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In developed countries including the United States, prominence is accorded to print literacy. Children are, at a very early age introduced to reading in-utero and identify with reading books as they grow unlike children in other parts of the world, where less prominence is accorded to the written word. In fiscal year 2020, the United States accepted and resettled 35% refugees from Africa (Migration Policy Institute, 2021). With the ever changing global political, economic, and cultural dynamics, both at macro and micro level, the United States, is one of the countries providing refugee to displaced people from around the world. Upon resettlement, one of the expectations is refugee families will adapt to the United States systems including the literary practices, which are more focused around reading and writing.

Refugees' knowledge, experiences and practices are unique to each family. Not all refugees will identify with the U.S. understanding of literacy. This study looked at how refugees from Congo, in Africa were adapting to literacy practices in the United States, especially with the onset of the pandemic that led to a global lockdown and caused disruption in socio-economic and individual spheres. As several scholars have suggested, literacy is broad so in this study, I sought to understand a) What do Congolese refugee families believe about literacy, b) What did the Congolese refugee families do to support their children's literacy practices prior to coming to the United States? and c) What has been the Congolese experience with literacy in the past year?

LITERACY AND THE CONGOLESE REFUGEE FAMILIES: USING HOMEGROWN

LITERACY PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES TO EMBRACE LITERATENESS IN THE

UNITED STATES

by

Joy Catherine Birabwa

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Approved by

_____
Dr. Linda Hestenes
Committee Co-Chair

_____
Dr. Rachel Boit
Committee Co-Chair

DEDICATION

Mrs. Kelley William Randall, thank you for the immeasurable support, most importantly thank you for being a friend, sister and mother.

Mr. Richard & Mrs. Julia Kazibwe, thank you for your continuous unwavering support.

My children, Kirabo Rebecca and Kitiibwa Jeremiah, thank you for your patience..

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Joy Catherine Birabwa has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Co-Chair

<u>Dr. Linda Hestenes</u>

Committee Co-Chair

<u>Dr. Rachel Boit</u>

Committee Members

<u>Dr. Sudha Shreeniwas</u>

<u>January 5, 2022</u>

Date of Acceptance by Committee

<u>November 29, 2021</u>

Date of Final Oral Examination

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

In developed countries including the United States, it is the norm that parents introduce their children to printed word by reading to them in utero or, shortly after birth. Research has shown that by age three, children in the United States are not only able to identify story books shared with their parents and caregivers but are also able to notice print within their environment (McGee et al., 2004). Scholars have observed the prominence accorded to print literacy in the United States which signifies that by prekindergarten time, children in over 40 states can demonstrate their literacy competence while, on the other hand, active play-based experiential learning is given less significance (McGee et al., 2004). The outcome to giving prominence to print text at an early stage means that, "by the end of kindergarten, children are able to read emergent-reader texts with purpose and understanding" (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015, p. 2). Conversely, failure to demonstrate or acknowledge play-based experiential learning as a level of competence, has inadvertently culminated in children who have had no prior access to reading resources being perceived illiterate, and yet, children have different life development and learning experiences.

A United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2018) report noted that those countries that have faced instability have the highest numbers of young people who are unable to read and write, thus considered illiterate. However, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) literacy definition acknowledges that literacy goes beyond the ability to merely read and write, as well as beyond linguistic precincts. The UNESCO definition of literacy incorporates three aspects on literacy to include: a) "means of communication and expression; b) literacy as a practice in particular contexts for particular

purposes and using specific languages; and c) literacy involving a continuum of learning measured at different proficient levels" (UIS, 2018, p. 3).

The variations in terminologies imply that literacy is a broad concept. Venezky et al. (1990) in defining literacy, suggest the importance of examining the various terms that could encompass literacy including, "conventional literacy, functional literacy, survival literacy, marginal literacy and functional adult literacy" (p. 4). Similarly, other researchers compound the complexity of literacy further by introducing concepts, such as "work literacy, family literacy, functional literacy and health literacy" (Shaw et al, 2017). In *Tools of the Mind*, Bodrova (1996) argues that an everyday activity like playing is a strategy that promotes learning, especially when it is between dyads. Hence, literacy is not confined to only how well a child reads and writes, but rather, literacy and being literate have to be examined within context.

Beyond developed countries like the United States, print literacy in many cultures is barely supported or incorporated in a child's early learning experience and is therefore not considered the embodiment of literacy. For example, in the case of African countries, Parry et al., (2014) observe that although most African governments have made efforts to introduce reading skills in schools, a strong reading culture has not been embraced by many African nations on the continent. Therefore, defining literacy and labeling one literate or illiterate must be understood within this context, given that different cultures and different countries employ appropriate indigenous knowledge and strategies to promote their description of literacy within their own context. With this in mind, this study seeks to understand what literacy means to the Congolese refugee families who have resettled in the United States.

Theoretical Framework

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory of development promotes the same perspective, in as much as he emphasized that the variety of literacy strategies employed is as vast as the communities and countries on the globe (Miller, 2016; Kozulin et al., 2003). In the African context, literacy practices are informed by the indigenous knowledge, traditions, values, beliefs, and experiences of the people, which are as diverse as the over 2000 languages spoken on the African continent (African Language Program at Harvard, 2021; Green, 1985). In fact, there are studies that have revealed that literacy in some indigenous communities in Africa still happens through indigenous folklore, singing, dancing, riddles, poem recitation, drawing, and active play or games (Boutte et al., 2017; Green, 1985). Other studies have also suggested that learning happens through observation and imitation of cultural practices, behaviors and norms. This perspective aligns with Vygotsky's principles about scaffolding, and about language being one of the mental tools of the mind employed in learning and instruction within each environment.

In his socio-cultural theory of development, Vygotsky identified language as a universal tool of communication that cultures use to speak, write, draw and think (Bodrova, 1996; Kozulin et al., 2003; Veraksa et al., 2018). Given the diversity of languages in Africa, most Africans become multilinguists, as they usually attain proficiency in speaking one or more local languages in the family, though they may not necessarily always be able to fluently read and write in all these languages. Meanwhile, usually in formal school, they attain fluency in one foreign language, such as French or English (Parry et al., 2014; Reed et al., 2020). This ability to acquire knowledge and apply it in their community enables individuals to make meaningful contributions, not only in their culture but wherever they are. This may be as members of a family, community, citizens in their own country, immigrants or refugees in another country.

Nonetheless, their multi-language proficiency and indigenous knowledge, has in many instances reflected Africa's diverse literacy experiences and practices, which may not always be analogous to the Western world. When individuals migrate and resettle in the United States, they may encounter experiences that require them to demonstrate proficiency in reading and writing English, a skill that may be lacking for many refugees.

Refugees and Literacy

The dynamics at the global macro and micro level have created political, economic, and cultural turmoil in many countries (Wang et al., 2019), subsequently displacing an estimated 79.5 million people from their countries, thereby, turning 26 million of them into refugees (UNHCR USA, 2020). The United States is one of the developed countries that has over the years given hope to refugee families. In the last couple of years, families from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have had the highest number of refugees entering and resettling in the United States (Immigration National Forum, 2019; Sudha et al., 2021). When refugees come to the United States, the knowledge, practices and skills they have are, as Vygotsky's approach advocates, based on their practices and experiences in their historical socio-cultural context on the African continent. Relocating and resettling in the United States calls for adaptation to the literacy practices of their host country.

Historically, literacy, in non-scholarly work, has been defined simply as the ability to read and write. This definition invariably brands those unable to read and write as illiterate. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, the custodian agency for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), the 2019 report indicated that although there is a gradual increase in global literacy rates, 102 million youth lack the basic skills to read and write; with one in three people in low-income countries unable to read and write. Some of these people migrate as

refugees to developed countries including the United States. This basic literacy definition would categorize the 102 million youth as illiterate, a conclusion that is far from the reality. Venezky et al. (1990) suggest that determining who is illiterate depends on how literacy is defined.

Vygotsky's sociocultural approach proposes that literacy is best understood within cultural context. Vygotsky's perspective is in line with the UNESCO's three features of literacy: "a) Literacy is about the uses people make of it as a means of communication and expression, through a variety of media; b) Literacy is plural, being practiced in particular contexts for particular purposes and using specific languages; c) Literacy involves a continuum of learning measured at different proficient levels" (UNESCO UIS, 2018, p. 3). Therefore, it is fitting that Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory of development which urges researchers to explore the variation of learning and teaching within cultural contexts guides this research study.

Refugees Coping with the Pandemic

Each of the Congolese refugee families that have resettled in the United States have different and unique experiences. Minimal research work has been done on literacy practices amongst refugee families yet refugees from DRC constitute one of the topmost refugee groups resettling in the United States (McMorrow et al., 2021). Additionally, there do not appear to be any studies on recently arrived Congolese refugee families who live in the United States, particularly on how they have supported their children's literacy development during the pandemic. Like other families in the United States, these families faced unique situations when the world was struck with COVID-19 resulting in a global pandemic. COVID-19 caused drastic social, economic and financial situations for individual families and the world at large (Hussong et al., 2020). For example, families confronted, "economic resource loss, work related stress, isolation and separation, illness and exposure concerns, caregiving burdens and schooling needs

for children" (Hussong et al., 2020, p. 2). Evidence of how much the pandemic affected the literacy practices of Congolese refugee communities is nominal. For these reasons, this qualitative research study focused on the literacy experiences and practices of the Congolese refugee families resettled in the state of North Carolina in the United States.

This study challenges the assumption that the resettled Congolese refugee communities, are what, by common Western standard literacy definition, would be considered illiterate (Goetze et al., 2001). Throughout this study, literacy is considered as an activity that involves instruction, interaction and engagement between two or more people, resulting in the transfer and acquisition of knowledge and skill, and leading to some transformation in an individual. This view is in line with UNESCO's (2004) literacy definition. It also incorporates Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that considers learning as an active process happening within people's social and physical environments; and is "strongly embedded within the cultural and historical contexts of people's lives" (Williams, 1999, p. 21).

Using Vygotsky's sociocultural approach, the aims of this study are three-fold; first, to describe the literacy beliefs, practices and experiences amongst the Congolese refugee families; second, to explore the strategies Congolese refugee families use to support their children's literacy development; and third, investigate how COVID-19 affected the literacy practices of the Congolese refugee families. In this research proposal, Vygotsky's theoretical framework is discussed to provide context for the literature review and guide the data analysis. This study explored the interaction between the more knowledgeable other and the learner within the zones of proximal development in the Congolese refugee families.

CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory of Development

The Sociocultural theory of development also referred to as the Vygotskian approach, or the Cultural-Historical Theory (Bodrova et al., 1996; Scrimsher & Tudge., 2003), has often been used in examining the learning and teaching process in early childhood education (Bodrova et al., 1996; Scrimsher & Tudge., 2003). I, therefore, use this theoretical framework in this project to guide the study design and data analyses to provide perspective for the learning process and interactions between the parents and the children within the Congolese refugee families. Vygotsky's theory of development looks at learning as collective responsibility and "emphasizes the importance of sociocultural forces in shaping the situation of a child's development and learning. It points to the crucial role played by parents, teachers, peers and the community in defining the types of interaction occurring between children and their environments" (Kozulin et al., 2003, p. 3).

The core principles advanced by Vygotsky's theory consider development to be both a qualitative and quantitative process including individual mental functioning, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and cultural context (Bodrova et al., 1995; Kozulin et al., 2003; Miller, 2016; Veraksa et al., 2018). In this respect, Vygotsky considered individuals' learning process as a dyadic activity happening over time within their environments and impacting both the learner and teacher who is considered the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) leading the learning during an activity. Vygotsky notes that learning is continuous and happens over time. As the learning process goes on, children demonstrate small milestones in form of quantitative progress, with the qualitative change noticeable at a later point. For example, children introduced to print text will over time become phonetically aware and will be able to repeat the letter sounds

and subsequently, they will be able to sound and read out three letter words like, cat, mat, pat and so on.

According to Vygotsky's approach, individuals are not separate from their social and physical environment but rather the environment in which they exist continuously influences their habits, behavior, and responses (Miller. 2016). The MKO, who could be either an adult or peer, during that activity will teach the less knowledgeable other based on their knowledge and interpretation of the practices, activities, and interactions within their environment (Bodrova et al., 1996; Miller, 2016; Scrimsher & Tudge 2003). For instance, a farmer in Uganda, a country in Africa, will teach a budding farmer about observing the weather patterns to know the planting season, while a farmer in the United States will teach about using technology to know weather patterns and planting seasons. Activity-in-cultural context is therefore one of the relevant principles in understanding learning and teaching. The theory has other core principles to it which emphasizes learning not only as a main force of development but equally as a continuous process sensitive to the diversity in cultures (Miller, 2016; Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). A case in point is the refugee communities. To them, resettlement is a continuous learning process, a dyadic collaboration experience between the individual refugee and the more knowledgeable other who could be anyone including a lawyer, social worker, teacher. In this chapter, I focus on expounding the core concepts of Vygotsky's theory in relation to literacy amongst refugee families; "the child-in-activity-in-cultural-contexts, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD); the sociocultural origins of mental functioning; the mediation of intellectual functioning by tools provided by culture, and sociocultural methodology" (Miller, 2016, p. 158).

Child-in-Activity-in-Cultural-Contexts as the Unit of Study

According to the Sociocultural psychologists, wherever children are, they participate in some form of activity, at times, as part of their routine (Miller, 2016). This engagement in any activity is what Vygotsky perceived as a child-in-activity-in-cultural-context as the unit of study. Learning does not take place in isolation. Both physical and social interaction are necessary for learning to take place (Bodrova et al., 1995). The child-in-activity-in-cultural-context, as a unit of study, observes children at each stage of development and while a child's milestone is notable by how they participate in any small activity, regardless of evident significant cognitive and emotional milestones, children continue to learn (Kozulin et al., 2003; Miller., 2016). Scrimsher and Tudge, (2003) assert that learning begins with the tools surrounding the child as early as birth when the child observes, imitates, and constructs their understanding based on the social interactions they encounter within their environment. For instance, at the family level, together with an adult, children participate in ordinary tasks such as having family meals at a dinner table. This offers a learning moment for the child, and they begin to associate the dining table with eating and family time. Ordinary tasks, according to Miller (2016), comprise practices like household chores, family mealtimes and sleeping arrangements among others. These practices are held in conformity with the family culture and fit within the culture of the society. For instance, cultural practices may differ in how morning routines are handled from one family to another. One's family's cultural practice may require children, as part of their morning routine, to have breakfast at a dining table before heading out to school. On the hand, in another family, the child is required to start their day with doing chores before sitting down on a mat on the floor for any breakfast. Yet, still in another family, a child's morning routine is not breakfast, but rather, running to school on an empty stomach. As Miller (2016) noted that while there is a wide

variety of family activities ranging from games, sleeping arrangements, classroom instruction, cooking to water harvesting, all these practices differ within families and cultures. Practices like gestures, physical touch, sounds, and play also differ. Children interface with these practices; they observe, internalize, and create their own meaning of the situation, from which they likely replicate.

In the United States for instance, there are several edutainment places which Miller (2016) considers as part of culturally organized educational spaces. As part of the cultural practices, museums, malls, and parks are used as learning spaces where parents and adults spend time with their children. In the process, as they share in an activity, the parents provide a lesson, formally or informally and children absorb the information. The objects, symbols, and places that the children encounter provide learning experiences that children associate with their environment. The consistent, persistent and repetitious encounters help the child to make meaning of the environment and they learn and apply the skills and knowledge for the next time they must apply them (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). At every stage of growth, there is new acquisition of knowledge and while the results may be insignificant, progressively they become evident, over time (Miller, 2016). For instance, when a child learns to read and write the alphabet, they begin with scribbling lines, then they write individual letters and words, and later, they can verbalize and eventually write and read sentences. Vygotsky's approach notes that this learning process is continuous and gradual and is based on what is within this child's environment. For children who have access to reading resources, this may be the path indicating their print literacy growth. While a child who is not surrounded with reading resources, their learning curve will be associated with what is in within their environment. Miller (2016)

emphasizes that cultural context plays a great role on learning as the objects and symbols within different cultures are used as learning tools and will thus impact children's learning.

