators. In terms of acknowledging and respecting family religious dietary restrictions, the Child and Adult Care Food Program distributers should work with centers administrations to ensure they have access to meal alternatives and accommodations for their students.

The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) aids child care centers and institutions by providing nutritious foods to their students. Many center-based child care arrangements including NC Pre-K programs use CACFP. When using CACFP, all meals must include milk,

meat or meat alternates, vegetables/fruit, and grains (United States Department of Agriculture, n.d.). Therefore, refugee children with dietary restrictions should not just be given a snack or an incomplete meal like Manali and Nabeeha described but alternatives should be provided. Currently the CACFP is not required to provide meal modifications for children with specific dietary needs, however centers can choose to make accommodations on a case-by-case basis (Connecticut State Department of Education, 2020). Thusly, CACFP could begin to make sure they do provide meal modifications and work with the food distribution companies that create meals that provide different options such as vegetarian or vegan, which are acceptable for Muslim families. Furthermore, food distribution companies could provide a Halal option for families, while Halal is specific for some of the families in this study in particular, other dietary restrictions and preferences should be acknowledged and addressed properly for families. This research shows that it is a high priority and a cause for stress for at least the two Muslim mothers in this study and warrants recognition from ECE centers and programs on the importance of acknowledging their children's food needs. Not providing the correct food for children may not deter a family from enrolling however to increase cultural sensitivity, given that CACFP has the capabilities to provide modifications, they should work to meet the needs of families within child care centers.

Future Directions and Recommendations

All research has strengths and limitations based on the context and methods used in the study. I will note the methodological choices of this study and address both its strengths and limitations, as well as how further work can expand the findings presented within this current study. First, the current study focused on one time point of data collection and captured mother perceptions and preferences in the fall of 2020. Ideally, a longitudinal study focused on the entire

process of choosing and enrolling refugee children in ECE arrangements would be the next step in expanding this research. Interviewing and observing families before their children start Pre-K and then once they were enrolled and attending Pre-K for a few months would have been a stronger study because we would then know what mothers know about and prefer before they were exposed to an extended period of time enrolled in a high quality ECE program.

Secondly, this study included four refugee mothers, however they were from three different countries and at different stages of the ECE process with different previous child care experiences. This was a strength in that it provided a heterogenous perspective from refugee mothers. In terms of their experiences in their countries of origin and their time in the United States, it demonstrated the impact previous cultural experiences can have on parent perceptions and preferences. The diversity of the sample provided insight on parent perceptions before and after their children were enrolled. Even with different arrangement experiences, there were similarities in what parents preferred.

However, to address the limitations of a smaller heterogenous sample, a larger more homogeneous sample in terms of that stage and process in which families were participating in early care and education would be beneficial to note similarities and differences in parent perspectives of those who either had children already enrolled or who were still in the first decision making process. Additionally, given that the study is framed within community cultural wealth future work would benefits from having a larger homogenous group of participants in terms of ethnic and cultural backgrounds could provide a better summary of parent beliefs and values as it related to their country of origin and cultural backgrounds. Although all 4 mothers were from south Asian countries, a sample with specific groups of parents would be important to get at between and within group differences to learn how certain cultural communities navigate

the child care decision-making process, thus the small sample does not allow for generalization of results.

Lastly, in future research more family perspective should be captured. Child care decision-making includes the entire family such as fathers as well as relatives that may be caring for children. Thus a sample that includes other family members such as the father's perspectives or extended family such as grandparents that care for the children should also be included in future studies as the father perspective is often nonexistent in child care decision-making literature. The inclusion of other family member perspectives could also guarantee triangulation of the data which would provide multiple sources of data on this topic to ensure validation of the results (Rose et al., 2019)

While not the focus of this study, several related topics emerged that need closer examination in future research. For one, more detailed work on how parents navigate ECE access and enrollment is needed. Three mothers had help from a refugee services nonprofit, thus future research documenting the collaboration of how professionals such as Ms. Katherine first connected with the Pre-K offices and helped families enroll could be documented and shared with other centers and agencies to help improve parent access to care. Additionally, work identifying the challenges parents faced and how they overcame completing documents and interviews without a support system would be valuable information to explore and share with professionals that aim to help refugee families with young children.

Furthermore, the mothers in this study focused on their preferences of center-based ECE arrangements, in particular Pre-K programs. However, researching refugee parent preferences and how they perceive specific types of care arrangements (e.g., family, friend, and neighbor care; licensed home-based care) could get at more nuanced information on what they know about

different types of care and what they would prefer. All four mothers had knowledge about Pre-K, but a sample with parents interested or with experience with different types of ECE such as licensed home-based care could provide refugee agencies and child care referral offices more information on how to best serve and introduce families to child care arrangements that could accommodate their wants and needs.

Additionally, further research should continue to utilize community cultural wealth and the accommodations model together to centralize the voices and experiences of refugee mothers and highlight their perspectives that negate deficit ideas about their relationship with early care and education. These frameworks complement one another and with the combination of the accommodations model and CCW, child care access research could be conducted with a more culturally relevant lens, integrating and concentrating on the cultural parent perspective while also acknowledging the external factors at play during child care decision-making. Refugee families are underrepresented in research and the continued use of CCW could increase the limited scope of their experiences thus amplifying their strengths and the assets they could bring to child care systems. Reporting their histories and experience in child care can potentially empower parents to share their ideas and wants which could work to transform education and care opportunities for families. The mothers spoke up and shared their wants and motivations for their children which works to shift the deficit-based view that plagues research around immigrant and refugee families and could be used to inform ECE services and policies.