Culture comprises a variety of elements. In understanding culture and its role, Miller (2016) explains that culture is the composition of "shared beliefs, values, knowledge, worldview, structured relationship skills, customs and socialization practices" (p. 160). Vygotsky emphasized that culture's shared symbols; language both verbal and written, images, and narratives is what is shared when adults interact with children at the different stages of their growth in different situations. For every child-in-activity-in-cultural-context as the unit of study, the influence of culture cannot be eliminated. What a child learns and how they learn is greatly influenced by what cultural values and symbols exist within their immediate vicinity. This Vygotsky highlighted as the physical and historical cultural influence. Those within that immediate circle, are the immediate channels of transmitting the knowledge and values to the one with less information. This is often noticed in families when adults spend time with their children, in the process, they share stories and skills. Research has shown that refugee families often do this with their children to transfer knowledge and skills not only about their home country but also about their culture and heritage (Boit et al., 2020). A child's knowledge is bound to increase based on who is within their vicinity, or within their zone as Vygotsky termed it.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The Zone of Proximal development (ZPD), referred to in Figure 1, is that space between the MKO's understanding and the level of understanding that the learner needs to acquire to gain the same understanding as the MKO. Within the ZPD, the dyad interacts and learn from each other through a collaborative process as both now share a common goal (Miller, 2016; Scrimsher

& Tudge, 2003). The more knowledgeable other has information that the learner is not in possession of. The sociocultural theorists acknowledge that prior to the learning interaction, the more knowledgeable individual and the learner are operating within different spaces. This zone is not limited to only school environments. Vygotsky realized this could be any informal settings like playgrounds where peers interact or homes where parents are teaching their children values or chores.

At each of these levels, whether in a formal or informal setting, the more knowledgeable other is interacting with the child and influences the child's thinking, attitudes, and beliefs. In this zone, learning does not happen in a vacuum. Naturally, children are observant, eager to learn, and they imitate and express that which they have seen, heard and then play it out. According to Miller (2002), proximal zone refers to "any situation in which some activity is leading children beyond their current level of functioning" (p. 167). It is what Scrimsher and Tudge (2003) referred to as children being influenced to learn beyond what they know and focusing on what is happening within their immediate social environment. A six-month old child will mimic sounds and gestures that the parents make when they interact with the child (Miller, 2016).

According to Miller (2016), cultures have curriculums specific and unique to them and children will continuously learn what is within their culture over time, demonstrating what they have learnt. The progress is more evident over a period, as the adult and child interact. Through informal or formal coaching, children learn a variety of skills including cooking, weaving, dancing, writing, reading, and singing. Vygotsky's framework suggests that as learning interactions happen, both qualitative and quantitative changes take place. For example, children learning to talk may begin with saying sounds like *Da* for daddy. With time, they are able to say

"daddy" and progressively, as they grow and develop cognitively, they acquire the skills to write the word.

Fundamental to the zone of proximal development is scaffolding, the tool that facilitates the learning process and involves dialogue, discovery, and collaboration (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003) in which both the knowledgeable other and the child, both gain individual perspective of the activity they are engaged in. In the Western world where there is often easy access to print resources for middle-and upper-class families, parents introduce learning to their children through routines that involve reading books to them at bedtime. Children then begin to imitate the sounds in books and eventually are capable to narrate the stories of the book they have read. In other parts of the world, learning about one's cultural norms is around a bonfire listening to an older member of the family narrate stories or riddles. These stories are retold through generations.

The Sociocultural Origins of Mental Functioning

Vygotsky's view of the sociocultural origins of mental functioning principle highlights the influence of the more knowledgeable other on the child. This is a two-way process where the more knowledgeable individual transmits knowledge to the learner. Consequently, the learner is expected to think and act like the more knowledgeable other and hence learning is mutual for the dyad (Miller, 2016). Vygotsky observed that the flow of information is initially from adults to child, referred to as the between-minds, or intermental, while the process involving the child absorbing the information and making sense of it in their mind is within-mind or the intramental (Miller, 2016). This procedure of the child's comprehension of the process of information from between-minds to within-mind is correlated closely to the smallest unit of study which happens at the child-in-activity-in-context within the zone of proximal development. Learning and

development are interconnected, implying that as a child develops and grows both physically and mentally, those within their social circles or zone of proximity are widening and cognitive capabilities are growing. Learning is a two-way process. While Vygotsky's theory placed emphasis on the adult, as the more knowledgeable other, research studies have indicated that children can at times be the more knowledgeable other and, inversely, adults benefit from children.

Vygotsky placed an emphasis on external factors influencing learning. His approach emphasizes that children learn to interact with others through external dialogue, internalizing the information, holding an internal dialogue within their minds through a process known as appropriation (Miller, 2016; Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). Vygotsky believed that the verbalization of words preceded internalization of words. As a child learns to stand and walk, they may hear the words repeated and until they internalize them, they may not correlate the words with the actions. Consequently, the appropriation process is influenced by experiences within the zone of proximal development, where afterwards children make their own meaning and then assimilate this new knowledge (Miller, 2016; Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). For assimilation to materialize, Vygotsky suggested that there are psychological and technical tools.

Figure 1. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and the Zone of Proximal Development
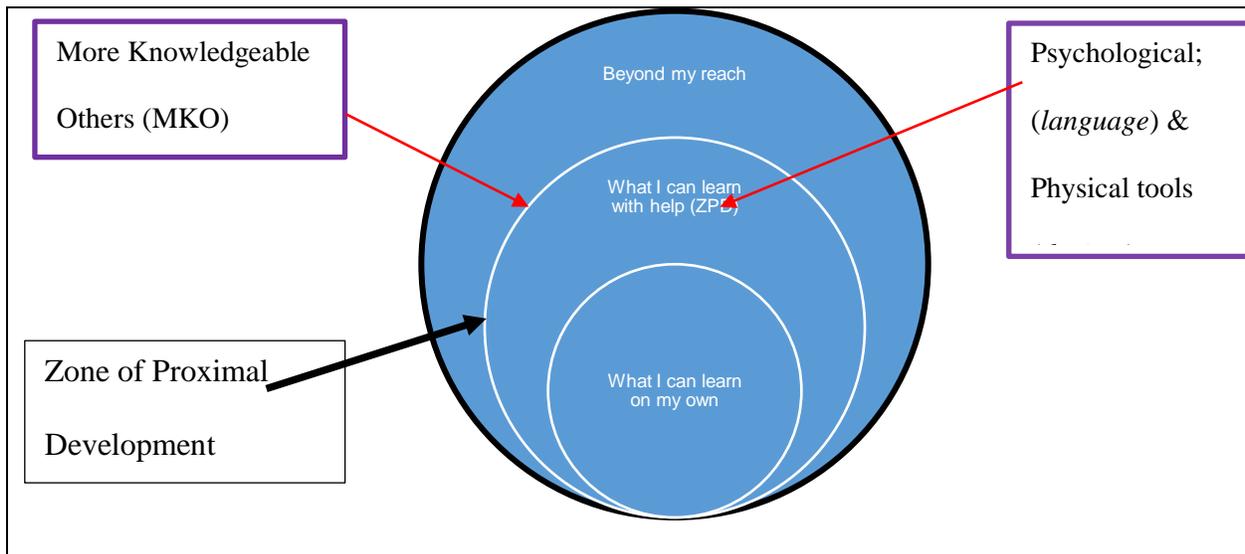
Tools: Language Plays a Central Role in Mental Development

  Each culture has, over historical time, developed its own tools and symbols, and through their use, the appropriation process or internalization and assimilation is completed (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). According to Miller (2016) the psychological tools that Vygotsky considered included, "language systems, counting systems, writing, diagrams, maps, conventional signs, and works of art" (Miller, 2016, p. 170). On the other hand, computers and robots are the physical devices that facilitate learning, as indicated in Figure 1. Miller (2016) highlighted some strategies that learners employ. According to Miller (2016), attending and memorization of school related material are strategies for learning and upon internalization of information, children externalize their thoughts through the psychological tool: the spoken word – language.

  Vygotsky recognized language as the most important mental tool for development, as well as, the most relevant one that demonstrates meaning. Interactions between the dyad of a parent and child provide experiences for both teaching and learning moments and the child uses dialogue in form of the language to articulate their understanding (Bodrova et al., 1995; Miller

2002). Language is a very important tool because through verbal interaction, the adult expert learns what the child knows. However, Vygotsky noted that speech and thought are independent of each other (Miller, 2002), and meaning of words may vary amongst cultures, while implications of the words may also differ based on gestures and intonations. As Miller (2016) writes, "it also requires that the child understand intonations of speech and the dynamics of social contexts and infer the mental state" (Miller, 2016, p. 174). This implies that in language, verbalization of words, intonations and gestures must be understood within cultural context.

Variation in cultural standards and assets explains the differences in usage and acceptance of the psychological and technical tools, and thus children are guided to develop and acquire the appropriate cultural cognitive knowledge and skills. Miller (2016) acknowledges the tools are relevant in helping children develop in thought, application and transformation of knowledge. Thus, cultures can select and emphasize psychological and physical tools that are culturally appropriate and significant within their situation.

Tools: Technology as Central Role in Learning

Accordingly, as mentioned above, not all cultures will find physical tools like computers to be culturally relevant. Communities in rural areas where there is no electricity grid may not find today's technological devices like computers a relevant physical tool for learning, and yet, with the advent of the Internet, technology has become a physical asset and an enabler of learning in certain cultures. Miller (2016) identified computers and robots as the physical tools that facilitate learning. Further, Cicconi (2014) explains that the advent of the internet and the advancement in technology have provided numerous opportunities for learning from the more knowledgeable other within certain cultural contexts.

Cultural differences account for the discrepancies in learning and teaching. Children of the same age in different cultures will not have the same skills and knowledge. This variation led to Vygotsky suggesting a review of standardized assessments for learners. Vygotsky suggested that it was imperative to reevaluate instruction of children and management of assessments by placing importance on knowledge children have in the present moment. Invariably, children of the same age in different locations, have cultural differences which impacts the zone of proximal learning and their psychological and technical tools. Subsequently their knowledge and skills are not going to be the same (Miller, 2016). "Teaching and learning are a cooperative, collaborative enterprise, involving a shift from teacher regulated activity to the student's self-regulation" (Miller, 2016, p. 180). In many formal settings, the learning process involves learner observing an adult-expert and attempting to do what the educator does, what Vygotsky called scaffolding (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). The emphasis, when teaching, should be on the child's potential or their eagerness to learn new concepts (Miller. 2016). Through scaffolding, the more knowledgeable other who could be a parent, teacher or peer assesses what the learner can do on their own, prior to assisting them with the task on hand. This assistance helps the learner to gain the skill or knowledge they need at that stage of their growth which they previously did not have (Scrimsher & Tudge, 2003). This guidance can be provided in various ways ranging from words of motivation to hand holding.

Miller (2016) notes that Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory is popular in research studies involving immigrant families, in cross cultural research and in understanding learning and teaching in early childhood classrooms. For purposes of this study, cognizant of the possibility of labeling those who cannot read and write as illiterate, Vygotsky's approach provides the appropriate framework to firstly examine the refugees' prior literacy beliefs and practices across

the two cultures, secondly examine the Congolese home culture and the American culture they have resettled in, and thirdly examine how the change in cultural contexts has influenced their views of literacy and in turn, their literacy beliefs and practices.

CHAPTER III: LITERATURE REVIEW

General Overview of Literacy

Literacy is a fundamental human right that is recognized as essential to social and economic development. While several scholars have explored literacy in various forms including financial, health, digital, media, adult, family and functional literacy, this study seeks to understand the meaning of literacy and its forms, practices and experiences amongst these particular families who form part of the Congolese refugee community. Venezky et al.(1990) noted that the definition and interpretation of literacy will vacillate toward either an individual's or society's interests, viewpoints and interpretation of disciplinary interests and philosophical concerns. For instance, according to the United States National Literacy Act (1991) "literacy means an individual's ability to read, write, and speak in English, and compute and solve problems at levels of proficiency necessary to function on the job and in society, to achieve one's goals, and develop one's knowledge and potential" (Irwin, 1991, p. 7). Similar thoughts are expressed through the United Nations agency mandated with promoting lifelong learning with a focus on adult and continuing education, literacy, and non-formal basic education (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO). The organization defines literacy as "the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society" (UNESCO, 2018, p. 2). This United Nations' perspective complements various scholars' perceptions of literacy within reading and writing. At the same time, the definitions above have elements that align with

Vygotsky's perspective on the significance of cultural context in understanding an activity that involves learning and instruction.

Other scholars too, like Montoya (2018) define literacy as, "the ability to read and write at a level whereby individuals can effectively understand and use written communication in all media (print or electronic), including digital literacy" (p. 4). Sénéchal (2007) identifies four key elements associated with reading and how they are used to determine literacy abilities. That is understanding why we read and write, having knowledge of how we read and write, awareness of the structure of language and lastly, cognizance of the narrative knowledge and listening comprehension. To these scholars, literacy encompasses reading and writing.

To consider literacy as merely reading and writing disregards those who lack the resources to access and develop reading and writing as a skill. Venezky et al. (1991) argue this thinking would automatically place those without reading and writing skills in the illiterate cohort, which perspective does not ally with the "realm of science" (p. x). Subsequently, scholars like Keefe et al. (2011) recommend exploring other definitions of literacy to cater for those communities with multiple and diverse forms of literacy practices considerate of the differences in social context (p. 94). Desmond et al. (2008) exert that literacy can be defined based on specialization. Thus, they define family literacy as "a form of intergenerational learning that is based on the fundamental connection and interaction between the education of children, young people and adults" (Desmond et al., 2008, p. v). Writing about the need to appreciate and legitimize African worldwide views wherever Africans are, Boutte et al. (2017) for their part define African Diaspora Literacy as, "Black people's knowledge of their (collective) story and cultural dispossession" (p. 68). Venezky et al., (1990) further illustrate the term literacy includes other components like functional literacy. Their view is that while functional literacy maybe a

redundant term, it nonetheless incorporates the idea of the practical knowledge required in daily use and is in no way similar to academic literacy. Venezky et al. (1990) suggest that the term "conveys the sense of social relevancy that is critical for proper understanding of literacy" (p. 5). The scholars' inclusion of practical knowledge and social relevance correlates not only with UNESCO's (2018) second part of the literacy definition and how it is a continuum of learning enabling individuals to achieve goals, develop knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their community and wider society. It also correlates with what is happening in societies where for other reasons, literacy is not about reading and writing.

In some parts of the developing world, music, songs, chants and rhymes are used as the introductory medium to literacy (Paquette et al., 2008). Meanwhile, in developed countries like the United States, these literacy experiences likely begin with print, when parents share books and read out loud to their infants and toddlers (McGee et al., 2000), as well as using reading strategies that provide the introductory literacy experiences to the children. Families introduce literacy experiences to their children in utero (Niklas et al., 2016). When parents share a book or read out loud, use gestures, and turn pages, they are building four foundational print literacy concepts for their children. They are inferring that "Literacy is pleasurable; activities occur in predictable routines and other social interactions embedded in cultural practices; materials are handled in special ways, and literacy involves the use of symbols and the communication of meanings" (McGee et al., 2000, p. 36). The same inferences while intended, may not be evident for parents who engage their children in non-print literacy practices. To each family, the sociocultural context determines what literacy aspects and practices families will apply in their lives. While for some it may be songs and dance, to others it might be acquisition of a trade skill

and yet for others, it might be learning to read. The difference is in how they do this and the meaning attached to the actions.

Most parents in the United States have access to a variety of print resources (Malo et al., 2000) appropriate to develop children's literacy levels at each stage. Their children will embrace forms of literacy like reading and writing activities if they find these activities not only pleasurable, but also associate the moments shared as bonding and loving time spent with their parents. Parents will consider these moments as both pleasurable and opportunities for learning that are integrated with "goals of educational advancement, cultural uplift and literate discourse" (Whitehurst et al., 1998, p. 848). Russell (2005) categorizes the several print genres of: "mother goose books, wordless books, toy books, alphabet, counting, concept and easy to read books" (p. 99), as appropriate shared book reading literature that parents can use, and are expected to make use of, to set the appropriate literacy foundation. As these children grow, they demonstrate the process that Vygotsky refers to as quantitative and qualitative development and enhanced knowledge and skills. Stephenson et al. (2008) agree that book reading sessions accelerate children's language skills. Over time, the children will learn to verbalize the words they have heard read to them by the more knowledgeable other.

As they observed children's literacy growth, McGee et al., (2000) contend that at each milestone, children demonstrated different conduct. In this study, McGee et al., (2000) observed a young child (Kristen) and her family and noted that both her parents spent time reading to her from the time she was brought home. Before the age of one, Kristen's favorite toys were books which she would take to her parents to read to her. On her own, she would try to turn pages and try to chew on them. At the age of three, she could recite text from her books as well as initiate drawings. Kristen's milestones changed with her age. This child is experiencing the different

levels of zone of proximal development that Vygotsky outlines. The range of tasks Kristen has

performed show that she has achieved qualitative potential by spending time with the more

knowledgeable others in her proximity. Kristen exemplifies an emergent reader who has grown

up in a family where literacy practices involve reading print and is developing well on the

emergent literacy path that involves, "skills, knowledge, and attitudes presumed to be

developmental precursors to conventional forms of reading and writing" (Whitehurst et al., 1998,

p. 849).

Stephenson et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study with English speaking children

whose parents often read to them to establish whether there was a correlation between children's

task-focused behavior, the environmental factors, their emergent literacy skills and word reading

skills. The study emphasized that it was important for parents to teach children letter names,

letter sounds, and words. Language and literacy competence begins at home, before formal

school (Niklas et al., 2016). Children from refugee families born at the same time as Kristen may

not have the same print literacy experience. Their lived experience is different, and this is

therefore, why Vygotsky's principal argument that, the unit of study of a child's activity should

be within culture, is relevant. By participating in this reading activity with her parents, children

like Kristen emulate what Vygotsky referred to as the child-in-activity-in-cultural-context

participating in a meaningful activity that is promoting learning.

However, this activity is not confined to reading only because as noted, other scholars

like Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) argue that an emphasis on print literacy for emergent readers is

inappropriate. Instead, learning for emergent readers, and at kindergarten should be play-based

as it was prior to the 1980s in the United States. These scholars argue that play-based learning

has more benefits to the students than enforcing print literacy at that early learning stage

specifically because through play, children learn symbols, grasp concepts and develop their language skills. "Children learn through playful, hands-on experiences with materials, the natural world, and engaging, caring adults" (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015, p. 5). Through play, children will mimic what they see in their environment, and learn the language; what Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) refer to as, "Active, play-based experiences in the early years foster strong oral language in children" (p. 5). Along the same lines, Paquette et al., (2008) maintain that literacy instruction can be enhanced using music and "patterned text that often occurs first in songs, chants and rhymes which are repeated throughout childhood" (p. 228). These forms of learning are particularly encouraged for communities with limited access to reading resources both within the United States and other parts of the world. Vygotsky's sociocultural approach argues that knowledge and skills are acquired by children participating in culturally organized activities and using the psychological and physical tools that are culturally appropriate. The variation in cultural contexts renders learning to take on a uniqueness and exclusivity to each culture.

Communities from the Hispanic, Native American, African American, Irish American and other cultures residing in the United States use another powerful rich cultural family tradition to enhance literacy practices within the family (Malo et al., 2000). Through storytelling, parents narrate their personal stories, daily events and past experiences, which helps prepare their children for reading. Children develop several skills through the oral tradition of storytelling including, "comprehension of vocabulary, natural rhythms and patterns of language, figures of speech and metaphors" (Malo et al., 2000, p. 1). For these communities, storytelling is appropriate in that it happens at any time. Cultural values are conveyed through generations, and storytelling is used by both children and adults at home and school, providing enriching

experiences for everyone (Malo et al., 2000). Different cultures have also been known to use storytelling as a strategy to teach cultural languages, values and to present practices to younger generations. Carlsson-Paige et al. (2015) agree that both parents and teachers can promote literacy practices using a broad range of strategies including storytelling, book reading, singing, reciting poems, drawing, writing and playing. The difference in the environment dictates the most suitable strategy to employ to initiate and enhance literacy practices, either at home or at school. These differences in literacy emphasis are influenced by cultural practices within different contexts. The existing cultural values and symbols will influence what the child verbalizes and internalizes and according to Vygotsky, language is key in a child's cognitive development (Miller, 2016). In this study, there is prerequisite for an operational definition of literacy to set the parameters within which we will explore this terminology. Venezeky et al. (1990) maintain that despite the many variations of the term literacy, there must be standard within the social context. The families in this study have sustained various social and cultural contexts thus the operational definition of literacy will take this into consideration. Consequently, literacy in this study is an activity that involves instruction, interaction and engagement between two or more individuals, resulting in the transfer and acquisition of knowledge and skill, or both, and leading to some transformation in an individual.

An Overview of Literacy Practices in Africa

According to the Harvard African language program, the African continent has one third of the world's languages; that is, over 2000 languages (Hyman, 2003). At an Association of Independent Publishers' Annual General Meeting in Johannesburg (2013), it was observed that several African languages are marginalized and are not available in print. Scholars have previously noted that it is a common occurrence to find that literacy practices in Africa are

depicted in non-print forms of play, music, chanting, dance, and folk-storytelling (Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015; Green, 1985; Paquette et al., 2008). For example, Green (1985) points out that while Western music literacy is based on "arithmetic accounting of sounds" (p. 405), African music literacy is historically derived from oral literacy, "a source of communication and history retold through sound" (p. 406). This is illustrated in drum signals and languages that are as distinct and as varied as the people, and as numerous as the more than 2000 spoken languages in Africa. Vygotsky and other Soviet social theorists agreed that language was the most significant psychological tool. Miller (2016) concurs too, that acquisition of language is what gives meaning to our experiences. In some African families, literacy has for generations been transmitted through "dance, music, song and iconographic artistic representations" (Green, 1985, p. 407) rendering meaning to experiences and constructing culture.

Like culture, economic and environmental contexts differ within families, communities and countries. Yet, these have the greatest influence on learning because learning opportunities happen through life's mundane activities and practices, many times involving dialogue between both children and adults (Auerbach, 1989). In the absence of reading resources, dialogue is maintained through gestures and behaviors observed through daily interactions. Just as sharing books is bound to stimulate dialogue between an intergenerational dyad (Whitehouse et al., 2018), in countries and communities with limited access to children's reading resources, this dialogue takes on varying formats like storytelling, play, art, drawings, songs, poems and dance. These are forms that may not be obvious to the outsider (Malo et al., 2000; Desmond et al., 2008; Carlsson-Paige et al., 2015). However, the outcomes are powerful since they ultimately empower both the children and adults with literacy education (Grabsch et al., 1997).

In countries plagued with conflict, inefficient educational resources, and ineffective education systems (Magos et al., 2018; Huss et al., 2020), children and adults' literacy practices are based on the experiences with the symbols and interactions within their environment (Desmond et al., 2008). Several studies have explored various literacy practices amongst communities in Africa. Ngwaru, et al., (2010) in their study highlight the impediments to print literacy in Ghana and Zimbabwe. They also show the discordance between the school (formal learning) and home environment (informal learning). In Ghana, the scholars interviewed a single mother living with her two children in a remote area of the country. Although her two children attended formal school, her daughter explained that she did not know there were print resources she could use at school. Print literacy experiences at home were neither possible, nor a priority for Prisca (Ngwaru, et al., 2010). In Zimbabwe, one study focused on how the relationship between the parents and teachers negatively affected the children's literacy experiences (Ngwaru, et al., 2010). They noted that parents and teachers did not have the same literacy goals for the children. After the focus group discussions held as part of the study, both teachers and parents agreed to initiate print literacy day events as one of the ways to bridge the literacy gap between school and home (Ngwaru, et al., 2010). At the end of this study, both parents and teachers through collaboration learnt that problem-solving together would help them attain literacy goals for their children, whether text literacy or otherwise.

Narration of stories connects people and promotes cultural beliefs and values. A study conducted in Senegal, among the Halpular tribe witnessed how grandmothers from the Halpular tribe used storytelling to communicate cultural traditions and moral values related to honor, dignity, truth and respect for elders (Desmond et al., 2008). The tribemates revered a grandmothers' role, and had coined proverbs such as, "Grandmother's lessons are like a school

that prepares you for life," (Desmond et al., 2008. p. 19), thus acknowledging their significance in society. The researchers found that families in this community gathered in the evening to listen to grandmothers as they narrated favorite traditional tales and proverbs. Scrimsher and Tudge (2003) contend that instruction like this from those within the zone of proximal development was not meant to enhance a particular skill of any task but it was related to development. Indeed, through their observations, the researchers designed a booklet incorporating the stories, and describing the grandmothers' and how their status and activities promoted non print literacy in this Senegalese community. This resulted in development of written text that would then be made available to those who could read print (Desmond et al., 2008).

In KwaZulu -Natal, a town in South Africa, researchers observed family literacy practices noting that despite government interventions supporting preschools, print literacy scores remained low within this community (Desmond et al, 2008). This was attributed to the parents whose reading and writing abilities were not as strong as their non-print literacy practices that happened through adult-child-dyad daily interactions, like going to fetch water (Desmond et al, 2008). This community is one of the several indigenous cultures that use actions and gestures as a form of instruction. As the adult-child-dyad went on their journey, they talked about their surroundings, the people they met, and thereafter related the experience when they returned home. Through this kind of dialogue, the child's literacy skills such as planning, vocabulary, recall, repetition, and sequencing are established (Miller, 2016). Desmond et al. (2008) note that "Young children do not read and write but, as they learn to talk, parents can help them by encouraging conversation" (p. 34). Miller (2016) wrote that according to Vygotsky's approach, each culture is unique and therefore determines the most appropriate psychological and technical

tools applicable to enhancing their learning. In communities such as the one in Kwa Zulu Natal, these daily interactions between the dyad provide both teaching and learning moments. Both learner and expert appreciate the value of their social contexts.

As noted from the examples from the three African countries, literacy experiences vary. The common thread could be the four foundational literacy concepts advanced by McGee et al., (2000) as "Literacy is pleasurable; activities occur in predictable routines and other social interactions embedded in cultural practices; materials are handled in special ways, and literacy involves the use of symbols and the communication of meanings" (p. 36). Nonetheless, literacy experiences should be investigated with consideration of the social and cultural diversity of the communities to cater for the variations in available literacy resources and cultural contexts. This is particularly important for the United States as it currently admits refugees from all over the world (Sudha et al., 2021). Arriving from countries with different sociocultural expectations than the United States, refugees must reexamine their historical, social, economic, and cultural perspectives as they assimilate into their host country.

Refugees Resettlement in the United States

The United States of America is one of the 37 developed refugee resettlement countries besides Canada, Australia and Europe that resettles less than 1% of the global refugees (Immigration Forum, 2020). Most refugees (over 86%) stay in the developing countries, according to a United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) report of June 2020. The UNHCR, the global organization mandated to safeguard lives, protect rights, and provide a better future for refugees, observes that there are at least 79.5 million (UNHCR June 2020) displaced people around the world living as refugees. In 2020, UNHCR was responsible for over 20 million refugees, 7.4 million of them children of school going age. While many refugees flee

to neighboring countries (Kaplan et al., 2016; Huss et al., 2020; Magos et al., 2018; Birman, 2005), each country sets its immigration policies including determining the annual entry limits.

In the United States, the President in consultation with Congress, sets the limit for the expected number of refugees per year. Undeterred by the rising global refugee numbers, the United States has not significantly increased its refugee acceptance numbers since 2019. In 1980, the United States annual refugee resettlement ceiling was over 200,000 refugees. But, in October 2020, the annual resettlement number was reduced to 15,000 refugees (Migration Policy, 2020) and yet, the global refugee numbers are on the increase.

Refugees arrive in the United States from several countries and are resettled in different States. North Carolina is among the top ten States that receives refugees and resettles them in the urban counties of Wake, Durham, Guilford, Mecklenburg, and adjacent areas (Immigration National Forum, 2020; Migration Policy, 2020; Sudha et al., 2021). In the FY 2018, and in FY 2020, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) had the highest number of refugees admitted into the United States (Migration Policy, 2020). The United States Migration Policy (2020) reported in FY 2020, a total of 2,868 refugees from the DRC were received in the United States.

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)- Why the High Numbers?

For over 20 years, the political, economic and social environment in the DRC has been tumultuous and unfavorable for family existence. The country has been plagued by internal conflicts and wars that have caused over 5 million deaths and displaced over 5.5million people (IRC report, 2020). Besides internal displacement and deaths, the political violence in the rural areas culminated in survivors migrating from the rural to urban areas in search of basic services, safety, shelter, and stability. Yet, in the urban areas, they still find insecurity, inefficient, or non-existent infrastructure, an apathetic provision of refugee services, not to mention increased

military violence. In desperation, the residents flee to neighboring countries in search of security

and stability.

Figure 2. Geographical Location of Democratic Republic of Congo.

Source: © *Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.*

Source:https://mk0fistulafoundi2ls4.kinstacdn.com/wp-

content/uploads/2019/08/DRC-424x424.png
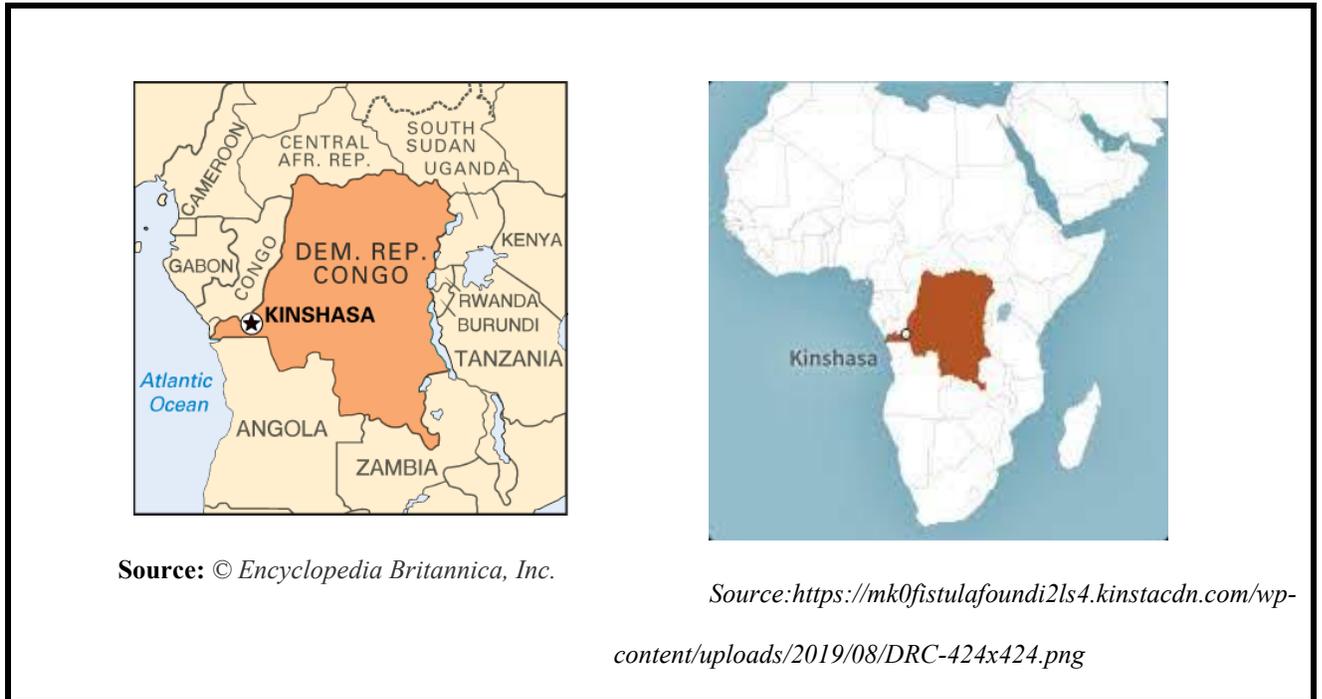
The DRC is situated in the central western part of sub-Saharan Africa (See Fig 2 above).

The DRC has a population of close to 91,341,620 (UNESCO UIS, 2021; Worldometer data,

2021; World Population Review 2021), and its capital is Kinshasa. The country is endowed with

diverse natural resources including gems, minerals, diverse ecosystem, tropical rainforests and

vast grasslands and mountains, some of which are dormant volcanic mountains. However,

despite the diverse and rich resources in the country, poverty in the DRC is rampant such that the

country is ranked as the second poorest country in the world (Pachner et al., 2020).