Lastly, more work should take a mixed method approach and not only quantitively note the limited utilization of ECE by refugee families but include qualitative aspects to gain information on the nuances of why and how refugee families utilize early care and education. Overall, continued research centralizing the cultural and contextual experiences of refugee

families as they relate to the child care decision-making process can help expand services and supports for these families.

Conclusion

Overall, the aims of this study were to explore refugee mothers' perceptions and preferences as they related to early care and education arrangements for their children. The accommodations model and community cultural wealth frameworks helped demonstrate that refugee mothers' cultural experiences, personal characteristics, and community context shape their ECE perceptions and preferences and that multiple aspects influence their child care decision-making.

From this study, it is evident that refugee families want to participate in ECE, however there are multiple factors that facilitate and impede their interest and access to early care and education. Early care and education is a critical service that not only helps refugee children's development but can assist the entire family in their integration process (Gross & Ntagengwa, 2016; Vesely & Ginsberg, 2011). Refugees have a complex integration and transitional process and research must continue to investigate the early care and education experiences of refugee families with acknowledgement and attention to this context. In conclusion, this study adds to the limited research on refugee families and aims to better inform practices and policies that can improve early care and education access and utilization for refugee families.

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APPENDIX A: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Interview Questions: First Visit

Hi, please start with telling me about yourself and your family.

- Demographic background (Who lives in your household? number of children, their names and ages, languages spoken, country of origin, occupations, educational background)

Can you please tell me about your time before coming to the US.

- What was life like in your home country?
- Your time in transition at potential refugee camps?
- What was life like living and working there?

As you know, I am interested in the care of young children between the ages of 3 – 5.

- In your home country, when do children start school? Before going to school what do they do and who would care for them?
- What were the early education experiences like in your country of origin (COO) or your time in refugee camps?
- Thinking about the experiences of young children in your COO, how does that differ from what you think about the early experiences of young children in the U.S?

I am interested in your thoughts and view about childcare/preschool in general.

- Please share your thoughts on how you would define childcare/preschool
- When I say ECE/childcare/preschool, what comes to mind? What do those terms mean to you?

Can you tell me about everyday life here in the US?

- Before and now during Covid (Jobs, school, everyday family activities)
- Where have you lived and how long have you lived in each place?
- Do you have a support system here in the community or neighborhood? Are there any programs or organizations that you attend and are connected to? (Before/during Covid)

Can you tell me all you know about preschool and childcare in the United States?

- Previous experience interacting with ECE in U.S.?
- Can you tell me about your older children and their early education experiences? Here or in other countries?

Interview Questions: Second Visit

Last time we spoke, you told me about your family, care for young children in your COO, as well as your thoughts about childcare. So today I want to learn more about your feelings towards childcare and the factors you think would be most important for you and your family.

Given what you know about ECE/preschool and your child's experiences, how does it differ from the ECE experiences in your COO or your time as a refugee in camps?

- What do you feel is the purpose of preschool/childcare for young children?
- Do you think there are benefits of preschool/childcare? If so, what are the benefits for your young children?
    - Do you think it benefits you as parents or your family in general? If so, how?
- Does anything concern you about preschool/childcare? Are there any drawbacks about preschool?
    - Do you think it negatively affects you or your child in any way? If so, how?
- What would you like for your child to know before going to kindergarten? What do you think your child needs to know before beginning school/kindergarten?
    - What type of care do you think they need before starting kindergarten?

I am also interested in the factors of childcare that you think are most important.

First, please tell me about your current childcare arrangement and who all cares for your young children throughout the week?

- What support do you rely on from outside the home? – (formal centers, playgroups, family members and friends)
- What factors influenced your choice of childcare?
    - Helped you?
    - Made it difficult?

*Families with children already in care or previously enrolled

- How did your current child care arrangement come about?
    - Why did you end up choosing this particular childcare arrangement?
- What role does childcare play in your family's life?
    - In your child's life and development?
    - In preparing your child for kindergarten/formal school?
- What did you look for when choosing a childcare arrangement?
- What were some important factors you were looking for when choosing childcare? The most important?
- What factors stopped you from choosing a certain childcare arrangement?
- Is there anything specific that you wish/think all childcare should have for children? Your child specifically?

- What are some good things about your child's current childcare arrangement?
- What are some things that you do not like about your child's current childcare arrangement?
- If you could choose any kind of childcare arrangement for your child, what would it be and why?
    - Describe the perfect preschool program for your child
- What advice would you give to other families when looking for/choosing childcare?

*Families with children not enrolled

- Are you planning on sending your child to childcare?
- What arrangements are you considering?
- What role do you see childcare playing in your family's life?
    - In your child's life and development?
    - In preparing your child for kindergarten/formal school?
- What will be some of the most important factors you look for when choosing childcare?
- What would be the most important your focus on when looking/choosing childcare for your child?
- What factors would stop you from choosing a childcare arrangement?
- Is there anything specific that you wish/think all childcare should have for children? Your child specifically?
- If you could choose any kind of childcare arrangement for your child, what would it be and why?
    - Describe the perfect preschool program for your child
- What advice or help would you like in finding and choosing a childcare arrangement for your child?

Thank you for all that valuable information, is there anything else you'd like to add?