DRC is the third largest country in Africa but has poor management of its government

systems (Kreibum 2016; Pachner et al., 2020) including service sectors like education. All

service sectors including education are non-functional. With over 250 languages spoken in this

country and no definite policy on language of instruction in schools, provision of national education service is a challenge. While government guidelines stipulate that instruction of French begins in the third grade, the DRC Constitution recognizes Swahili, Lingala, Tshiluba and Kituba as the other prominent national languages of the over 250 languages.

The DRC's education system setup is complex. There are four main religious based institutions mandated with overseeing the education system, each with its own administration. The education system is divided amongst the "Catholic network (conventionné Catholique), the Kimbanguist network (conventionné Kimbanguiste), the Protestant network (conventionné Protestante), and the Islamic network (conventionné islamique)" (Titeca et al., 2011, p. 220). Globally, the World Bank recommends education standards to help countries like DRC achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 that considers inclusive, equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning for all. However, the existing education set up and systems in DRC barely adhere to the World Bank's recommended standards regarding curriculum, class sizes, teachers' qualifications, salaries and the assessment system (UIL, 2020). This stratification, lack of adherence to the standards, combined with the multiplicity of languages, amongst other factors, makes it practically impossible for the nearly 7 million children aged 5-17 in DRC (UNICEF Congo, 2020) to get quality formal education in DRC. In fact, currently, access to recent and reliable information on education and literacy performance in DRC is not easily attainable. The available reports of 2016 estimate literacy rate for youth aged 15-24 years was 85% while that of the adults aged 65 years and above was at 48% (UNESCO UIS, 2021). According to USAID (2019), the country's education system is crippled, preventing attainment of national literacy efforts and denying citizens their fundamental human right of literacy as accorded by the UNESCO.

For communities lacking a strong reading culture, literacy cannot be separated from the individual's social, cultural, and historical context. While studies have shown that children's literacy capabilities are enriched through the home environments, research indicates that reading to children results in improved phonological awareness, letter knowledge, and that the informal environment helps children improve their vocabulary (Niklas et al., 2016). It is therefore essential, as Keefe et al., (2011) suggest, to diversify our understanding of literacy practices to cater for the communities with alternative instruction and diverse views of literacy. Lyle et al. (2017) argue that, "Literacy is deeply influenced by context" (p. 5). The sociocultural theory promotes the same thought about the environment and cultural context impacting literacy and learning. A state that may well apply to the Congolese refugees whose experiences are influenced both by their prior and current circumstances.

Congolese Refuges in the United States

The refugee experiences will vary depending on how much time the family has spent in any given place. In the case of the Congolese refugees, most individuals are multilingual, conversant in French, Swahili, Lingala, Tshiluba and Kituba, the common languages used between individuals from different ethnic groups in the DRC (CNNC, 2015; UNESCO UIS, 2021). On resettling to the United States, they find that the host country is a predominantly English-speaking country. Congolese refugees resettling in the United States are required to read, write and sign off documents in English, a language they are not proficient in. As part of the resettlement process, the United States government through different local agencies provides free English language classes to all refugees and this service is not exclusive to Congolese refugees. In North Carolina, the Center for New North Carolinians (CNNC) is one of the local organizations responsible for providing different services to refugees. CNNC statistics indicate

that 59% of the Congolese they receive, none can speak English, and neither can they read, nor write in English (CNNC, 2015).

Upon arrival to the United States, Congolese refugees like other refugees, are met by the sponsoring organization like Church World Services (CWS) who are responsible for providing them with the initial resettlement requirements including housing, transport and home necessities for a total of three months. After the three months, all refugees are expected to be self-sufficient, pay their rent, utilities and their personal life expenses (Saksena et al., 2019). Refugees are required to apply for Permanent Residency within a year of their arrival, and citizenship within a five-year period. For many, becoming independent within their first three months of arrival is a daunting task because they encounter various other challenges. For the Congolese refugees, limited English language skills is just one of the major reasons that hinders them from qualifying for better paying and less strenuous jobs (CNNC, 2015; Saksena et al., 2019; Sudha et al., 2021).

Additionally, the Congolese refugees are recipients of a six-week cultural orientation training that prepares them for life in the United States. In these classes, lessons on cultural differences they may encounter, as well as where and how to find solutions (CNNC, 2015) are taught. All refugees are encouraged to attend the free English classes although the majority are unable to regularly attend because of conflicting factors as they take on intensive yet poor paying jobs, with the goal of being independent within 90 days. For some, the work and home responsibilities are overwhelming. And yet for others, this is the first time they encounter an organized classroom setting; the language classes are their first formal learning environment and juggling this with other responsibilities proves to be overwhelming, consequently often leading to dropping out (CNNC, 2015). The sociocultural context is all different from what they were accustomed to.

United States School Expectations of Parents and Children

According to the 1989 Federal National Educational Goals, later incorporated into "Goals 2000": Educate America Act, the number one goal of education, requires all parents in America to prepare their children for school and all children must "start school ready to learn" (Lewit et al., 1995, p. 128). Carlton et al. (1999) describe school readiness as, the "level of development at which an individual is able to learn specific material in a typical school context" (p. 338). The expectation with this goal is that children will come from their homes and begin school, already having achieved certain key developmental learning milestones. To have children meet the set standards and be ready for school and ready to learn, "every parent in the United States is required to be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need" (LII, 2021). However, the United States education system is decentralized according to each state, and therefore school readiness varies across states. Lewis and Baker (1995) also noted that while there is no definite cross cutting tool to measure readiness, the issue is also controversial as it is not clear whether the children should be ready for school, or the school should be ready for the children.

There is a double-edged meaning to "school readiness" to mean "readiness for learning and readiness for school" (Lewis & Baker, 1995, p. 129). Further, some research denotes that readiness for learning infers to the individual child's competencies to take in knowledge at school while readiness for school infers to fulfilling the physical intellectual and social development standards. Along with that, parents in the United States are expected to be involved in their children's daily education progress. Teachers typically expect parents to look through their children's schoolwork, respond to requests and notes, read, understand and comply with the

school policies, and the education system. For refugee parents and children, these expectations are not only a new phenomenon, but they are unfamiliar, unclear and thus stressful. There are refugee parents who have had no prior school experience, or whose school experience considerably differ from those of the United States education system.

It is also important to recognize that parents and children have other social traumatic experiences that may affect their perspective on life's priorities. With the onset of the global pandemic in 2020, there was another layer of complexity added to the education scene not only in the United States, but globally. The closure of schools led to cessation of face-to-face learning and a migration to online learning. Parents were expected to provide their children with the appropriate physical tools, that is, technology devices as well as the knowledge and skills to guide their children through online learning. It is presumed that these changes further affected Congolese refugee families.

COVID-19 and its Impact

A new coronavirus was noticed in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (Hashemi-Shahri et al., 2020; Spring, 2020) resulting in a global pandemic and ultimately leading to a worldwide lockdown beginning in March 2020. This global pandemic resulted in "Stay home" directives that confined everyone in their homes. On 11th March 2020, the United States government declared a nationwide emergency, and called for closure of all services, including schools. In North Carolina, the Governor through Executive Order No. 117 declared closure of all K-12 traditional public schools to in-person instruction and ordered for online learning as the option. Initially, this was intended for a few months, but after two more Executive Orders No. 120 and No. 138 followed, schools in North Carolina were closed for face-to-face learning throughout the year 2020 (StrongSchools, NC, 2020). To support this decision, the State Board of Education

(SBE) and the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) allocated $50 million to support schools' closure to in-person instruction and to promote online instruction to students through the pandemic (Government Press Release, March 2020). The funds were to cater for families to receive "meals, improve distance learning, childcare, and much more" (Government Press Release, March 2020). Through an announcement later posted on the website, the Guilford County Schools (GCS) leadership within North Carolina called for donations of devices to enable remote learning for the students within the county.

Ryan et al. (2020) explain that low-income families were faced with other stressors that hindered them from helping their children with reading, or any form of schoolwork. For instance, in Canada, it is believed that the shift to online classes aggravated challenges for refugee families who due to their prior experiences were already struggling to meet the learning standards (Edmonds et al., 2021). Additionally, equity of access to technological devices, coupled with technologically savviness were a concern (Edmonds et al., 2021, p. 9). A report by Ryan et al., (2020) noted that the onset of Covid-19 highlighted not only the digital divide, but also highlighted the teachers' and parents' technological limitations, exacerbating the learning gap especially among the underprivileged groups.

The Current Study

The United States has received many refugees from different sociocultural backgrounds, resettling them in different states where they are encouraged to assimilate. As part of the assimilation process, all children from refugee families are required to attend school in fulfillment of education as a universal human right. However, many Congolese refugees have had less experience with formal school literacy practices such as access to print text and the Internet since technology is limited in DRC. There have been previous studies on refugees and

literacy. However, there is not much literature focused on what the existing literacy practices within Congolese families are like. It is also not clear what the Congolese parents' and caregivers' literacy beliefs and practices are and how they utilize their knowledge to prepare, support and equip their children to be successful both in the home and school in the United States.

Given their varying education experiences and backgrounds, children from refugee families are confronted with challenges in fulfilling school expectations to which they are abruptly introduced in their new country. Equally challenging is navigating the education system in the United States which has not been adequately equipped to support children from refugee families (Richardson, 2018). Literature has indicated that with the global pandemic, education has on a global scale changed (Ryan et al., 2020; Hussong et al., 2020). While adjusting and adapting to a new country, new culture, new language, and to satisfy the school expectations, the onset of COVID-19 brought an abrupt and unexpected change in the learning scene with a swift change from face-face instruction to virtual (online) learning which added further complexities for refugee families.

This research study will address these concerns by considering three main research questions: a) What do Congolese refugee families believe about literacy? b) What did the Congolese refugee families do to support their children's literacy practices prior to coming to the United States? and c) What has been the Congolese refugee families' experience with literacy during the pandemic?

CHAPTER IV: METHODS

Qualitative Methodology

Matters related to refugees are both complex and sensitive. The choice therefore was to conduct a qualitative study, to examine the complexity and broadness of the literacy phenomenon within the families from this community. According to Hancock et al. (2017), case study research, "typically focuses on individual representative of a group" (p. 15). In this study, the case study approach was chosen to allow for in-depth dialogue and exploration of complex and sensitive issues amongst the sample group (CNNC, 2015; Crowe et al., 2011; Cypress. 2017; Snowdon, 2015). The main purpose of this research was three-fold; (1) to describe the literacy beliefs, practices and experiences amongst the Congolese refugee families resettled in North Carolina; (2) to explore the strategies Congolese refugee families use to support their children's literacy development; and (3) to investigate how COVID-19 affected the literacy practices of the Congolese refugee families resettled within one medium sized county of North Carolina.

The Collective case study method, a combination of both the Intrinsic and Instrumental case study methods is the design that was used to direct this study. The Intrinsic method allowed for the researcher to understand the individual participants as members of a large group, while the Instrumental method provided the appreciation of complicated issues such as related to refugees and literacy (Hancock et al., 2017). Using Instrumental Case study provided deeper insight into the refugee and literacy issue allowing for the researcher to draw generalizations. Collective Case study approach allows for the use of interviews and observations for data collection, both of which were used in this research study. The set of open-ended questions that were used at the three interviews were approved by the University Institutional Review Board. The open-ended questions enabled self-reflection and free expression on the part of the

interviewees. In reporting the findings, both the quotes and observations are used, both of which are a major feature of the case study method. These are obtained after the data analysis process, which involved going back and forth between six main steps: transcribing, reviewing, coding, categorizing, synthesizing and interpretation of the collected data.

Recruitment

The University Institutional Review Board approved the study before recruitment began. For this particular study, Congolese families resettled in the state of North Carolina in the United States were recruited. Participants came from families who had to have lived in the U.S. from one to five years and experienced the pandemic or a part of the pandemic in the United States. Each of the families also had to have at least one child within the age range of 4-8 years. The children had at the time of the study, also had to have at least three months of interaction with the United States school system. Identifying willing participants was done through snowballing, which Etikan et al. (2016) also referred to as Chain-referral-sampling. This is regarded as a convenient way to find participants from a hard-to-reach population. Using email and phone services, I contacted organizations working with refugees. In the same way, I reached out to current and former students and individuals who might have had some form of contact with any Congolese refugees. I also approached various churches known to serve this community. In many instances, I was required to either send or leave the information sheet about my research to be emailed or handed out to a potential participant. I followed up on leads and referrals from friends, advisors, and students.

With each referral, I followed up as the Principle Investigator and identified myself in that role. I do not speak Kiswahili, as spoken by most Congolese refugees. However, applying my plausible French, I sufficiently explained my research, and why I was conducting this study, I

inquired on whether they, the refugees felt comfortable to talk about their experiences with literacy. At the end of the recruitment process, five participants from five families met the criteria and accepted to participate in the study. These included two mothers and three fathers. There were other potential participants who I had approached but they did not meet the prespecified criteria. This included a mother who was located 92 miles away from the researcher. Another one was a mother whose biological children were grown up, and she now identified as a grandmother. There was also a mother who did not self-identify as a refugee from Congo.

The five participants spoke at least one Congolese native language, in addition to French and/or Swahili. They were not proficient in English and therefore interviews were not conducted in English. The participants that agreed to participate were asked what language they preferred to use in our conversations. Since the preference was for Swahili, an interpreter was necessitated, and one was engaged at the time when two participants had agreed to participate in the study. The other three participants were recruited when the Interpreter was part of the research team. The interpreter was a former refugee herself, who is now a U.S. citizen. She self-identified as a refugee from Burundi, who had for some time lived in Congo. She was proficient in Congolese Swahili and some of the other native languages. After signing the Statement of Confidentiality, the Interpreter immediately begun with facilitating translations to confirm meetings with the participants who spoke only Swahili and their native language. She, together with me, met the participants, scheduled and reconfirmed all interview appointments.

During the initial conversation, which was either face-to-face or by phone, I explained how the research would be conducted; a total of three interviews, each lasting an hour. Additionally, I let the participants know that I would be accompanied by an interpreter for each session. I assured each participant that they were free to stop participating at any time without

fear of any repercussions. I also informed participants that they would receive a $20 gift card at the end of each interview. Depending on the feedback from each potential participant, those who accepted to participate in the study were asked if the interview could be via zoom or face-to-face. All participants preferred a face-to-face interview and suggested a place of their convenience. Following their acceptance, a date for the first face-face interview was set, meeting place agreed upon and contact information exchanged. Due to the COVID-19 situation, with the exception of one participant, all these preparatory discussions had been conducted on the phone. The Interpreter and I had the initial face-to-face meeting with the participants the time we held the first interview. At the first meeting, participants signed the consent form before the beginning of the first interview.

Interview Procedure

In observance of the COVID-19 protocols, the interpreter and I sanitized and had our masks on before and throughout the interviews. Once we were with the participant for the first interview, I would once again introduce myself and the interpreter. Through the interpreter, I would once again explain the purpose of the research. Each participant was reminded that they had the free will to stop the interview at any point they felt uncomfortable. I introduced the audio recorder, and with the recorder in hand, I informed participants that each interview would be audio-recorded and answered any questions they had regarding recording. Through the Interpreter, I informed participants that they did not have to state their names during the recording and that they could use a pseudo name if that was more convenient for them. The Consent form was read and explained to each participant, giving each one was given a chance to ask questions. Given that this was still the pandemic season, with restrictions on person-to-

person interactions, all initial basics including explaining consent form had to be covered at the first face-to-face meeting. Once participants were in agreement, they signed the form.

The recording began once the participant confirmed they had no more questions and ended as soon as the participant gave the last response. The participants were given a $20 gift card as an appreciation for their time at the end of each interview. To clarify, at the start of the interviewing process, I had only two participants. When I concluded the first interviews with each of the initial two participants, I asked if they knew anyone else who might be interested in participating in the study. Thereafter, the follow up interview was scheduled. At the end of the study, the Interpreter and I had met each participant a total of three face-to-face sessions. Each interview session did not last no more than 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded. All interviews took place over a one-month time period.

Field Notes

Throughout the study, I wrote field notes after each session, recording the observations during the interviews. This included the ambiance, the family members who were present during the interviews and the family interactions and activities during the interview. The field notes were not taken during the interviews because a) the researcher had to interact with the participants, and b) the researcher had to be present in the moment and avoid any activities/actions that could make the participants uncomfortable.

Researcher's Positionality

As a graduate student, while I have read extensively on issues related to refugees, participated in research projects and attended conferences focusing on refugees, I cannot compare any experiences I have had to the participants. As a researcher, my professional background and personal experiences are deeply rooted in educational projects based in Uganda

and other countries in Africa. I had the privilege to learn English in school and this proved advantageous to my scholarship in the United States. While I speak my native language Luganda, I am also proficient in English and French which are internationally recognized languages. Speaking French made it easier to interact with these families although I did not speak any of their native languages. Originating from another African country worked in my favor during this study, in that, the refugee families found comfort in this fact. To minimize the influence of both lived and professional experiences, privileges and the likely prejudices, I reviewed the data together with my peers. I reflected after each interview and took note of my personal biases in the field notes journal. I was also conscious that I had to seek continual guidance from the Interpreter so the families could comfortably express themselves. At the start of this research, I had no personal knowledge of the likely participants, nor any interaction, or cognizance of any Congolese refugees located in North Carolina.

Participants

Alimasi

Alimasi had by the time of this interview lived in the United States for two years. He currently has an infirmity which has made it difficult for him to find suitable employment. He is married and has currently in his household, ten adults, and five children, whose ages range between three and ten years. At eighty years of age, Alimasi reported that he has had a total of thirty-two children, some of whom lost their lives during the war. Those who are alive are spread out in refugee camps in various countries in Africa. While his mother-tongue is Kizoba, he can read and write in both Kiswahili and French. Considering that his wife's mother tongue is Kibembe, their preferred language of communication is Swahili, in which both are conversant. Alimasi can neither read nor write in English.

During his childhood in Congo, Alimasi's father introduced him to fishing, the mainstay trade in Congo at the time, *"When my dad…because my dad was fisherman too and he…I use to practice, I use to practice to...how to catch fish. I use to show them wire so I can catch with them fish,"* he explained. In his youthful days at school, Alimasi learnt mechanics though he did not practice the trade because as he explains, *"I didn't finish school".* When asked about his experience at school in Congo, he explained that formal school in Congo began with the Colonialists who forced parents to take their children to school. When he moved to the refugee camp, he had to learn new skills to survive. As he explained, in the refugee camp he met an old man who was a practicing herbalist. This man trained Alimasi who explains, "*he taught me many things how to treat people. I used like herbs to treat them [people]".* In this way, Alimasi was able to provide the basic subsistence for his family in the refugee camp. Despite of his own limited time in a formal school setting, Alimasi dreams of a better future for his children.

Mitima

Mitima has lived in the United States for four years and eleven months. A father of ten, Mitima currently lives with his wife and three of his children. His other children, he says are either married, others are still in Congo while others are in a refugee camp in a different country in Africa. Mitima speaks Lingala, Swahili and French, *"I can speak good Swahili, I can write good, I can speak good French and I can write good, and Lingala too."* Regarding English, Mitima explains, *"I don't know English. The language I want to learn is English because we live in different countries where everyone speaks that language".*

Narrating his school experience in Congo, Mitima says he attended school but explains, *"when I was in my age, we didn't have like a lot of schools because I remember when I start school and 6th grade, I had to move to go maybe to live in another family because to find a*

school". In Congo, Mitima attended school and qualified as a teacher, a skill that was beneficial in the refugee camp. After leaving Congo, he carried on with his teaching work in the refugee camp, *"I went to work as a teacher, but I have experience teaching children."* However, once he moved to the United States, he was not able to practice. Mitima goes to the local agency working with refugees to attend English classes in the mornings and then spends the afternoon at home with his young children while his wife heads to work. Although life is very different from what he would like, Mitima has dreams for his children and says, *"I wanted them to know where, we come from Congo, to know weather on Congo, to know everything from there. And they know people in Congo live with…each other"*.

Buhendwa

The third participant, Buhendwa is a father of four, who all arrived in the United States during the COVID-19 pandemic. In his household, he lives together with his wife, Buhendwa and their four children aged seven, five, three and a seven-month-old baby. He and his wife speak Kibembe but Swahili is the main language of communication in the family, *"Children speak Swahili a lot because they grow up in refugee camp, most people speak Swahili and they speak a little bit Kibembe,"* he explains. Speaking about his experience and the importance of his native language, Buhendwa says, *"When I was in Congo we moved from Congo to refugee camp to another country but we never lose our languages and we use to read books in Kibembe and even Bible we read those Bible in Kibembe."* He therefore uses the languages interchangeably as the need arises, alternating between Kibembe, Swahili, French and the limited English he has currently learnt. To Buhendwa, school is very important.

Buhendwa works the night shift, returning home in the early hours of the morning. Prior to coming to the United States, Buhendwa worked with a Charity organization in the refugee

camp teaching other refugees about Sanitation and Hygiene practices. His dream for his children he says, *"As a parent, I want just them to, to learn and to get a better life. What I want them to do in the future to be doctors."* He hopes that once he learns English, he will be able to help his children achieve his dreams for them.

Ndaya

Ndaya was born in Congo. She recalls that her family later resettled in a refugee camp in Tanzania when she was still a child herself. In Tanzania, Ndaya attended both primary and high school. In school, she learnt Swahili but says that while she can speak it, she is not able to effectively write in Swahili. Ndaya, together with her husband and five children have lived in the United States for about two years. Her three older children attend school while she is currently spending more time at home with her a ten-month-old baby and a two-year-old daughter. She has previously had English lessons and has some minimal understanding when someone speaks to her. She has plans to resume these classes, for as she says, *"learning is not just about going to school and getting an education or learning about life."*

Fimi

Two and a half years ago, Fimi together with her husband and son arrived in the United States. Fimi who is not proficient in English but speaks Swahili and French, spends more time at home with her children. She says though that language limitations have not hindered her from using her skill to occasionally earn an income and contribute to the family revenue. She attributes learning this skill from Congo and says this for her is literacy, stating, *"In Congo we do literacy different ways because I can say it depends with family and in school it the same thing like how to learn thing in school but now in family it depends with the family."*

Although all five participants completed the interviews, the thorough transcribed and translated data were available for only three of the five participants. These three were the fathers whose views were analyzed in greater detail in the following chapters. The incompleteness of the data stemmed mainly from language translation and interpretation challenges thus the data from two of the participants was not viable for inclusion in the current study.

Analytic Approach

All collected data was sorted, labeled and stored with an identification number. Each interview session with each family, corresponded to one research question which represented the individual families' own unique lived experiences. Therefore, each family's three interviews were reviewed as a complete independent study. Initially, I tried to use software that could transcribe the interviews. However, no software could recognize the Congolese Swahili language and transcribe it, nor was I able to find any software that could accurately translate the interviews in the Swahili as spoken by the Congolese families. In order to ensure accuracy of the recordings and reduce prejudices, a Congolese refugee teaching French, Congolese Swahili, and who is also conversant with the native languages in Congo, transcribed the audio recordings over a three-week period. He signed a confidentiality statement before commencing the assignment. The transcribed interviews were then reviewed by the researcher to check for spelling errors, and the accurate flow of the English information.

The analytic intent of this study was to understand the participants' literacy practices. Working independently, the researcher and graduate peer moved to the second stage of qualitative date analysis; coding (Stuckey, 2015). According to Stuckey (2015), coding requires both time and creativity. It involves a three-step process, "1) Reading through the data and creating a storyline; 2) Categorizing the data into codes; and 3)Using memos for clarification and

interpretation" (p. 7). A graduate peer and I, individually read through the participants' data which was labeled 'Participant 1' through to 'Participant 3'. No real names were provided to the graduate peer. We then re-read each participant's data in accordance with the research questions. We categorized the quotes in line with the main research questions, identifying the most appropriate quotes that answered each of the three research questions per participant. The graduate peer then shared her categorized data which corresponded to each participant and to each research question. To avoid any confusion, the graduate peer received 'Participant 2's data after categorizing all of 'Participant 1's data and likewise for 'Participant 3'. I also reviewed each participants' responses in accordance with each research question. I took the lead in data analysis, read and re-read the transcribed interview scripts. I organized the data into descriptive categories and generated themes. The data analytic approach used in this study is more inductive than deductive (Azungah, 2018). Later, I synthesized and interpreted the themes.

To ensure reliability of terminology at preparation stage, the research questions were reviewed by two Congolese who spoke Congolese Swahili and French. The purpose was to ensure that the term 'literacy' was correctly reflected in the research questions and meant the same thing in the two languages. Their feedback was taken into consideration leading to the translation of the research questions into those two languages (See Appendix B and C). The three sets of interviews provided in depth understanding of the families. At the end of each interview, I wrote field notes capturing my observations of the gestures, family interactions and activities. Besides reading the transcribed transcripts repeatedly, the analysis process was supported through working with a fellow graduate student who was familiar with the topic of this study and who had experience with a case study approach. This approach along with self-reflection throughout the process helped reduce bias.

Upon completion of the categorization stage, I printed all the data as part of the process of getting ready for the next stage: synthesizing the data. Working individually, I created a document (*research question and quote*) with a table with five columns for each participant. Column 1 was blank, but column 2, 3 and 4 represented the research question. Column 5 had "Other' quotes that were interesting but not answering any particular question. I then organized the printouts according to participant and color-coded quotes that were noted by the graduate peer and myself. I followed this process for each participant for the three research questions finding similar quotes noted by the graduate peer and myself. I then copied the common quotes into the table format as the most relevant to each of the research questions. Pseudo-names were then created for each participant and codes were developed to reflect the fathers' views. The codes emerged from the data collected and continued to evolve as I reviewed the data, interpreted the information, and wrote the findings. The graduate peer reviewer also provided feedback and input on the codes and interpretation. The data analysis was an iterative activity, that aligned with Stuckley's (2015) opinion on qualitative data and how it is an iterative and creative process.

CHAPTER V: RESULTS

After the set of three interviews with each father, I learnt there were beliefs and practices about literacy that resonated amongst the three refugee fathers. Surprisingly, their outlook on literacy was similar to the operational definition of literacy used in this study. It was also evident that their own parents' influences, as well as social and cultural experiences molded their perceptions of what constituted literacy, and what they did or did not do in regard to literacy practices with their children. This spilled over into whom they considered to play a key role in literacy or instruction of literacy. I herein, following the data analysis process and using the socio-cultural theory, I share the fathers' own viewpoints in Tables 1-3. To begin with, their viewpoint in reference to their beliefs and understanding of Literacy is explained in the following themes (see Table 1): Literacy is learning; Literacy is a practical skill; Literacy is about going to school; Literacy is language and it is culture; Literacy is play and it is stories; and lastly Literacy is the past parental lessons and influence.

Table 1. Themes and Quotes for Research Question 1

Theme	Mitima	Alimasi	Buhendwa
"Literacy is learning"	*"When you learn something it's about to learn everything about the world, it's about to learn something about different people, it's about to learn about different families, I can say its including everything."*	*"When you learn something like I can say for example, to...to catch fish I can go to water and catch*	*"Literacy is to learn something and you...after you have...you learn that thing you have to share with other people so*

		some fish and sell them.”	*this literacy can help other people.”*
“Literacy is a practical skill”	*“Literacy is to learn something and you…after you have…you learn that thing you have to share with other people so this literacy can help other people.”*	*“When you learn something like I can say for example, to...to catch fish I can go to water and catch some fish and sell them.”*	*“Skills taught me how to get job by myself.”*
Literacy is about going to school.	*“... I can say to, to learn something first is to go to school to have something from school and because when you didn't go to school I think you can have something but I didn't go to school”*	*“We learnt about geography, history, like every school is alphabetic, mathematics, everything we learnt at school.”*	*“When children go to school and learn very good he is going to be successful”*

Literacy is language and it is culture.	*"When the children, the baby has growing, there is what our parents used to talk to the children first is about to teach the baby, the child, the language. When this child is growing, we use to told them the language, bring me a chair, bring me the water to drink, go call your mum for me."*	*"When children don't respect others there can be some difficult between other families when ...your child don't respect other families so they can be a difficulty."*	*"All languages are very good for...very important because when you are here you have to learn the language they speak here and the original language where we come from is very important for me and for my children because I don't want like children to lose that language for the future."*
Literacy is Play. It is Stories	*"Congo we use like evening we sit outside with children we can tell them stories or they can even taught us stories and ...but here child don't have, we don't have that time with our children. I know, in Congo boys go to play soccer and the girls*	*"Sometimes, we sit down and they ask me about Congo, how was Congo and I just explain them with the question they ask me."*	*"Because Congo a child play outside like they can, like my children in refugee camp they use to play outside, they use to build things with the hands, like they use*

	can go to the church, do different things."		*create the things but now [In the United States] they don't do that because they are in school, they are in house."*
Past parental lessons and influence	*"I taught my children the same way the same way my parents taught me. And when I brought my children to school I taught them your teacher is your parents, is like your second parent you have to respect them because that the way my parents taught me."*	*When my Dad … because my dad was fisherman too and he…I use to practice, I use to practice to…how to catch fish. Only fishing because that was my parents did and that what I saw what my parents did."*	*"They [the parents] taught us how to in the morning you have to get up and clean yourself and go to school and learn after that you go home."*

Research Question #1: What do Congolese Refugee Families Believe About Literacy?

    Literacy is learning: According to the fathers, this learning happens in school and out of school. According to Buhendwa, *"literacy is to learn something and after you have, you learn that thing you have to share with other people so this literacy can help other people."* As a former teacher, Mitima explains literacy to be, *"when I learn something, let me say about school, I can, when I finish my school, I can get a good job, I can get a better life."* Alimasi had similar thoughts in accordance with the other two fathers saying literacy is, *"When you learn something, it…something like…you get something, you are going to be rich when you learn something."*

    Literacy is a practical skill. What you learn, can be as specific as a skill. For Alimasi that practical skill, which translates to literacy for him is, *"When you learn something like I can say for example, to...to catch fish I can go to water and catch some fish and sell them."* The father of four, Buhendwa added that beyond literacy has the aspect of sharing what you learn and he thus describes it further as, *"Literacy is to learn something and you…after you have…you learn that thing you have to share with other people so this literacy can help other people."* Mitima's views are not very different from the other two fathers, because in his view, *"When you learn something it's about to learn everything about the world, it's about to learn something about different people, it's about to learn about different families, I can say its including everything."* Mitima clarified this view by providing an example.

> For example, like me I don't go to the work but my wife does. When she gets some money, I show her how to save money, I taught her how to you can use this and save this in the saving account. Because If I don't do that she will use all that money and that's not good for somebody.

Literacy is about going to school. This learning of the something can happen both at home and at school. For that matter, literacy involves going to school. Buhendwa noted that there are aspects that are only taught at school, thus he qualified that literacy is what you learn at school. He said, *"We learnt about geography, history, like every school is alphabetic, mathematics, everything we learnt at school."*

Mitima, the former teacher elucidated on literacy as

> I can say success now [being here in the United States] it [literacy] is about to go to school and to get success. I can say to, to learn something first is to go to school to have something from school and because when you didn't go to school I think you can have something but I didn't go to school my life was good not better but when someone go to school he can be better than good.

Alimasi expressed a similar view when he said, "*I can say to, to learn something first is to go to school to have something from school.*"

The fathers also made connections between literacy and culture. Their use and interpretation of words, symbols and gestures, led to the emergence of another sub theme: **Literacy is language and it is culture.** Literacy, language and culture were seen as one as part and parcel of each other. Eighty-year-old Alimasi related literacy to language by stating, *"I use like when I send them something I tell them to my language because I want them to know... So, but try when I send them like give me something so I told them in my language."* Bahendwa's view on literacy as language was conveyed when he said,

> All languages are very good for…very important because when you are here you have to learn the language they speak here and the original language where we

come from is very important for me and for my children because I don't want like children to lose that language for the future.

When clarifying how language and culture are literacy, Mitima stated,

When the child, the baby has growing, there is what our parents used to talk to the children first is about to teach the baby, the child, the language. When this child is growing, we use to told them the language, bring me a chair, bring me the water to drink, go call your mum for me.

Buhendwa's perspective on culture and literacy was, *"When children don't respect others there can be some difficult between other families when…your child don't respect other families so they can be a difficulty."*

The fathers' views on the definition of literacy were as broad as their personal experiences.

Literacy is Play. It is Stories. The fathers recounted that through plays and stories they experienced literacy. Likewise, perhaps though not regularly, they used plays and stories to tell their children about their original home, offering plays and stories as illustrations to empower them. Alimasi reminisced on several games he and his friends enjoyed in childhood, he talked about one:

There is a game "nwe" used…I use to show my children we use kind of …like half stones and we …I show them how to play, how you can win, and after like time is come you are showing them so, they can play themselves. Yes, there was …they teach them about numbers. There was another game we use to play a small ball like tennis ball and they used to play game with that.

He also explained that besides playing, storytelling was one of the things he enjoyed as a child. Today when he spends time with his children, he rarely tells them stories unless they ask questions, *"Sometimes, we sit down and they ask me about Congo, how was Congo and I just explain them with the question they ask me."*

Buhendwa shared the refugee camp experience, *"Because Congo a child play outside like they can, like my children in refugee camp they use to play outside, they use to build things with the hands, like they use create the things but now [In the United States] they don't do that because they are in school, they are in house."*

Likewise, Mitima narrated the Congo experience, *"Congo we use like evening we sit outside with children we can tell them stories or they can even taught us stories and ...but here child don't have, we don't have that time with our children. I know, in Congo boys go to play soccer and the girls can go to the church, do different things."*

Past parental lessons and influence was another theme that informed what they believed as part of literacy**.** All three fathers preferred to teach their children what they themselves had learnt from their own parents. In this theme, the fathers felt that their parents' influence had benefited them and they, in similar manner, wanted to pass on the same wisdom and practices to their children. Mitima admitted that his parents influenced his parenting skills:

> I taught my children the same way the same way my parents taught me. And
> when I brought my children to school I taught them your teacher is your parents,
> is like your second parent you have to respect them because that the way my
> parents taught me.

Buhendwa too was teaching his children based on what he learnt from his parents, *"They [the parents] taught us how to in the morning you have to get up and clean yourself and go to*

school and learn after that you go home." At eighty years, Alimasi still remembered his parent's influence, *"When my Dad … because my dad was fisherman too and he…I use to practice, I use to practice to…how to catch fish. Only fishing because that was my parents did and that what I saw what my parents did."*

From their statements, the fathers provided insight into the first research question which sought to understand the Congolese refugee families' beliefs about children's literacy development. They also acknowledged that life as they are experiencing it now has changed. Buhendwa says, *"The training here in the United States and ours is different."*

Research Question #2 – What did the Congolese Refugee Families Do to Support their Children's Literacy Practices Prior to Coming to the United States?

The second research question was to help the researcher understand what the Congolese refugee families did to support their children's literacy while in Congo. Furthermore, the purpose was to establish whether there were any differences or similarities within their current literacy practices in the U.S. as opposed to what was in Congo. While the responses from the fathers generated three themes (Attending school and fulfillment of homework obligations, Appreciation for reading and writing, and the Strength of communities, see table 2), the fathers did highlight some of the approaches, they intentionally or unintentionally, are using now to help their children's literacy development in the U.S.

Table 2: Themes and Quotes for Research Question 2

Research Question #2 – What did the Congolese refugee families do to support their children's literacy practices prior to coming to the United States? How is that different/similar to how they do now?			
Theme	*Mitima*	*Alimasi*	*Buhendwa*

Attending school and fulfillment of homework obligations	*"School hours was very important than at home. We learnt at school a lot than home. We do those things after school and he wasn't just you have to do this no. They just taught us how to do but we focus a lot at school."*	*"Children in Congo they went to school and when they come back we help them with what they did."*	*"At school the children are trained by the teachers and there is a priest who looks at the subjects to see how the teachers teach."*
Appreciation for reading and writing	*"Reading means a lot to me personally, when I was studying and, when I was at home [Congo]."*	*"They [school] ...we just learning how to read and sign..."*	*"I can read and write French, Swahili and Kibembe and English but much."* *"Parents has some books from our language they use to read them and some Bibles."*
The Strengths of Community	*"First we meet because us Congolese we are here but we can get problems*	*"We meet together with other families because we use to*	*"When I don't understand I called*

	anytime. You can get sick, you can lose someone and when we meet we do those meetings it's about to help each other when somebody is sick, when somebody lose someone so we can help each other cause some people don't have money even to pay medical bills, do funerals, do everything we have to work with each other. That's why we do meetings as Congolese communities."	*live together with them at the refugee camp."*	*the aunts. I call the uncle."*

For the refugees, while they had limited experience with formal school, they still agreed that school was imperative for their children. Their past experiences, whether as children themselves or as parents with school going children in their original country or the refugee camp, ensued three main themes: Attending school and fulfillment of homework obligations, Appreciation for reading and writing and lastly, Strength in community.

Attending school and fulfillment of homework obligations Alimasi explains *"I didn't go even to school and I just sent them to school to learn because I couldn't help anything about school because I never go to school."* Sharing further about his own prior experience in Congo, Alimasi says,

> "We didn't have many things to children because ...we didn't have so many things to our children because we didn't even go to school but when they went to school they just come home, and we know they went to school. That it. We didn't even know what they are learning."

This has not stopped Alimasi from sending his children to school while in the United States. He says, while *"Children in Congo they went to school and when they come back we help them with what they did."* Today, although he is incapable of personally going to the school, he has made alterative arrangements and ensures that the children are at school. *"When there is a meeting teacher communicate the one who older so they can tell me but sometimes I don't go because I am disable but the brother they can go to the meeting,"* explains Alimasi.

The importance of going to school is not lost on either Mitima or Buhendwa. As a teacher himself, Mitima says that while in Congo, *"At school the children are trained by the teachers and there is a priest who looks at the subjects to see how the teachers teach."*

> I have to be close to my children when they going to school and see the teacher and ask them questions if the children are doing good at school and even at home I have be close to them and to see how they are doing, how they are taking notes, everything I have to be there for them if I was with my children.

In the refugee camp, Mitima says, things changed, *"When I was to the refugee camp, they were not [school] structures."* Life has continued to change. He elaborated:

Here there is no contact with the teachers and parents. In Congo, teachers used to

contact parents when the child is not doing well in class, they contact parents,

your child is not doing good. But here [United States] we just see child or they

just move to other class. we don't know if they sat or what.

Buhendwa based his views on his school experience and agreed that school was

important,

School hours was very important than at home. We learnt at school a lot than

home. We do those things after school and he wasn't just you have to do this no.

They just taught us how to do but we focus a lot at school.

Buhedwa talked about his day off,

Saturday when I am home I am off and home, I just with the children check all

those homeworks they did all week they are missing and what I understand I can

work with them,

Appreciation for reading and writing emerged as a theme most likely because the

fathers send their children to school and then have to contend with homework. As a former

teacher, Mitima explained, *"Reading means a lot to me personally, when I was studying and,*

when I was at home [Congo]." While Alimasi who acknowledges that he did not complete

school, still at the time he was growing up in Congo, school was a new phenomenon that his

parents expected him to attend and while there, he learnt reading and writing, *"They [school]*

...we just learning how to read and sign and break time we play ball and after that we return in

class." Buhendwa is proud of his reading and writing skills, as he says, *"I can read and write*

French, Swahili and Kibembe and English but much." During the interviews it was evident that

while the fathers faced challenges speaking, reading and writing the English language, they were

capable readers and writers in the other languages they had learnt at home and at school. They talked about reading the Bible and other books in their native languages.

The Strengths of Community theme emphasized the fathers' views concerning the value of building relationships. Alimasi explains this, *"We meet together with other families because we use to live together with them at the refugee camp."* Buhendwa does not disagree. He says they are carrying on a tradition, the tradition of being part of a community is something they would like to instill in their children wherever they will resettle, *"We have like Babembe community we use to meet and talk ...if there is something they want to let it know so they can meet us, we can talk about it and sometime at hospitals."* In regard to the same, Mitima says,

> First we meet because us Congolese we are here but we can get problems anytime. You can get sick, you can lose someone and when we meet we do those meetings it's about to help each other when somebody is sick, when somebody lose someone so we can help each other cause some people don't have money even to pay medical bills, do funerals, do everything we have to work with each other. That's why we do meetings as Congolese communities.

The fathers' insights into the second research question highlighted areas that they were working on or struggling with to help their children's literacy development in the United States. They employed different strategies to overcome their challenges and strengthen areas they felt they were successfully handling. Some of these strategies are highlighted in Appendix A.

Research Question #3: What has been the Congolese Refugee Families' Experience with Literacy during the Pandemic?

The final research question considered the families' experiences with literacy during the global Covid-19 pandemic. Their experiences are reflected in the following three themes:

Literacy increases family strain, Loss of autonomy, and Dependence on community (see Table 3).

Table 3. Themes and Quotes for Research Question 3

Research Question #3: What has been the Congolese refugee families' experience with literacy during the pandemic?			
Theme	*Mitima*	*Alimasi*	*Buhendwa*
Literacy increases family strain	*"On computer but they didn't receive anything from learning."*	*"the youngest …it was difficult because I don't know how to show them how to read."*	He says, *"Was very hard to learn on computer the best thing is to learn face to face. For that time the aunts are the one who helped [him] a lot because they use a lot of English. So, the aunts help."*
Loss of Autonomy	*"During the pandemic it was very hard. Because we've been in the house, no going out. It was a difficult period. The children did not have to leave home, and the*	*"I was affected because the government said you don't have to go somewhere and didn't go to mosque to pray, I didn't go*	*"For me as a parent I was affected because children they don't feel free to play outside they stay only in a house and they use to play with other*

	parents did not have to leave. Everyone was inside.”	*maybe…sometimes I want to go out I can't go somewhere. [I] was very affected with that.”*	*children but here is not. It seems like children they don't get ,.. they are still same way they don't feel like running around, play around.”*
Dependence on Community	*“It was very hard to study home without the teacher help you there and they didn't go to school to be with the friends. My daughter she has a lot of homework and sometimes they were very difficult for her to finish this homeworks but I was with her I use to help if not I contact the…I tell her to contact the teacher to help her.”*	*“Teacher called then and they give them computers and they start studying online and sometime when children have problem they came teacher some time they came to help them it not a lot.”*	*“There is people from Church World Services it's the agency who bring us, so they are people volunteers those are bringing books for the children.”*

The effect of the pandemic was felt globally. The fathers encountered challenges in regard to their children's education. As schools transitioned to virtual learning, literacy took a new meaning for their children, for themselves and for the family as a whole. It was everything unexpected and complicated.

Literacy increases family strain emerged as the main theme revealing the fathers' struggle with embracing the new format of learning and the role of becoming the 'teacher'. They all felt they needed the teachers' presence. While the provision of computers was meant to ease the burden and ensure continuation and consistency with schools, the fathers and the children received these with mixed feelings. Buhendwa says, he had to ensure these arrangements were in place for his two older children who were attending school at the time. He says, *"Was very hard to learn on computer the best thing is to learn face to face. For that time the aunts are the one who helped [him] a lot because they use a lot of English. So, the aunts help."* In Alimasi's household, the situation was not much different since he was not proficient in English. Regarding the children's schoolwork he said, *"the youngest ...it was difficult because I don't know how to show them how to read."* Without the face-to-face school, Mitima felt, his children were not learning anything online, *"On computer but they didn't receive anything from learning."*

Loss of Autonomy. This dire situation of the pandemic meant the fathers were caught up in situations incapable of providing the necessary support to their children. Their authority diminished leading to feelings of losing their autonomy. Additionally, confinement in the home, with limited access to the necessary service providers, amidst a total lockdown of all services and restricted movements escalated the feeling of hopelessness. All the fathers express their hardship in different ways. Buhendwa said,

For me as a parent I was affected because children they don't feel

free to play outside they stay only in a house and they use to play

with other children but here is not. It seems like children they don't

get ,.. they are still same way they don't feel like running around,

play around.

In his family, Mitima said, "*During the pandemic it was very hard. Because we've been*

in the house, no going out. It was a difficult period. The children did not have to leave home, and

the parents did not have to leave. Everyone was inside." Although Alimasi usually does not

move around much, he nonetheless, equally felt the effects of this lockdown and explained, "*I*

was affected because the government said you don't have to go somewhere and didn't go to

mosque to pray, I didn't go maybe…sometimes I want to go out I can't go somewhere. [I] was

very affected with that."

Dependence on Community. With limited access to others beyond one's family, the

fathers indicated that they felt an overwhelming need for their community. These included

individual friends, family members, and service providers who constituted their support system.

Although they could not reach many of those community members, they tried to recreate links

with other support groups. Such as was the case for Buhendwa and his family who arrived during

the pandemic and had very limited contact with resources in the United States. He says, "*There*

is people from Church World Services it's the agency who bring us, so they are people

volunteers those are bringing books for the children." In Alimasi's family, Alimasi notes,

"*Teacher called then and they give them computers and they start studying online and sometime*

when children have problem they came teacher some time they came to help them it not a lot."

Mitima's household was equally trying to find their support. He explains,

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It was very hard to study home without the teacher help you there

and they didn't go to school to be with the friends. My daughter

she has a lot of homework and sometimes they were very difficult

for her to finish this homeworks but I was with her I use to help if

not I contact the…I tell her to contact the teacher to help her.

While all the themes have been categorized as responding to each research question, it is important to note that there is interconnectedness. The families' practices and beliefs are reflected in the way they see, understand and practice literacy. Literacy to them is a continuous process. Resettling in the United States and living through a pandemic has affected how they, as families view and practice literacy. Likely, this process as life will continue to evolve for them and their families, meaning more changes for them.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

Vygostky's sociocultural theory suggests that curricula are specific to cultures, they influence beliefs and values and mirror these in the practices. The findings in this research study indicate that the Congolese refugee families' beliefs and values around literacy are associated to with their cultural beliefs and values. Their perspective of literacy is influenced by their cultural curriculum and hence the term literacy in their view is extensive. Literacy as defined by the Congolese refugee families in this study, is as all-encompassing as the scholarly definitions reviewed for this study. For instance, the themes that emerged as literacy as learning and literacy as a practical skill aligned to the second part of the UNESCO (2018) definition that states, "Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society" (UNESCO, 2018, p. 2). According to the responses, literacy was attained when one gained knowledge and skills that proved beneficial to the individual. Consider Alimasi, he would not view himself illiterate because reflecting on his life experiences and in spite of his limited formal school experience, he could practice fishing, he knew mechanics, and practiced as a herbalist. He had different skillsets, practical skills that he used when needed.

Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory acknowledges that individuals are not separate from their social, physical and cultural environments (Miller. 2016). The fathers' understanding of literacy seemed to shift with whatever was happening in their environment. While still in Congo, the fathers all say, they attended some form of formal school. Therefore, their understanding of literacy was in relation to school and what was learnt there – and for some reading happened at school. Overall, literacy is what you learn at school. There was a shift in their understanding while in the refugee camp, where there was no formal school structure, and hence their

perception of literacy in that environment changed. Once again, for these family heads, resettling in the United States means that attributes of literacy change again, except for the certainty that school and literacy, especially in the United States are compatible. However, the fathers did not easily relate to the concept that literacy as understood and practiced in the United States had implications for them in the home. The fathers did not understand that this was common practice in the United States that reading and writing begins in the home with the parents. They still expected the teachers would take on this responsibility, especially since they were still struggling with learning English. As Buhendwa says, "*But I just know the government has to know the school so that the children can read. Except for this restriction, I don't know now, I don't know*." Mitima concurs when he says, "*Yes I know that when a child go to school they have to have books they have to read books but for us we know that the teacher must to help them how to read.*"

This is in contrast to their native language, which they believe that they have to teach their children themselves. Niklas et al. (2016) noted that language and literacy competence begin at home, before formal school. The fathers' understood literacy to be both language as well as culture. They also understood that it was their responsibility to teach their children their language and culture. Vygotsky's socio-cultural approach considers language as one of the most significant psychological tools that individuals use, and this keeps them rooted to their social and physical environment. Miller (2016) says it is the environment that continuously influences individuals' habits, behavior, and responses. For the three fathers, literacy changed as they changed environments but what they maintained was learning and teaching their children their native languages. To this, the fathers acknowledged that they had the primary responsibility to teach their children, and it was very important that they taught their children the language from

their origin. Buhendwa emphasized that when he said, "*When I was Congo we moved from Congo to refugee camp to another country but we never lose our languages because our parents didn't want us to lose that language, original language...*" Likely, because the fathers are struggling with English, they therefore see it as the teachers' responsibility to teach that to their children, while for their part, as parents, they without a doubt see it as their number one responsibility to teach their children their language and aspects of their culture.

To achieve this goal, they use the tools they can relate to within their environment. Malo et al. (2000) mention one of the powerful traditions used to instruct is the use of storytelling and point out that parents use moments to narrate their personal stories, daily events and past experiences to their children. The findings reflected that these fathers from Congo, did employ story narrating to talk to their children, even about past events that they probably did not enjoy talking about. The fathers intimated that literacy is stories. Literacy is play. Carlsson-Paige et al., (2015) recognized this too in observing that adults can nurture children when they engage them in play and the hands-on experiences using materials within their environment. During one interview session, a mother got kitchen items to prepare a local dish. Instinctively, her two children gathered around her and watched her instinctively losing interest in the interview session we were conducting with the father.

These fathers' practices were a reflection of their own childhood involvements. With no deliberate intentions, the fathers were naturally instilling values and practices learnt from their own parents. They wanted to maintain and see things the way they had been taught to by their parents. Auerbach, (1989) noted that in communities where reading resources were scarce, learning opportunities were constantly presented through life's mundane activities and practices, often involving dialogue between both children and adults. This sort of learning involved

scaffolding, a technique that Vygostky considered very effective in transmission of knowledge. The Congolese fathers learnt through scaffolding and they also use scaffolding to teach their children. Buhendwa explained that, "*I remember my grandfather use to tell me come here I can show you how to do these things.*" Today, Buhendwa's parenting style with his children involves them watching and observing him or his wife. He says, "*When children are watching that when they grow up they can think oh my Mum use to do this.*" Besides scaffolding, the parents have dialogue with their children mostly in their native language. All families were not using English as the means of communication in the home, they chose one of their native languages. While as a family, there was less practice with English, the continual use of the native language ensured that the parents taught their children their native language.

Writing about Vygostky's approach, Miller (2016) emphasized that one of the distinctive aspects of this theory is its focus on the uniqueness of each culture. The Congolese fathers have such diverse yet rich experiences that provide a broader understanding of literacy. To them literacy means: a) learning b) practical skill c) what you learn at school d) language and culture e) play and stories and f)past parental lessons and influence. To refer to McGee et al. (2000), literacy experiences can only be understood in consideration of the social and cultural diversity of the communities so we can embrace the variations in available literacy resources and cultural contexts. Literacy for these families did not unconditionally mean reading and writing.

To support their children's literacy development, these fathers recognized their limitations and realized they needed to find support. There was strength in being part of a community, and that community was comprised of teachers, service providers as well as family members. It was therefore important that they intentionally established these connections so that their children could benefit. Take Buhendwa for instance, when homework with his children was

complicated for him and the children, he called on his sisters to help his children with homework. Alimasi said his infirmity greatly inhibited him. He therefore found strength and support from his older children and the teachers. This practice, the Congolese fathers say was a tradition they carried on from Congo. Mitima explains, "*Congo even I don't know my neighbor's language, the neighbor can teach me and if he doesn't know my language I can teach him so we can communicate.*" Finding support from the community is what Vygotsky's had in mind when he considered learning as a collective responsibility involving parents, teachers, peers and the community (Kozulin et al., 2003).

Vygotsky noted that learning does not happen in a vacuum and this is evident in the themes that emerged about attending school and fulfillment of homework. The fathers realized they needed to send their children to school, especially now when they needed to adhere to the Federal and state laws that required all children to attend school. Although their background indicated that they came from a country where the education systems is crippled, (USAID, 2019), the fathers recognized that they had to conform to America's education goal where all parents in America are required to prepare their children for school and all children must "start school ready to learn" (Lewit et al., 1995, p. 128). And so, irrespective of the school related challenges the children and the parents encounter, these fathers still send their children to school to learn reading and writing, besides other activities taught in schools in the United States. Mitima sums it up, *"The training here in the United States and ours is different."*

The training may be different and the language maybe different but these fathers are not incapable of speaking, reading and writing other languages. They are multilinguists, passionate about reading and writing in the languages that have been in their environment even as they make all the effort to learn English. While these fathers were not very explicit on whether they

read to their children in English, they hinted that they were proficient in reading text that was in Kiswahili, French and their native language. Buhendwa explained, "*We read books in French.*" These together with the informal discussions with their children helped their children in building their vocabulary in other languages (Niklas et al., 2016). Even in as much as there were significant differences in how things were done between the United States and the previous places where they had lived in, the fathers still sought support within the community to see to their children's literacy development. Besides Buhendwa, none of the other fathers mentioned whether they had received any print resources to help their children's print literacy. Buhendwa too did not explain how he made use of the print resources with his children.

However, as they gradually found their footing and adjusted to their new life, the pandemic brought a spin to their life. With the pandemic came a total lockdown throughout the world, not to mention the USA. Locally, there was limited access to services and other people outside one's family, as all families were ordered to stay at home. The fathers had to devise other mechanisms to help their families through the months of the lockdown and restrictions. Closure of services and schools and being confined home translated into loss of autonomy for these fathers. This hit the three fathers deeply, in that while the restrictions were generally intended for their safety, it nonetheless translated into disempowerment. Mitima said he could not go for his much-needed English classes. Buhendwa and his family arrived in the United States during this period and had to stay confined in a hotel with no contact to any family members. Even Alimasi whose movements are normally restricted because of his infirmity, felt the frustration of being confined in the house with his family. Mitima says, *"That time we prayed because it was very scary."* Alimasi explained, "*We didn't know is going on because this is the first time we hear about that pandemic.*" The fear of the unknown, the limitations of what could and couldn't be

done increased stressors in their homes. Ryan et al. (2020) noted that during the pandemic, this was a common occurrence in many low-income families.

This was also the time that technological disparities in these families intensified. At the same time, the gap of technological savviness between the parents and children expanded (Edmonds et al., 2021). This situation aggravated the tension in the home considering the parent was supposed to be the first contact of learning in the home. In this case, the parent is not conversant in the English, the medium of instruction. The dichotomy being that the parents want the children to learn and the children need the parents' support but the parents do not know how to help. This increases the stress in the family as learning amplified the family strain in that both the physical and psychological tools recommended by Vygotsky are not within comfortable reach of the parent and the child. In accordance with the study by Niklas et al. (2016) that emphasized how language and literacy competence begins at home, before formal school, the three fathers acknowledged that the role of instructing their children was very important. However, in this American culture, it was different and unattainable. They felt this learning underscored their significance as fathers yet they wanted to ensure that their children understood, shared and preserved part of their original culture, even in the new country where they were resettled. Miller (2016) explained culture as the composition of "shared beliefs, values, knowledge, worldview, structured relationship skills, customs and socialization practices" (p. 160). As the fathers were the more knowledgeable in regard to their native language and their culture, with resettlement in the U.S. and then the transition to virtual school, the roles were reversed. The fathers were not technologically savvy, neither were they proficient in English yet the fathers understood that they had to support their children. "*What I want as a parent I want just them to, to learn and to get a better life in the life as a parent,*" said Buhendwa.

To see their wishes for their children come true in America, the fathers tapped into the resource they knew: the community. Through the community, they had to find ways and means of reaching out for the much-needed support. For instance, in the absence of a translator, they had to learn how to communicate with the school regarding school matters. They had to find ways to adapt to the technology and help their children not only with the online classes but with homework too. As they learn to maneuver through the American system, the fathers find support in the community around them. Mitima says, he makes use of the summer school for his children, speaking about his daughter, "*She has to go back to go to summer school to do again practice.*" What does all of this mean then?

Implications

As Keefe et al., (2011) suggest, through extensive reading and research, it is important for educators to diversify their understanding of literacy to serve diverse communities. Literacy is influenced by an individual's social, cultural, and historical context. Malo et al., (2000) observed that most parents in the United States have access to a variety of print resources, which helps them to develop their children's literacy levels at each stage. However, for these Congolese families who are rebuilding their lives in the United States, literacy does not yet mean print, reading and writing. Their perception of what literacy is, is still significantly influenced by their past experiences and practices. Since literacy for these families evolves, there is a chance that with time, they will learn to appreciate the American view of literacy as reading and writing. However, teachers and educators working with children from these families have to devise strategies that will get these families to appreciate and embrace print literacy in their homes. Since scaffolding is an avenue that they are familiar with and use in their homes, educators could think about using scaffolding both print and digital literacy practices when engaging with these

families. For instance, videos showcasing parents' reading techniques in these families' prominent native language.

The families recognized school as a U.S. government requirement and appreciated that the government made provision for their children to attend school as well as provide the required resources. Perhaps stemming from their previous experiences, school had not been considered as relevant. It was considered as any other avenue linked to literacy, just like learning a practical skill from a more knowledgeable other. This limited view of school means that these parents may never explore ways that they could pursue higher education for themselves and for their own children. Their children could become discouraged from pursuing further education or they could be more motivated to seek out schools that offer practical skills. Additionally, the parents may at times not feel obligated to follow up on school related matters while at other times, they may feel intimidated to do so because of the language barriers, unknown rules and regulations and fear of the consequences.

It is also important to note that priority and emphasis in these families is to ensure the children learn their parents' native language. English was secondary and was considered something the teacher would teach, but not the parents' responsibility. Retaining their native language is a reflection of their identity; they do not want to lose who they are. Perhaps then one way to introduce print literacy would be to find leisure books that are written in their native languages so families can read together. This is important because while print literacy would be introduced in the home, it would also provide insight into aspects of their culture and the memories that are less traumatic.

In as much as these immigrant families would like to indulge their children in literacy, in same way they were influenced and impacted by their own parents, life has drastically changed

for them. There is a disconnect between what they previously knew and the now perceptible reality. This leaves these fathers in search of more answers than guidance while the children take on adult roles in matters they are not cognitively ready to handle. These fathers therefore felt that they needed to have more social connections, especially with their religious community leaders and their fellow Congolese.

Limitations of the Study

Literacy is a fundamental human right that has by Western standards been defined as, "the ability to read and write at a level whereby individuals can effectively understand and use written communication in all media (print or electronic), including digital literacy" (Montoya, 2018, p. 4). UNESCO (2018) has expounded on the literacy definition saying, "Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential, and participate fully in community and wider society" (p. 2). During the interviews, I could only use words from these various definitions to explain literacy. There was no single word that could be directly translated into the native language that implicitly and comprehensively and it meant literacy. For each participant, literacy elicited different responses. At times, the explanation of the term did not bring the desired results. For instance, one participant when through the interpreter I asked what literacy is, the participant's response about literacy continued along these lines:

"*In Congo I remember when if one family wants to marry a girl from another family the dad or the father takes it's a kind offer but it's the one they use like to attack animals to kill animal. I think it's spear, and he go to the family who they are going to married, where there is a girl. So, he put it in the middle of the yard and he said so my son is going to marry your daughter.*"

Often times, the interpreter and I had to think of examples to explain literacy without us biasing the participants' responses. We were not always effective and could have biased responses or at other times, there were informational gaps. However, I was also always very conscious of my biases. As a native of an African country myself, there were examples that participants provided as part of their experiences which I could relate to them. This got me excited and I had to particularly be conscious that I did not draw away nor contribute to their story. Rather, I needed to ensure they built on to that experience of their own especially if it was in relation to the study interests.

In any case, the researcher was not conversant with the languages the five participants used. The language barrier was not just in relation to the use of the term 'literacy' but rather it was a challenge for all parties in expressing their views. While the participants felt comfortable stating their views in their dialect, the rich descriptions and details of their experiences was at times lost in translation. At times like this, I missed the full cultural implications of what the respondent explained yet at other times, it was difficult to have the appropriate follow up question without giving a leading response or inadvertently but insignificantly adding my own biases.

While I was able to have the opportunity to meet with the families three times and interact with the three fathers and two mothers, I was not able to have the children share their perspectives on moving to the United States and school. During this research, I did not have the opportunity to get the perspectives of anyone from the education sector such as teachers and school principals to gain insight into the questions they have about these families and the strategies they employ when dealing with children from refugee families. Despite these

limitations, this study does provide a wealth of information to consider and use as researchers and professionals work with Congolese refugee families.

Future Research

The families had spent between one and five years in the United States and all had children attending school. Each of the families had children born outside of the United States and children born in the United States. Additionally, while all the participants mentioned school and associated school to reading and writing, none of the families mentioned reading was a priority in their homes. Irrespective of the time they have spent in the United States or their interaction with school, these fathers did not mention any books that they were either reading to their children or reading as a family. For these fathers, gaining a skill was still important and it was the way to success. However, these views were based primarily on their previous experiences in Congo and the refugee camp. Are they, with time, likely to change their views regarding print and digital literacy to embrace it and make it part of their culture? A longitudinal study following these families on their resettlement journey in the United States may be the answer to this question.

This study was carried out at the time when the United States, like other countries around the world, was slowly opening up services after the lockdown restrictions. The families, especially the ones who have been in the country for less than two years were still trying to adjust to life in the United States. Adjusting to the language and the use of technology, such as zoom classes was a matter participants talked about as one of their greatest challenges. Further studies that follow the families on their adjustment to technology, how they embrace digital literacy and how this affects the parent-child relationship, would be highly beneficial.

Participants talked about the skills they learnt in Congo. While some felt they needed to learn English, none of the participants made reference to improving their literacy skills in terms of reading and writing. Further research could focus on finding out how "lack of literacy" in the western definition, reading and writing, has impacted the life of refugees from Africa; how it may have impacted their economic, financial or social development when they resettle in the United States. Future studies should also consider the intersectionality of issues. There were both obvious and subtle signs of trauma in these families. How does stress and trauma affect literacy development in these families? This study focused on only one member of the family. Future studies could look at the other members of the family, the children, and the other spouses. It would also be interesting to hear from the educators who interact with children from these families. Lastly, a comparative study looking at how regular Congolese immigrants handle literacy in comparison to Congolese refugees would add an important perspective on these issues.

Conclusion

The United States has provided sanctuary to many families from different nationalities around the world that have had to leave their original countries in search of safety and shelter. These communities bring with them different knowledge, practices and experiences. The indigenous knowledge, practices and experiences brought to the United States, or other western countries for that matter, they are indeed literate. On the contrary, the refugees have a wealth of information and skills to share. They have established different ways of acquiring and transferring knowledge and skills and while it may be different from individuals born in the United States, they are indeed literate. The participants in this study have shown that literacy is a continuous process – never ending. It does not matter whether you are a child or an adult, as your

environment changes, so does your need to become literate, especially in the cultural

perspectives of that environment. For instance, literacy to the Congolese immigrants is closely

associated with learning something. This is not so drawn out from UNESCO (2018) definition

that is ascribed to literacy as learning. As one participant summarized his view, "*Literacy is*

learning something."

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Strategies	Mitima	Alimasi	Buhendwa
Physical devices like Computers, ipads	*"I use internet and computer."*	*"After that they can maybe watch TV or sometimes maybe they can, some of them they can check the phones after that I took everything like the phones, computers and I turn tv off, they have to prepare to go to bed for tomorrow."*	*"When he first leaves school and takes about one or twenty minutes and take who we are and see if there are any homework, we start doing together what I can because I don't know English, which I can translate, and I will be able to translate it and I will be able to translate it."*
Family Members or resources	*"For that time ...after that they sent computers for the children to start learning in computer and they sent some...some to*	*"When they came home I told to eat something, after eating, I tell them to do the homework, there is an older who is ten so he can the youngest and I'm here with*	*"Saturday when I am home I am off and home I just with my children check all those home works*

	read on computer and … *and we help them with* *reading."*	*them and they are sitting* *here wishing then if they are* *doing the homework. And I* *communicate with the ten* *years old to check if the* *youngest is doing the* *homework."*	*they did all week to* *see they are missing* *and what I* *understand I can* *work with them."*
Others in the Community	*"Yes I know that when a* *child go to school they* *have to have books they* *have to read books but for* *us we know that the* *teacher must to help them* *how to read."*	*"When there is something* *the child needs to be* *progress, I speak to the, I* *speak to the teacher* *because the teacher can* *help them because I have* *nothing to do for them."*	*"When I don't* *understand I called* *the aunt's I call the* *uncle they come* *before here so they* *already finish high* *school they* *understand so they* *can explain to* *them."*

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, ENGLISH VERSION

Getting to know you and Background information

a.) Tell me something about you and your family
    a.   Who lives in your household?
        i.   How many adults are in your family?
        ii.   How many children are in this family and how old are they?
    b.   Do they attend school?
b.) What languages do you often use in the home?
    a.   Do you find you use another language when you go to other places?
    b.   How did you learn the languages that you speak? How about your children? (acquired at home or taught in school)
    c.   Are there languages that you prefer more than others? Which ones? Why?
    d.   Are you able to read and write in all these languages?
c.) What is your personal experience with schools and learning in DRC?
    a.   Did you attend formal school in DRC? How long were you in school?
d.) How long have you been in the US?
    a.   How long have you stayed in Guilford county?
e.) Do you have opportunities to interact with other families in your community?
    a.   Tell me more about these interactions i.e. how often?
    b.   Why do you meet with these other families (for what purpose?)
    c.   Where do these families come from?

1: What are Congolese refugee families' beliefs about children's literacy

development? What do Congolese refugee families believe about literacy?

    1.) What does literacy mean to you?
      a.) Is literacy important to you? Why?
      b.) What are some practices you do to ensure/demonstrate the importance of literacy?
    2.) What does literacy mean to you personally?
    3.) How is children's literacy development promoted in your region of DRC?
      a.) What do parents do at home?
      b.) What is done at school? Can you show or tell me some examples of literacy the way it is done there?
    4.) What are your thoughts about children's literacy and success?
      a.   Success in school?
      b.   Success in life?
2: What did the Congolese refugee families do to support their children's

literacy? How is that different/similar to how they do now?

    1.) Tell me about literacy in Congolese families in your part of the country?

2.) What does children's literacy success look like for parents in DRC?
   a. What are some of the things/ practices' parents do to develop their children's literacy?
   b. Have there been changes in how literacy as perceived and promoted as you were growing up and now?
      i. If so, share more about those changes.
      ii. If not, what is the reason for things being the same?
3.) How do you as a parent know that you have achieved a milestone / made progress with your child's literacy development?
   a. What do they use to determine the child's achievement?
   b. What are the things your child is expected to know at this particular stage of their lives in DRC?
4.) What prevents parents from achieving literacy development for their children?
5.) What are your beliefs about literacy since you came to the United States?
   a. How have those beliefs influenced your interactions with your children?
6.) What are some of the literacy practices that changed for you as a family when you resettled in the United States?
   a. Do you know some of the school literacy expectations in the United States?
      i. If so, which ones and how did you come to know what is expected?
   b. What are some of the changes you have had to make to ensure your child adopts to the literacy expectations in the United States?
   c. What are some of the activities you have had to do as a family to promote your children's literacy development during the summer when school is closed?

3: What has been the Congolese families' experiences with literacy during the

Covid-19 pandemic?

1) Tell me about your experience with your children during the pandemic?
   a. Were the children attending school?
      i. How did they attend?
   b. What did you have to do differently for the children during the pandemic than when they attended face to face school?
   c. How did you help your child with literacy homework during the pandemic?
   d. Did you have literacy assignments for the children?
      i. If so, share some examples of literacy assignments that you had to help your child with.
   e. How did you do the literacy assignments with the children?
2) What did you do during the summer of 2020 and the summer of 2021 as a family to help your child with their literacy development?
3) What are some of the changes you have had to make as a family to ensure your child's literacy development continues?
   a. Name and demonstrate some activities you have done together as a family.
4) What are your current beliefs about literacy?
   a. Has this pandemic period affected your beliefs at all?
   b. If so, why and how?

c. If not, why not?

5) What would you like to see happen long term with literacy and your child?

APPENDIX C: MAHOJIANO NA MZAZI MKIMBIZI, CONGOLESE SWAHILI

Mahojiano na mzazi na Kukujua

a) Zungumza kukuhusu na kuhusu familia yako.

a. Ni Nani anaishi katika familia yako?

      i. Je! Ni watu wazima wangapi katika familia yako?

      ii. Je! Ni watoto wangapi katika familia hii na wana umri gani?

b. Wanaenda shule? Je! Unatumia lugha gani nyumbani?

      a. Je! Inakufikia kutumia lugha nyingine unapoenda sehemu zingine?

      b. Ulijifunzaje lugha unazo zungumuza? Vipi kuhusu watoto wako?(uliupata

nyumbani au ulifundiswa shuleni?).

c. Je! Kuna lugha unazozipendelea zahidi kuliko zingine ?Zipi? Kwa ninii?

d. Je! Unaweza kusema na kuandika katika lugha hizi zote?

  c) Una ozoefu gani kibinasfi na shule tena na kusoma huko Kongo?

a. Ulisoma shule rasmi katika nchi ya Kongo? Ulikuwa shuleni kwa muda gani?

  d) Umekuwa Marekani kwa muda gani?

a. Umekaa kwa muda gani katika kata la Guilford?

  e) Je ! Una fursa ya kuathiriana na familia zingine ndani ya jamii yako?

a. Nieleze zahidi kuhusu maathiriano yale, yaani ni mara ngapi?

b. Kwa nini unakutana na familia hizi zingine?(kwa kusudi gani?)

c. Hizo familia zinatoka mahali gani?

1. Swala la utafiti. Familia za wakimbizi wa Congo zina amini nini kuhusu maendeleo kwa kujifunza kwa watoto? Je! Familia za wakimbizi wa Congo zina amini nini kuhusu kujifunza ?

1. Kujifunza kuna maana gani kwako ?

   a. Je! Kujifunza ni muhimu kwako ?kwa nini ?

   b. Je! Ni mazoea gani unayofanya kuhakikisha/ kuonyesha umuhimu wakujifunza?

2. Kusoma kuna maana gani kwako binafsi ?

3. Ukuzaji wa kujifunza unakuzwa vipi katika mkoa wako Congo?

   a. Toa maonyesho / mazoea ambazo zinaweza kuonyesha au kuzungumza juu yake?

4. Ukuzaji wa kujifunza unaendeleaje katika inchi ya Congo ?

   a. Je! Wazazi wanafanya nini nyumbani ?

   b. Je! Ni nini anafanyika shuleni ?

5. Je! Maoni yako ni nini kuhusu kujifunza kwa watoto na kufahulu ?

   a. Kufahulu shuleni.

   b. Kufahulu kimaisha.

Familia za wakimbizi wa Congo zilifanya nini ili kasaidiya kujifunza kwa watoto wao? Je! Hilo tofauti/ sawa na jinsi unayofanya salsa?

1. Nieleze kuhusu kujifunza ndani ya familia yako.

2. Je! Mafanikio katika kujifunza ya watoto yanaonekanaje kwa wazazi hijo Congo?

a. Je! Ni mambo gani/mazoea gani ambayo wazazi wanafanya ili kukuza kujifunza kwa watoto wao?

b. Je! Kumekuwa na mabadiliko katika jinsi kujifunza kunavyoonekana na kukuzwa tokeya ulikuwa ukikomaa hadi sasa?

i. Ikiwa ndivyo, eleza zaidi kuhusu mabadiliko hayo.

ii. Ikiwa sivyo, ni nini sababu ya vitu kubaki pasipo kubakilika?

3. Je! Wewe kama mzazi unajuaje kuwa umefanya hatua/ umefanya maendeleo kwa kukuza kujifunza ya mtoto wako?

a. Je! Wanatumia nini ili kuamua kufanyikiwa kwa mtoto ?

b. Je! Inchini Congo, ni vitu gani mtoto wako anatarajiwa kujua katika kiwango iki kia maisha yake?

4. Ni nini inazuia wazazi kufikia maendeleo katika kujifunza kwa watoto wao?

5. Una amini nini kuhusu kujifunza tangu ulipokuja Marekani?

a. Je! Yale unayoamini inasababisha vipi mawasiliano na watoto wako?

6. Je! Ni mazoea gani ya kujifunza ambayo yalibadilika katika familia yako wakati ulipokaa Marekani?

a. Je! Unajua matarajio ya shule huko Marekani kuhusu kujifunza ?

i. Ikiwa ndivyo, ni zipi na ulipateje kujua kinachotarajiwa?

b. Ni mabadiliko gani ambayo umelazimika ku fanya ili uakikishe mtoto wako anazoea matarajio ya kujifunza huku Marekani?

c. Je! Ni shuguli gani ambazo umelazimika kufanya katika familia ili kukuza maendeleo katika kujifunza kwa watoto wako?

Ni nini Umekuwa uzoefu wa familia za Congo kuhusu kujifunza   wakati wa janga la ugonjwa wa Covid-19?

1. Nieleze kuhusu uzoefu wako na watoto wako wakati wa janga hilo.

a. Je! Watoto walikuwa wakienda shule?

b. Je! Ulilazimika kafanya nini tofauti kwa watoto wakati wa janga kuliko muda walienda shule kusama ana kwa ana?

c. Ulisaidiaje mtoto wako kufanya kazi zake za kujifunza nyumbani wakati wa janga hilo?

d. Je! Ulikuwa na kazi za mtoto za kujifunza nyumbani? Ikiwa ndivyo, eleza mifano kadhaa za kazi za kujifunza nyumbani ambazo ulilazimika kumsaidia mtoto wako?

e. Ulifanyaje kazi za kusoma na kujifunza nyumbani pamoja na mtoto?

2. Ulifanya nini ndani ya familia katika majira ya joto wa 2020 na 2021 ili kumsaidia mtoto wako kujifunza na kusoma kwake?

3. Je! Ni mabadiliko gani ambayo umelazimika kufanya katika familia ili kuhakikisha maendeleo ya kujifunza nakusoma ya mtoto wako yanaendelea?

a. Taja na uoneshe shughuli kadhaa ambazo umefanya katika familia.

4. Je! Unaamini nini kwa sasa kuhusu majifunzo ?

a. Je! Kipindi hiki cha janga kimeathiri kabisa ulioyaamini?

b. Ikiwa ni hivyo, kwa nini na jinsi gani? c. Ikiwa sivyo, kwa nini?

5. Je! Ungependa kuona nini kutokea kwa kujifunza na kwa mtoto wako kisha muda mrefu?

.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW DU PARENT REFUGIE, FRENCH

Vous connaître et Question de recherche 1.

Informations sur le background

a) Parlez-moi de vous et de votre famille.

a. Qui habite dans votre ménage?

  i. Combien d'adultes y a-t-ils dans votre famille ?

  ii. Combien d'enfants y a-t-ils dans cette famille et quel âge ont-ils ?

b. Vont-ils à l'école ?

b) Quelles langues utilisez-vous souvent à la maison ?

a. Utilisez-vous une autre langue lorsque vous allez dans d'autres endroits ?

b. Comment avez-vous appris les langues que vous parlez ? Et concernant vos enfants? (
acquises à la maison ou apprises à l'école)

c. Y a-t-il des langues que vous préférez plus que d'autres ? Quelles sont-elles? Pourquoi?

d. Êtes-vous à mesure de lire et écrire dans toutes ces langues ?

c) Quelle est votre expérience personnelle avec les écoles et l'apprentissage en RDC?

a. Avez-vous fréquenté une école formelle en RDC? Combien de temps y avez-vous passé?

d) Depuis combien de temps avez-vous été aux États-Unis ?

a. Depuis combien de temps avez-vous habité dans le comté de Guiford?

e) Avez-vous l'occasion d'interagir avec d'autres familles dans votre communauté ?

a. Parlez-moi en détail de ces interactions, c'est-à-dire à quelle fréquence.

b. Pour quelle raison rencontrez-vous ces autres familles (dans quel but?).

c. D'où viennent ces familles ?

1. **Quelles sont les croyances des familles des réfugiés Congolais à propos du développement de l'alphabétisation des enfants ? Que pensent les familles de réfugiés Congolais sur l'alphabétisation?**

1) Que signifie l'alphabétisation pour vous.

a. L'alphabétisation est-elle importante pour vous ? Pourquoi ?

b. Quelles pratiques accomplissez-vous pour garantir/démontrer l'importance de l'alphabétisation?

2) Que signifie l'alphabétisation pour vous personnellement ?

3) De quelle manière le développement de l'alphabétisation des enfants est-il promue dans votre région de la RDC?

a. Que font les parents à la maison ?

b. Qu'est-ce qui est fait à l'école ? Pouvez-vous me montrer ou me donner quelques exemples sur la manière dont l'alphabétisation est effectuée là-bas?

4) Que pensez-vous de l'alphabétisation et la réussite des enfants ?

a. La réussite à l'école ?

b. La réussite dans la vie ?

Que faisaient les familles des réfugiés Congolais pour soutenir l'alphabétisation de leurs enfants? En quoi cela est-il différent/semblable à ce qu'elles font maintenant ?

1) Parlez-moi de l'alphabétisation au sein des familles Congolaises dans votre coin au pays.

2) A quoi ressemble la réussite en alphabétisation des enfants pour les parents en RDC?

a. Quelles sont quelques-unes des choses/pratiques faites par les parents envue de promouvoir l'alphabétisation de leurs enfants ?

b. Y a-t-il eu des changements dans la manière dont l'alphabétisation était perçue et promue depuis votre enfance jusqu'à maintenant ?

 i. Si oui, parlez davantage de ces changements. ii. Si non, quelle est la raison qui fait que les choses demeurent inchangées ?

3) En tant que parent, comment savez-vous que vous avez franchi une étape importante/fait des progrès en ce qui concerne l'amélioration de l'alphabétisation de votre enfant?

a. Qu'est-ce qu'on fait pour définir la réussite de l'enfant ?

b. Quelles sont les choses que votre enfant est supposé savoir à ce stade particulier de sa vie en RDC?

4). Qu'est-ce qui empêche les parents d'améliorer l'alphabétisation de leurs enfants ?

5) Quelles sont vos croyances concernant l'alphabétisation depuis votre arrivée aux États-Unis ?

a. Comment est-ce que ces croyances ont-elles influé sur vos interactions avec vos enfants?

6) Quelles sont quelques-unes des pratiques d'alphabétisation qui ont changé pour vous en famille quand vous vous êtes réinstallés aux États-Unis ?

a. Connaissez-vous certaines des attentes des écoles d'alphabétisation aux États-Unis ?

 i. Si oui, quelles sont-elles et comment avez-vous sû ce qui est attendu?

b. Quels sont certains des activités que vous avez dû faire en famille pour promouvoir le développement de l'alphabétisation de vos enfants en été alors que l'école était fermée?

3. Quelles ont été les expériences des familles Congolaises en matière d'alphabétisation durant la pandémie de Covid-19?

1) Parlez-moi de votre expérience avec vos enfants pendant la pandémie ?

a. Les enfants partaient-ils à l'école ? i. Comment ont-ils fréquenté?

b. Qu'avez-vous dû faire de différent pour les enfants durant la pandémie que lorsqu'ils fréquentaient l'école en mode face à face?

c. Comment avez-vous aidé votre enfant à faire des devoirs d'alphabétisation pendant la pandémie?

d. Aviez-vous des devoirs d'alphabétisation pour les enfants ?

 i. Si oui, donnez quelques exemples des devoirs d'alphabétisation que vous avez dû faire pour aider votre enfant.

e. Comment avez-vous fait les devoirs d'alphabétisation avec les enfants ?

2) Qu'avez-vous fait en famille pendant les étés de 2020 et 2021 pour aider votre enfant à améliorer son alphabétisation ?

3) Quels sont quelques-uns des changements que vous avez dû réaliser en famille pour assurer que le développement de l'alphabétisation de votre enfant se poursuive?

a. Nommez et illustrez certaines activités que vous avez réalisées en famille.

4) Quelles sont vos croyances actuelles au sujet de l'alphabétisation ?

a. Est-ce que cette période de pandémie a affecté vos croyances ?

b. Si oui, pourquoi et comment ? Si non, pourquoi pas ?

5. Que voudriez-vous voir se produire à long terme pour l'alphabétisation et votre enfant ?